

Daniel Malva. Gabinete de Curiosidades

30 May–29 Jun 2014 at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London



Daniel Malva, *Canis lupus familiaris*

There is the sensation of stumbling upon a Victorian parlour – various specimens greet you, each neatly catalogued, as you browse the zoological display. Iridescent beetles, a terrifyingly life-like spider, a toucan, a pelican and a mandrill – they are all pinned in boxes or propped on stands, carefully preserved, some through taxidermy, others, formaldehyde. However, the dusty cabinets and vitrines of the Victorian collector’s house are replaced with hauntingly intimate photographs, milky and pale. Each creature feels suspended, at once present, yet just out of reach. Other images cause a shock as the eye focuses to find the subject amongst this optical fog – a disembodied hand, a human skull, a whale heart – the border between animal and human hard to distinguish and blurred. Kristin Hjellegjerde (ArtEco) is proud to announce ‘Gabinete de Curiosidades’, a solo exhibition addressing issues of re-categorisation, ecology and biology through photography by Brazilian artist Daniel Malva, running from 30th May – 29th June 2014.

The choice of these strange and sometimes unsettling subjects hails from the artist's background in biology, which he studied before going on to earn his degree in photography from Senac. During his time in the natural sciences, Malva also spent four years working at the Genome Project, and it was this experience, coupled with visits to natural history museums in and around the small towns of Sao Paulo, that was influential in his now iconic photographic work coming together. Inspired by the collections of the great voyages and discoveries of the 16th and 17th centuries, Malva began to create his Museu de História Natural, a menagerie of the animal and the human, the part and the whole, interior and exterior. It is an exploration of the underlying unifying qualities of all biological matter. Fully taxidermied animals are joined by skulls and other viscera in an attempt "to show that we are all made of the same material," says Malva. "As part of nature, we have skulls, bones and flesh. Life and death come for everyone. I hope to show that it doesn't make sense to live with racial and social prejudices and differences – on a biological level, we are all one and the same, the same material, the same mortal flesh."

Malva works with a unique photographic technique which allows him to at once highlight and obscure the subject. For him, the relationship between the three components of subject, photographic process and final image is one of equal strength between the three. An integral part of the artist's oeuvre is his own involvement in each step of the production, a "resumption of the role of the photographer in the 19th century." In an age of digital cameras and smart phones that allow for high resolution photography at the swipe of a button, Malva seeks to bring back a focus to the craft of the photographer. "The digital era has heralded a whole new world for photography, but since the 20th century, the industry has been gradually moving away from the act of being involved in the full process – of experimenting. I feel as though people engage less and less with what they do, and this is creating a distance between us and the photograph – I feel that anything produced without involvement (both technical and emotional) reduces the finished product into something poor and obsolete."

The artist creates his signature milky lens effect by using recycled and trash components while taking the photograph. "I wanted to create a unique texture that was not common to digital photography," he explains. Malva experimented with programming the camera's processor, opening it up to understand how everything worked mechanically. "I've always loved finding out how things work, and my photography also comprises finding new approaches to working with common techniques or subjects," says Malva, who is currently studying mechatronics. It was then that he realised he could use a lower quality lens to get different photographic effects. "One day I came across a shampoo cap, which, when placed against a window or source of light, projected a small image," he says. This turned out to be a seminal moment, as he began experimenting with photographing through the bottle cap. "My intention with these distorted images is to confront reality and create a connection between the spectator and the subject, but in a not-so-obvious or literal way," he says.

Malva also credits as an influence those artists who have used typologies of language, such as Sophie Calle and, in particular, Bernd and Hilla Becher. "I realised I needed to join these two branches of knowledge, the study of identification and nomenclature with the investigations into classification and typology that these artists had made," he says. The result is a series of work that continues to evolve, classifying and reclassifying the world

around him and highlighting the role of these small museum collections and the people who care for them. “There is a great need to preserve knowledge,” he says, “We need to seek alternate ways in order to address issues of ecology and conservation, and I feel that these photographs, at least in part, help to highlight that.” Since finishing the Natural History Museum series, Malva has been experimenting with new lenses and working in a dark room. New work investigates the way in which the terrestrial can represent the celestial – and that, after all, is Malva’s very argument – beetles, spiders, whales, teeth, fingers, skulls and hearts, the list goes on – but we are all made of the same earthly matter. All that we are is comprised of the eons of recycled biological matter that have gone before us, and the millennia of universal debris falling from space, stretching back as far as the beginning of time.

