

Tonico Lemos Auad

Unknown to the world

2 Oct – 12 Dec 2021







*Tom Jeffreys is a writer based in Edinburgh predominantly covering contemporary art and culture. His work has been published in magazines, newspapers and websites including ArtReview, Apollo, Frieze, The Independent, Monocle and New Scientist. He is the author of two books: The White Birch: A Russian Reflection (Little, Brown, 2021) and Signal Failure: London to Birmingham, HS2 on foot (Influx Press, 2017). He is also editor of The Learned Pig, an online magazine focused on art, thinking, nature, and writing.*

## *Unknown to the world*

After leaving Tonico Lemos Auad's exhibition at Cample Line and beginning to walk 20+ miles from a disused quarry in Redbrae Wood to the train station at Lockerbie, I'm thinking about trees and about cycles of growth and decay, use and reuse. My route takes me through Auchencairn Forest – an enticing green on my Ordnance Survey map; on foot, a repetitive monocrop plantation. Footpaths are access tracks for industrial machinery. Bare swathes of land denote cash crop extraction.

As I walk through densely planted Sitka spruce, my mind is on oaks, Baltic pine, and Douglas Fir: different trees originally felled for different uses – from barns to royal residences or medical institutions – and then, no longer needed, reclaimed and reused by Auad. The ethics of reuse underpins much of his work. Conveying the specific details of which materials came from where is less important to him than the more general sense that each piece has a past and that they have now come together to find new purposes in his work. Auad sets this approach consciously against built-in obsolescence. This is capitalism's tendency to make products that deliberately become outdated or break beyond repair and which, as a result, traps us in cycles of consumption and waste. For Auad, this is not only an environmental issue but one of well-being. He draws a parallel between practices of material reuse and the healing abilities of bodies and minds. Perhaps restoring one can help restore the other.

My walk continues and I notice a pain in my heel. As it grows worse, I keep thinking of the upstairs installation: those great pieces of wood held weightless in mid-air by the insouciant magic of precision engineering. In the accompanying film, Auad speaks of the building's seven original roof beams as a 'sequence' that imbues the upstairs space with 'rhythm'. He tells of his fascination with textile as a form of architecture. Here, the reverse is also true: architecture becomes textile, with the trusses forming a transverse warp and his great beams weaving over and under. In the gallery, I notice some cobwebs and I start to think of spiders like textile-architects, dangling impossible weights from these rafters long before any artists turned up.





*Unknown to the world* is a beautiful and technically impressive exhibition. ‘Wow’ is not a very insightful response to art, but I find it hard to climb the gallery stairs and not emit a gasp of wonder, excitement, curiosity. Auad speaks of forms ‘swimming in the space’: heft held weightless, lined up harmonious and rhythmic. Some of Auad’s titles allude to water: *Weight of the oceans*, for example, or *Neither land nor sea*. I picture a shipping canal (each beam a barge), or famous boats held in temporal stasis (in Dundee or Greenwich or Leith), or a river bearing driftwood downstream. This driftwood links the exhibition to filmmaker Derek Jarman’s shoreline garden at Dungeness, an influence acknowledged by Auad. Like him, Jarman found harmony in material reuse. My mind flicks from vertical to horizontal and back again: trees felled for hulls or masts; ships to ship the timber that they themselves are made from. Jarman’s driftwood menhirs. Auad’s plinth-high totems.

The work invites us to spend time in its company, to get up close, to allow mind and body to roam and wander. I take two hours in the gallery, hardly notice as time flows fast, onward to the estuary. There is just so much to take in. The materials themselves are, in a quite conventional sense, beautiful, and for a time I’m transfixed by the tree rings of a beam held up high. But Auad is also a master of contrast (hard, gleaming bronze, the softness of handwoven wool rope) and colour: lilac, russet red, burnt oranges and ochre, dusky pale pink (there’s a photograph of Jarman in a boiler suit exactly this shade). Many of the interventions reflect or respond to what’s already there, so it can be hard to tell what’s what. Marquetry techniques have been employed to infill pale wood into the cracked and salt-silvered surface of an oak beam. The inlay forms streaks, like a river or a vein of quartz: a seam of wood within the wood. *Nocturnal* (2021) is a landscape formed of subtle differences between blacks that are never black: grey, navy, charcoal, sepia. I can’t help thinking of *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas and the gentle rhythms of that ‘slow, black, sloe-black, crow-black, fishing-boat-bobbing sea’.

