



**EXPO
CHGO**

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CHICAGO | NAVY PIER



Almeida & Dale



The past of the present: **black art and ancestry**

For a long time, the history of art behaved as a kind of extension of colonial, European and white knowledge. The great “geniuses” were always men from the so-called Old World, the schools were all Western, the canvases featured temperate landscapes, and the critics all shared the same origins.

Thus, a history of the gaze and ways of seeing was constructed, which classified as “art” the works that fit these models and dubbed as “craft”, “folk” and “popular art” any type of production that did not fit into this explanatory scheme of broad repercussions. In this way, while art museums were dedicated to works with specific authorship, title, archive, measure and date; ethnography museums, on the other hand, aimed to cover the “rest” of the production. And so, a true visual language was constructed, that did not fail to behave as yet another strategy of domination and subjugation.

The art produced in the so-called colonial or peripheral countries did not escape this measure and compass: either it would be “more of the same”, or “it would be nothing”. The phenomenon is also evident in Brazil, with textbooks dating the beginning of the national artistic history from the arrival of the “French Mission” in 1816, as if, until then, nothing here existed or was deserving of attention.

The art market also followed this trend, valuing what was related to these forms of artistic classification and being silent over productions that brought other forms of visual expression. In galleries, fairs and stands, an art in dialogue with what truly was

a Western dictate stood out. A way of creating and conditioning tastes.

It took a while, but the art scene is changing, internationally and nationally, in Brazil, with the inclusion of artists and works that remained for a long time outside the canon of the arts. It was at least paradoxical that, in a country with a black majority – if we consider the categories of the IBGE [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics], preto and pardo –, the dominant view privileged European-based art for so long, as if this were the sole and most legitimate cultural influence in the country.

The exhibition that the Almeida & Dale gallery prepared for the 2022 Chicago Expo, with black artists, somehow takes part in what is, nowadays, an unavoidable tendency. The search for an art that is less catechized, and closer to the Brazilian reality, could never not be black. Black in its subjectivities, in its concerns, in its soul. Black also in its activism, in the reinterpretation of history, in the religiosity of an Afro-Brazilian matrix; – practices that circulated and still circulate this Afro-Atlantic route, through which philosophies, rituals, cuisines, cosmologies and ancestral religions traveled.

Some of the artists present in this show have already passed away, but their works are increasingly alive. Creators, priests and prophets like Mestre Didi and Rubem Valentim, who for so long remained outside the history of Brazilian art, finally return to the place they never left.

Lilia Moritz Schwarcz

Mestre Didi



Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos — Mestre Didi — was born on December 2, 1917 in Salvador. He was the son of tailor Arsenio dos Santos and Maria Bebiana do Espírito Santo; also known as Mãe Senhora or Mãe Preta do Brasil, titles she received in the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1965. He was a descendant of the traditional Asipà family, originally from Ketu, an important city in the Yoruba empire, and from the time he was a boy he had been surrounded by personalities linked to the preservation and dissemination of religions and cultures of African roots in Bahia and Brazil. His great-grandmother, D. Marcelina da Silva, was one of the founders of the first Nagô house in Bahia, Ilê Ásê Aira Intile, later Ilê IyaNassô. Mãe Senhora was one of the main Mães de Santo of the Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá terreiro, in Salvador.

As a boy, through Mãe Aninha, founder and first Iyalorixá of Ilê Axe Opô Afonjá, he received the title of Assogba; he became high priest of the Obaluaiyê cult when he was just 14 years old. In 1925, the eight-year-old boy was initiated into the cult of the ancestors (Egungun) of the Yoruba tradition on the island of Itaparica, in Bahia. It was from that time on he began being called, affectionately, “Master Didi”.

The artist learned to craft ritual objects since childhood, as well as to manipulate materials, shapes and objects of the Orisha Obaluaiyê cult. In 1964 he held the first of his several solo exhibitions and in 1966 he traveled to West Africa and did comparative research between Brazil and Africa. In 1967, he visited Nigeria and Dahomey, on a mission sponsored by UNESCO, in order to carry out further studies on the tradition of the orixás of Bahia and Africa. He then came into contact with descendants of his family who still resided

in Ketu and thus revisited his own ancestry.

