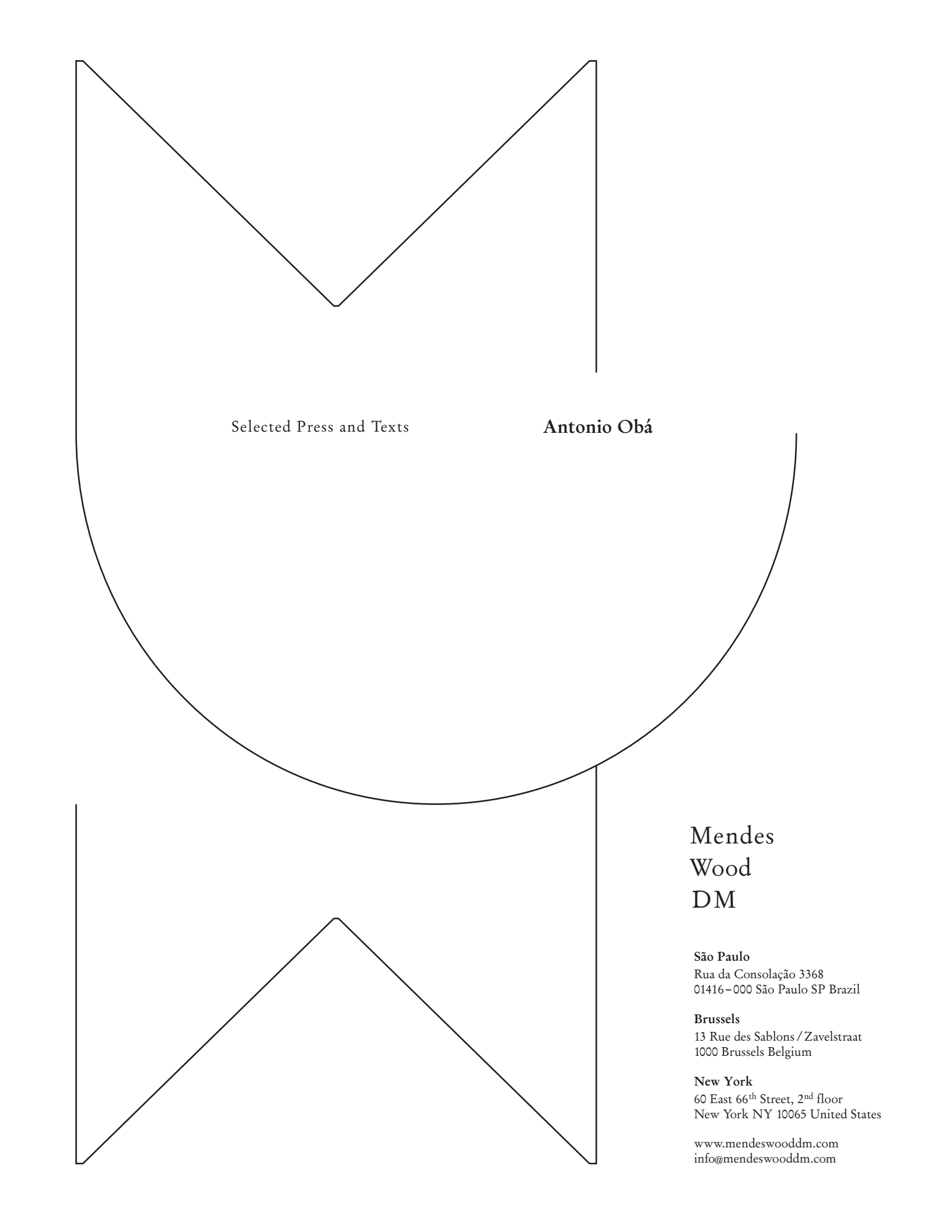




Selected Press and Texts

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Antonio Obá develops his body of work through a road linking colonial Brazil and contemporary Brazil. Also, he walks on this road from the moment he begins to understand the black body and the black individual in the construction of history. This understanding came at the beginning of his relationship with painting, in a way that Brazilian Baroque reveals itself, and thus opens up an infinity of relationships in the artist's work, which demands a look at the past.

In colonial Brazil, the influence of an aftereffect from medieval exteriorism would not be so specifically Portuguese, but European Norse and impregnated with magic, that would suffering Europe the conflict of Catholicism against the reformer but would persist for a long time in the colonies. In Minas Gerais, mainly, and in the northeast and center-west of the country, religious practices such as processions, festivals and rituals would find fertile ground for its dissemination, combined with the baroque pomp that the richness of the extraction of minerals could propitiate.