Auad prepares us gently for the abundance of detail to come. On the ground floor are two groups of sculptural pieces and one of the artist’s hybrid textile works. In height, each piece of wood might simply be a fence post, but the time and care and skilled labour that



*Nocturnal, 2021*





has been lavished so subtly upon them denotes significance, some ritual power perhaps. At the same time, I'm reminded of how, in the Soviet Union, visible brushmarks were seen as evidence that painting was a manual act and therefore a form of labour to celebrate. In Auad's sculptures, some surfaces have been worked like beaten copper; others carved into to create traceable patterns of tiny burls or beans. Some of these processes are absurdly time-consuming and the effects extremely subtle. For example, take a look upstairs at the parallel lines running around one beam, produced by removing the entire surface layer to leave just those lines remaining. This is what Auad means when he speaks of contemporary art's 'disrespectful' approach to traditional crafts. He works extremely closely with many collaborators but his priorities are not the same as theirs. 'I really admire their skills,' he tells me, 'but I'm not following the laws of any one particular practice.'

Textiles have long been a vital presence in Auad's work. At Cample Line, fabrics hang from some pieces of wood, woollen ropes thread through others. They point towards a multiplicity of peoples, traditions, techniques and cultures. Knots abound. Each nods to maritime practices and the importance of security, both physical (knots to hold things fast) and also symbolic (knots to denote social ties like marriage perhaps or friendship). But Auad's use of knots also owes a debt to shibari, the ancient Japanese practice of rope bondage. This is characteristic of his interest in bringing together diverse vernacular craft traditions. Some writers have described these juxtapositions as confrontational but to me they feel more like companionable, even joyful, introductions. Around the walls are constructed textile pieces, made using Tunisian stitch, a hybrid between knitting and crochet. These incorporate a wide range of materials including cotton, wool, linen, and Japanese paper yarn. Facing each other upstairs is a pair based upon a purchased textile made from reclaimed materials including sari cloth. You can see the gold flecks if you get up close, and you might start to think about multiple concentric circles of recycling and reuse. In *Neither land nor sea*, Auad has pulled at the threads of a flag-like square of dark linen, unpicking parts only to reweave them. He speaks of an 'entropic concept of disorganising that very organised pattern of weft and warp'.

At Cample Line, it's always worth taking a moment to look out the window. As I sit on a wide ledge, I gaze outside, connecting Auad's work with the world beyond: not only picturesque landscape features like dry stone walls weaving up sheep-grazed hills but also neighbouring Armstrong Joinery, who worked on Cample Line and other buildings at Cample Mill. I start to think of the gallery itself as an act of reuse. By one window is Auad's *Hippocampus* (2021), a textile piece marked by a design of repeated n-shaped hoops. *Hippocampus*, by the way, is part of the brain, but it is also Greek for both a sea horse and a mythological hybrid between fish and horse. I wonder if Auad is drawn to the hybridity of the word or if he sees something of the brain's undulating ridges in the form of these hoops. To me, they echo the weaving technique itself but they also riff on the bronze handle-like form attached to one of the high-up beams. The extraordinary purple heart wooden frame encourages me to see those interlocking beams as frames of a kind too – the work framing the window framing the world. As I look outside, I notice the similarity between those woven hoops and the arches of the nearby viaduct. Then my eye drifts down to a tree, a coppiced beech I think: wood as the picture, wood as the frame, and my mind whirls in endless circles of cutting and growth and cutting and regrowth.

Or perhaps, after all, I'm simply tying myself in knots. Time for a walk.