It was a departure and a return trip and the opposite too. In 1980 Mestre Didi created his own terreiro — the Ilê Asipà — where he continued the Nagô religious tradition. In 1975, Didi received the highest Alapini priestly hierarchy in the cult of the Egun Ancestors. A true diasporic intellectual, Mestre Didi published several books on Yoruba culture, where he sought to narrate the history of African culture in Bahia, and recorded ancient Itáns; tales that are part of the sacred heritage of the Nagô tradition. But he never distinguished between art and writing, with both being part of the same and inseparable cosmological universe.

As we can see in the work featured in this exhibition, the priest/artist makes use of natural materials — such as cowrie shells, seeds, leather, veins, beads, sisal, and palm leaves — with his works representing an expression of the historical continuity of African traditions that traveled to Brazil, as well as a new aesthetic that does not distinguish present from past, abstraction from figuration. Often his sculptures resemble totems, others resonate with animals such as the serpent, at other times they aesthetically idealize the union between sacred materials. His sculptures summarize the relationship between the thinker, the sculptor, the man and the priest, in a dialogue between the ethics of the sacred and the profane. His works recreate the symbols of the orixás and show the innovative and revolutionary meaning of a black art, as made in dialogue with African ancestry.

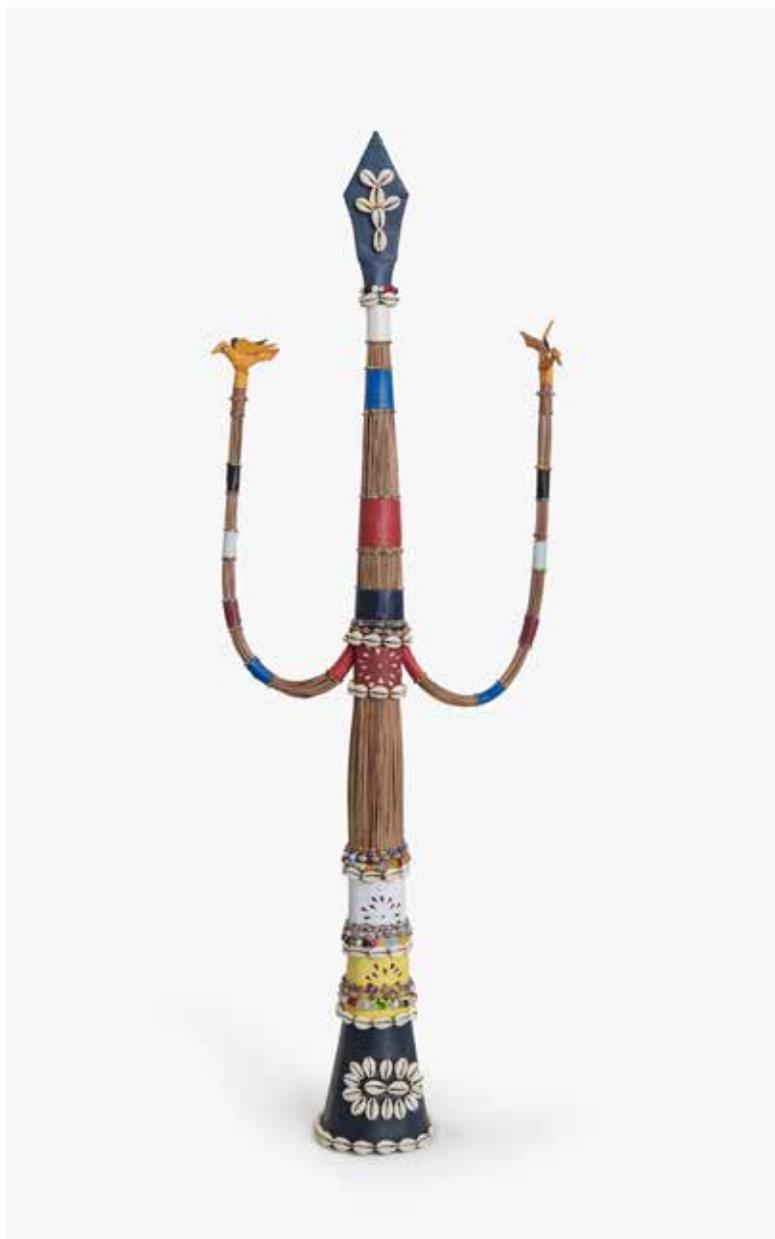


Mestre Didi

OPA EXIN EDA OHUNKOHUN -
Scepter of spear and force of
nature Dec. 1980

palm grove, painted leather,
shells and beads

152 x 78 x 16 cm



Mestre Didi

OPA EXIN EYE MEJI - Spear scepter
with two birds Dec. 1990
palm vein, painted leather, shells
and beads
110 x 37 x 15 cm