The production at that time in a cultural sense is the opulent worship of the baroque temples, the monumentality of the altars, tragic expressiveness of the images, the elegance of the details and the surrealities of the gesture. All this aesthetic construction of the Catholic faith in Brazil triggers a different relationship with the ethics of the church as a political force for the maintenance of the slave system and, consequently, of control of major's country population: black people.

Obá explores the implications of the Catholic black body and from this begins to move towards a study of objects and monotypes, which in their allegorical character, propose figures of bodies that are buried. This way is indicating their primitive forms: the fossil of man. The exploitation of erased memory takes place as a kind of excavation, soon the artist moves away from the painting and begins to look for the origin of the black man away from the Catholic faith and all its aesthetic implications.

The move away from the Brazilian Baroque in its less intricate resolutions causes the artist to throw himself on an empty ground to understand the origin of the black body and that man beyond his body, but against the origin of this body in artistic representations.

This confrontation is reminiscent of memories, places of knowledge and identities; a resinated diasporic space when it is integrated into the South American continent and begins to produce and legitimize its expression. The reminiscences of the memory mentioned, are found in the Afro-Brazilian religious rites and reflect in the syncretisms and constructions of identity.

The empty territory brought the artist back to the painting, now more diluted in the work of Antonio Obá, who no longer walks the road of colonization to the present times. It is a silent painting, removing the sound from the landscapes and lies in the silence of the portraits. It is the isolated individual who is in the surveillance, reveal himself in the reflection of the grinding knife, prepared not to walk but to remains where it is his place. The artist delivers legitimate figurative references of the history of the Negro in his paintings, like the man who eats the watermelon and the Eres surrounding the Old Black Man.

Obá crossed the superficialities of references and gave the soul of an artist who now knows about his body and understands it as a geographical, political and human space, beyond body, memory, and history, which once triggered cannot be erased again. The title of the show suggests he takes a position, and this presupposes that he should not run away, but be aware and aware of himself, which will consciously lead him to understand the whole of the world.



If we are forests not orchards, how can we break the boundaries of our identity? At first sight, this question – posed by the indigenous leader, environmentalist and honorary professor at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora Ailton Krenak – evokes the notion of territory as a place of political, ancestral and spiritual belonging. Similarly, a Bantu saying states that Nations are forests, suggesting that the root of our belonging is the intertwining of our own history and other histories that connect us to different temporalities. Therefore, identity stems from difference, which is intersected by coloniality. Consequently, there is a clash between the ‘same’ and the ‘diverse’. According to Martiniquais writer, poet, and novelist Édouard Glissant in his text *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (1981), ‘Sameness requires fixed Being. Diversity establishes Becoming. Just as Sameness began with expansionist plunder in the West, Diversity came to light through the political and armed resistance of peoples’.

Antonio Obá. Obá. Kwa language. King. Soba. Obá River in Nigeria. Ancestral figure that holds the secrets of knowledge. Orisha Obá Lady of Turbulent Freshwater who controls the power of floods and clay. The river as a metaphor for what flows in different connections.

The memory of Antônio Obá’s domestic living. The mother from Anápolis and the Father from Catalão, both towns in inland Goiás. A process of crisscrossed stories and the birth of Obá in Ceilândia (Distrito Federal). His parents’ daily manual labor in the fields as a thread of memory that sews together past and present. For the artist, the activation of this memory is poetically transposed into performance, object, drawing, painting, and installation.

The memory that works as aesthetic potential and translates a relationship with an inner

reality, with inland traditions and domestic experiences. Here we can highlight the many religious festivals in the state of Goiás, such as the Divine Eternal Father Pilgrimages, the Praise to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, the Congada in Catalão, the Our Lady of Abadia, the Praise to Our Lady Mary Help of Christians, and the Divine Holy Spirit Festivity. The rites, the prayers, the novenas within a Catholic spiritual practice intertwined by an Afro-Indigenous spirituality.

