

INHABITED

28.05.26 — 17.07.26



CHICO DA SILVA, SEM TÍTULO, 1967

Exhibition Group Show: INHABITED

Laís Amaral, Jaider Esbell, Sonia Gomes, Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato, Mestre Didi, Paulo Monteiro, Antonio Obá, Heitor dos Prazeres, Chico da Silva, Tadáskia, Rubem Valentim.

Opening: Thursday, May 28th 2026

Exhibition: 29th May – 17th July 2026

The group exhibition, INHABITED, at L'Appartement Gallery brings together the work of eleven Brazilian artists active across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, tracing a set of shared concerns that persist through time: the relationship between form and belief, material and memory, abstraction and lived experience. The central idea of the exhibition is that form is never neutral in the Brazilian context. It is always inhabited by something invisible: a belief system, a memory, a lived experience. Across painting, sculpture, and assemblage, form in the Brazilian context operates as a carrier of meaning, shaped by Afro-Brazilian religions, Indigenous cosmologies, and everyday experience. It becomes a site where material and immaterial dimensions intersect, where the visible holds within it systems of belief, ritual, and memory.

Rather than tracing a linear trajectory from modern to contemporary, INHABITED reveals a set of ongoing conversations. Bringing into dialogue key representatives of modern Brazilian art with contemporary artists who draw from and reactivate this legacy, the exhibition considers how artistic practices in Brazil are deeply intertwined with spiritual, cosmological, and vernacular systems of knowledge.

In the works of Mestre Didi and Rubem Valentim, abstraction becomes a structured spiritual language. Drawing from Candomblé and Yoruba symbolic systems, their practices transform geometry into a coded vocabulary, where repetition, rhythm, and sign articulate systems of belief. Valentim, in particular, took the free-flowing and syncretic universe of popular and spiritual traditions as a starting point to develop a precise and rigorous visual language. Integrating symbols such as the arrow, triangle, circle, and the double-edged axe associated with Candomblé deities, he translated sacred emblems into a refined geometric lexicon.

In his hands, these forms—removed from their ritual context—are reorganised into compositions of striking clarity, where colour and structure attain a sense of balance between the rational and the metaphysical. A deeply religious man who described himself as an “artist-priest,” Valentim understood his practice as a form of spiritual transmission. His paintings, sculptures, and reliefs become sites where making itself is an act of belief—where, as he stated, “there is no salvation outside of making.” Through this process, geometry becomes not only a formal device but a vehicle for spiritual elevation, where symbolic systems are both preserved and transformed. This lineage finds a contemporary resonance in the work of Antonio Obá, whose practice similarly engages with ritual, symbolism, and the body as sites of spiritual and cultural inscription, reactivating religious imagery within a critical and deeply personal framework.

This relationship between image and cosmology extends into the work of Jaider Esbell and Tadáskia. Engaging with Indigenous and Afro-diasporic perspectives, their practices collapse distinctions between figuration and abstraction, constructing images that operate simultaneously as narrative, map, and symbolic field. Their works propose other ways of seeing and understanding the world, grounded in relational and non-Western epistemologies, where the spiritual and the material are inseparable.

Alongside these practices, artists such as Chico da Silva, Heitor dos Prazeres, and Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato articulate forms of vernacular modernity. Developed outside dominant art historical frameworks, their works draw from landscape, imagination, and daily life, yet are structured through pattern, repetition, and intuitive systems. In their hands, modernism becomes something lived rather than theorised—rooted in experience rather than ideology, and often shaped by an underlying symbolic and spiritual sensibility embedded in everyday life.

Material itself becomes a site of memory in the work of Sonia Gomes and Laís Amaral. Through processes of accumulation, layering, and transformation, their practices foreground tactility and making as forms of knowledge. Fabric, pigment, and surface retain traces of gesture and time, carrying histories that are both personal and collective, where material becomes a vessel for memory, affect, and spiritual resonance. In parallel, the work of Paulo Monteiro explores the tension between materiality and form through a more restrained and introspective language, where subtle shifts in surface, line, and colour evoke a contemplative engagement with painting as both object and process.

Across these diverse practices, recurring themes emerge: the persistence of symbolic systems, the inseparability of material and meaning, and the continuity of cultural knowledge across generations. What connects these artists is not a shared style, but a shared understanding of form as something inhabited—by memory, by spirituality, and by lived experience.

Laís AMARAL

Laís Amaral (b. 1993, São Gonçalo, Brazil) is a self-trained artist whose practice emerges from a sustained engagement with the relationship between art and craft, shaped by her role as cofounder of the Trovoa collective and her identification as an “artist-artisan”. Working primarily in painting, she employs unconventional everyday tools to create textured surfaces that challenge Western notions of abstraction while addressing questions of race, gender and social experience.

