

## Studio



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RIVANE NEUENSCHWANDER

### THE BACK STORY

## After the Excess, the Insects

Video art has the unfair reputation for being tough and abstruse stuff, but so far the works in the Hirshhorn Museum's Black Box series have mostly been crowd-pleasers. The latest piece, by well-known Brazilian artist Rivane Neuenschwander, has audiences chuckling. Titled "Quarta-Feira de Cinzas/Epilogue" ("Ash Wednesday/Epilogue," in English), the five-minute video, shot in extreme close-up by filmmaker Cao Guimaraes, shows a forest floor littered with confetti. (Ash Wednesday is the day after Brazil's famous Carnival parties.) As we watch, various ant species begin to gather up the brightly colored dots, fighting over them and finally dragging them down into their nests. Our waste becomes their treasure; our play is their hard work.



### HOW DID YOU GET THE ANTS TO CLEAN UP THE CONFETTI?

I had to prepare a little sauce for them! I think I tried both pork fat — like a salami flavor — and honey mixed with water. They pick up a piece of paper because they're attracted by the smell, and then they carry it to the nest. But there are also some ants who will pick up the paper just to clear a path. I have a brother who's a scientist, so he often tells me what animals like and how they will interact with certain kinds of smells and food.

There's a very important reference in literature here, in the book "Macunaíma" by Mário de Andrade, to leaf-cutter ants. One of his sentences is, "Lots of leaf-cutter ants, and little health, are the evils of Brazil." It's a very famous quote in Brazilian culture.

In the United States or Europe, I think confetti is used for other events, too, but here it's mainly for Carnival. There's a sense that you have something colorful and playful like confetti, but in contraposition you have those ants working hard. The ants are kind of carrying the leftovers of a celebration. There's Carnival, and then afterward, the melancholic aspect of the last day of Carnival — it's the sort of contradictory feelings that we have here in Brazil.

— Interview conducted and condensed by Blake Gopnik

**Quarta-Feira de Cinzas/Epilogue**, through April 20 at the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum, Independence Avenue at Seventh Street SW. Free, open daily 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Call 202-633-1000 or visit [www.hirshhorn.si.edu](http://www.hirshhorn.si.edu).

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### Crawling Into View

**VIDEO** | Watch Rivane Neuenschwander's video work at [washingtonpost.com/museums](http://washingtonpost.com/museums).