In its autobiographical dimension, for the artist, syncretism stems from the impacts of coloniality on non-hegemonic forms of existence. Including, in this context, the expansion of Catholicism carried out by Portuguese missionaries from the mid-15th century in countries such as Congo, Angola, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria, Benin, Cape Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe. The same extractive dynamics appears in the history of the first Jesuits in charge of catechizing indigenous peoples and in the political and religious strategies that were formed in the clash between the Catholic tradition and the Black Brotherhoods or Confraternities in colonial Brazil, as well as in the Kings' Festival Reisados, the Brotherhood of Our Lady of Good Death, and the contemporary Festa de Reinado. Above all, how do micro narratives constitute macro politics in contemporary art? In Obá's own words, these memories are not 'a sort of nostalgia. Instead, I try to understand them in their bigger picture: what does it mean for me today? Also, what does it mean historically within my national reality?'

Et Verbum (2011) consists of a wooden box filled with communion wafers, where red words suggest a dimension of the body within the sacred, the carnal, and the erotic. *Et Verbum* refers to verse 14 of the Gospel According to John: 'the Word made flesh, was sent as 'a man to men''. The Latin etymology of the word *hóstia* (wafer, in Portuguese) refers to both 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 sacrificial flesh, in reference to the flesh of Christ. It is the fabulation of the flesh, the sacrificial body; the bodies of those whose integrity was not taken into account in colonial times.

Et Verbum generates a narrative of human morphology within art history, for instance, in the period before the Renaissance and later in modern tradition, as something considered fragmented and free from consciousness. A body as an object of nature outside the spirit was the basis of the racial theories that emerged between the late-19th and early-20th centuries. In this sense, French writer Georges Bataille becomes a key reference for the artist in his reflection on the integrity of the body within the three dimensions of eroticism (the body, the heart, and the sacred).

Integrity is found in the replacement of the isolation of being and its discontinuity with a feeling of deep continuity. All eroticism becomes a manifestation of the sacred. The series *Ambiente com Espelhos* (*Venus Noire, Vanitas, Votivo*) [*Environment with Mirrors* (*Venus Noire, Vanitas, Votive*)] (2017) is a projection of elements not reflected by a hegemonic history – the non-Apollonian – beyond its surface. Or still, in line with Protagoras's axiom: 'Man is the measure of all things'. Which bodies are seen in the place of fetish and do not become measures of something? When does the ephemerality of the body translate a colonial history? How does the experience of the sacred resize these bodies for the potential regeneration of their integrity?

In turn, the monotypes *Fecha-Corpo, Mártir, Agnus Dei* [*Close-Body, Martyr, Agnus Dei*] (2016) and the installation *Malungo* (2017) establish a relationship with each other through the blackness that is not only color but also the materiality of coal. It represents something that was once alive, but whose existence still endures. In this context, the

term Bantu Malungo refers not only to the distilled spirit cachaça but also to a runaway slave or the link of a chain. Cachaça is an offering on an altar to Exu, messenger-orisha and lord of the crossroads. Cachaça as a form of enslaved labor in the colonial past and as pain-relief for the numbing of the body. The ritualistic meaning is conjured in the edge of human elevation in the sense of aggregating pain and pleasure in a body placed in involuntary sacrifice.

For Antonio Obá, the syncretic altar replaces the idea of white purity with the reiteration of black purity. The alchemical nigredo that when decomposed by combustion turns into the chaos that reinvents itself and enhances the creation of other epistemologies and places of coexistence. This relationship is perhaps indirectly linked to the poetic research of German artist Joseph Beuys influenced by Paracelsus' alchemy around the constitutive principles of mercury, salt and sulfur in the transmutation of plant elementals as a symbolic image of society. More specifically, Beuys' reading of the Science of the Spirit and the Social Question by Austrian educator, philosopher, and artist Rudolf Steiner in the formulation of the concept of social organism as community development.

In the essay *De la traversée: raconter des expériences, partager le sens*, published in 2002, Cameroonian philosopher Jean-Godefroy Bidima argues that the crossing (*traversée*) is conjured in the 'historical possibilities of the social fabric and the subjective trends and motivations that push historical characters to another place'. This place of movement, according to Bidima, 'is concerned with becoming, excrescence, and exuberance; it tells us the plurals that make up a particular story'. The crossing is where memory also becomes a gap once torn by violence. And, consequently, forgetfulness forcibly requires new writing strategies. The notion of writing is not restricted to script but also evokes speech that reverberates in the body and transcends temporalities. The painting *Fábula dos Erês* [The Erês Fable] (2019) depicts a domestic environment in which the perspective not only refers to the geometry of space but also reveals what memory ruminates, what memory makes up, what memory insists on diffusely preserving. Erês are states of trance. Erês are the child spirits that help the divinities. Similarly, in *Oratório I* [Oratory I] (2016) and *Totem* (2016), the link with *aiyé* (world) and *òrùn* (sky) puts people and things into a kind of sacred state. In turn, in *Sankofa – Aroni* (2016), the figures of Ossosi (orisha of hunting and the woods) and Àròní (guardian of the secrets of the leaves and liturgical herbs) enter the forest and become the path itself. Sankofa is an Adinkra pictographic symbol from the Akan people (Ghana, Ivory Coast, Togo), which is represented by a bird, emphasizing the importance of learning from the past to build the present. For the artist, it refers to 'undertaking a return via a path that you had not necessarily taken previously' to get back to your own roots.

