

# Antonio Obá

1983 in Ceilândia, Brazil  
Lives and works in Brasília

Antonio Obá investigates the influence and contradictions within the cultural construction of Brazil, giving rise to an act of resistance and reflection on the idea of national identity. Obá utilizes icons present in Brazilian culture as allusions to racial and political identity, these iconic historical and sometimes religious subjects are explored within his sculpture, painting, installations, and performance. Obá's own body is central to his research, questioning the eroticization of the black male body and construction of his own identity.

Antônio Obá (Ceilândia, 1983) lives and works in Brasília.

His works have been included in exhibitions such as *Possédé.e.s*, Montpellier Contemporain, Montpellier (2020); *Sentinela*, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo (2019); *36° Panorama da Arte Brasileira*, MAM, São Paulo (2019); *Histórias Afro-Atlânticas*, MASP / Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo (2018); *Arte Democracia Utopia - quem não luta tá morto*, MAR, Rio de Janeiro (2018); *Pele de Dentro*, Mendes Wood DM, New York (2018); *Pipa Prize 2017*, MAM-Rio, Rio de Janeiro (2017); *entre*, Casa da América Latina, Brasília (2016); *My body is a cage*, Galeria Luciana Caravello, Rio de Janeiro (2016); *ONDEANDAAONDA*, Museu Nacional da República, Brasília (2015); *OCUPAÇÃO*, Elefante Centro Cultural, Brasília (2014).



*Sentinela*, MendesWood DM, São Paulo, 2019



*Malungo, Parcours, Basel, Switzerland, 2019*





*Pele de Dentro*, Mendes Wood DM, New York, 2018



*Antonio Obá*, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, 2017



*Figura campesina I*, 2020, oil on canvas, 39 3/8 × 31 1/2 in, 100 × 80 cm







*At the gates of Paradise*, 2020, oil on canvas, 78 3/4 × 113 3/4 in, 200 × 289 cm



*Herói do fogo interior II - A façanha*, 2020, oil on canvas, 68 1/2 × 54 3/8 in, 174 × 138 cm