Daniel Malva was born in 1977 in Ribeirão Preto, Brazil. He has lived and worked in São Paulo since 2001. At the age of 13, Malva began drawing, working in an advertising studio. He spent the next eight years there, drawing and experimenting with various media. In 1998 he joined the Faculdade de Biologia, followed by work as a researcher for the Projeto Genoma for four years. In 2006, he received his Bachelor’s degree in photography from the National Service of Commerce Learning (Senac-SP). Since then, he has been in search of new photographic approaches: the effects and textures in his work are the result of his objective lens, built with the remains of other lenses and/or discarded material. In 2009, inspired by the collections of the 16th and 17th centuries, Malva presented the photo essay Natural History Museum. In 2012, he began studying Mechatronics, aiming at enhancing the construction of his photographic equipment. Recent solo exhibitions include Organometrismo, Rio de Janeiro Botanical Gardens, Brazil (2013), Natural History Museum, at the Ophicina and Mezanino Gallery, both in Sao Paulo (2010 and 2009 respectively), while group shows include and There and Back, IPF, Lisboa and Porto, Portugal (2012).

Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

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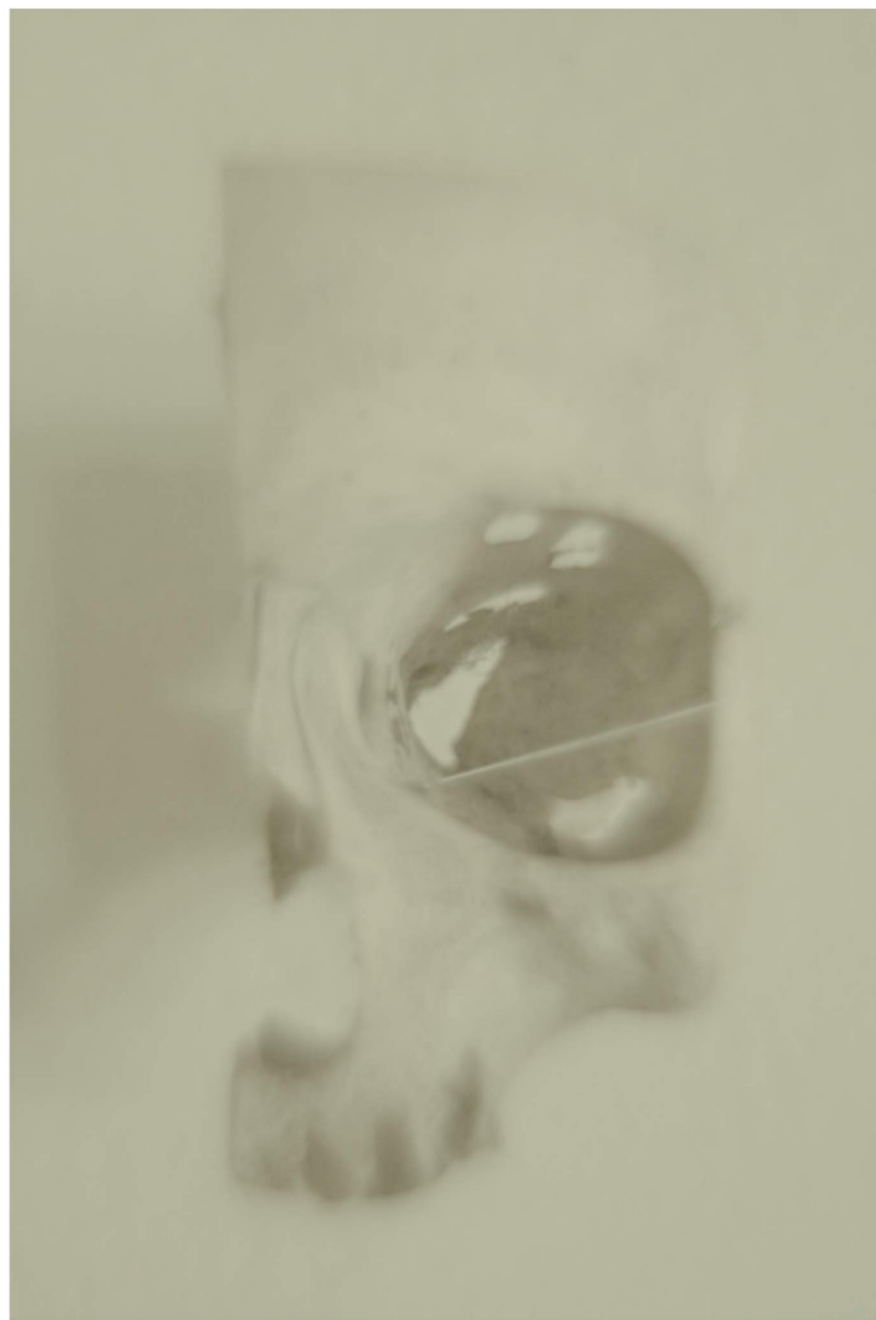
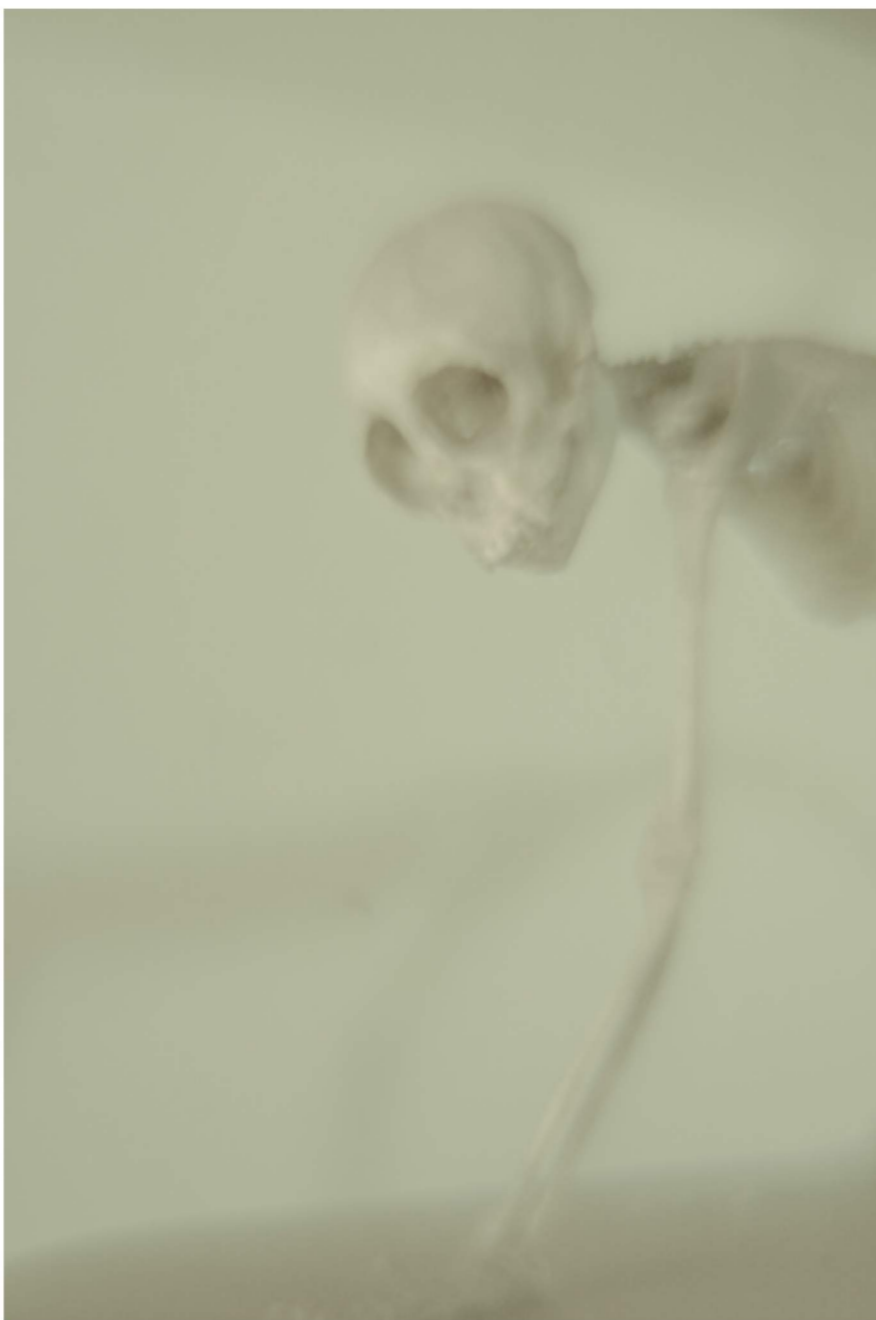
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Opening hours

Tuesday - Saturday

From 11am to 6pm



Captions

1. Daniel Malva, *Caiman latirostris*
2. Daniel Malva, *Callithrix penicillata*
3. Daniel Malva, *Homo sapiens*
4. Daniel Malva, *Mandrillus sphinx*
5. Daniel Malva, *Balaenoptera*
6. Daniel Malva, *Ramphastus dicolorus*