

The New York Times

He Shined a Light on Other Artists. Now the Light Turns to Him.

The Afro-Brazilian artist Emanuel Araújo is considered a giant in his home country. A museum he founded is working to preserve his legacy.



The artist Emanuel Araújo at the Museu Afro Brasil in São Paulo in 2012. Araújo, who died last year, was also a curator and collector as well as the driving force behind the museum, which emphasized Brazil's Black heritage. Credit...Isadora Brant/Folhapress

By Jill Langlois

Reporting from São Paulo, Brazil.

Aug. 25, 2023

The day Emanuel Araújo died last year, his museum was in shambles.

It was Sept. 7, the 200th anniversary of Brazil's independence, and renovations at the Museu Afro Brasil had just begun the month before.

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An artist known as much for his geometric sculptures and reliefs as for his tenacity and penchant for getting what he wanted, Araújo (pronounced Ahra-OO-zhoh) was just two months shy of his 82nd birthday at the time of his death — 18 years after he founded the museum and later fought for state funding for much-needed updates.

Even as floors were being torn up and walls taken down, Araújo was adamant that the Museu Afro Brasil — which bears his name on the building and which he considered his most important work — not shutter completely, leaving the long-term exhibitions open to the public.

Although he is not well known in many parts of the world, Araújo is a household name in Brazil's art world. He spent his life trying to create much-needed exhibition spaces for underrecognized Afro-Brazilian artists — this in a country with a population that is majority Black — and it pained him to think that the doors of the museum, in São Paulo's Ibirapuera Park, would be closed.

“We already had to shut down for eight months in 2020 because of the pandemic, and Emanuel was so distressed about it, so worried,” Sandra Salles, executive director of the Museu Afro Brasil, said in a recent interview. “He refused to work from home. We laughed because even when the park was closed and we couldn't physically get to the museum, he wanted to go in to work.”

So when Araújo died, there was no need to discuss where his funeral would be held. Friends and colleagues got together and started clearing out the gallery next to the museum's ground-floor entrance. At the center of the high-ceilinged room, its stark-white walls bare save for two of Araújo's reliefs, they placed one of the artist's best-known pieces, “Baobá.”

The sculpture, an imposing vertical figure with sharp angles carved in wood and painted black, is named after a tree sacred to the West African Yoruba people. It represents the connection between the physical and spiritual worlds and is considered a witness to time and a guardian of memory. It's also a fitting symbol for a man who spent his life trying to preserve the history and culture of Afro-Brazilians through its artists.

“He used to say, ‘If I don't remember them, remember their story, nobody will,’” Salles said. “This country has no memory. They'll think this all fell from the sky.”

Now the spotlight is being turned back on Araújo's work: His first solo exhibition in the United States will be at Jack Shainman Gallery, in New York, which also represents his estate. The show, opening Sept. 12, will highlight pieces the artist created throughout his career, from the 1970s to 2022, in various mediums, including wood, metal and found objects.

“He spent so much of his life supporting other artists,” the gallery's co-founder, Jack Shainman, said. “In a way, he was hiding in plain sight. And his concerns, his intentions, his work really parallels so many of the artists I work with already that adding his voice feels almost like it's part of a chorus.”

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“Baobá,” foreground, one of Araújo’s best-known works, is named after a tree sacred to the West African Yoruba people. It represents the connection between the physical and spiritual worlds and is considered a guardian of memory. At the back is an untitled piece by the artist. Credit...Gabriela Portilho for The New York Times

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Emanuel Araújo, "Untitled," 2005, wood and automotive paint. Credit...via the Estate of Emanuel Araújo and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

The New York Times



Emanuel Araújo, "Navio" ("Ship"), 2021, wood, automotive paint, nails, photographs, vintage globe. Credit...via the Estate of Emanuel Araújo and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

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Araújo's "Redondo e raio vermelho" ("Round and red lightning"), 2017, wood and automotive paint. Credit...via the Estate of Emanuel Araújo and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

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Much of Araújo's personal collection of pieces from African and Afro-Brazilian artists — which number in the thousands and are spread out across his homes and the Museu Afro Brasil — will also be put up for auction later this year in São Paulo, with hopes that they will continue to be available for public viewing.

