



HENRIQUE OLIVEIRA

TAPUMES

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T A P U M E S



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26 MARCH - 11 AUGUST 2009

Rice Gallery
HOUSTON, TEXAS

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(11) 4066-2836





FOREWORD

As a sign of the electronic times we live in, I first saw Henrique Oliveira's work via email. My colleague Alison De Lima Greene, Curator of Contemporary Art & Special Projects at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, had just returned from São Paulo, Brazil where she saw Henrique's work at Baró Cruz Gallery. Alison sent an image of an installation she had seen there saying, "I thought this would be right up your alley (as it were)," and she included a link to Henrique's website. Browsing images of installations, which Henrique calls "tridimensionals," I was struck not only by the incredible color and texture, but also by the massive scale. Truly site-specific, each installation's splitting and ruptured layers seemed to twist or swell out of the surrounding spaces in which they were created.

After some research, I contacted Henrique to see if he would be interested in doing an installation at Rice Gallery. Henrique replied immediately, and we began to correspond. With little information about his work written in English, I started with the basics: What materials do you use? How do you construct your installations? How long do they take to make? Responding to my query about why most of the installations have the same title, *Tapumes*, Henrique explained that in his native Portuguese, *tapumes* can mean "fencing," "boarding," or "enclosure." The word makes reference to the temporary wooden construction fences seen throughout the city of São Paulo, which when they deteriorate are the source of the weathered wood Henrique uses to construct his installations.

Henrique visited Houston in November 2008 to see the gallery space, and four months later he shipped almost 500 pounds of “*tapumes*” from São Paulo. Henrique and several assistants spent two weeks working from 10:00 am to 10:00 pm, composing and constructing the installation at Rice Gallery. It was his first solo exhibition in the United States and presented many firsts for him. Henrique used flexible plywood called BenderBoard to construct an elaborate armature on the gallery’s back wall. This armature, with its interweaving strips and forms, could have been an installation in its own right. In addition to the wood shipped from Brazil, he used plywood and veneers donated by local vendors. Henrique painted the various wooden strips with a thin acrylic wash, using colors he could not get in Brazil. Finally, he shaped and stapled the painted strips to the armature’s protruding forms. Through the gallery’s front glass wall, passersby, myself included, watched in awe as Henrique, a trained painter influenced by Abstract Expressionists like Willem de Kooning, filled the gallery’s back wall with subtly shifting and contrasting color.

Two weeks (and approximately 160,000 staples and 60 pounds of screws) later, *Tapumes* was finished. When viewed at a distance, the individual strips of colored wood merged and resolved into a whole image. When viewed up close, the character of each strip could be seen, similar to the way the surface of an impressionist painting reveals itself to be made of thousands of brushstrokes. Visitors saw familiar things in the organic shapes. For example, one visitor commented in the guestbook, “Totally reminds of caves in the Ozarks.” Others saw “birds in flight,” a hanging “stalactite,” and a resting piece of “garlic.” Another remarked, “It’s like staring in the clouds and seeing so many things.” But it was the sheer beauty and monumentality of the piece that impressed everyone. Henrique had combined painting with a unique sense of scale and sensitivity to his sculptural medium. As he poetically put it, “I let the wood show me the way.”

Kimberly Davenport
Director



































EXCERPTS FROM
SITE VISIT INTERVIEW

12 November 2008

Henrique Oliveira, Artist (HO)
Kimberly Davenport, Director (KD)

KD: How did you become an artist?

HO: I think everything came from drawing. I have had a close relationship with drawing since I was a kid and it became stronger when I was about 18 years old. First I made caricatures, landscape drawings, and some that would go more towards an abstract approach, but I didn't know that art could become a profession. At first I thought about architecture, but in the end I decided the

kind of drawing I'd like to do would not be connected to any practical purpose. So that's when I decided that I would be an artist. I was about 23 years old, and I went to school to study fine arts.

My background is based on painting. About five years ago, I started doing installations with wood because I was interested in other kinds of material. Even at the beginning when I started painting, I was curious about experimenting with other materials. I used to experiment by gluing newspaper on the canvas, scraping it, and mixing sand on the painting. I tried other things as well. About 2002 or 2003, such experiments became part of my work.

KD: How did you move from painting to large scale installation?

HO: I started to collect plywood to paint on it, using the wood as my canvas. When I tried to join the pieces of plywood, I discovered unexpected things happened to the surface and I studied the changes carefully. At the same time, I noticed a plywood construction fence in front of the art building where I was studying. For over two years I saw the plywood deteriorate, and I equated this deterioration with the process of painting. Toward the end of the school year, one week before the annual student show, construction on

the building was completed and they tore down the fence, discarding the plywood. I collected it and made the first installation.

KD: Many artists might do that but they might not be able to leap to such a huge scale.

