

Edgar Martins



00:00.00

The origins of Edgar Martins (born 1977) are an important key that significantly shapes the character of his work. The artist's birthplace, Évora, a south Portuguese town with a population of about fifty thousand, is included on UNESCO's World Heritage List. It has influenced Martins not just through its majestic Roman landmarks but also with its Moorish sense of symmetry, rhythm and detail. At the same time, these attributes in Martins' works are combined with technical quality, many times to the point of an obsessive preoccupation with the perfect composition he encountered during his adolescence in the former Portuguese colony of Macau. The strong cultural traditions existing in both places are ingrained in the artist's unique talent to evoke an intense experience and strengthen the ability to transpose 'beauty' even through subject matter that is basically unattractive.

The direction of Martins' original spontaneous inclinations was later channelled by the creative climate in Britain, where he settled after graduating from the Royal College of Art in London. This crucial life decision capped the inspirational sources forming the input for his creations, subsequently captured in a conceptual dimension, where the artist repeatedly explores and compares the three environments with which he is intimately familiar. Since that time, he has also started to concentrate on experiments with photography techniques, thus enriching his art with a striking robustness and convincing depth of photographic expression. As a result, during the first decade of the new millennium, he has gradually progressed from a unique mix of input materials and influences to a minimalist position in his photography, one that is sometimes even austere/poised, but, at the same time, contains finely chiselled details.

Additionally, the compositional structure utilised by Edgar Martins is thoroughly founded in the use of the traditional rules of imagery. His photographs draw on the principles of symmetry combined with carefully applied asymmetry to acquire their originality, and, through almost inappropriate focused deviation, add even more depth to the idea of basic symmetry. The artist achieves unique clarity through the partial deconstruction of his subject (for example, by removing his subject from its original environment), by applying a mirroring process (once again supporting the idea of symmetry), through abstracting away from a specific motif or by applying a by misleading 'blurring' of perception,

ultimately questioning the boundary between reality and its visual matrix. It is characteristic of Martins' work that in his nature and landscape photography his shots evoke an impression of an artificial construct, such as in his cycle *Dystopia/Dystopia* (2007) and in *The Accidental Theorist* (2007). Conversely, when he focuses his attention on an industrial environment, the motif takes on the dimensions of a living organism. An example of this sense of an organic structure can be seen in, for example, Martins' photographs of the SolarWorld complex in Freiburg (2011) and in his other works portraying the interiors of industrial buildings and research centres.

In his work entitled *0:00.00* (2015) Martins starts with the illusive contrasts between a fully automated, perfectly functioning work environment and the visual absence of the human activity that takes place in it. He completed this project over the course of the eighteen-months during which he collaborated with the Bayerische Motoren Werke Group at their Munich-based production shop and the company's development centres. Even in this case, his photos, mainly founded on the principle of long exposure without the need for subsequent post-production, reflect the artist's interest in the aforementioned aestheticisation of his subject matter and the search for beauty in an industrial, or, more precisely, post-industrial environment during the fourth stage of the industrial revolution. The suggestive shots documenting the production process provide a laconic commentary on the purposes for which the building was built. By portraying this temple dedicated to the production of luxury cars, through capturing the existing work ritual only as a secondary aspect, and by evoking certain impressions about the company's target clientele, Edgar Martins is providing a commentary on the style-forming identity of a brand name anchored in three all-revealing letters: BMW.

Through systematic efforts to bring the technical aspects of creativity into absolute balance, with the objective of increasing the visibility and memorialising the work process, Edgar Martins presents a convincing and surprisingly almost poetic testimony about the relationships existing between technology, industry and mass production and their impact on the cultural dimension of a globalised civilisation.

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Courtesy: Edgar Martins, Galeria Guimarães Contemporary Art

p. 67: Paint shop, BMW Group Plant Munich (Germany). On this line the painted car bodies undergo a precise visual and manual inspection, with highly qualified technicians verifying the paint layers for any imperfections such as paint bubbles or scratches.

p. 68: Paint shop, BMW Group Plant Munich (Germany). Painted body storage. After the paint process, painted car bodies are stored in this automated storage area. A remote transport system brings car bodies in and out of this storage area according to planned production.

p. 69: Assembly line, BMW Group Plant Munich (Germany). This mechanism is called the "tilting suspension belt", as the carrier can turn the car body up to a 90° angle, as shown on the right. This allows an ergonomic position for the technicians working in this section, where brake lines, the gas tank and other parts of the car's underbody are assembled.

p. 70: Aachen crash test centre (Germany). This is one of two crash test centres belonging to the BMW Group, located in Aachen, north of Munich, specialised in rollover manoeuvres/tests.

p. 71: Paint shop, BMW Group Plant Munich (Germany). On this line the painted car bodies undergo a precise visual and manual inspection, with highly qualified technicians verifying the paint layers for any imperfections such as paint bubbles or scratches.



