

Caetano de Almeida Is Projecting a New Intensity

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Editor's Pick

by Liz Logan March 13, 2017

The Brazilian artist's textile-inspired paintings, now on display in a New York solo show, suggest an unraveling in his native country.

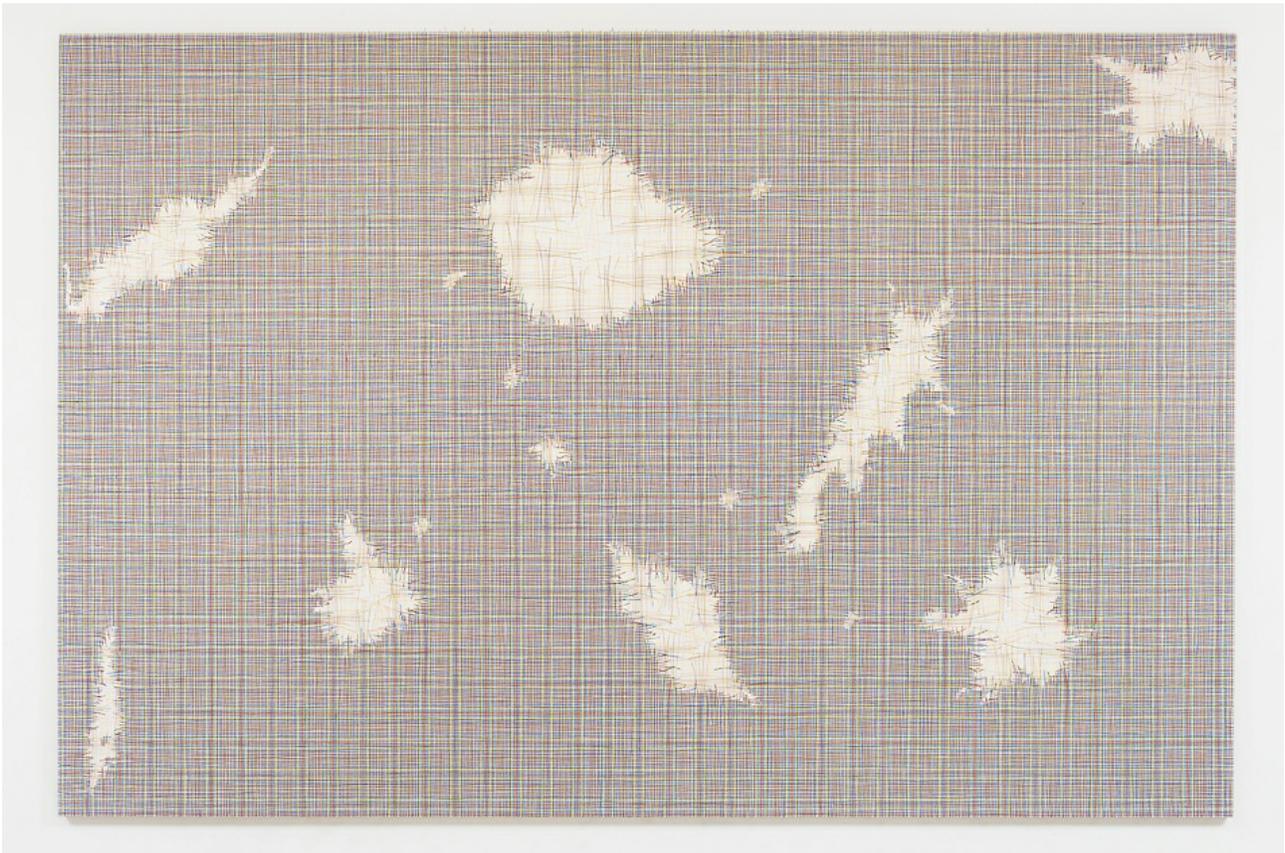


A show at New York gallery 11R features recent work by Caetano de Almeida, whose latest paintings allude to the sociopolitical crisis in his native Brazil. Top: A detail of *Murta*, 2016, which along with all the paintings below, is on display in de Almeida's 11R show. All photos courtesy of 11R