*Estripulia: pula-carniça*, 2020, oil on canvas, 68 7/8 × 54 in, 175 × 137 cm



*Sesta*, 2019, oil on canvas, 66 7/8 × 118 1/8 in, 170 × 300 cm



*Réquiem*, 2019, oil on canvas, 74 3/4 × 74 3/4 in, 190 × 190 cm



*Herói do fogo interior*, 2019, oil on linen, 19 3/4 × 19 3/4 in, 50 × 50 cm



"Quando dois ou mais...", 2019, oil on canvas, 35 3/8 × 35 3/8 in, 90 × 90 cm



*Um turista*, 2019, oil on canvas, 39 3/8 × 27 1/2 in, 100 × 70 cm



*Tocaia*, 2019, oil on canvas, 60 × 60 cm



*Yauareté*, 2019, oil on canvas, 72 7/8 × 57 1/8 in, 185 × 145 cm





*Paisagem interior*, 2018, oil on canvas, 34 1/4 × 33 1/2 in, 87 × 85 cm

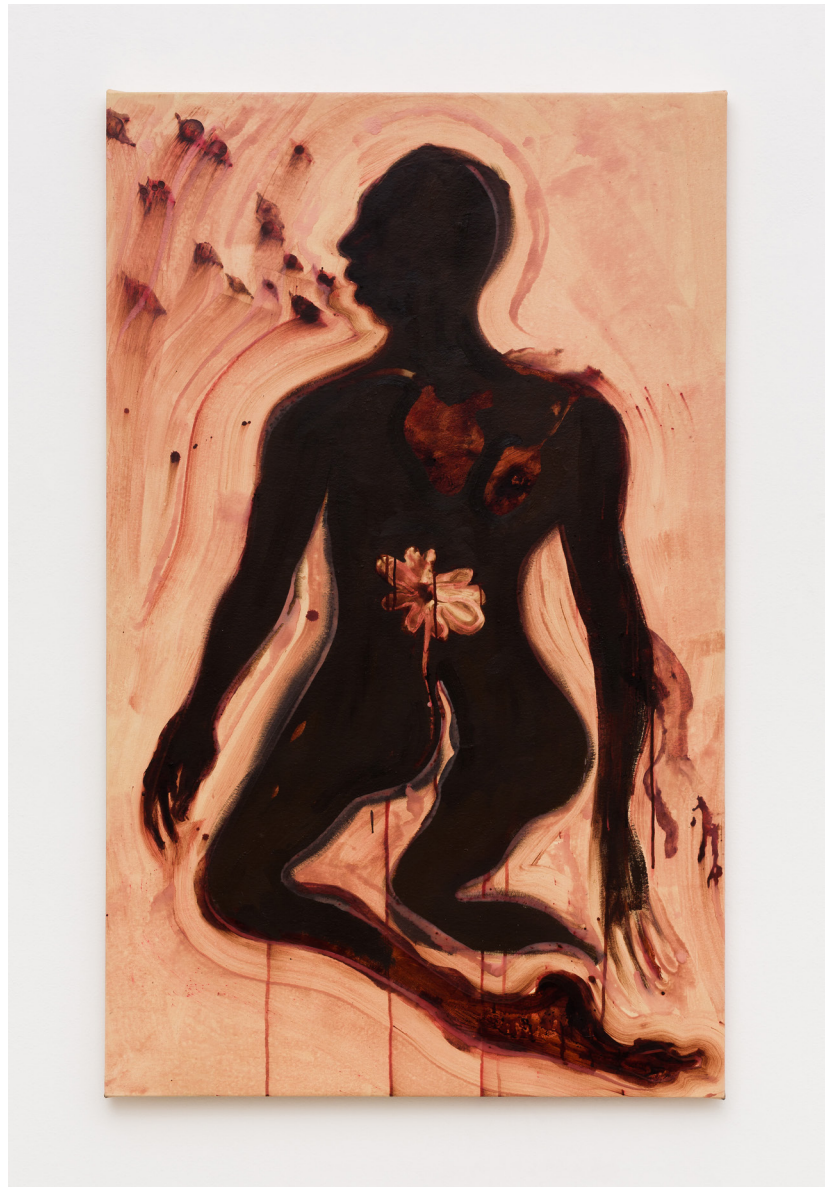


*Paisagem interior*, 2018, oil on canvas, 57 1/8 × 72 7/8 in, 145 × 185 cm





*Strange Fruit II - Abacateiro*, 2018, oil on canvas, 33 1/8 × 39 3/8 in, 84 × 100 cm



*Sombra Ajoelhada*, 2018, mixed media on canvas, 55 1/8 × 34 1/4 in, 140 × 87 cm



*Dois Espectros - Abacateiro, 2018, oil on canvas, 29 1/8 × 24 3/8 in, 74 × 62 cm*



*Sem título*, 2018, watercolor on paper, 132 × 22,5 cm



*Sem título*, 2018, watercolor and gold paint on paper, 32 × 22 cm, 40 × 30.5 cm (framed)