*Unknown to the world, 2021*

*Buffalo* (detail), 2021









*Hippocampus, 2021*

## List of works

1. **Untitled**, 2021  
Wool, paper, linen and cotton in a purple heart wooden frame  
31.3 x 26 x 3 cm
2. **Unknown to the world**, 2021  
Carved reclaimed timber, cast bronze and linen in four parts, each  
120 x 15 x 15 cm  
128 x 15 x 15 cm  
130 x 15 x 15 cm  
140 x 15 x 15 cm
3. **Buffalo**, 2021  
Carved reclaimed timber and linen in two parts, each  
128 x 26 x 28 cm  
128 x 28 x 28 cm
4. **October**, 2021  
Wool, paper, linen and cotton in a purple heart wooden frame  
64 x 64 cm
5. **God of a thousand arms**, 2021  
Carved reclaimed timber, wood, bronze, handwoven wool rope  
Overall display dimensions  
204 x 230 x 30 cm
6. **Weight of the oceans**, 2021  
Carved reclaimed timber, wood, bronze, handwoven wool rope  
Overall display dimensions  
200 x 245 x 24 cm
7. **Carimbó**, 2021  
Woven textile, wool, linen, thread  
82 x 100 x 2 cm
8. **Hippocampus**, 2021  
Wool, paper, linen and cotton in a purple heart wooden frame  
64 x 65 x 3 cm
9. **Neither land nor sea**, 2021  
Carved reclaimed timber, bronze, linen  
Overall display dimensions  
188 x 269 x 28 cm
10. **Nocturnal**, 2021  
Wool, paper, linen and cotton in a purple heart wooden frame  
64 x 64 cm
11. **Jibóia Arco-Iris**, 2021  
Carved reclaimed timber, wood, bronze, handwoven wool rope  
Overall display dimensions  
254 x 255 x 32 cm
12. **Salt Castle**, 2021  
Woven textile, wool, linen, thread  
126 x 150 x 2 cm