São Paulo–based artist Caetano de Almeida has always brought a distinctly Brazilian flair to his acrylic paintings: bold, prismatic colors typical of the country’s textiles; tangled lines reminiscent of São Paulo’s twisty roadways; geometric shapes and dense grids that pay homage to his Brazilian forebears Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica. In a new solo show at the New York City gallery 11R, on view through March 26, de Almeida seems to have reached a new level of creative confidence: His signature style appears intensified, and his emotions and nostalgia are more apparent than ever.

“My relationship to my painting now is less cerebral and more related to my memories and affections,” he says. The show’s title, “Palhinha” (meaning “straw”), is a folksy reference to the material typically used to weave handicrafts in Brazil.

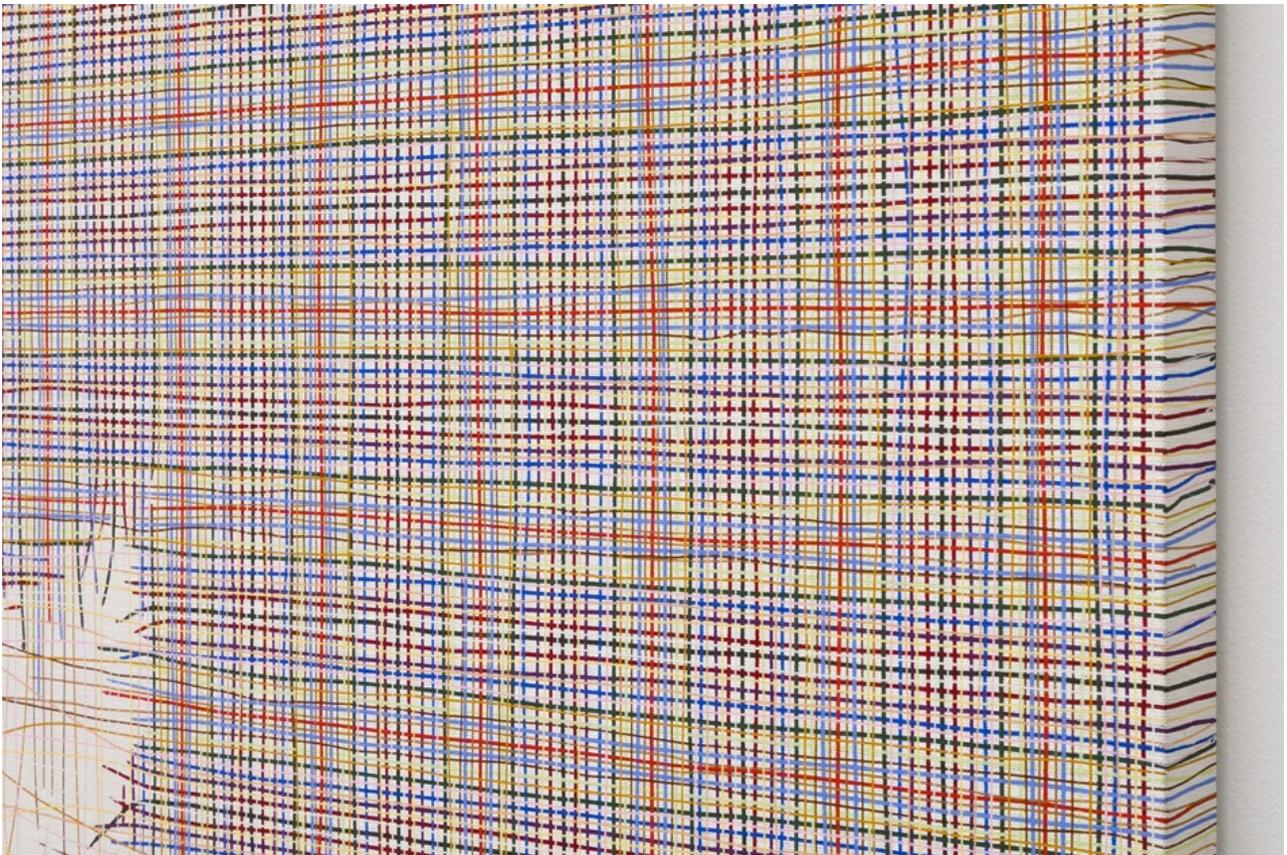
De Almeida has been working as an artist since he graduated from São Paulo’s Armando Alvares Penteado Foundation, Brazil’s top art school, in 1983. In the ensuing years, his work has been exhibited in Latin America, Europe and the U.S. In 2016, he was the subject of a major monograph, *Caetano de Almeida: O delicioso jardim do vizinho (The Neighbor’s Delicious Garden)*, published by Cobogó.



