

Review of Ernesto Neto, The Edges of The World, Hayward Gallery – Southbank Centre, London



Review by Elisa Caldarola

Festival Brazil is a big event running throughout the summer at the Southbank Centre in London. Brazilian artist, Ernesto Neto is one of the most iconic international contemporary visual artists working today. For the festival, he has created *The Edges of The World*, a multi-sensorial installation that occupies the entire upper floor of Hayward Gallery and branches out into the terraces. Part of the work is an inflatable pool that visitors can actually use (provided that they bring a swimsuit, are older than 8 and taller than 1.10 m), as well as a delicious tropical oasis.

The main body of the work is made entirely out of nylon, possibly Neto's favourite material. When we go up the stairs to the upper floor, we enter a space where the ceiling, the walls, and even part of the floor are delicately covered in a veil of nylon. We are invited to touch and explore gently. The colours are delicate: mostly pastels, with the exception of some red and yellow areas.

However, when we look more closely, we see the many orifices on the surface of the veil and the tensionless pieces of nylon reveals the sensual content of the work. It is the nylon itself that holds these characteristics. The whole space of the gallery looks like the body of some mysterious creature wearing immense nylon tights. It is an alluring creature that wants to be admired. On a wall there is a city map in relief. Neto sees bodies as if they were cities: topographic concepts replace the usual psychological language to describe the identity of the person inhabiting the body.

There are vertical wooden elements – covered in nylon like everything else, which look like the bones of a large animal. There is a strawberry-like structure, where we can enter and sit. Inside it has a drum we can play with a pendulum-like tool. It produces a deep sound: this is the inside of a hearth. Neto says of the veil structure that it is like skin, the first contact zone between bodies and the world. We are looking at the skin of an animal from the inside, so that we also have access to the internal organs. We can walk inside a multi-coloured intestinal tunnel and then move to an area where the floor has been covered in an apple-green veil of nylon. We are invited to walk barefoot on it, softly. That the work is delicately treated is a condition of its survival. The work is a creature we have to take care of.

My favourite bit is the hidden world beyond the nylon ceiling: we get to see it only if we climb the stairs placed here and there around the exhibition space. From this new viewpoint the ceiling becomes the ground on which a forest of ethereal nylon segments has grown, and only the tips of the large structures below can be seen in this surreal landscape. It is silent and distant, a place for contemplation, totally different from the playground below. Is this the space beyond the skin, a metaphor for the mysterious, alien outer world? Neto's creature turns immersive again on the terrace, literally so when it invites us to enter the little pool. So don't forget to go on a sunny day if you want to have all the fun.



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