Born into a family of goldsmiths in the town of Santo Amaro da Purificação in Brazil's northeastern state of Bahia, Araújo learned to work with wood in the studio of a master woodcarver, Eufrásio Vargas. At 13, he took a job as a graphic designer for his hometown's Official Press, a company that prints government communications and announcements.

Six years later, certain that he was on the right path as an artist, he held his first solo exhibition. He soon moved to the state capital, Salvador, where he studied printmaking at the Escola de Belas Artes da Bahia. He would go on to show his work in some 50 solo shows and more than 150 group exhibitions, winning several awards along the way, including a gold medal at the 1972 Graphic Biennial in Florence.

After a stint as director of the Museu de Arte da Bahia in the early 1980s, Araújo headed to New York, where he taught courses in graphic arts and sculpture at City College. Back in Brazil, he spent a decade as the director of São Paulo's Pinacoteca, one of the country's most important art museums, before founding the Museu Afro Brasil in 2004.

An avid collector, he filled the museum's immense galleries with art he'd accumulated over the years: a mix of works touching on the themes of labor, farming and slavery. All tell the story of the journey Africans took when they were forcibly brought to Brazil and of the resilience they needed to rebuild their communities and hold on to their cultures.

When Araújo liked an artist, he made it his mission to buy every piece of theirs he could find. He was passionate about collecting and exhibiting the works of little-known Black artists, like the brothers João and Arthur Timótheo da Costa, who worked together at Brazil's mint, designing stamps and prints before turning their focus to painting in the early 1900s.

But while Araújo had been winning praise for supporting certain artists, he was criticized for not including others.

"Anyone with a critical eye can see there are few women artists represented in the museum," said Amanda Carneiro, a curator and an artistic organizer for the 2024 Venice Biennial who used to work alongside Araújo as a coordination assistant at the Museu Afro Brasil's education center. "Everything has its limits. The Museu Afro Brasil is wonderful, but when something stands alone, it ends up carrying more weight and not being plural enough in its representation of diversity."

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Araújo's first solo show at the São Paulo Museum of Art, better known by its Portuguese acronym MASP, in 1981. Credit...via the Estate of Emanuel Araujo and Simões de Assis

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This section of the Museu Afro Brasil displays religious items. Credit...Gabriela Portilho for The New York Times

That's something that Salles thinks Araújo was trying to change in the months before his death. The last two exhibitions that Araújo oversaw were "Multiple Female Voices," showcasing 86 works from 28 female artists.

While Araújo's fondness for accumulating as many works by a single artist as possible may have seemed excessive, it also pointed to his generosity. He gave countless pieces from his personal collection to the Museu Afro Brasil — about 2,000 works in the museum's 9,000-piece collection are on loan from him — and made donations to several other art institutes, including the Pinacoteca.

Image

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Araújo giving Marta Suplicy, then the mayor of São Paulo, a tour of the Museu Afro Brasil in 2004. Credit... Jorge Araujo/Folha Images

“He made a big difference, he still makes a big difference,” says Keyna Eleison, curator and a former artistic director of Rio de Janeiro’s Museum of Modern Art. “We need to keep talking about Emanuel. He needs to be referenced. We need to make him a household name.”

Araújo spent little time in the office tucked away in a corner of the museum and rarely sat, but when he did, it was at the desk of his secretary of more than 30 years, Maria de Fátima Pádua, so they could discuss the day’s tasks. A demanding boss who also loved to joke around, he could generally be found flitting around the museum in one of his signature hats and designer shoes — Burberry and Prada were his favorites — with his dogs, Joca and Tim, by his side.

For Araújo, some of the longtime staffers were like family. His secretary now cares for his dogs, their yellow and white ceramic bowls still on the shelf in his office. Next to them sits a framed photo of a chubby, smiling baby, the son of another museum employee and Araújo’s godson and namesake.

For the people who worked closest with him, he was like family, too.