The work is part of the series *Sentinela* [Sentinel] (2019), in which the artist imagines the absence of his place of origin whilst moving through different places. Longing for the land. Longing for the smell of wet soil. Longing for the color of the tropical savanna. The moments of quietness that create memory. The title *Sentinela* refers to the time he spent listening to Milton Nascimento's song of the same title in this situation of absence. Quietness is also alertness, as in the following excerpt of the song: 'you need to scream your strength, brother, to survive / Death will not come if we stick together / The paths are one, we mustn't flee nor detract (...)' The same relationship also appears in *Tocaia* [Ambush] (2019). There is also reference to Guimarães Rosa's *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*. In the painting *Yauaretê* (2019), whose title is a combination between the Tupi words for jaguar – *ÿagûara* – and truthful – *eté*, we see Obá's view of Rosa's short story *Meu tio, o Iauaretê* [My Uncle, the Iauaretê], which presents the dilemma between the limits of being prey/game and predator/hunter. The protagonist is a jaguar hunter, of mixed white and indigenous lineage, who after living intensely with jaguars begins to

metamorphose into one. Yet, which symmetries are created in the relationship between the Self and the Other?

Dialogically, Fortuna [Fortune] (2015), an object from the series *Inventário Instrumental da Casa* [Instrumental Inventory of the House], consists of the gold mold of a forked chicken breastbone, widely known as a wishbone, on a white plate purchased from an antique shop in Minas Gerais. The artist references *Carmina Burana* (Songs of Beuern) – a cantata made of a series of anonymous poems written in medieval Latin and German produced by the German composer Carl Orff (1935-1936) – as the result of the understanding that ‘gambling is the fatal aspect of the relationship with luck’. In an excerpt from *Carmina Burana* entitled *The Fortune* (‘The Wheel of Fortune turns/I go down, demeaned/another is raised up’) we find the uncertain aspect of luck. The tarot’s oracle. The Wheel of Fortune. The Roman Goddess Fortuna. Random purposes of life. The inheritance. The objects that used to belong to his grandmother in her childhood. All that constitutes immeasurable value.

Most importantly, Obá’s production put forward the notion of self-ethnography as an epistemological strategy in the contemporary art world of non-hegemonic creations, by reflecting on the crisis of the metanarratives adopted by different scholars in the second half of the 20th century. Methodologically, this refers to the strategy of poetically unveiling different subjectivities in which the interpretation of the scene revisits the past by launching to the present a dialogical, polyphonic and communitarian production that weaves and inscribes Obá’s writing in the here and now: What is a Black body? What is a mixed-raced body? With these physical features that I was born with I have already inherited a whole range of behaviors that I do not master, which I have received as a kind of social inheritance. So, of course, this involves thinking about the Black body, about this historic body. Obviously these situations introduce some issues. All this experience within a Catholic tradition. Why has the Afro-Brazilian side always been rejected, always marginalized? So I think it starts from a lot of personal distress and a personal quest to understand these roots. When I talk about this issue of syncretism, there is the ritual side that has always really interested me, the issue of a transcendental, archetypal, symbolic perception...



An update of our colonial past through its domestic rituals and the training of enslaved bodies echoes today, and lead us to reflect on the historical consequences of social amalgamation. Engaging in an autobiography of cultural and genealogical nature – his own a personal history – Antonio Obá puts us in a place of conscious danger. He demonstrates that his redemption will always be licentious, or better yet, a settling of accounts with himself, given the absence of recent daily living and family references that go beyond the body phenotype. He questions human behaviour and decision-making policies which can be strategically expressed in the mystic and religious universe.