Her work explores environmental degradation and processes of “whitening” in Brazilian territories, using layered compositions and techniques of covering and scraping to evoke excavation and the uncovering of obscured narratives. Amaral has presented solo exhibitions at Mendes Wood DM, New York, M+B, and participated in major group exhibitions including the Gwangju Biennale and presentations at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, and Museu de Arte do Rio, consolidating her presence in contemporary art.

Jaider ESBELL

Jaider Esbell (1979–2021), an artist, writer and curator from the Macushi people in the Brazilian Amazon, articulated his practice through the intertwined roles of “activist” and piya’san (shaman) curator. His work challenges colonial structures and Western artistic frameworks while asserting Indigenous epistemologies, grounded in Indigenous cosmologies and shaped by political and spiritual traditions.

He gained national recognition with the PIPA Prize in 2016 and curated Moquém Surai at the São Paulo Biennial in 2021, a landmark Indigenous-led exhibition. His work has since been presented internationally, including by the Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, establishing him as a pivotal figure in contemporary Indigenous art and discourse.

Sonia GOMES

Sonia Gomes (b. 1948, Caetanópolis, Brazil) is a Brazilian artist based in São Paulo whose practice centers on sculptural assemblages made from discarded fabrics and found materials. Through processes of cutting, tying and stitching which are often without preparatory sketches, she transforms personal memory, material histories and craft traditions into a contemporary sculptural language.

Gomes has exhibited internationally, including at the Venice Biennale, and in major Brazilian institutions such as the Museu de Arte de São Paulo and the Pinacoteca de São Paulo; her work is also included in major international and national collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou, and the Museu Afro Brasil, consolidating her position in contemporary art.

Amadeo Luciano LORENZATO

Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato (1900–1995) was a Brazilian painter born in Belo Horizonte to Italian immigrant parents. He is known for developing an independent painting practice centered on landscapes and everyday scenes, characterized by geometric simplification and richly textured surfaces created with self-made pigments and unconventional tools. Working largely outside dominant art movements, he maintained a singular visual language despite encounters with figures such as Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse.

His work began to be exhibited from the mid-1960s and later entered major institutional collections, including the Museu de Arte de São Paulo and the Pinacoteca de São Paulo, securing his recognition as a significant figure in 20th-century Brazilian painting.

Mestre DIDI

Mestre Didi (Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos; 1917–2013) was an artist, writer and religious leader whose practice is grounded in Afro-Brazilian sacred traditions, particularly those derived from Yoruba cosmology and the ritual systems of Candomblé. His sculptural work employs materials such as wood, leather, straw, beads, and cowrie shells to create symbolic forms tied to ancestry and the sacred. From the 1960s onward, his work gained recognition in Brazil and internationally, including participation in the 1st Bienal de Artes Plásticas da Bahia and exhibitions across Africa.

His works are held in major collections such as the Museum Afro Brasil, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, and Museu de Arte de São Paulo, establishing his importance in Afro-Brazilian art and cultural history.

Paulo MONTEIRO

Paulo Monteiro (b. 1961, São Paulo, Brazil) works across painting, drawing and sculpture, exploring the tension between material and form through a reduced visual language. A member of the Casa 7 group in the 1980s, he helped reintroduce expressive, gesture-driven painting in Brazil, foregrounding materiality and process. Using modest materials such as paper, plaster, bronze and canvas, his practice emphasizes repetition, balance and the poetics of restraint.

His work has been widely exhibited in Brazil and internationally, including at the Pinacoteca de São Paulo, the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo and the Museu de Arte do Rio, as well as at the São Paulo Biennial. His works are held in major public and private collections in Brazil and abroad.

Antonio OBÁ

Antonio Obá (b. 1983, Ceilândia, Brazil) explores the intersections of body, spirituality and Afro-Brazilian identity through painting, sculpture, photography and performance. Drawing on references such as Candomblé, Umbanda and Catholic iconography, his work examines how personal and collective histories are constructed and ritualized within Brazilian society. Through recurring symbols like the body and religious objects, he creates layered compositions that question systems of belief and racial narratives.

His work has been widely exhibited across Brazil, Europe and the United States, including a major presentation at the Venice Biennale 2022. His works are held in important collections such as the Pinacoteca de São Paulo and the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, as well as international public and private collections.