*Sem título*, 2018, watercolor and gold paint on paper, 32 × 22,5 cm



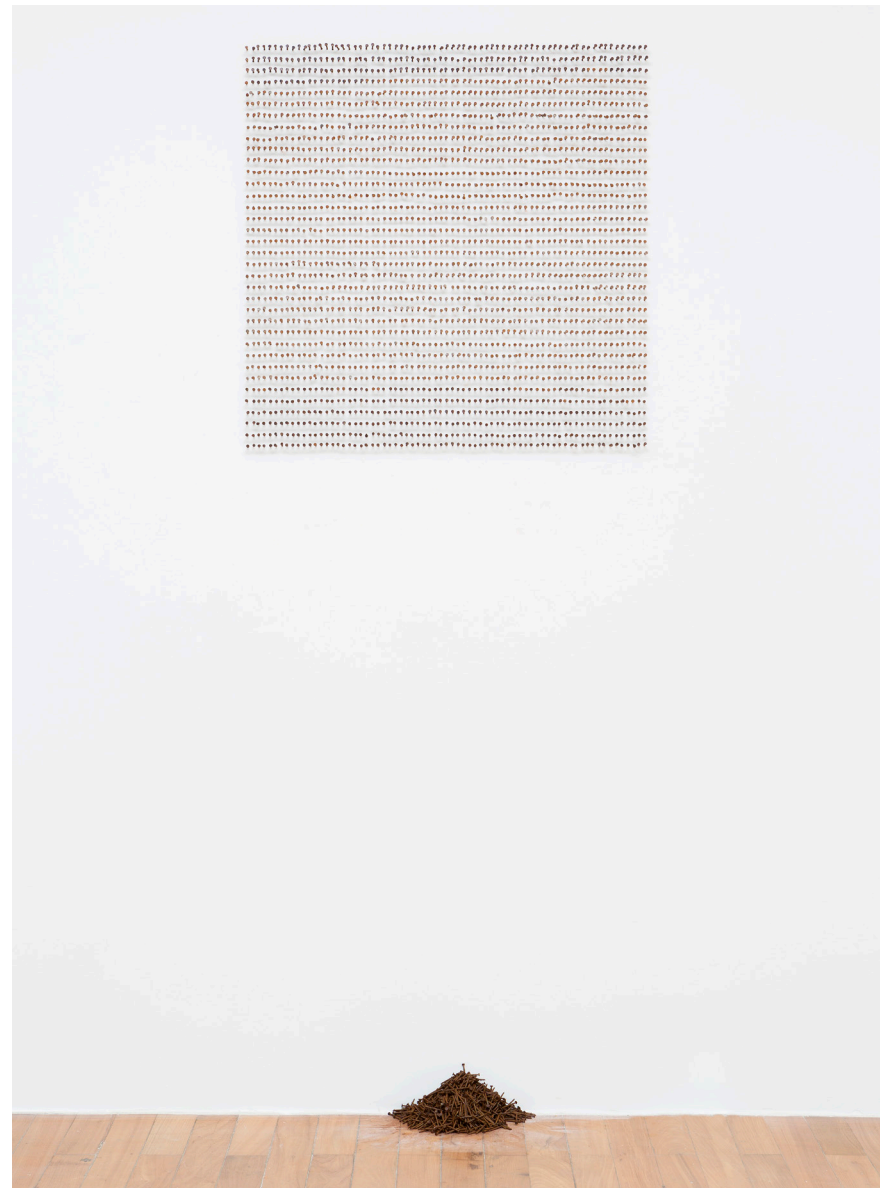
*Sem título*, 2018, watercolor and gold pen on paper, 40 × 31 cm



*Sem título*, 2018, watercolor on paper, 42 × 30 cm



*Votivo*, 2017, parafin wax on paper, candles, dring and wooden pegs, variable dimentions



