

## **Spaghetti junction**

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**2023**

Brasília-based artist Ismael Monticelli is concerned with the intrinsic violence of utopian projects. In Brazil, the violence of erasure – integral to the establishment of utopias – follows a colonial logic and comes with both human and environmental costs. For the artist, the built environment of modernism – far from fulfilling the utopian promise for which it was designed – becomes a stage for political obscurantism and reactionism. Alluding to the resurgence of mysticism in contemporary Brazilian society and politics, Monticelli draws on ideas of bestiary that European settlers took with them to the New World, such as representations of monsters that were deemed to populate unknown regions. He also reflects on the legacy of Oscar Niemeyer’s architecture for Brasília, including the Palácio da Alvorada (the President’s official residence since 1958) and the city’s Catholic cathedral, completed in 1970.

With his installation, *Spaghetti Junction* (2022), Monticelli draws parallels between Birmingham and Brasília with a “bestiary” of brutalism. He deliberately employs medieval allegories as a way of avoiding the use of hard-edged motifs and forms to represent modernism. The installation comprises a 6-metre-tall painted blue triangle, on to which paintings and sculptures are fixed in a totemic arrangement. Gravelly Hill Interchange in Birmingham – commonly known as “Spaghetti Junction” – becomes a metaphor for entanglement in time and space, between the UK city and Brasília, but also ancient Egypt, the Middle Ages, the mid-20th century, and the present day. In Monticelli’s paintings, the modernist buildings of Brasilia are akin to black shadows and corpses, their remnants “feasted” on by medieval and ancient beasts. Monticelli’s systematic and methodological approach enables an examination of connections between the civic designs of Brasília and Birmingham, and of the relationship between architecture, politics, and people.

[Text published in the exhibition catalog *Horror in the Modernist Block*, curated by Melanie Pocock, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham/UK, 2023.]