

# HYPERALLERGIC

## Making Free Associations at the São Paulo Biennial

With 90 artists featured from across the globe at this year's São Paulo biennial, it feels imprudent to cast all the work under a single theme.

By Elisa Wouk Almino, October 16, 2016

In my review of this year's São Paulo Biennial, I noted an overwhelming trend among the featured artists to look back on their ancestral roots, whether by gaining deeper understandings of their ecologies, remembering slavery, or honoring Brazilian indigenous life. These are some of the "transdisciplinary approaches to research and education" that the biennial, curated by Jochen Volz, Gabi Ngcobo, Júlia Rebouças, Lars Bang Larsen, and Sofía Olascoaga, puts forth. The theme, *Incerteza Viva* or "Live Uncertainty," is intended to show how artists have faced the unstable and unknown, and how they can provide us with useful "strategies" for living.

While the somewhat pedantic tone of the biennial's literature can make the art sound more demagogic than it is, the best works here compel us to reconsider or pay attention to our daily habits, from the language we use to the food we eat. Víctor Grippo's initially mystifying installation of piles of potatoes on dining tables, for instance, illustrate the potential to recycle the energy generated from the root vegetable. But with 90 artists included from across the globe, it feels imprudent to cast all the artwork

here under a single theme. In reality, the experience of the biennial is more meandering, as the show struggles to contain itself, at times being subsumed into the worlds of individual artists, like Sonia Andrade's "Hydragrammas," a collection of 100 objects, including shells, gloves, suitcases, and scraps of ribbon, arranged as in a laboratory. So, in this photo essay, I've gathered a collection of images from the biennial — from Ebony G. Patterson's baroque portraits to José Antonio Suárez Londoño's obsessive, repetitive drawings — that recreate this feeling of wandering and invite you to stitch them together — or not.



*Detail of Ebony Patterson's installation*