

# whitewall

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Valeska Soares  
*Duet (from "After")*  
2008

Hand-carved white marble  
Pillow I: 7.5 x 25 x 17.5 inches  
Pillow II: 7.5 x 23 x 20 inches  
Courtesy of Eleven Rivington, New York  
and Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo

NEW ARTIST

# VALESKA SOARES: A LOVE AFFAIR

BY SIMON WATSON



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Whether preparing for her latest installation, which will appear at the entrance of the 28th São Paulo Biennial (opening October 25), or creating an intimate gallery exhibition, Valeska Soares lends a sense of theatricality to a minimalist aesthetic language that includes spare use of materials, serialization, and repetition. Much as Proust's madeleine dipped in tea unleashed a torrent of memories, Soares's recent New York solo show, "After" at Eleven Rivington, was a series of touchstones unlocking memories of loves lost. To enter her elegant installation was to slip into a private chamber, a bedroom. On the ground, or the bed, were two pillows with indentations made by heads; high up on a wall a series of views of the sky stood in for a window; and along another wall a set of bookshelves contained neatly arrayed books on the theme of love. *Duet* (2008), a delicately carved marble sculpture, represented two pillows, their undulating surfaces and indentations suggesting signs of use and evoking an untold story.

Along the entry wall of the installation was the large book sculpture, titled *Love Stories* (2008), which is part of an ongoing republishing project. Selecting books in five different languages that contain the word *love* in their titles, Soares makes new books that include on their cover and spine the title, author, and exact number of pages found in the "original" publication. The story within each book has been removed, however — the pages are empty, void. They invite the viewer to fill in the blanks. And finally, installed on the

wall on the far side of *Love Stories* was a series of 12 photographs printed on canvas that allude to a more solitary meditation on time's passage. Titled "Afterimages," it is a series of views of clouds and sky that Soares photographed at different moments from her backyard garden. Alluding to the months found in a calendar, the repetition of the 12 photographs gently, lyrically hints at the passage of time.

In a recent conversation, the artist said, "I've been working with references to time, and relationships with cultural references . . . of innovative quotation. I have a project of doing 12 pillows. It has to do with time and absence. The pillows seemed the next step in deconstructing the bed. I've done mattresses and made other allusions to the bed. This work is about death, about mortuary sculpture. And of course it's a reference to the pillows of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. These pillows are based on photos I took of my pillows in my bed. *Duet* is about dancing, not dancing, dancing around each other, not able to dance, trying not to step on each other's feet. . . ."

Soares's most recent installation is for the 28th São Paulo Biennial. Biennial curator Ivo Mesquita's exhibition proposes rethinking the role of the Biennial. As the São Paulo Biennial is the second oldest, Soares has chosen to reinterpret its very first catalogue.

"I have a relationship with books, and publishing, and literature," she says. "I came up with the idea of transforming book texts into

sculpture. I cast each letter and character from a particular text. When Ivo Mesquita came to me about appearing in the upcoming São Paulo Biennial, I decided to use the first Biennial catalogue from 1951. Taking the cover and the internal text, I'm turning the text into paper-pulp casts, and the catalogue's cover will be done as a huge carpet (5 meters by 7 meters). And piled on top of the carpet will be the individual letters and characters. There are 45,000 characters in the catalogue, but the first day we will just pile 17,000 characters. And the then paper-pulp letters will be added to the pile throughout the Biennial . . . It's like a threshold — an entrance to the building where you clean your feet. And it's the threshold of the exhibition, and of the idea of the exhibition and its own examination of its history and archive." With a robust sense of investigative play and sensuality, Soares is a romantic's minimalist.

A native of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, Soares has lived and worked in New York since 1992. Her works are included in important museum collections, such as the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the Tate Modern, London. Solo exhibitions include "After," Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo (2007); "nar-cis-sus," Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo (2005); "Follies," The Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2003); "Puro Teatro," Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City (2002); and "Vanishing Point," Galeria Camargo Vilaça, São Paulo (1998). Her work has been included in the 51st Venice Biennale (2005) and the Taipei Biennial (2006), and it will be presented at the upcoming 28th São Paulo Biennial (2008). "After" at Eleven Rivington in April 2008 was Soares's first full-scale solo exhibition in a New York gallery.