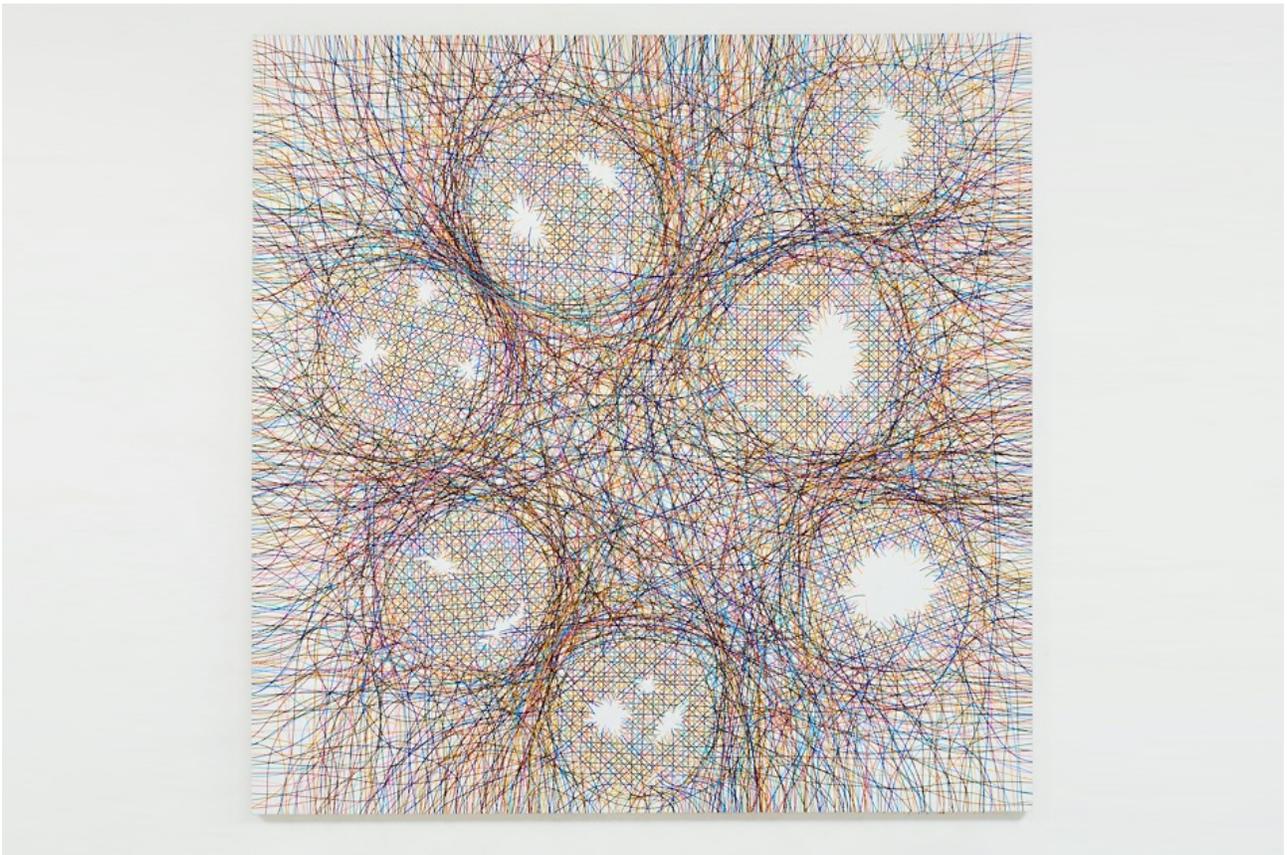
Tapeçaria, 2016



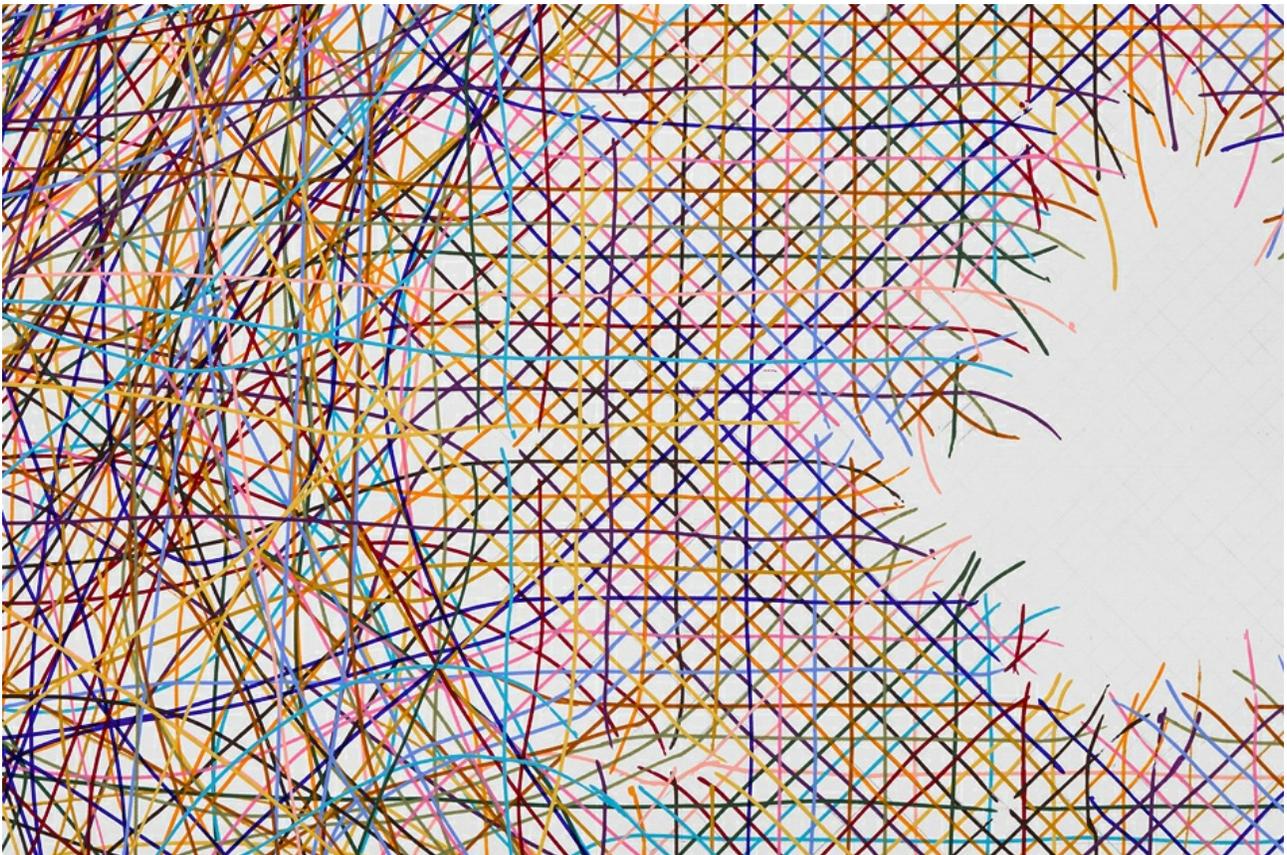
Tapeçaria, 2016