The artist allows the renewal of the sacred art theme, which is barely perceived in a hurried visit – one must insist and dig deeper. The performance entitled “Receita de como fazer um santo” [Recipe for making a saint] sums up the attributes used in his artistic production. The performance includes objects, the body and paintings that also refer to the synthesis of paintings, installations and performances. The themes suggested in the titles of the works include religious representation, the black mythic sexuality or the ambivalence of gender, private servitude, cultural and racial ‘eugenics’ (turning white), the purging of traumas, and the reconstruction of the present by the ritualistic manipulation of objects.

Obá leads us to reflect, as well, on the concept of ‘performance-ritual’ that prevails in most of his work. If every performance, in general, reveals ritualistic principles, the artist specifically evokes and establishes the rite as a theme as well. The scenes have a purging and appeasement effect on the viewers.

The body is there, both as reason and as matter, questioning eroticism and stigmas of identity. Therefore, physical fitness is another element in his work. Muscle tone and a strong, vigorous body meet requirements of the design of every performance. Just like in “Malungo: rito para uma missa preta” [Malungo: ritual for a black mass], in which the

artist, while indulging himself with a liter of cachaça in a chalice just like the ones used in Catholic masses, repeatedly makes the sign of the cross with macerated charcoal in his own body, generating, as a result, the exhaustion of limits, to claim a leading devotional role typical of the Congolese masses. In Obá's point of view, this is "syncretism as seen by the perspective of personal negritude". In other circumstances, it is the naked body itself that is exposed and offered as a sacrifice. The exploitation of the black body, seen both as mechanical and manual labour and as part of the sexual exoticism, is thus revealed.

Subject to slander and opportunist interpretations because of the hypocrisy of political-religious groups trying to win their "herd"; and constituencies with a moral discourse that encourages terror and intellectual impoverishment, some works are reduced to attacks on symbols of the Catholic religion, disrespect for the image of Our Lady of Aparecida, or the indecency of the naked body. This is because understanding the comments of a black artist, a Catholic with strong family ties whose provocation aims at highlighting the overwhelming presence of colonialist, Catholic, slavery-based societies in the formation of the Brazilian people, is of no interest at all. And, for that end, he cuts in his own flesh and inflicts himself the pain of such a review.

Antonio Obá's artistic look allows us to realise us that 'transfiguring' deals with the search for the autonomy of desire and decision-making ability by the identification that has been usurped from him. The artist questions the critical development processes of religious and cultural heretical self-acceptance. He puts his own marks to the test, so that we are conscious of the fact that we repeatedly create an intimate relationship with what we want and what might not exist in practice, but rather what persists as a lack.

Reminiscences and absences are the central points of the series entitled "Ambiente com espelhos" ["Room with mirrors"], specially designed for the Pipa Prize 2017 finalists' exhibition. A set of five pairs of frames and screens, distributed in space and hung on the walls, establishes at the same time successive dialogues and confrontations.

The first relationship can be noticed between each diptych. On one side, a non-framed canvas; on the other, a framed plate of iron, standing in for a mirror. The raw cotton canvas absorbs presences. They are parts of the body, but may as well be emotions and family or cultural memories. Every mark and every memory, positioned to the left, disappears on the right, demanding an image that we can make of ourselves by means of the rusty plate. A mirror that barely reflects an image is the shield of vision, a reflection that does not serve exteriority, suggesting we look within ourselves.

A link is also created between the diptychs in space. The title of the series warns us that we are in an environment, and must examine it. We must notice its broad context. For a moment, we see a specific place in the room. Architecture's historical legacy of the 'halls of mirrors' is related to their design and use as the venues for political meetings and assertion of power. However, as a decorative structure, it also produces devices and metaphors for the illusion of what we see, according to our position in the room. In this experiment, partly invoked here by the work, when the body changes position in space, visual perception is also changed.

The work entitled "Variações especulares – Narciso"; ["Specular variations – Narcissus"], positioned at the back of the room, on the wall between two confronting rows, highlights the issue of ambivalence of dialog and occasional clashes. It is as if the object played back everything that it absorbs. It refers to the multiple points of view generated by the positioning of the body. On closer examination, if you stand in front of the oratory frame supporting the iron plate, the spectral mirror invokes the subject's individualization.