HEITOR DOS PRAZERES

Heitor dos Prazeres (1898–1966) was a self-taught artist whose work centers on vivid, detailed scenes of popular culture in Rio de Janeiro, including samba, festivities, and Afro-Brazilian religiosity. Drawing from his lived experience as a Black artist, his paintings highlight urban community, everyday life and social inequality, challenging dominant elite narratives.

His work was exhibited internationally, including at the São Paulo Biennial and the Venice Biennale and he represented Brazil at the First World Festival of Negro Arts; his works are now held in major Brazilian museum collections, establishing his place in 20th-century Brazilian art and Afro-diasporic cultural history.

Chico da SILVA

Chico da Silva (Francisco Domingos da Silva; c.1910/1922–1985) was a Brazilian self-taught painter associated with naïve art, born in Acre to a Peruvian Indigenous father and a mother from Ceará. He was later based in Fortaleza where he developed most of his work. He began drawing on walls with charcoal in the early 1940s, and his career shifted in 1943 after meeting Jean-Pierre Chabloz, which led to exhibitions in Brazil and abroad. He gained international recognition in the 1950s and 1960s, including participation in the Venice Biennale where he received an Honorable Mention.

His paintings are known for dense compositions filled with hybrid creatures, plants, and imaginary animals, built through detailed patterns and controlled use of color. Despite later disputes over authorship in his workshop, his work remains widely collected and recognized as significant in 20th-century Brazilian art.

TADÁSKÍA

Tadáskía (b. 1993, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) is a Brazilian artist, writer and performer whose multidisciplinary practice spans drawing, painting, performance, video and text. Her work combines writing and image in minimal, gestural compositions that explore themes of Blackness, gender identity, desire and subjectivity; often treating language as both material and structure. Her practice moves freely across media and resists fixed categorization.

Tadáskía has presented work in major international contexts, including the 59th Venice Biennale, and in institutions such as the Museu de Arte de São Paulo; her work is also included in important collections, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, consolidating her presence in contemporary Brazilian and international art.

Rubem VALENTIM

Rubem Valentim (1922–1991) was a painter, sculptor and engraver who developed a singular visual language combining Afro-Brazilian spiritual symbolism with geometric abstraction. Moving from early figurative work to a codified system of signs, his practice draws on Candomblé and Umbanda iconography to construct a symbolic and universalizing formal vocabulary.

He participated in the First World Festival of Negro Arts, the 14th Bienal de São Paulo and had solo retrospectives at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo and Mendes Wood DM, while also being shown internationally in venues such as Moderna Museet, Stockholm, and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada. His works are held in major collections in Brazil and abroad, establishing him as a central figure in Afro-Brazilian abstraction.

L'APPARTEMENT

Our overarching ambition is to cultivate a dynamic community that engages both seasoned collectors and younger generations, while revitalising the Geneva art scene.

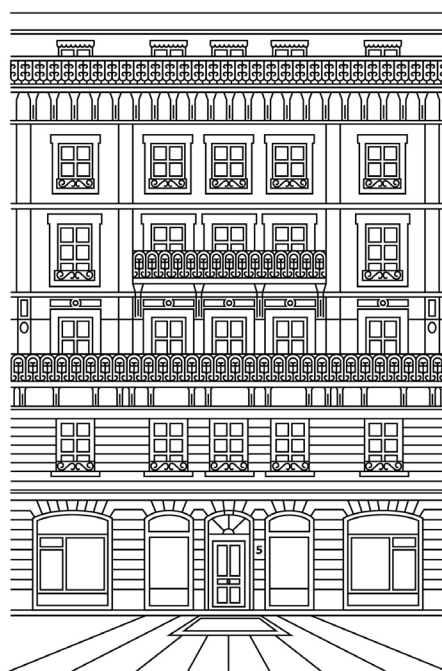
Founded by Thea Montauti d'Harcourt Lyginos, L'Appartement is a space dedicated to hosting focused exhibitions that highlight specific artists projects and dialogues.

Through diverse exhibitions, collaborations and off-site projects, L'Appartement Gallery, Geneva aims to create a dynamic podium for emerging and established artists worldwide and to create a dialogue between modern, contemporary art and design. At the core of the gallery's vision is the nurturing of emerging talents alongside historically significant artists.

Embracing a modern, hybrid gallery model, L'Appartement seeks to build connections between the art industry and other sectors, thus expanding the influence of art on diverse audiences. Nestled on the second floor of a historic building in Geneva, the gallery offers an intimate setting for collaborative initiatives, involving artists, international galleries and independent curators. Complementing the gallery's presence in Geneva, in July 2026, the gallery will host an off-site exhibition in the cycladic island of Antiparos, curated by Craig Burnett.

L'APPARTEMENT

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