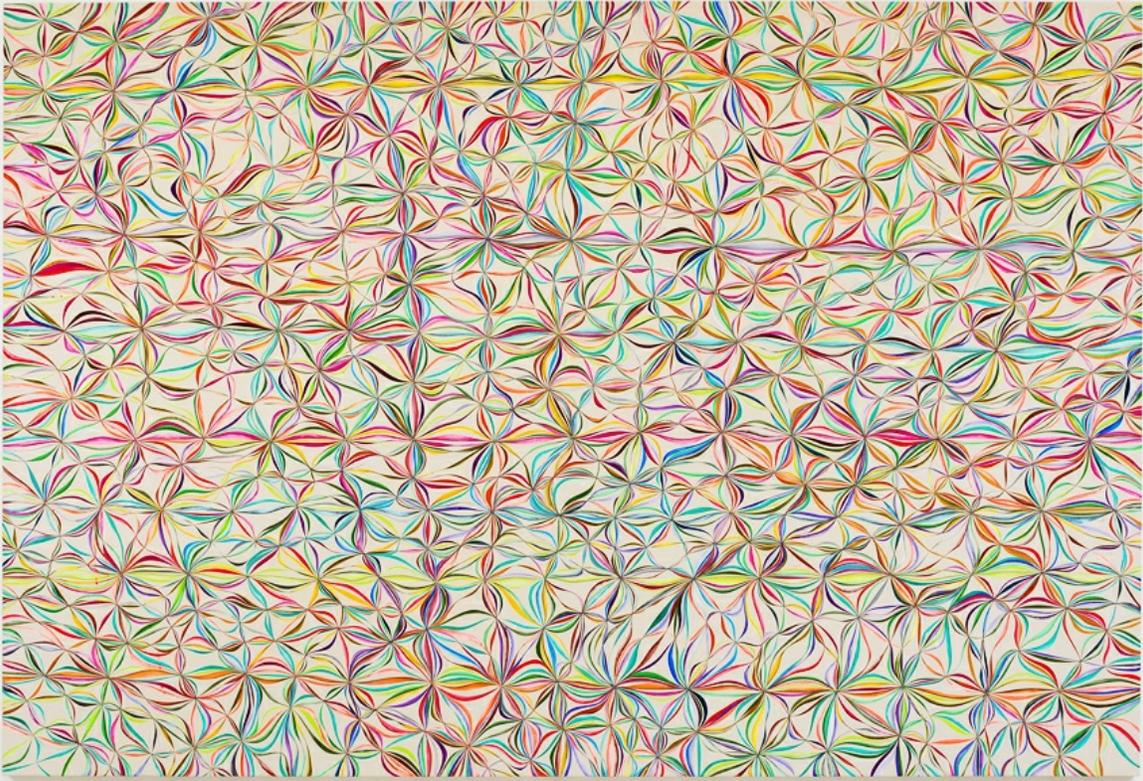
Detail of *Tapeçaria*, 2016



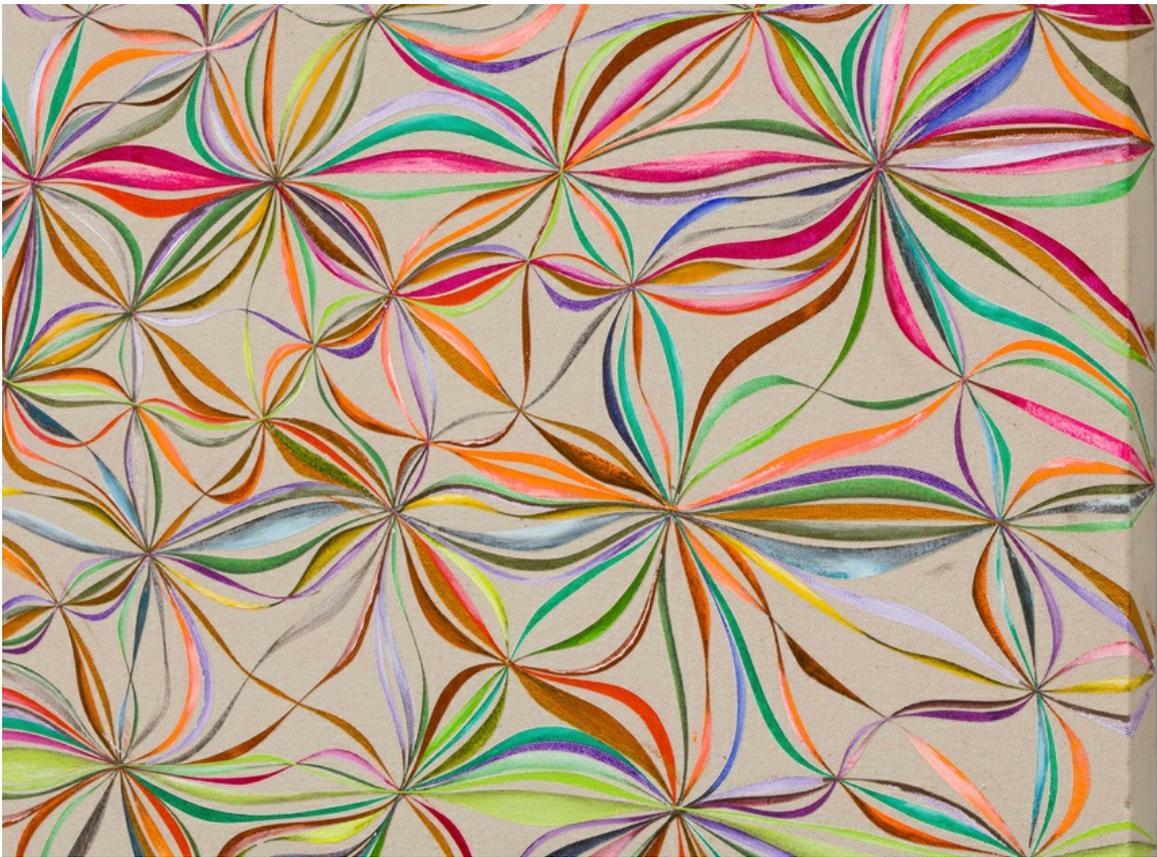