Now, in this intimate relationship, you can ask if there is something that you are able to see. Upon the suggestion that it is impossible to see anything out of the image blur, the search for a self-image in the reflection questions the concepts of original or learned memory. Strictly speaking, the word 'specular' is related to anything reflecting light, an assumed evaluation, or even a vague consideration about something or someone. It is related to the concept of opinion based on one's own ideas and interests. As a state of flux, flashes of the present appear as a way of questioning the possibilities of cognitive transformation about circumstances of 'being in the world'. The artist himself who says in his poem, as if in prayer:

path
I am path
I shall be
be me
without anticipating
see me

Written language is a recurrent manifestation in Antonio Obá's artistic production process. In his early works, this can be seen in his interest in calligraphy drawing, then it comes back as the testimonial or, at times, almost descriptive content he gives to some titles, or even through the inscription of words over his works. In many of his words, as in the poem above, he reveals how much the impelling force of its production is based on wanting to keep up with the others, being in their shoes, repositioning himself and seeing what there is in fact to be seen but is not immediately presented. Critical reviews, even if by means or art, are perhaps for just a few men of faith.



The works that Antonio Obá has been developing over the years, a selection of which are in this exhibition, pass through various languages of the visual arts, such as his exquisite drawings that point out the exquisite mastery of line, shadow and composition; the arrangements we can understand as assemblages or objects; installations whose atmospheres incorporate sacredness; and finally his sweeping performances utilizing his own body.

Always well executed formally, his works are the result of thorough research, relentless artistic practice and the revisiting of his ancestry. His arrested thoughts about the body occupy his being and his processes of unveiling and revealing, of reconciling himself with his own lineages. His poetics denote an immersion within his interior self, evoking other beings from the visible and invisible world; which constitute him as a human being, living being, animal being.

At first glance, we encounter the sacred in Antonio Obá's works, in the more everyday sense, as he activates Judeo-Christian liturgical iconography. However, as we approach other works, we are encountered with the layers of Africanism, more precisely situated between the spiritual and cultural heritages of the Iorubá and Baongo peoples, who are revealed through a narrative impregnated with meaning for Afro-Brazilians, dialoguing with the memory of the painful crossing of the Atlantic Ocean.

These layers are also revealed by the adopted name of the artist. Antonio, references Santo Antonio (Saint Anthony), not after Saint Anthony of Pádua, but Saint Anthony of Categeró, born in Northern Africa in the 15th century. A black enslaved man, he was taken to Sicily, where he dedicated himself to protecting the poor.

The name 'Obá,' represents the duality of the masculine and feminine genders. 'Obá' was the word for 'King' in the Benin Empire of West Africa, founded in the 15th century and destroyed by the British at the end of the 19th century. 'Obá' is also connected to the

word 'iabá', which is the name used for orishas (deities) with female attributes. In nature iaba is identified as the ruler of troubled waters and also as the Iaba River, also known as the Niger River. 'Obá' also references the Great Warrior Queen, Xangô's first wife, an Orisha who rules over thunder and fights with an 'ofá' (bow and arrow), sword, and shield.

Thus, Antonio Obá carries names imbued with noble attributes, which together converge in a celebrated religious syncretism. However, this fusion or new interpretation of religious and spiritual practices, denounces the violence of the processes of colonization in Brazil; a mestizo country which is the product of the violation of indigenous and enslaved black women by Portuguese colonizers.

The Brazilian population has an inner diversity and an extreme multiplicity of colors and cultures, unnamed religions and spiritual rituals are practiced, and are marked in the routines of daily chores and family customs. They are the continuation of knowledge which carry touches, lines, smells, tastes, and colors, of customs whose origins are now impossible to trace. The habits of these intimate traditions hide identities, forms of existence that unite the human and the natural being, while not cartographically separating them from the formidable mystery of existence.

Obá's recent paintings present black men who resemble the artist, but they transcend man and the notion of realism based on the canons of mimesis, the classical tradition. In them, Obá reconnects to his ancestry and revisits his animals, animals that survive in us despite the civil excesses of postmodernity, standardization, and normativity.

Obá's paintings utilize tones of faded yellow, pink, blue, and green taken from the facades of rural homes. These homes are lined with a mixture of water, lime and chalk powder, a type of popular dye. Discolored over time, the homes become less uniform in color which attaches them to a historical linearity, to color collectivities and individualities with various tones of being.

