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Joana Vasconcelos

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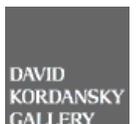
03.23.13-08.25.13 *Palácio Nacional da Ajuda*

Using unexpectedly quotidian materials—from plastic cutlery to tampons—Joana Vasconcelos creates grandiose sculptures that critique and invigorate their environments. Following her redecoration of the Château de Versailles in 2012, the Paris-born, Lisbon-based artist's current exhibition takes over a similarly ostentatious setting—the nineteenth-century Ajuda National Palace in Lisbon—with thirty-eight sculptures made over the past twelve years.

Riffing on the decor and function of the palace's Sala de Mármore—designed as a Victorian-style winter garden with alabaster walls and floors—Vasconcelos flanks a neoclassical Carrara marble fountain with two robotic sculptures made from dozens of Bosch irons (*A todo o vapor verde* [Full Steam Ahead Green], 2013, and *A todo o vapor vermelho* [Full Steam Ahead Red], 2012.). In each, a rosette of clothing irons whose pointed noses radiate outward echoes the shape of the fountain's wide basin. Every petal of this ornate flower consists of two irons with their flat sides joined together. Periodically these pairs all hinge open, like Venus flytraps, in unison, letting out a hiss of steam that evokes the warm and moist conditions of the greenhouse.

Originally exhibited in Marie Antoinette's bedroom, *Perruque* (Wig), 2012, resembles an enormous Fabergé egg. Now, luscious tresses dangle from this absurdist take on a wig stand—made of polished wood and featuring ornate ebony inlays—in Queen Maria Pia's chambers. Against a backdrop of crystal chandeliers, red velvet curtains, gilded armchairs, and a pompous full-length portrait, *Perruque* honors decorative craftsmanship while mocking royal vanities. A similarly flamboyant and eccentric work, *A novia* (The Bride), 2001–2005, is an oversize chandelier made of some two thousand OB tampons. Shown at the 2005 Venice Biennale (but deemed too outrageous for Versailles), the glistening pendant dominates the Sala de D. João IV. Dwarfing the macho history paintings of King João IV nearby, Vasconcelos's work imbues this staid, masculine room with a healthy dose of femininity and humor.

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