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15 seconds of art: Brazil's Instituto Inhotim embraces Instagram
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Art space in Belo Horizonte found an innovative way to engage with its audience during the pandemic—and now it's here to stay.



Image: Marilá Dardot's *Primeira Página* on an LED billboard in Belo Horizonte. Courtesy of Instituto Inhotim

Museums desperately sought ways to connect with their audiences while their buildings were shut during the pandemic. Last year, Instituto Inhotim in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, began the project *15 Segundos* (15 seconds), a month-long digital commission inspired by Instagram. The title refers to the duration of an Instagram story, which is how the museum shared the works, as well as on LED billboards throughout the city. A spokesperson says: “Our reasoning was: how can the museum expand

beyond its physical limits? How can the digital medium, with its structural and functional characteristics, provide different ways of experiencing art, other than simply representational reproduction?”

A year on, Inhotim is continuing the programme—even though the space is now open to the public—and is even expanding the digital commissions. Why? Because it has greatly helped the museum grow its audience. According to the spokesperson, the first edition, featuring Marilá Dardot's *Primeira Página*, had an average reach of 4,500 viewers per Instagram story, peaking at 6,661 impressions. Inhotim gained nearly 2,000 followers in October, and the profile's reach and impressions increased by 50% in that month.

This year, Inhotim has commissioned two works by Brazilian artists. Rivane Neuenschwander has developed her 2005 project *Primeiro Amor* (first love), in which members of the public were invited to recall and describe the faces of their first love to a forensic artist. The title *First Love* also evokes a short story by the Irish author Samuel Beckett. Inhotim will show one drawing a day for the whole month. “In this work I invited the public to revive old memories which, simultaneously, contrast with the poetics of criminal investigation,” explains Neuenschwander. The second commission, by Cildo Meireles, will begin on 1 November and will also last one month.

Inhotim considers Instagram its main social network for engagement, and has rapidly increased its activities on the platform in the past 18 months. Other Instagram programming includes musical performances; a series that goes behind the scenes to show production, restoration and installation of art at the institute; and conversations with artists who have works in its collection.

The museum now has a dedicated four-person team who work on the digital and social media content, plus an audio and video editor and an external strategy agency. “Inhotim is one of the few art institutions that has been focusing on the digital medium as a strong, legitimate and integrated part of its programme, and not just an additional aspect that sits alongside its physical programme,” the spokesperson says.

It is interesting to see how, just a short while after museums were limited to the confines of social media, they are beginning to factor the platforms into their plans: “A core focus of our work at the moment is: how can the digital medium become an asset for experimentation for the institution and for our digital visitors?”