*Pregação*, 2017, rusty nails, 70 × 70 cm





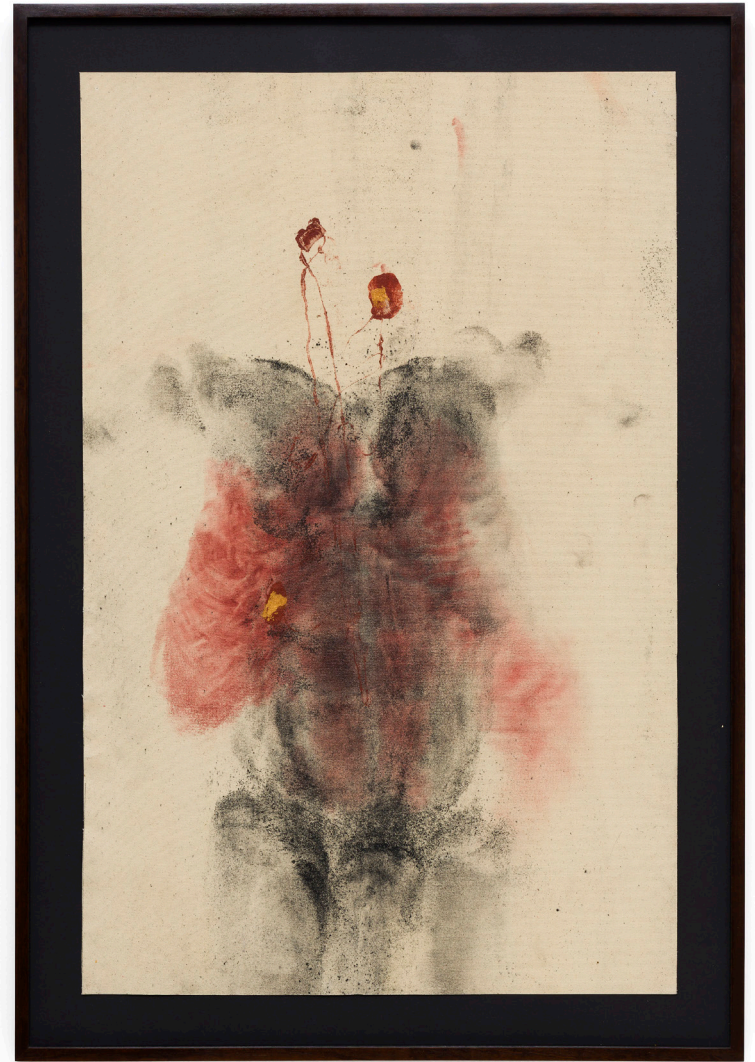
*Variações especulares - Narciso, from Ambiente com Espelhos series, 2017, antique wood frame and brushed steel, 179 × 173,5 cm*



*Antônio Obá, Votivo, from Ambiente com Espelhos series, 2017, charcoal, pigment, golden sheet, iron powder on cotton canvas, antique wooden frame and brushed steel, 70 × 161 × 2 cm*



*Sankofa* - Aroni, 2016, wooden bowl, paraffin, gypsum powder and sculpture ebony, 42 × 19 cm



*Fecha-Corpo*, 2016, monotype on canvas, golden nankin, pigment and charcoal powder, 106 × 68 cm



*Mártir*, 2016, monotype on canvas, golden nankin, pigment and charcoal powder, 103 × 68 cm



*Totem*, 2016, wood and candles, 42 × 23 cm





*Fortune*, 2015, porcelain plate and gold object, 18 × 13 × 2,5 cm





Antônio Obá, *Et Verbum*, 2011, wooden box on wafers and food coloring, 40 × 54 × 14 cm

*Body-Close: Transmutation of Memory and the Performativities of the Sacred in Antonio Obá*

If we are forests and not orchards, how can we break the boundaries of our identity? This issue reported by the indigenous leader, environmentalist and Honorary Doctorate Degree at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Ailton Krenak, a principle, brings us to the notion of territory as a place of political, ancestral and spiritual belonging. Similarly, there is a Bantu proverb that Nations are forests, no root of our belonging is an intertwining of our history entangled with other stories that relate to different temporalities. Therefore, identity starts from the difference that is crossed by coloniality. Accordingly, there is the incorporation between Same and Diverse. Second, Martinian writer, poet, and novelist Édouard Glissant in his text *Sameness and Diversity* (1981): The Sameness requires Being, the Diversity defines the relationship. As it began with expansion in the West, Diversity was born through the political and armed violence of the people.