The representation of black bodies are entangled in white lines, lace over a brown almost black skin. Over black bodies are the búzios (cowrie shells) of divination games, which also served as coins[1], when occupying the place of the eyes they act as reminders to always see the past. The black bodies with búzios also reference sambaquis[2], accumulated layers of bodies at rest, matter in arrest, bodies that say farewell to this world, bodies that remind us of those who arrived in ships centuries ago.

Drawings, objects, installations, performances and paintings that invite us into the artists intimacy, in a resumption of a feeling, almost instinct, but denser than rationality that allows us to comprehend, which is not exactly about 'understanding.'

Antônio Obá challenges us to move away from the notion of urban centralities as points where everything happens at an accelerated rhythm towards investigating the re-emergence of our interior. In this encounter, we recognize ourselves in other rhythms, in other beings, in other affectivities, in other intensities, in a communion with the ancestry that composes us, that inhabits us and constitutes us.

If, like black bodies in the world, we often still find ourselves lost and out of place, the works of Antônio Obá announce that the first place to be reconquered is the one that we carry inside us that brings us comfort, performing a game in reverse, in which the reverse is the beginning.



Mendes Wood DM has the pleasure to present the first solo show in São Paulo by the artist Antônio Obá. The artworks exhibited encompass a diversity of supports and media, such as painting, monotype, installation and performance. The artist incorporates Brazilian religious icons to question a racial and political identity memory.

A number of ex-votos – objects offered to the gods as gratitude for fulfilling a vow – are displayed throughout the room, including ordinary materials, such as horse teeth, horse-shoes and nails, amongst others, which, in the context of a syncretic discourse, articulate the proposition of an exchange with the gods.

The idea of a symbolic offering through the ex-votos challenges their own purpose.

These objects of gratitude for a wish granted by a god are, in this case, in the artist's own words, records of a broken body, manifested in the wood as a stain that cannot be forgotten, but that enable a discussion on the interaction between the ritualistic and historic perspectives that each person carries.

These religious icons, along with the artist's contemporary experiences and beliefs, establish a network of senses connecting our times with a past deleted by history. The monotypes that imprint the artist's own body onto canvas reiterate his interest in re-signifying the body in rites and social situations, transfiguring his intentions in the pictorial field beyond the religious signs, raising a discussion about the black body, not only physical, but from a historical and social perspective.

In the field of art historiography, Obá's work encourages an investigation on the relationships of influence and interchange in the construction of Brazilian culture, the erasing of the black element of the history of Brazilian art that, nonetheless, gives room to an act of resistance and reflection on the idea of a national identity.



Born in Ceilândia, in the outskirts of Brasília, and raised in a catholic family, PIPA Prize 2017 Finalist Antonio Obá investigates and reconfigures a certain Brazilian religious tradition. Interested in the pursuit and affirmation of his own body, Obá found in the field of performance his ideal realm. There, he's able to reproduce a kind of ritualistic aspect of religion. "The anchoring point [of my work] revolves around the statement of the presence of the body," he tells PIPA Institute Curator Luiz Camillo Osorio in an exclusive PIPA Prize interview.

The centrality of the body in his work is intimately related to the desire he has of understanding his own identity, mixing intimate memory and a larger social context that exists long before him and has defined his place in society. Obá frequently examines what it means to have a black, miscegenated body, a "body cast to the shadows that now claims its positionality speech." The result is a work that brings to the surface reflections on racism, acculturation processes, miscegenation, religious rituals, masochism and eroticism.

Although working primarily with performance, the artist also draws, writes and paints. His interest and aptitude towards art comes from an early age, and was developed in High School, largely thanks to the help and support of a dear teacher. Yet, it was only as an undergrad student that he starting taking his calling seriously.

Enrolled in a Marketing Bachelor course, Obá heard from one of his maisters, an artist himself, that he couldn't become a true artist unless he had the discipline for it. A month later, he dropped out of the Marketing course to study Visual Arts at the Faculdade de Artes Dulcina de Moraes (FADM) instead.

The influence of a number of teachers and professors was, by the way, a major one when it came to the decision of making and studying art. "Today, I am also a teacher," he says. "I think that this is essential if you want to provide an education that is both aesthetic

and sensitive”.

The artist also highlights the importance of, as a black artist, occupying art spaces in order to be seen and heard by people. “I put myself in this situation: I am a mestizo, I build my affective and familiar relationships in a catechizing tradition and most of the artistic references that contributed to my background came from of an European aesthetics construct; as I said above, this is a cultural and educational problem.” One he is actively – and daily – fighting to change.