Mestre Didi

ONPA MERIN AYE OPA: Center of the four
cardinal points of the Earth n.d.
palm grove, leather, shells and
coastal straw
140 x 55 x 14 cm

Rubem Valentim



Rubem Valentim is another artist who traverses, with great consistency, through an Afro-Brazilian, popular and religious aesthetic, rereading, in this way, Western art itself. The artist was born in Salvador on November 9, 1922 – a fine coincidence since that year was the centenary of Brazil’s official independence, but also the landmark of modernism in the country, of an art attentive to the national, but still very linked to a European standard.

Valentim began his contact with the visual arts as an autodidact, and already in the 40s started a career producing figurative works such as still lifes, landscapes, flowers and human figures, influenced by realism and expressionism. From the beginning, however, there was a strong interest in the artisanal traditions of the Northeast, such as, for example, the ceramics of the Recôncavo Baiano.

In 1953, he graduated in journalism from the University of Bahia and began publishing articles on art. At that time, too, he began to incorporate symbols and emblems, usually geometric and inspired by African-based religions, in abstract canvases, which became more frequent from 1955 onwards. In 1957, he moved to Rio de Janeiro and abandoned figuration, delving deeper into the research of the signs of Afro-Brazilian religions. His painting, then, acquired a rigorously geometric form.

Also in 1966, he took part in the World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar, Senegal; activity that marked a watershed moment in

his production. Back in Brazil, he brought with him the baggage he accumulated in Africa. He took up residence in Brasília, where he taught painting at the Ateliê Livre do Instituto de Artes da UNB, University of Brasília, an institution where he remained until 1968. In this context, he deepened his references to the religious universe of African origin, with its cult tools, altar structures and orixás’ symbols. These emblems are originally geometric. However, in the artist’s work, as we can see in the three works that make up this show, they are reorganized by an even more rigorous geometry, formed by horizontal and vertical lines, triangles, circles and squares. Thus, the artist composes a personal repertoire that, combined with the creative use of strong colors and linked to the orixás, lends itself to other formal possibilities.

Valentim always rejected the idea of affiliating himself to any European current. He stated that his art came from the rite, the festivities and the religious totems that represented orixás — such as Xangô’s double axe, Oxóssi’s arrow and Ossaim’s rods. He therefore created a kind of writing for these elements, a new “signography”, according to his definition.



Rubem Valentim
Emblem 86 1986
acrylic on canvas
41 x 27 cm



Rubem Valentim
Emblem 87 1987
acrylic on canvas
41,5 x 33,5 cm



Rubem Valentim
Emblem-85 1985
acrylic on canvas
55 x 46 cm

Heitor dos Prazeres



A parallel path, albeit different in its own way, was followed by Heitor dos Prazeres, in this complex Afro-Atlantic world. The artist took advantage of the solidarity network he knew in “Little Africa” – an area located in the center of Rio de Janeiro, and so named by the artist. In this region, the world of samba, candomblé, and African cuisine welcomed and shaped the people who lived there. Heitor, who was born on September 23, 1898, was the son of Eduardo Alexandre dos Prazeres, carpenter and clarinetist in the National Guard band, and seamstress Celestina Gonçalves Martins. It was from his father that he learned his first lessons as a carpenter, in addition to spending his childhood listening to the sound of polkas, waltzes and choros.

At a young age, in order to help with household expenses, he worked as a shoeshine boy, a newsboy and a carpenter’s helper. He did not, however, give up his cavaquinho, in addition to attending meetings held at Tia Ciata’s house, where he spend time with composers and musicians such as Sinhô, Donga, Pixinguinha, and João da Baiana. In the 1920s, he established himself as one of the recognizable names of the Carioca carnival, helping to found and organize several samba groups in Rio Comprido, Estácio and the surrounding area, being a staple figure at Estação Primeira de Mangueira.