“He might be gone, but the museum will never be without him,” Salles said. “All of this will always have come from him.”

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Jack Shainman Gallery Takes On the Estate of Emanuel Araújo, a Giant on the Brazilian Art Scene

BY MAXIMILIANO DURÓN

August 8, 2023 8:21am



Emanuel Araújo, *Redondo e raio vermelho*, 2017.

PHOTO DANIEL BRADICA/COURTESY THE ESTATE OF EMANOEL ARAÚJO AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

New York's **Jack Shainman Gallery** (<https://www.artnews.com/t/jack-shainman-gallery/>) has taken on representation of the estate of Brazilian artist Emanuel Araújo, an abstractionist who worked in painting and sculpture. The late artist's first exhibition with the gallery will open in September at its West 20th Street space in Chelsea.

The deal had been in the works for more than a year, well before Araújo **died unexpectedly** (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/emanoel-araujo-founder-museu-afro-brasil-dead-1234639266/>) last September at 81.

“When this all started, Emanoel was alive and very well,” Shainman said. “It wasn’t about taking on an estate; it was about taking on this amazing person. It was all planning for a show that was going to happen with him coming to New York.”

He continued, “We had so many plans. We immediately had the idea to do collaborative shows back and forth” between the Museu Afro Brasil in São Paulo, which Araújo had founded in 2004 and run until his death, and Shainman’s three gallery locations, including his Upstate New York space, the School. (Next year, the gallery will open a new space in Tribeca.)

Shainman was introduced to Araújo’s work by fellow dealer Graham Steele and *ARTnews* Top 200 Collector Bob Rennie, a longtime Shainman client. The pandemic prevented Shainman from flying down to São Paulo to meet Araújo in person, so they communicated over Zoom. “Although they were Zoom calls, believe it or not, we had an amazing connection. He was an extraordinary person—he was glowing. We were so glad to meet each other.”

In many of Araújo’s works, variously colored shapes intersect and collapse into each other, ultimately creating altogether new forms. He pushed the bounds between painting and sculpture, making shaped canvases from wood that were wall-mounted as well as ones that were freestanding.

“His work encompasses so many things,” Shainman said. “I just have such a total fascination with it. There’s an energy that the pieces have when you look at them. It almost brings you energy—it’s bigger than the thing is. The more you spend time with them, the more they reveal themselves. They’re both simple and super complex simultaneously, so there’s that tension.”



From left, Emanoel Araújo: *Untitled* (2017) and *Totem* (2015).
PHOTO DANIEL BRADICA/COURTESY THE ESTATE OF EMANOEL ARAÚJO AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

The exhibition at Jack Shainman Gallery in the fall will survey much of Araújo’s career, with pieces from as early as the 1970s up to 2021. They range from a large circular sculpture in mostly black with pops of red (*Redondo e raio vermelho*, 2017) to an untitled 2017 work that features multiple red and gray shapes passing back and forth through each other.

“Many of the works were spoken about and chosen with him before he passed,” Shainman said, noting that the gallery had begun to ship some to New York. “Honestly, I chose works that were my favorite. The estate gave us carte blanche, and we will be showing top-notch works.”

Araújo was also an influential teacher and the founder of the Oscar Niemeyer–designed Museu Afro Brasil, in Ibirapuera Park, not far from São Paulo’s famed Biennale Pavilion. The museum’s collection of more than 6,000 objects ranges from painting and sculpture to ceramics and engravings to historical documents and photographs, all showing the impact of Black people on Brazilian society.

“He was a mentor to so many young artists,” Shainman added. “He put the money up and bought their work—talk about creating a support system. That was a huge part of his identity.”

Prior to founding the museum, Araújo served as director of the Museu de Arte da Bahia (1981–83), director of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (1992–2002), and Municipal Secretary of Culture for São Paulo (2005). He was the subject of a midcareer retrospective in 2007 at the Instituto Tomie Ohtake in São Paulo and a survey in 2018 at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) as part of the museum’s “Histórias afro-atlânticas” program.



