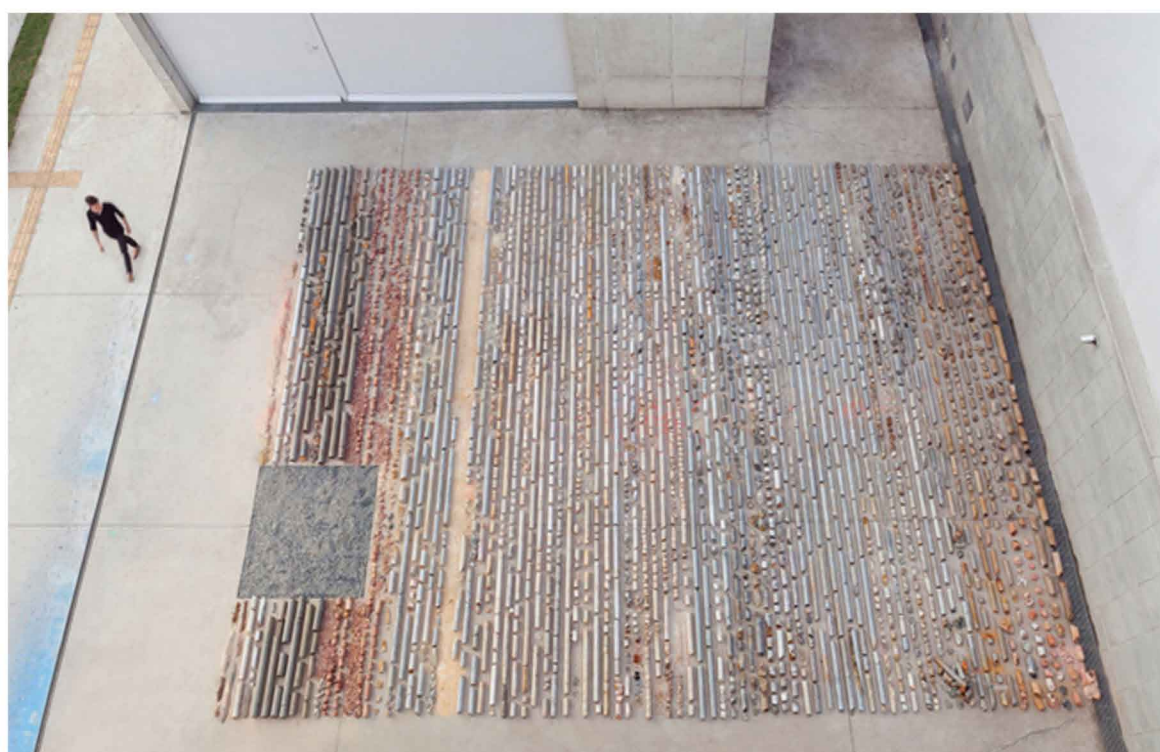


SÃO PAULO



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Daniel de Paula, *Testemunho*, 2015, rock, soil, 8" × 23' × 29'. Installation view. Photo: Filipe Berndt.

Daniel de Paula

GALERIA LEME

The open-air patio that stands between the two concrete buildings that house Galeria Leme, designed by Brazilian Pritzker Prize–winner Paulo Mendes da Rocha and Metro Architects, is usually used as a parking area. This unassuming space serves as the stage for SITU, a program (organized by curator Bruno de Almeida) of site-specific projects by Latin American artists that is intended to explore the intersections of art, architecture, and the city.

For the second edition of SITU, de Almeida invited Daniel de Paula, a Brazilian artist based in São Paulo whose artworks are typically site-specific reflections on the bureaucratic, historical, economic, political, and social structures that shape their location and context. His readymades of choice, for example streetlamps and lighting rods, are typically removed from public areas after intense negotiations with public and private organizations—a process the artist sees as an integral part of the artwork, not merely a vehicle for its making.

De Paula's *Testemunho*, 2015, consists of two thousand linear feet of stone cylinders and fragments thereof, laid out and spaced systematically to form an area of about 23 by 30 feet, covering most of the patio floor. These cylindrical rock rods, on average about four inches high—the occasional pile of rubble reaches twice that height—are in Portuguese technically called *testemunhos* (testimonials) by geologists and engineers and serve as documental proof of the quality of the soil of sites where large-scale urban mobility structures such as ring roads, overpasses, and tunnels are built. The testimonials de Paula presented here relate to seven different road works in the state of São Paulo and are made from rocks and minerals that date as far back as 4.5 million years. The artist laid them out with the help of a geologist so that the youngest rocks were the closest to the road that runs outside the gallery area and the oldest closest to the back wall parallel to it. One might not have considered the work's relationship to the road outside, and the chronology would have been unnoticeable to most viewers unless guided by the gallery's accompanying brochure. What stood out visually was the elegance of the rhythmical repetition of the simple individual forms and their variations in hues, especially when seen from the covered footbridge that connects the gallery's two buildings.

The testimonials were acquired from a group of São Paulo–based construction companies. It is well known that in Brazil, government funds tend to be used to enrich a well-connected few, and indeed, the budgets for many of the road works that were the source of de Paula's testimonials increased markedly once the jobs were begun. *Testemunho* comes at a time when deeply rooted corruption is increasingly coming to light in Brazil, and one of the biggest scandals currently in the news involves some of the same companies responsible for the infrastructure works referred to by de Paula. Not only is *Testemunho* indirectly a substantiation of this current state of affairs; it also refers directly to Galeria Leme's history. The original site of the gallery, a few blocks away from where it stands now, is occupied by a skyscraper that houses the headquarters of construction giant Odebrecht—one of the companies responsible for a still-unfinished ring road that is under investigation for irregularities. Its testimonials in de Paula's work are among the oldest rock rods exhibited. Arraying the ancient rocks in *Testemunho* according to their date of origin, de Paula flattens this enormous time frame and roots it in the present. He reminds us that public works ostensibly devised to improve the quality of life in Brazil have yielded results, if any, at a very high social and financial cost.

—*Camila Belchior*