HO: What happened was that I could get the plywood in great quantity, and I always tried to fill the space. For example, if I had a space like this [room] to install a work, I would not put it in the middle. It would have to fill the space entirely because the shape of the work is determined by the shape of the space.

When I started to do the installations, it was like a rupture with my painting practice. At that time I was doing very flat paintings with a lot of curves; they were more organic and related to abstract expressionism. The plywood gave me straight lines, so at first, it was a more geometric approach. As I started to develop the technique, however, I discovered I could make some shapes more complex and more organic, so that I could bring all the gesturality that was in my painting to the installation. After I started working with the plywood, I saw it had an influence on my painting. I started to build the paintings with layers of paint in the same way I used layers of wood in the installations.

KD: Obviously you were influenced by abstract expressionism. Why couldn't you be satisfied with just that gesture in the painting? Why did your gesture have to become three-dimensional?

HO: It's hard to say, but I always wanted to do something else in addition to painting. I was interested in other things. I think my painting developed in its own way, but working in wood helped me with the painting. It's not a continuation of abstract expressionism; it is a different approach. It's not because I wasn't satisfied with painting. It's because I wanted to do other things too.

KD: In looking at some of the photographs we have of your work, I thought it was fascinating that even in this early work there is an idea of the rupture, two things splitting apart. It's interesting that you talk about the merging of gestural painting and the use of wood. What is that to you, this crashing and coming apart?

HO: My work is always about creating tension in the space so this rupture was natural. I wanted to create the same tension in my wood pieces as I did in my paintings. My first approach was to develop the wood piece like a flat painting, gluing the pieces and stapling the layers of the wood. I learned, however, that it didn't develop like a

painting because it's not the same thing. It was something between painting, architecture, and sculpture. It was none of these things exactly, but it related to each of them. I needed to find the limits of the space.

KD: You've talked about the Abstract Expressionists several times. You've mentioned the possibility of doing something based on Willem De Kooning. Are these still your favorite painters? Who have been your biggest influences?

HO: I think Van Gogh, De Kooning, and Turner are among my favorites. There are more than three of course.

KD: Why do you like them?

HO: Well, I don't know. There is something in the way they create the painting surface that's built with the matter of the painting and you see how it's connected to the image. I like it a lot. It has that tension that I try to get into my works.

KD: How do you title your work? Is the title important? Do you do it before or after?

HO: I always want some title, but when it's not possible I just prefer it untitled.

KD: What does this word mean, t-a-p-u-m-e-s?

HO: *Tapumes* is a series [of installations].

KD: And what does that mean?

HO: *Tapumes* comes from the Portuguese verb *tapar* which means "to close." Also, it's the name of a kind of fencing used at construction [sites]. Plywood is used to close [the site off] and it is called *tapume*.

The series is *Tapumes*, but to have a reference, the subtitle is the name of the place where it was created.

KD: Is your work characteristically Brazilian?

HO: I think the material I use is connected to an idea of Brazil.

KD: What is that idea?

HO: Well, we have a lot of this kind of wood. It is used on construction sites and houses in poor areas, like *favelas* are made from this wood. But I am not trying to get the idea of those things into my work. What interests me is how this material is related to painting, and the layers, and the constructions. I think the relationship of seeing the landscape in Brazil and being interested in those aspects as qualities of painting can be brought into [the] installations.