Emanuel Araújo, *Relevo branco*, 2018.
PHOTO DANIEL BRADICA/COURTESY THE ESTATE OF EMANOEL ARAÚJO AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY

Outside his home country, Araújo is not as widely known, though his work is in the collections of major international institutions, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Tate Modern in London, and the Museum of Sydney. Part of the gallery’s charge with the new representation is to bring Araújo’s art and contributions to a wider audience.

“I’ve always loved introducing something into the arena that’s not really known or not thought about,” Shainman said. “Emanuel had a whole career in Brazil, so although his work isn’t really known here, it is bringing something in on such a high level. In some ways he got overlooked because he was doing so many other things in addition to making his art.”



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Emanoel Araújo, Founder of Museu Afro Brasil, Is Dead at 81

BY SHANTI ESCALANTE-DE MATTEI

September 13, 2022 2:54pm



Emanoel Araújo, a renowned artist and teacher who founded the Museu Afro Brasil in São Paulo, died on September 7. He was 81 years old.

COURTESY MUSEU AFRO BRASIL

Emanoel Araújo, a renowned artist and teacher who founded the [Museu Afro Brasil](https://www.artnews.com/t/museu-afro-brasil/) in São Paulo, died on September 7 at his home in São Paulo. He was 81 years old. The news was confirmed by the institution he founded; a cause of death was not given.

“Emanoel Araujo has always been a patriot who raised and spread Brazil and the culture of our country,” the Museu Afro Brasil [said on Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/museuafrobrasil.official/posts/pfbid02Za28wobRcTHBaJPd7fEdirS85j5JNQcaSdrDQiWlWqKuowDuxq3nyFw7BjRZGRDr) (<https://www.facebook.com/museuafrobrasil.official/posts/pfbid02Za28wobRcTHBaJPd7fEdirS85j5JNQcaSdrDQiWlWqKuowDuxq3nyFw7BjRZGRDr>)

Born in 1940 to a family of traditional goldsmiths in Santo Amaro da Purificação, a small city in Brazil's northeastern state of Bahia, Araújo came to learn many crafts, including carpentry and linotype printmaking after his father forbade him and his siblings from becoming goldsmiths. He continued his studies in printmaking and engraving at the Escola de Belas Artes da Bahia (UFBA), and went on to exhibit successfully, with his first solo show coming in 1959.

Araújo became known not just for his prints but for his sculptures, whose sharp geometric compositions diverged sharply from the more organic scenes he cut into linoleum of women, folk dancers, and cityscapes. Early in his career he fell in with a group of architects that began collaborating with them to create massive concrete sculptures.

In 1981 to 1983 Araújo was the director of the Bahia Museum, and from there went on to teach printmaking and sculpture at the City University of New York. When he returned to Brazil in 1992, he was named director of the Pinacoteca in São Paulo, one of the country's most important art museums. Holding that position for a decade, Araújo helped revitalize the institution and also led a redesign of the museum.

In 2004 Araújo opened his own museum, Museu Afro Brasil, as a public institution to honor the Afro-Brazilian histories and arts that have molded Brazilian culture. The museum was established with Araújo's personal collection of Afro-Brazilian art and artifacts.

Despite his identities as a Black and openly gay man, Araújo managed not to just survive in the face of racism and homophobia in the country as both artist and museum leader, but he thrived, able to complete the most important work of his life, Museu Afro Brasil.

"The museum is my greatest work, it's the work I've always wanted to make, this is a legacy I want to leave for the Afro-Brazilian culture," Araújo said **in a short documentary** (<https://www.lofficielusa.com/art/brazilian-artist-emanuel-araujo-hans-ulrich-obrist-artcrush-interview>).



Artist Emanuel Araujo Speaks to Hans Ulrich Obrist About the Unthinkable Future of Brazil

With artwork featured in the Aspen Art Museum's annual ArtCrush auction, Brazilian multi-media artist Emanuel Araujo has been on Hans Ulrich Obrist's radar for some time. Here, *L'OFFICIEL* exclusively publishes a 2017 conversation between the pair from *Hans Ulrich Obrist: Entrevistas Brasileiras*.