O salão da Véronique, 2016



Detail of *O salão da Véronique*, 2016



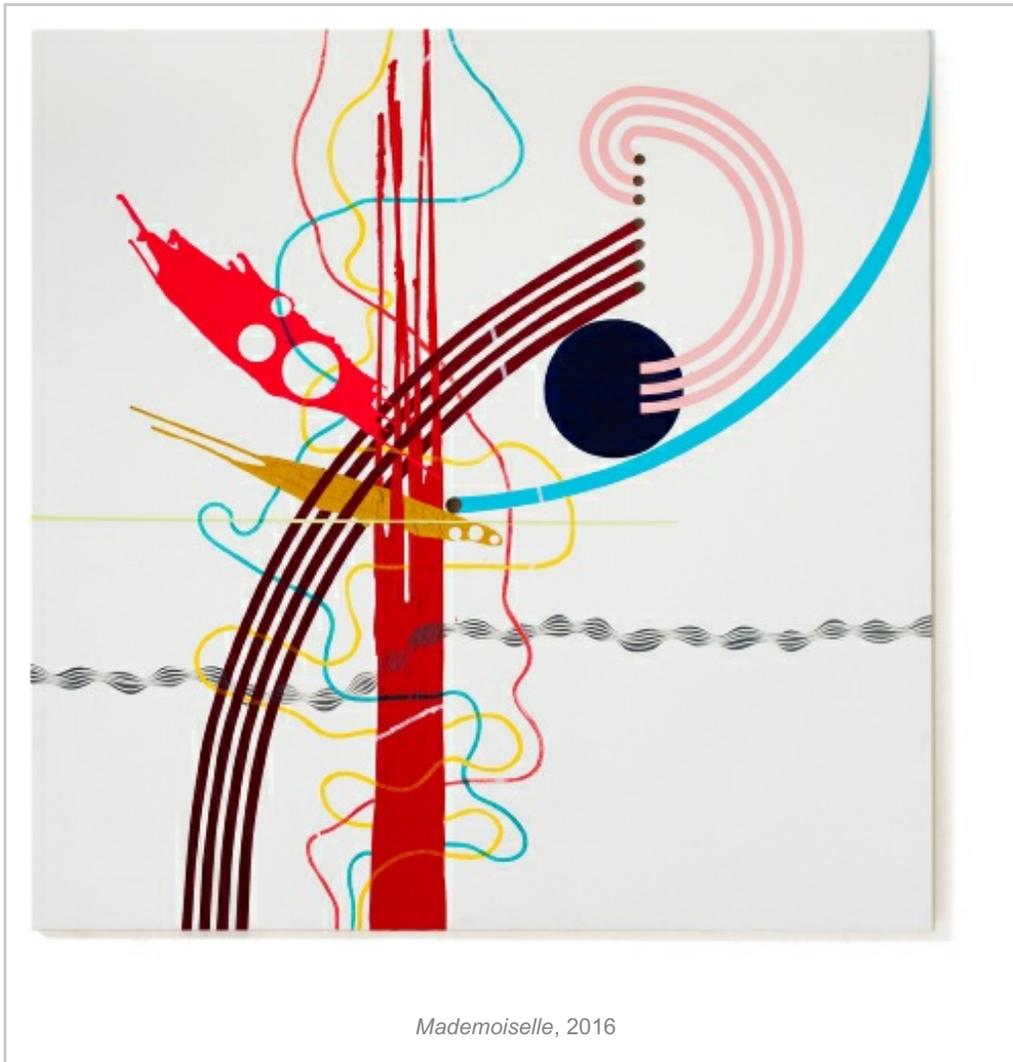
Murta, 2016



Detail of *Murta*, 2016

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affections.”