EXCERPTS FROM
LUNCHEON TALK

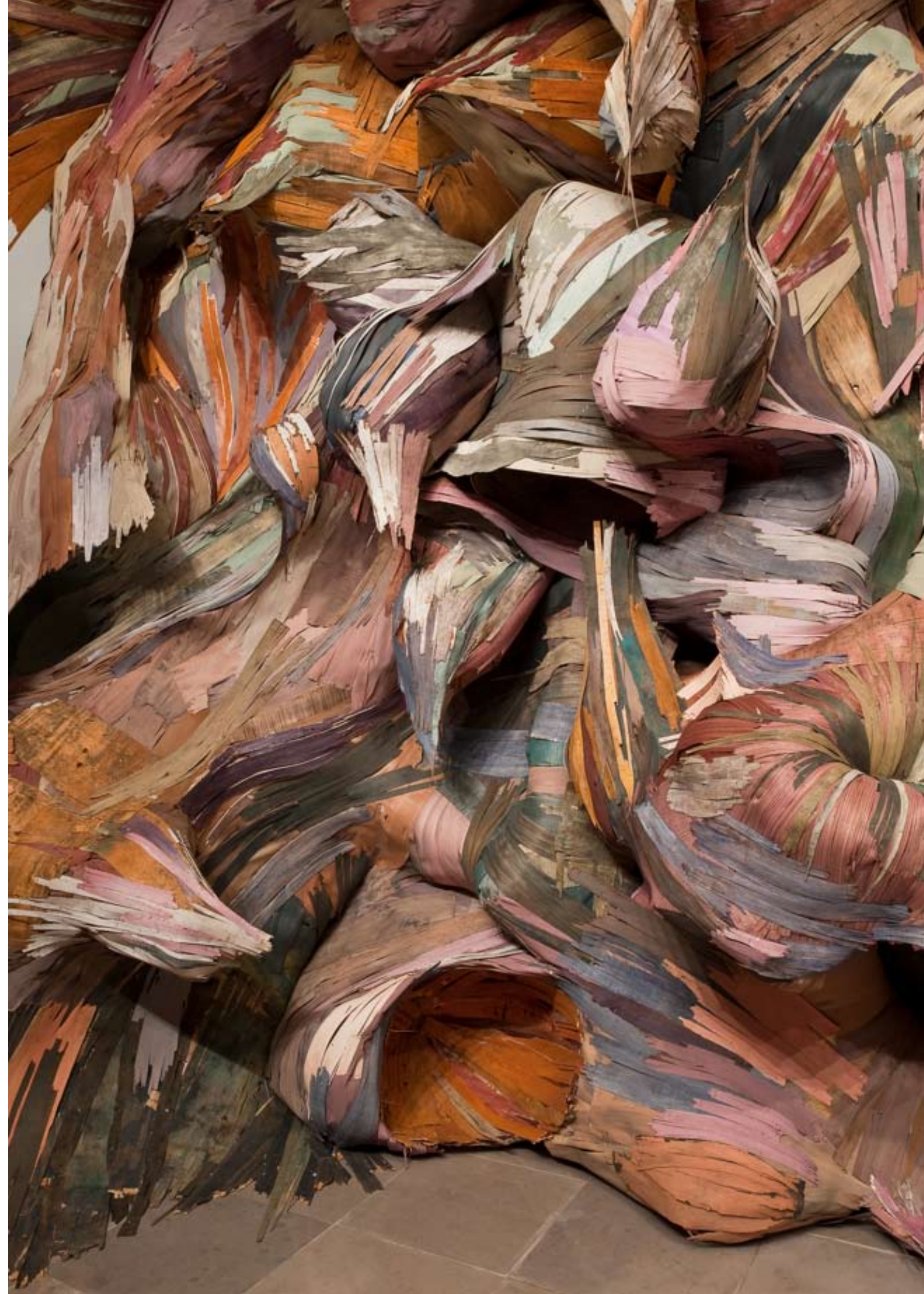
27 March 2009

HO: The installation at Rice Gallery, *Tapumes*, is related to an idea of oil impasto, an idea of painting that's based on the construction of layers that go one over the other, and I paint these layers.

Some of the wood used in *Tapumes* I collected from dumpsters in São Paulo, but the plywood and veneers were donated by Houston vendors. What I did here was to join these very different materials into very soft shapes. I think I created one of the most detailed and complex works I have ever done. This work is based on the concept of painting as something that is present in the world, as something that is outside and is like a kind of urban skin that I have collected and brought to the studio. Urban skin is the surface that I told you about, that I can find in São Paulo city.

QUESTION FROM AUDIENCE:
How do you come to the particular shapes? Do you work from sketches first or is it a material thing?

HO: I do some sketches, but I don't always [follow them]. Here, I did some sketches just to figure out what shapes I wanted to do. I based the shapes on oil impasto, some paintings that I would look at, and I would think how those paintings would be transformed into wood constructions.



A large, abstract painting with vibrant, layered colors like orange, green, and white, featuring a man with curly hair in the foreground. The man is smiling and has his arms crossed. The painting behind him is composed of many overlapping, brushstrokes and layers of color, creating a sense of depth and movement. The colors are warm and earthy, with some cooler tones like green and blue interspersed. The overall effect is one of dynamic energy and complexity.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Henrique Oliveira was born in Ourinhos, Brazil in 1973. He received a BFA in painting in 2004 and a Masters in Visual Poetics in 2007 from the University of São Paulo, Brazil. Oliveira's work has been exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Brazil. He participated in *Something from Nothing* (2008), an invitational exhibition organized by the Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans, Louisiana. *Tapumes* at Rice Gallery was Oliveira's first solo exhibition in the United States. In 2009, he was awarded a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, and the 2009/10 Cni Sesi Marcantonio Vilaça Prize in Fine Arts, a bi-annual award given to five Brazilian artists. Oliveira lives and works in São Paulo.

For additional information, visit www.henriqueoliveira.com.

Henrique Oliveira, *Tapumes*
Commission, Rice University Art Gallery
26 March – 11 August 2009

Rice University Art Gallery is located in Sewall Hall on the campus of Rice University, 6100 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77005, and on the web at ricegallery.org.