Antonio Obá. Obá. Kwa language. King. Soba. Obá River, located in Nigeria. Ancestral figure that holds the secrets about knowledge. Orisha Obá, Lady of freshwaters in turbulence, but who dominates the forces of floods and control over clay. The river becomes a metaphor for what flows into other bonds. The memory of Antônio Obá's domestic experiences. The mother from Anápolis and the Father from Catalão, cities located in the interior of Goiás. In this process of cross-stories and the birth of Obá in Ceilândia (DF). The daily manual labor realized by his parents in the fields as a thread of memory that sews the past to the present. For the artist, the activation of this memory is poetically transposed into performance, object, drawing, painting, installation. This memory acts as an aesthetic potential and reflects a relationship with an inner reality, with interior traditions and domestic experiences ... Religious festivities in Goiás can be cited as the pilgrimages of the 'Nossa Senhora do Rosário,' 'Congada de Catalão,' 'Nossa Senhora de Abadia,' praise to 'Nossa Senhora Auxiliadora,' 'Festa do Divino Espírito Santo.' The rites, the prayers, the novenas in a spiritual practice approached by Catholicism that is crossed by an Afro-indigenous spirituality. In an autobiographical dimension, the term syncretism for the artist is rubbed from the impacts of coloniality on non-hegemonic forms of existence. In this context, the expansion of Catholicism by Portuguese missionaries since the mid-15th century in countries such as Congo, Angola, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria, Benin, Cape Verde, Sao Tome, and Principe. As this extractivist dynamic appears with the history of the first Jesuits in the catechization of indigenous peoples

and the political and religious strategies that were tensioned to a Catholic tradition present in the Brotherhoods or Black Confraternities in colonial Brazil, as well as the Reisados, the Brotherhood of Nossa da Boa Morte, the Festas de Reinados in present time.

Above all, how do micro-narratives constitute macro-policies in contemporary art? According to Obá, 'these memories are not a kind of nostalgia, but I try to understand as a more significant aspect in the sense of what it is today for me? What is this historically, too, within a national reality?'

The work *Et Verbum* (2011) consists of a wooden box wherein its core is wafers with words written in red that suggest a dimension of the body within the sacred, carnal, and erotic. *Et Verbum* refers to verse 14 of the Gospel of John, which initially says: 'the Word made flesh, was sent as "a man to men."' The Latin etymology of the word *Hóstia* refers to the victim and 'animal.' In this context, the idea of flesh comprises a body incapable of reasoning. A body without a soul. A raw body. Above all, the flesh is not yet a body. It is a sacrificial flesh, roughly the flesh of Christ. This is a fabulation of the flesh, the sacrificial body, of which integrity was not considered in coloniality.

However, *Et Verbum* rubs narratives about a human morphology in art history, such as without a period before the Renaissance and later in a modern tradition, as something considered fragmented and dispersed from its consciousness. The body as an object of nature in a field of mind founded as racial theories between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this sense, the French writer Georges Bataille becomes a reference for the artist in his reflection on the integrity of this body that is in the three dimensions of eroticism (bodies, hearts and sacred).

Integrity is in the substitution of Being's isolation, its discontinuity, for a feeling of deep depth. Above all, all eroticism becomes a manifestation of the sacred. Nevertheless, the "Ambiente Com Espelhos (Venus Noire, Vanitas, Votivo)" [Mirror Environment (Venus Noire, Vanitas, Votivo)] Series of 2017, proposed beyond its surface what is not reflected by a hegemonic history. That which is not Apollonian. Or, part of Protagoras's following axiom: Man is a measure of all things. What are the bodies seen in place of the fetish and do not become measures of something? When does the ephemerality of bodies translate a

colonial history? How does the experience of the sacred resize these bodies for the potential regeneration of their integrity?

Already the monotypes "Fecha-Corpo, Mártir, Agnus Dei" [Close-Body, Martyr, Agnus Dei] (2016) and the installation "Malungo" (2017) establish relationships with each other by the blackness that is not only color but also the materiality of coal. This represents something alive, but its existence still endures. The term 'Bantu Malungo' refers in this context to both cachaça, the escaped enslaved, or the link of a chain. The cachaça is the size of the offering on this altar initially offered to Exu, orisha messenger and lord of the crossroads. Cachaça as unfree labor product in colonial history and as a palliative of pain for the numbness of these bodies. The ritualistic meaning is in the limit of the elevation of human in the sense of adding pain and pleasure in this body put in involuntary sacrifice.