In 1931, Heitor married Glória, with whom he had three daughters, but he soon became a widower in 1936. His entry into the world of painting dates from that time – they say to chase away the sadness. Self-taught, he used strong, solid colors in unique tones to portray the life and culture of black people: he painted children playing with balloons, bohemia in the streets of Lapa, card games, dances, the first houses on the hills, street parties, sambistas and samba circles – as is the case with the painting presented in this exhibition. Characteristic of his paintings are the faces of black people always portrayed sideways and with their heads and eyes turned upwards. Heitor rarely focuses on sad aspects of everyday life or even racism. The minute detail underlines the simplicity of this ideal world.

One of the canvases in this exhibition features a moving self-portrait, with the artist in action. In his painter’s apron, red beret (his personal brand) and striped floor, Heitor presents a rare self-reflective canvas, with a model posing on a sofa, to be painted twice: in the representation of the scene and in the painting within the painting.



Heitor dos Prazeres
Roda de samba 1964
oil on canvas
50 x 60 cm



Heitor dos Prazeres
Untitled 1963
oil on canvas
45,5 x 55 cm

Sonia Gomes



Sonia Gomes landed on this earth with the task of rereading, poetizing and giving color to this dull world. A lost object, a piece of wood worn out by time, an unused cage, an old book, a torn towel, an old dress kept in the drawer, in the hands of this “artist of the unexpected” soon become art, illuminating everything around.

Resuming an ancestral practice of black women, who weave and cares for life, this artist from Minas Gerais, but who now lives in São Paulo, mends, embroiders, rolls, structures, makes and remakes, and refuses to enter this reality of waste, in which everything soon becomes frugal. These “pieces of life” are soon transformed and subjected to twists, producing cloth sculptures that bring with them many “sewn memories” through the artist’s resourcefulness.

Daughter of a white father and a black mother, Sonia inherited the hybridity of family memories, made up not only by an easy and calming “mixture”, but also of perverse racism, which is inserted in the large and small cracks of everyday life. With her grandmother, a midwife and healer, she learned the craft of “caring for”, protecting, and storing threads of memory. From her white family she received the fabric trimmings made to decorate the table and festive bodies. From her Afro-Brazilian side, the family albums that have always been filled with the art of remembering. That’s why her work behaves as if it were made of pieces of life sewn together by art.

In her vast production, both lighter works, which almost float, and more robust structures, where the embroidery gives shape

to the once raw material that sometimes hangs from the ceiling, sometimes erupts through the floor or becomes art attached to the wall, stand out.

Her inspiration comes from Afro-Brazilian festivals – such as the folia de reis, the congo and the reisado – but also from a reinterpretation of magical Catholicism, in which materials are accumulated in a baroque manner. Sonia also evokes an African diasporic practice, where “planning” has always behaved as a sort of identity, assured by black solidarity networks.

These are remnants of fabric that, deconstructed and rebuilt, tell new stories without erasing the old ones. In the exhibition, we see two drawings by Sonia Gomes, made from the reinterpretation of children’s tales, fantastic in their plots. But the paintings don’t erase the mystery; they make it exponential. The artist’s lines play like Ariadne’s thread, carrying memory and secrets.

One of her many sculptural objects also stands out, bringing the tropical, strong and typical colors of the artist’s works, and the dialogue between fabrics and embroidery. In the center, a structure covered by a white, satin fabric, insinuates references to the Catholic religion, which for so long was used as a form of oppression for African peoples.



Sonia Gomes
Untitled 2010
ink and marker brush
on paper
42 x 29,5 cm



Sonia Gomes
Untitled 2010
ink and marker brush
on paper
41 x 29,5 cm



Sonia Gomes
Untitled 2006
sewing, binding and
different fabric on aluminum
90 x 40 x 26 cm



Sonia Gomes
Untitled n.d.
sewing, binding and different
fabric on aluminum
100 x 56 x 40 cm

Lidia Lisbôa



Lidia Lisbôa was born in Paraná, but moved to São Paulo in 1986. In dialogue with Sonia Gomes, she makes giant “crochets”, also constructed from scraps of cloth, which combine translucent structures with multicolored planes – a mass only harmonic in pretense, as strips with different shades, beads, and other small appliquéés interrupt the surface of the work, structured by the interweaving of the loom.