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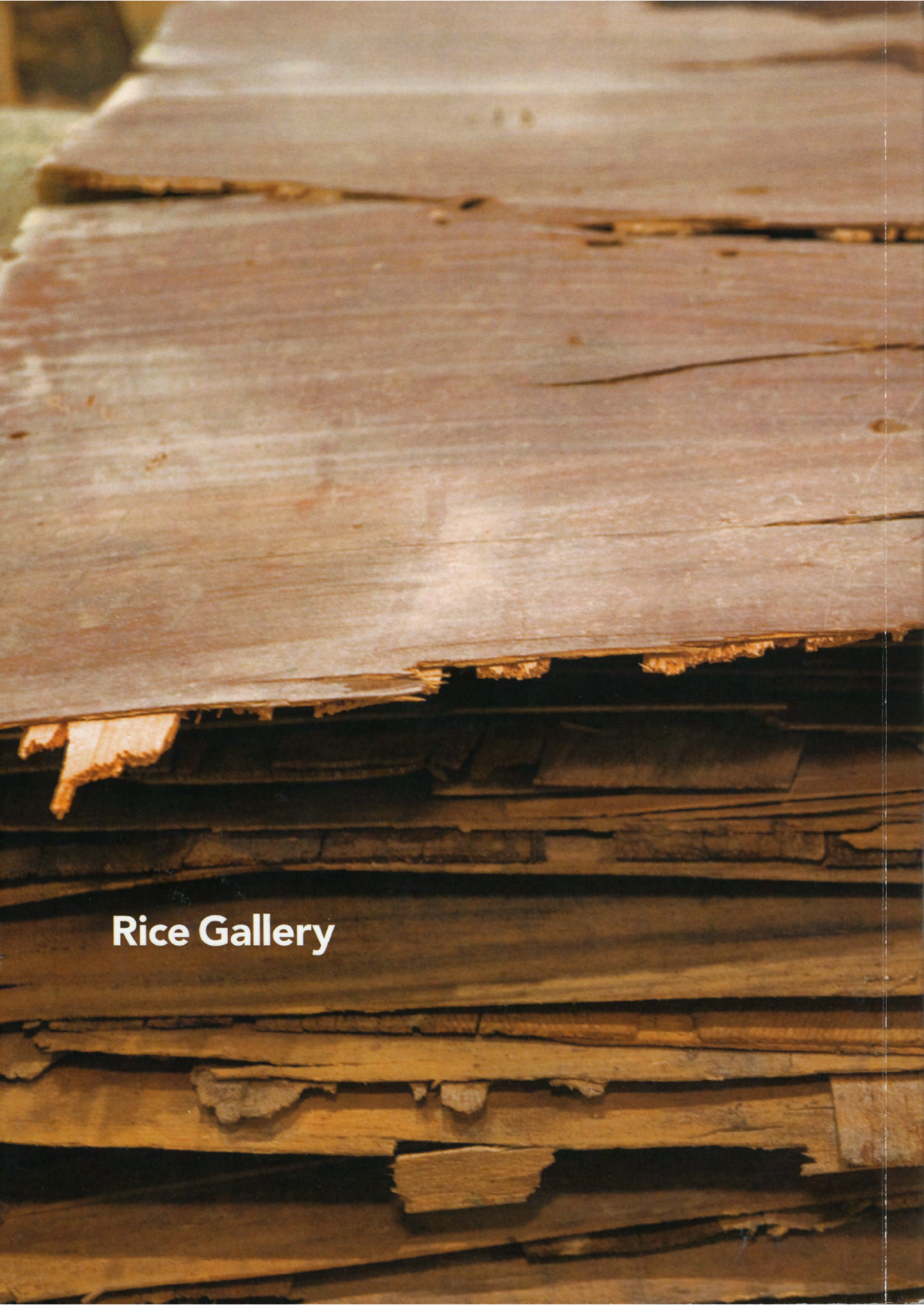
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Rice Gallery thanks Alison de Lima Greene for her curatorial sixth sense and characteristic generosity in bringing Henrique's work to our attention. Her thoughtfulness extended what could have been merely a moment of appreciation for a work of art into an incredible opportunity for the artist and for Rice Gallery.

We appreciate the in-kind contributions made by Brochsteins Inc., Houston, and Georgia Pacific LLC, Cleveland Plywood Facility. Their generosity allowed us to supply the artist with a quantity and quality of material that would have been impossible to offer otherwise.

We are grateful to Houston collectors Gail and Louis Adler for providing special exhibition support for *Tapumes*. They were way ahead of the curve by already owning paintings by Henrique Oliveira.

It was a lucky day when Brazilian artist Rosane Volchan, who lives in Houston, emailed to say she had heard about Henrique's show. Her hospitality toward Henrique made him feel at home.



Rice Gallery