The syncretic altar for Antonio Obá replaces the idea of a white purity reiterating a black purity. The alchemical figured that from its decomposition by combustion turns into the chaos that reinvents itself and enhances the creation of other places of coexistence and epistemologies. This relationship may be indirectly related to the poetic research of the German artist Joseph Beuys influenced by Paracelsus alchemy in the constitutive principles of mercury, salt and sulfur in the transmutation of plant elementals as a symbolic image of society. From Beuys' reading of the Science of the Spirit and the common question presented by educator, philosopher, and artist of Austrian origin Rudolf Steiner, to formulate the concept of social organism as community development.

In the text 'De la traversée: raconter des expériences, partager le sens,' published in 2002, Cameroonian philosopher Jean-Godefroy Bidima says that the crossing was constituted by the historical possibilities existing in the 'social fabric' and the subjective tendencies and motivations that push historical characters to another place. This place of movement, according to Bidima, is concerned with becomings, excrescences, and exuberances, it tells us from which plurals a particular story is made. The crossing is where memory also becomes a gap that was torn by violence. And, consequently, forgetfulness forcibly develops other writing strategies. The notion of writing is not restricted to spelling but also evokes speech that reverberates in the body and transcends temporalities. The painting 'Fabula dos Eres' (2019) has the representation of a domestic environment in which the perspective does not

only refer to geometry of space but confers what ruminates memory, what fables memory, what mind insists on, in preserving diffusely. The Eres can be stupor states. The Eres are the infantile spirits which assist the divinities.

Similarly, in 'Oratório I' (2016) and 'Totem' (2016), the connection with *aiyé* (world) and *òrùn* (sky) organize people and things into a kind of sacred sign. Already object 'Sankofa - Aroni' (2016), the figures of Ososi (orisha of the hunting and the woods) and *Àròṅì* (guardian of the secrets of the leaves and liturgical herbs) enter the forest and become the path. Sankofa is an Adinkra pictographic symbol that belongs to the Akan peoples (Ghana, Ivory Coast, Togo) which are represented by a bird that emphasizes the importance of learning from the past to build the present. For the artist, it refers to undertaking this return through a path that you did not precisely take previously to get back to your roots.

This work is part of the 'Sentinela' series (2019) in which the absence of its place of origin by transits elsewhere is reported. The longing for the earth. The longing for the smell of wet sand. The longing for the color of the cerrado land. The moments of quietness that fabulate the memory. The title of the 'Sentinela' series comes when he listens to the title song by Milton Nascimento in this circumstance of absence. The stillness is also to be alert as it appears in the following excerpt of the song: You need to scream your strength, brother, survive / Death will not come if we come together / The paths in one, not flee and not deviate (...) Thus, this relationship also appears in 'Tocaia' (2019). There are also readings of Guimarães Rosa in Grande Sertão Veredas. In the painting 'Yauaretê' (2019), by tupi *Íagúara* - jaguar and *eté* - real, Obá 's view of the tale 'Meu tio o Iauaretê,' Guimarães Rosa' s Iauaretê presents the dilemma between the limits between hunting/prey and hunter/predator. The protagonist jaguar hunter, mestizo of white with indigenous, living intensely with jaguars will metamorphose into one of them. However, what symmetries are constructed in the relationship between the Self and the Other?

Dialogically, the Fortuna (2015) object, from Inventário Instrumental da Casa series, consists of a gold mold of a forked chicken breast bone, called a wishbone, but popularly known as a lucky bone, on a white plate purchased from an antique shop in Minas Gerais. The artist references Carmina Burana (Songs of Beuern), a cantata with a series of anonymous poems written in medieval Latin and German, played by the German composer Carl Orff (1935-

1936) when he understands gambling as the fatal character of this relationship with luck. In the following excerpt from the cantata entitled *The Fortune* (*The Wheel of Fortune has spun / Disgraced Descent / Another has been hoisted up*) there is the uncertain aspect of luck. The oracle of the tarot. The Wheel of Fortune. The Roman Goddess Fortuna. The random purposes of life. The inheritance. The objects belonging to your grandmother in your childhood. All that constitutes immeasurable values.

