

VOGUE

LIVING

At This Brutalist São Paulo House, a New Creative Community Is Blossoming

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Does an art gallerist ever outgrow their art gallery? “No, never,” says Benjamin Trigano, while considering the endless process of discovery—of new talents, new pieces, new shows—that comes with the territory of his job. As far as physical space goes, though, the founder of [M+B](#) in Los Angeles does admit there could be “a more meaningful way” to experience art than the white cube we know.

In spite of M+B’s progressive roster, which spans the Haitian painter Didier William to Riot Grrrl photographer Whitney Hubbs, the gallery’s two West Hollywood outposts do mirror their contemporaries—other evenly-lit, blank-walled art meccas that are as immaculate as they are unintrusive. It allows showgoers to gaze at works without distractions, but it can also feel a little sterile at times. “At a lot of places it feels like you’re in and out,” agrees Trigano, a Parisian transplant who also owns the Philippe Starck-designed millennial boutique hotel chain [Mama Shelter](#). “Now, I’m trying to do something a bit different.”



During an opportune window between the Milan art fair Miart and Salone del Mobile last month, Trigano unexpectedly opened the doors to Casa MB, a cozy, apartment-concept gallery in the city’s Magenta District that is anything but bare. “We’re a gallery that’s not *truly* a gallery,” he clarifies of the maximalist Milanese family unit, where Expressionist paintings by the Vienna-based Hungarian painter Eva Beresin can be enjoyed in a mid-century salon replete with a Bauhaus sofa and emerald-tinted mirrored coffee table. “You can be there for 30 minutes or three hours,” says the gallerist, who welcomes appointment-only patrons with conversation and a fresh cup of espresso on a seasonal basis. “The fact that it’s happening at the same time as Domo Damo is purely coincidence.” [Domo Damo](#) being the *other* hybrid-home-secret Trigano is finally ready to reveal—halfway across the globe, in São Paulo, Brazil.

If Casa MB provides an unconventional space in which to observe art, then Domo Damo—whose name translates to “house of love” in Esperanto—offers something altogether more communal. “It’s a space for dreaming,” adds David Laloum, Trigano’s partner on the project, and a friend for over 40 years. A fellow French expatriate, Laloum previously owned Bar Secreto—the infamous nightclub favored by the likes of

Paulistanos and international A-listers from Michel Gondry to Madonna—when he came across an abandoned house by the late Brazilian architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha in the city’s Granja Julieta neighborhood.



“There was no choice, we had to have it,” Laloum remembers thinking when he first stepped foot into the striking residence once known as Casa Miani. From one angle, the modernist structure appears almost impenetrable, its walls of poured concrete—what Mendes da Rocha termed “liquid stone”—forming a cool gray monolith that stands in stark contrast to the surrounding Brazilian jungle. From another, diagonal cut-outs and skylights open the home up to the organic world around it. Inside, an enormous atrium allows streams of light to pour down a jagged cement stairwell—one of many—outlined in a toasted caramel wooden trim.

Laloum notes it was the first Brutalist house from the architect, who was commissioned to design it for the artist and gallery owner Gaetano Miano in 1962. After two years of construction, the Mianos only lived in the residence until 1968, at which point the family decamped from São Paulo to Rome to escape Brazil’s military dictatorship. Spanning three bedrooms, shared common spaces—for both the residents and service staff—and a private pool lined with vivid greenery and serene lily ponds, the estate is an expansive foil to both the industry’s white cube concept and M+B’s intimate Milanese apartment. But in true Mendes da Rocha fashion, its monumentality does not dwarf those inside it. Undeniably colossal, the Pritzker Prize-winning architect’s constructions retain a uniquely humanistic quality that allows the people to feel just as grand as the spaces they enter.

“We had to preserve everything,” says Laloum, who leads Domo Damo on the ground. (The Los Angeles-based Trigano Zooms in regularly, and visits in person as often as he can.) Indeed, nearly all of Mendes da Rocha’s original ideas are recognizable within the property today, which—other than nearly six decades of material updates—counts a stained wooden structure by designer Roberto Somlo as its only architectural addition. “We didn’t want to try to imitate the house,” says Laloum. “In fact, we knew that we could not.”

Instead, the new room complements Mendes da Rocha’s historical building while also paying poetic homage to another Brazilian modernist architect, Lina Bo Bardi, whose iconic Casa de Vidro house sits in the city’s Morumbi neighborhood. It also serves as one of three art studios for the project’s inaugural artist residency program, which just concluded as part of the soft opening.

Since mid-January, the emerging Brazilian artists Lu Ferreira, Andre Moura, and Thiago Molon have called Domo Doma home, cooking in its futuristic 1960s kitchen and lining the walls of its sun-soaked great room with paintings of dancing figures and mythological interpretations of Vidigal lore. “The fact that all three are painters happened to be a coincidence,” says Trigano, who admits that the medium is one of the easiest to control in a new space. The goal moving forward is to have a varied mix—not only of disciplines, but of artists with different points of view. Each artist is invited personally by the two founders, and, in addition to room and board, is given carte blanche in their activities. “It’s not *Big Brother*,” notes Laloum. “It’s their home for the time they’re there. We make introductions, host viewings, and advise them on their work, but it’s their time.”

Brasília-based visual artist Poli Pieratti, Congolese painter and poet Merveille KéléKélé, and Luana Vitra, who was born in Contagem and works across sculpture, dance, and performance, will kick off the next

chapter of the Domo Doma residency this summer, and are the first trio whose stay at the house will be shared more publicly. “Before you had to do a little homework if you wanted to find out,” says Trigano. “It wasn’t so much us trying to keep a secret, but rather us bringing back a sense of intimacy to the experience.”

The parallels between the studio-slash-gallery residence and Trigano’s own background in hospitality are also not lost on its two partners, who count the relationships they’re forming—inside the Brazilian art world, and between the artists themselves—as their guiding light. “We’re trying to create a community that will nurture itself,” says Laloum, who has already found proof of concept. After finishing the historic house’s first residency earlier this spring, Ferreira and Molon have decided to share a new studio in the real world as they both move forward in their careers. Domo Doma is eagerly awaiting their return.