Another raw material explored by the artist is ceramics – white, brown, earthy, darker – which refers to the first objects made by humanity to “care for” of food, “care for” the preservation of the group, but also protect from the weather and aesthetically mobilize the clay. Lidia Lisbôa’s ceramic sculptures form immense and elegant compact masses, reminiscent of the termite mounds spread across the Brazilian countryside. But the problem, in this case, becomes a solution, with these mysterious shapes that come out of the molded clay revealing the idea of coziness and welcoming. The termite mounds also refer to Candomblé liturgy, with their clay pots that serve for the reception and provision of the saints.

Both Lidia Lisbôa’s “crochets” and “termite mounds” dialogue with the female presence, so often relegated in the history of art.

They recall a child’s labor, hands impregnated with clay and manual chores. The hand that shapes the clay pan is the one that makes a doll, the one that sculps a tile over her knee and gives life to immanent matter. The termite mounds thus represent a form of homage to the work of Brazilian women artisans, many of them still anonymous.

The “termite mounds” present at the Almeida & Dale exhibition, in Chicago, include the Brazilian earth color, but also the many shades of brown that distinguish Brazilian people. That is why there is no homogeneity among the pieces, but also within each of them. The artist’s hand imprints upon the work the marks of handling, mixing of the earth, interferences in clay. A lighter vertical line stubbornly accompanies one of the works, as if indicating an archaeological layer. The red of the residue dialogues with the brown of the clay, as if to mark this richness of brown tones, present in most of the population. As the writer Lima Barreto, a black Brazilian, said: “There were whites, blacks, mulattos, caboclos, people of all colors and all feelings, people who had gotten themselves into such an adventure”.



Lidia Lisbôa
Untitled, from the Termite
mound series 2021
ceramics and glass
40 x 22 cm



Lidia Lisbôa
Untitled, from the Termite mound series 2020
ceramics
53 x 24 x 22 cm



Lidia Lisbôa
Untitled, from the Termite mound series 2022
bronze
45 x 24 x 24 cm

Sidney Amaral



If Heitor was a later-in-life painter, and without a more traditional training, Sidney Amaral, on the other hand, studied to become a professional in the field. He was a student, in the 1990s, at the Liceu de Artes e Ofícios de São Paulo, at the Escola Panamericana de Artes, at the ECOS Escola de Fotografia, and graduated in artistic education from Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado (Faap) in 1998.

Sidney held his first solo exhibition in 2001, at Centro Cultural São Paulo (CCSP). He then began, using different languages and materials — marble, bronze, porcelain, canvas —, exploring a reinterpretation of everyday objects and scenes from history, removing them from their original context. In his paintings, he included issues of black identity, and he often resorted to the past to illuminate the reality of the present marked by structural racism.

He also explored the techniques of photography, lithography

and watercolor, in order to critically reinterpret the records made by traveling artists in Brazil. Dismantling the colonial Eurocentrism present in these works, Sidney updated the images, subverting them. Black men and women stopped being supporting actors, assuming the leading role of the scenes as social agents of this transformation.

In the three works featured in this show, Sidney presents the police and religious violence that daily befalls the black, but also indigenous, body. Once again, the artist is present in the works, creating a porous frontier of self-representation. However, in the works of this artist there is not merely a denunciation of the processes of subalternization; he highlights the “agency” of black people to narrate other stories, to exalt their protagonists and question the impositions of the Catholic religion in the Brazilian colonial process.