*Dimensions are given H x W x D*

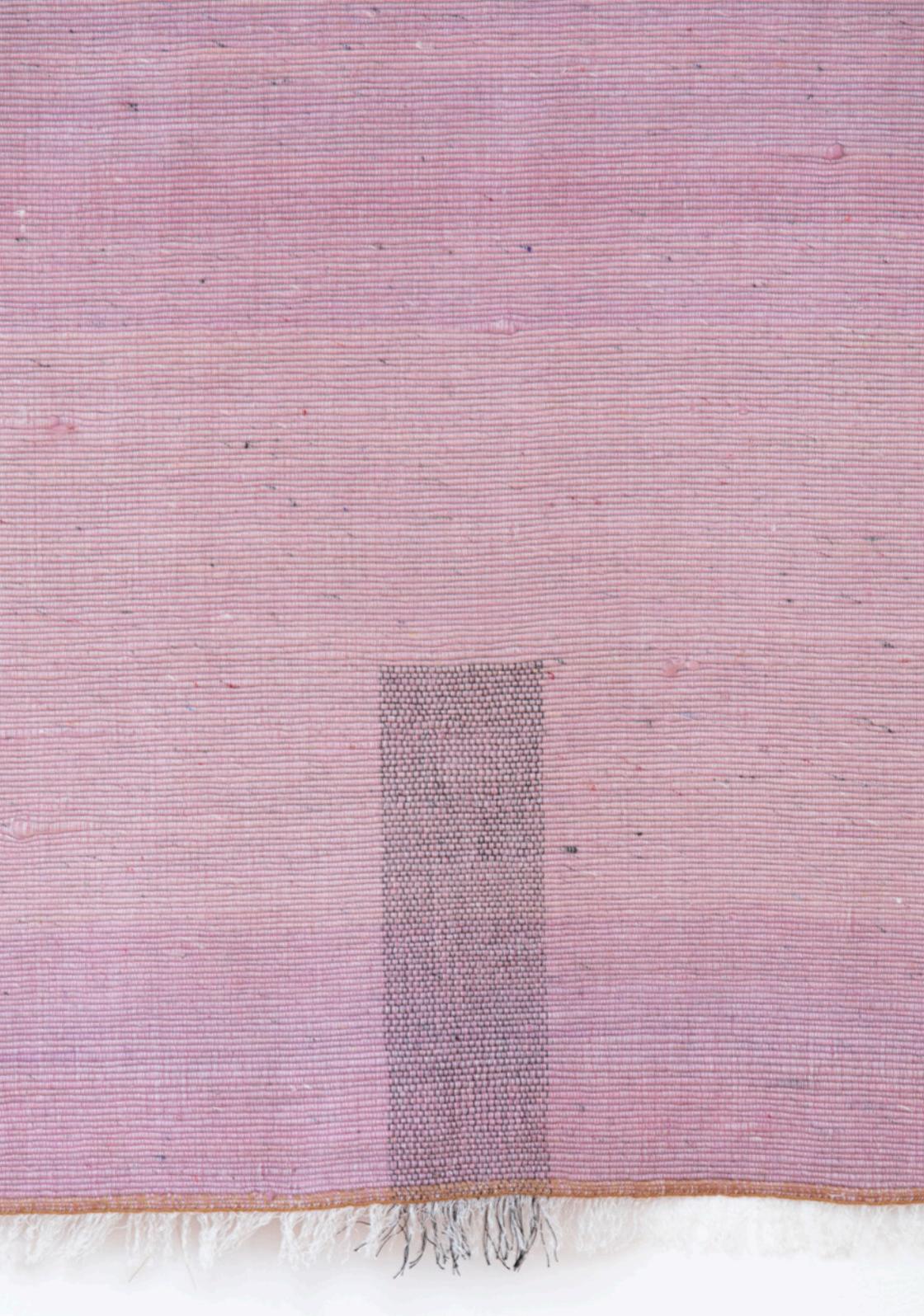
**Tonico Lemos Auad** was born in 1968 in Belém, Brazil. He now lives and works in London, UK. His varied practice investigates materiality, sensuality, process and how people negotiate the space around them. He works with a diverse range of materials, including carpets, jewellery, fruit and vegetables, lace, linen, wool, bricks, aluminium cans, plants, stone, wood and bronze, and draws on processes and techniques associated with carpentry, joinery, weaving, and needlework.

In 2020 the artist exhibited at Biennale Gherdëina VII in Ortisei, South Tyrol, Italy. In 2019, Stephen Friedman Gallery presented two separate solo projects by Auad and Mamma Andersson at Frieze London, winning the 2019 Frieze Stand Prize. In 2017 Auad presented 'A moment of the sky/ four humours' as part of the Sharjah Biennial (13th edition) in the UAE. In 2016, he was the subject of a major solo exhibition at De La Warr Pavilion in East Sussex, UK. In 2011, a collection of specially commissioned sculptures titled 'Carrancas and Reflected Archaeology' were exhibited as part of the Folkestone Triennial in Kent, UK.

Other recent solo exhibitions include 'Tonico Lemos Auad', Pivô, curated by Kiki Mazzuchelli, São Paulo, Brazil (2015); 'Paisagem Noturna', Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo, Brazil (2013); 'Tonico Lemos Auad', Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, UK (2012-2013); 'Sleep Walkers', Centro Cultural São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2011); 'Epílogo', Zapopan Museum, Zapopan, Mexico (2010); and Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, Colorado, USA (2007).

His work is included in the public collections of Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, New York, USA; Pizzuti Collection, Ohio, USA; San Diego Museum of Art, California, USA; West Collection, Pennsylvania, USA; FLAG Art Foundation, New York, USA; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California, USA; Zabłudowicz Collection, London, UK; Tate, London, UK; Museum of Contemporary Art, Vigo, Spain; British Friends of the Art Museums of Israel, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel; Pinacoteca de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil; and Instituto Inhotim, Brumadinho, Minas Gerais, Brazil.





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