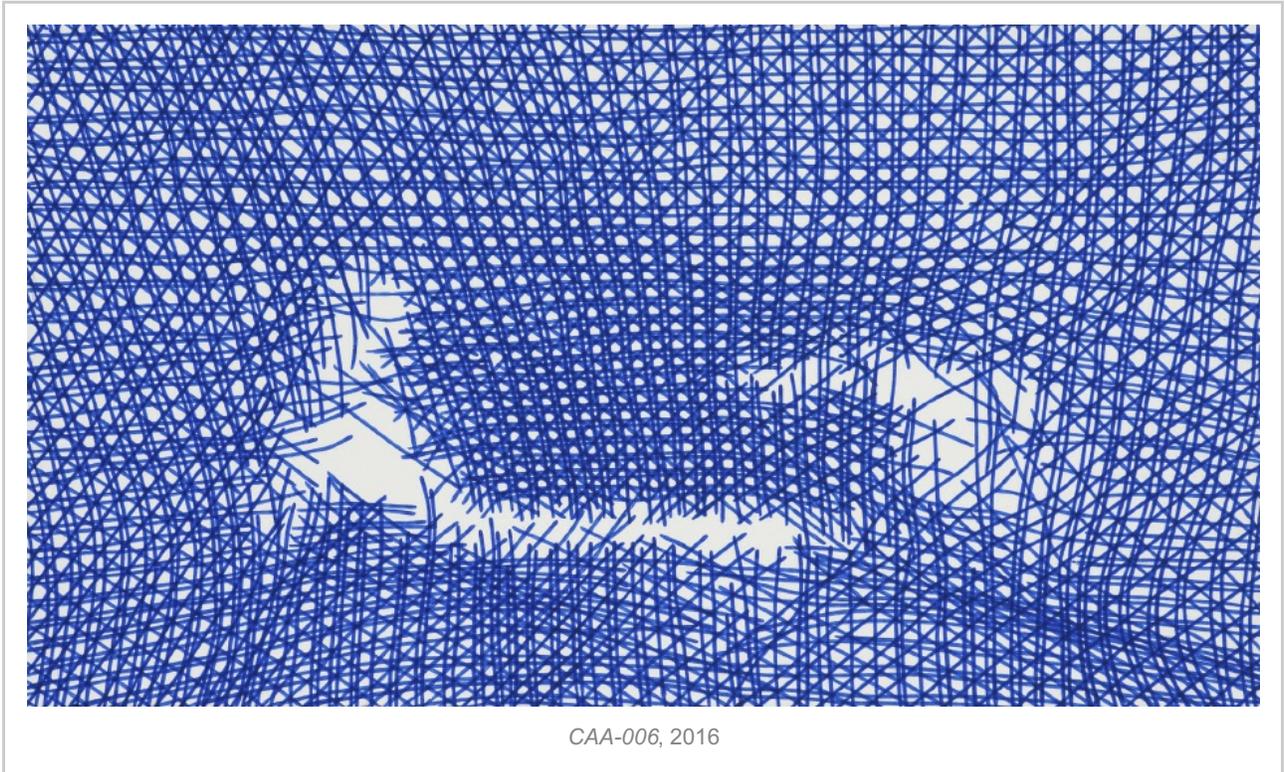
Mademoiselle, 2016

Textiles have always been something of an obsession for de Almeida, who has made embroidered pieces and paintings that resemble conventional fabric patterns with dramatic tears across them. In his geometric works, lines intertwine to create a woven effect. Now, his dense stripes, once one-inch wide, have been reduced to hair-line widths, as in *Tapeçaria* (Tapestry), from 2016. He achieved this effect using a Beugler pinstriping tool: a paint pen with interchangeable tips of different thicknesses that is typically used to paint stripes on cars and motorcycles. Previously, he painted his lines with the help of adhesive tape.

“This work is in keeping with what Caetano is known for — an investigation of color, pattern and rigorous geometry — except everything is turned up to a really high pitch,” says Augusto Arbizo, gallery director at 11R. “It’s almost as if he took his previous work and zoomed in.”

De Almeida has always had a keen eye for negative space, but in these works, the holes are particularly pronounced, as the lines break and fray. A series of smaller works marked CAA, for Caetano de Almeida Azul (Caetano de Almeida’s Blue), pays homage to French artist Yves Klein’s favorite color and adopts the pattern of *palhinha*, the titular traditional straw weaving, which looks like caning on wooden chairs. In each piece, the caning pattern is punctured and

falling apart to suggest, de Almeida says, “the decay of society.” With this brokenness, the paintings evoke Brazil’s current sociopolitical crisis, which has been marked by widespread corruption and violence. De Almeida repeats the motif in a series of small watercolors.



“Brazil is in bad shape right now,” Arbizo says. “Caetano’s unraveling motif is absolutely an allusion to what’s happening in his native land.” (It’s not the first time de Almeida has brought a bit of social commentary into this work: He once applied tape to canvases and then, in place of paint, simply exposed them to São Paulo’s deeply polluted air. Once the tape was removed, the canvases displayed compelling grisaille patterning.)



De Almeida's geometric abstraction takes cues from the Brazilian Concrete and Neo-Concrete movements, which were, by definition, devoid of allusions to reality and any kind of representation. But, says Arbizo, de Almeida expands that rich historical tradition by allowing a bit of autobiography to slip into his paintings. His titles often refer to his travels in France and elsewhere.

Arbizo muses, "You can appreciate Caetano's work formalistically — the color, the composition — but then he's let in these other, emotional elements. I think that's the best kind of painting. It speaks on a purely aesthetic level, and it also speaks of its time."