Sidney Amaral
Untitled n.d.
watercolour and graphite on paper
106 x 75,2 cm



Sidney Amaral
Untitled s.d.
watercolour and graphite on paper
30,5 x 46 cm



Sidney Amaral

Untitled s.d.
watercolour and graphite on paper
30,5 x 45,6 cm

Paulo Pires

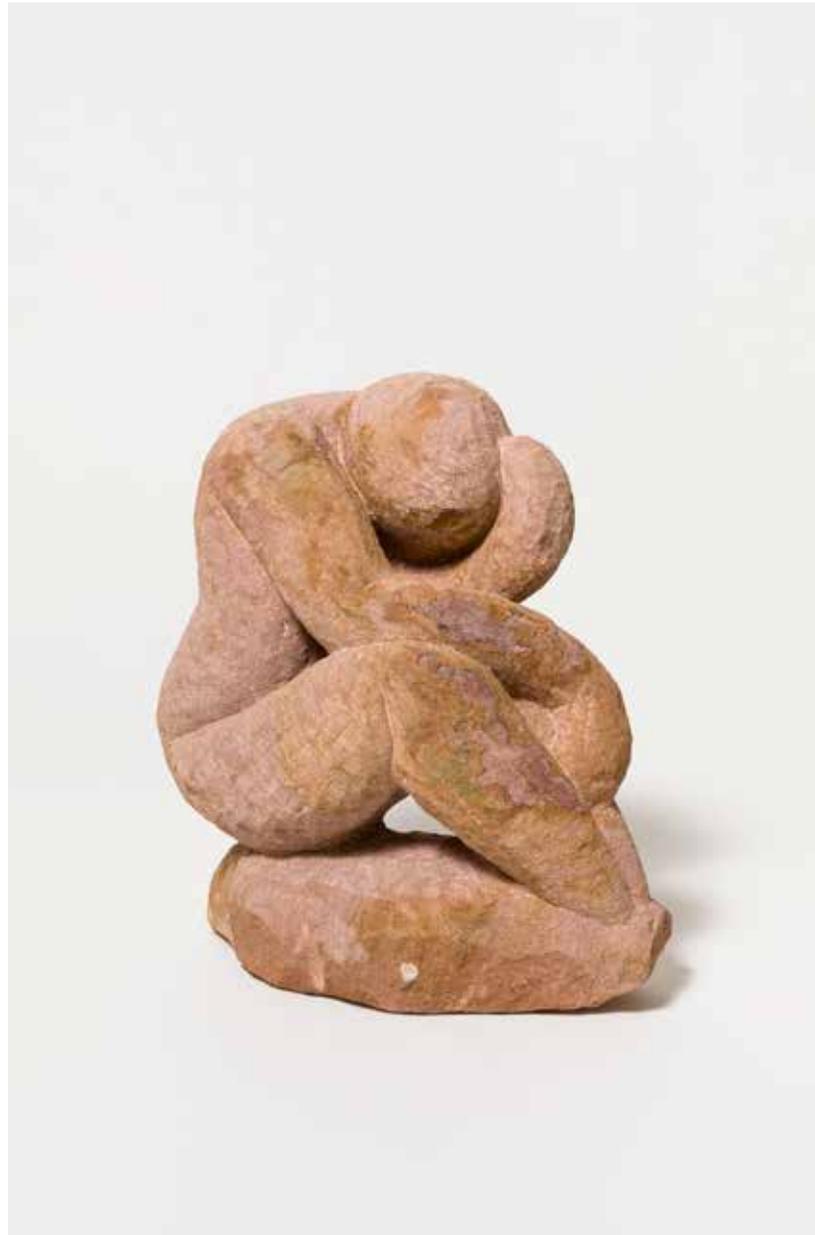


Paulo Pires also works with this rich language of colors. Returning to ancestral teachings, the artist explores sandstone, sculpting objects that seem to resonate with ancient knowledge and images. As if by miracle, forms surface that are made of a language at the same time synthetic, sensitive and very affective. A man and a woman who embrace, a group of bodies united in a caressing gesture. So delicate, these works seem to cheat with a single meaning, as if they carried – merely – a kind of suggestion. To complete the form of the clay one has to complete it in their imagination.

There is something primordial in these works that suggest a

journey of stories taken from raw material. The works allude to an indistinct series of silhouettes, and end up impressing upon the pieces a certain telluric air. The work is pure emotion, proof of the human essence, an invitation to meditate on human finitude itself.

Once again, white, brown, yellowish red, reddish brown become matter for a sketch of visceral feelings and emotions. Paulo Pires, who was born in Poxoréu, Mato Grosso, is a draftsman and painter, but says that sculpture is his gift. Pure affection made of clay.