Above all, it becomes relevant to highlight in Antônio Obá's production the notion of self-ethnography as an epistemological strategy in the contemporary art of non-hegemonic creations when reflecting on the crisis of the grand narratives approached by different theorists of the second half of the twentieth. Methodologically, it refers to the strategies of poetically unveiling different subjectivities in which the readings of this scene revisit the past by launching a dialogical, polyphonic and community writing that now weaves and inscribes Obá's comment: What is a black body? What is a half-breed body? And that within these physical characteristics which I was born already inherit a whole range of behaviors that I do not master. I receive as a kind of social inheritance. So, of course, this will involve thinking about the black body, this historic body. Of course, these situations are all problematized. All this experience in a Catholic tradition. Why has the Afro-Brazilian side always been renegade, still marginalized? And then, I think it starts from a lot of personal distress and a personal quest to understand these roots. When I talk about this question of syncretism, there is this ritual side that has always interested me a lot, this question of a transcendental, archetypal, symbolic perception...

*By Janaina Barros*

## Education

Visual Arts, FADM – Faculdade de Artes Dulcina de Moraes, Brasília, Brazil

## Solo Shows

2019

Sentinelas, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brazil

2018

Pele de Dentro, Mendes Wood DM, New York, USA

2017

Antonio Obá, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brazil

2016

Carnagem, Galeria Arte XXX, Brasília, Brazil

(In)corporações, Galeria Candido Portinari, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

## Group Shows

2020

Possédé.e.s, Montpellier Contemporain, Montpellier, France  
CONSTRUÇÃO, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brazil

2019

36° Panorama da Arte Brasileira, MAM, São Paulo, Brazil

2018

Histórias Afro-Atlânticas, MASP / Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, Brazil

Arte Democracia Utopia - quem não luta tá morto, MAR, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Queer Museu, EAV Parque Lage, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

2017

Pipa Prize 2017, MAM-Rio, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Queer Museu, Santander Cultural, Porto Alegre, Brazil

2016

Não existo sem meu corpo, R3 Gabinete de Arte, Goiás, Brazil

My body is a cage, Galeria Luciana Caravello, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

ONÀ – CICLO X, deCurators Galeria de Arte, Brasília, Brazil

ENTRE, Casa da América Latina, Brasília, Brazil

Transitório/permanente II, Elefante Centro cultural, Brasília, Brazil

2015

ONDEANDAAONDA, Museu Nacional, Brasília, Brazil

2014

OCUPAÇÃO, Elefante Centro Cultural, Brasília, Brazil

2013

Verônica, Elefante Centro Cultural, Brasília, Brazil

Imagem, Palavra, Vertigem, Galeria da UnB, Brasília, Brazil

Kohëdhekujtësë – gravura bashkëkohore braziliane, Muzeu historik Kombëtar, Tirana, Albania

BrasilArgentinaGráfica, Espaço Cultural Renato Russo, Brasília, Brazil

2012

É perdendo o medo de errar que matamos o monstro do meio-dia, Brasília Contemporânea, Brasília, Brazil

2010

Impermanências, Galeria de Arte Dulcina de Moraes, Brasília, Brazil

2009

Trans... Aparência, Galeria de Artes Dulcina de Moraes, Brasília, Brazil

2008

I Mostra Dulcina de Artes Visuais – Poéticas Contemporâneas, Galeria de arte Dulcina de Moraes, Brasília, Brazil

2004

Cultura Afro em Alta, Embassy of Mozambique, Brasília, Brazil

2003

Arte Social, Galeria Yara Amaral, Centro cultural do SESI, Brasília, Brazil

2002

Sob o signo de um novo olhar, Galeria Yara Amaral, Centro cultural do SESI, Brasília, Brazil

2001

Ponto de vista, Galeria Yara Amaral, Centro cultural do SESI, Brasília, Brazil