Paulo Pires
Stone age 2021
sandstone
44 x 42 x 25 cm



Paulo Pires
The courtship of the
stone 2021
sandstone
55 x 35 x 40 cm

José Adário (Zé Diabo)



It's time to come to an end, but also to return to the starting place. To this end, there is nothing better than closing this text by dealing with the exceptional work of the Bahian sculptor-smith José Adário, who was born in 1947 and since then has exuded his ancestry, combined with a lot of technical, artistic and religious skill in the production of emblematic rods and tools of the orixás. He is today one of the most celebrated artists in Brazilian Candomblé terreiros, but he also has a guaranteed presence in museums and institutions that, even if belatedly, come to understand the central importance of black art.

The works of José Adário show how “art is made in Candomblé”. A devotee of the deities himself, it's been over 60 years since José Adário dos Santos, aka Zé Diabo, has been “working for the saints”, producing liturgical tools for Candomblé and Umbanda. In his workshop, located in the historic center of Salvador, Adário creates sacred objects for the rituals of Exu, Ogum, Oxóssi, Oxumarê, Ossanha and Obaluaê – orixás that are worshiped with utensils made of iron.

Tools play a central role in Candomblé, as each orixá is assigned a set of fetishes that serve to form their settlement – a sort of altar that mediates between the deity and a person: the Orum, the spiritual world, and the Aiyê, the physical world. In turn, as Zé Diabo is himself initiated into the ritual, he is can produce sacred objects in the order followed by the xirê – the set of songs that evoke each saint in the rituals. His gift is the wisdom to deal with iron and its derivatives, in a synergy that the artist calls “Ogum's jabá”; a kind of technical sensibility necessary to understand the axés involved in the handling of the mineral and in the science of alternating rough movements and light gestures.

According to Zé Diabo, he inherited his ancestral wisdom from Ladeira de Nanã and the terreiros of Engenho Velho de Brotas, where he lived and formed his network of affections. Art and religion, therefore, do not have borders: one is made of the other.



José Adário (Zé Diabo)
Untitled 2019
iron
65,5 x 44 x 14 cm



José Adário (Zé Diabo)
Untitled 2019
iron
72 x 38 x 12,5 cm

The exhibition at the Almeida & Dale gallery is an invitation to enter the cosmovision of these black Brazilian artists, belonging to different generations, who symbolize in themselves and with their work what is newest in the Brazilian arts scene and who were, for so long, forgotten.

It is said that the Greeks considered forgetting the most painful of human experiences. Kin to death and sleep, the act of forgetting was the true death, because it carried silence, indifference and obscurity. Well, after centuries of erasure, African art imposes itself due to its strength, potency, beauty and cosmovision; delighted. Parodying the historian Carlo Ginzburg, “behold, after being cast out through the window, it (black and Afro-Brazilian art) returns through the door – the front door”.

IN/SITU 2022

Cildo Meireles



As a side event to the art fair, EXPO CHICAGO also promotes IN/SITU 2022. Occupying the Festival Hall of the city of Chicago, the program presents sculptures, videos, films and large-scale works. For this year's edition, the curator was Marcella Beccaria - chief curator of the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea in Turin, Italy. She conceived the Rare Earths exhibition, composed of large pieces that establish multiple relationships with the event space. The selection includes both new site-specific pieces, designed by contemporary artists especially for the site, as well as works by prominent artists, provided by the main international exhibitors participating in this year's exhibition. Coming from diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds, these artists present work in a variety of media, including sculpture, installation, performance, virtual reality and more.

At the curator's request, Almeida & Dale Art Gallery is sending two works by Cildo Meireles (1948, Rio de Janeiro - RJ) to IN/SITU 2022: In-mensa, 1982 and Canto, 1967/75. The gallery is proud to promote the work of this artist, who is one of the most important exponents of conceptual art in Brazil, having influenced generations of artists. In the works sent to the exhibition, it is possible to recognize Cildo's poetic mark, who frequently appropriates everyday objects, such as squeegees, measuring tapes, tables, furniture, needles and tools, and alters their structures to create situations in which he questions functionality and use and exchange values of objects, proposing new perspectives and meanings for our relationship with reality.

IN/SITU 2022

Cildo Meireles





Cildo Meireles
In-mensa 1982
wood
100 x 185 x 115 cm





Cildo Meireles
Corner 1967/75
oil on canvas, wood and
parquet floor
300 x 100 x 75 cm





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