07.26.2021 by Interview by Hans Ulrich Obrist



Emanuel Araujo photographed by Ding Musa.

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The Aspen Art Museum's annual ArtCrush celebration returns this year, bringing together a global community of art-lovers. With events running from August 4 to 6, ArtCrush highlights the leaders of the contemporary art scene, while supporting the museum's artistic and educational efforts. Culminating with a gala and live auction, co-chaired by Amy Phelan and Jamie Tisch, art collectors and patrons of the museum will flock to Aspen to fête the institution. In addition, an online auction with over 50 works will be held from today, July 26, to August 6.

With such talented artists participating, *L'OFFICIEL* asked Serpentine Gallery Artistic Director and Hans Ulrich Obrist, who is close to the Aspen Art Museum, to share a highlight from the auction. The curator and critic singled out Brazilian artist Emanuel Araujo, who he says is "an artist who deserves more visibility."

Emanuel Araujo was born in Santo Amaro da Purificação, a municipality in the state of Bahia, Brazil, in 1940. He moved to Salvador and studied at Escola de Belas Arts of the Federal University of Bahia. In 1987, he was invited as a distinguished professor at City College (City University of New York), where he taught graphic arts and sculpture.

Throughout his artistic career, he has worked as a sculptor, designer, costume illustrator, engraver, set designer, painter, curator, and museologist. His role as curator of important shows linked to national and international exhibitions, such as those of the sculptors Auguste Rodin, Aristide Maillol, Camille Claudel, Antoine Bourdelle, and Niki de Saint Phalle, as well as various exhibitions on Afro-Brazilian image and culture.

In 1972, he was awarded the gold medal in the third Graphic Biennial of Florence, Italy. In 1973, The São Paulo Association of Art Critics (APCA) awarded the artist in the category Best Recorder, and again in 1983 in the Best Sculptor category. He was also director of the Bahia Museum of Art (1981-1983) and director of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (1992-2002), which he restructured into an internationally recognized institution and one of the most important Brazilian museums. In 2004, Araujo founded the Museu Afro Brasil in São Paulo, with works from a collection donated by the Secretariat of Culture of the State of São Paulo. In 2007, he received a tribute to his 45-year career at Instituto Tomie Ohtake, with the exhibition *Autobiografia do Gesto*.

Araujo's work that is featured in the ArtCrush auction is a 1972 woodcut, from an important period of evolution in the artist's career as he moved from 2-D to 3-D media. In 2017, Obrist had the opportunity to speak with Araujo for the book *Hans Ulrich Obrist: Entrevistas Brasileiras*, published by Cobogó, about this transition, as well as his pioneering work in Brazil and what he hopes to see in the future. Here is their conversation:



Untitled 1972 woodcut by Emanuel Araujo, on auction at ArtCrush. Image courtesy of the artist and Graham Steele Inc.

Hans Ulrich Obrist: *When you started, who were your influences?*

Emanoel Araujo: I think my first teachers were Eufrásio Vargas and the artist Henrique Oswald. Several other artists made many impressions on me. As I learned, I admired artists that passed by in Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo.

HUO: *We heard from Paulo Herkenhoff that you share genealogy with the artist Rubem Valentim.*

EA: We are artists from the same family, he was from Bahia like me, and his work is developed through symbols created by the African-based religion of Bahia. I go in another direction, with a geometric, non-figurative language that expresses itself through rhythms and tensions. I always wanted to associate these elements with Paleo-African art, in the sense of its dogmas of stacking and repeating shapes, such as totem poles.

HUO: *And the beginning of your career was in the 1960s, right?*

EA: In 1963, I started to exhibit, first in Rio de Janeiro as a student artist, and in 1965 came my professional exhibitions in São Paulo and in Rio. That's how my professional life began. We also have to talk of the engravings and of my moving into sculpture. In 1976, I took my sculptures for the Nigeria Festival of Black Arts and Culture. I was accompanied by the art critic of *Jornal do Brasil* Roberto Pontual, and seeing all that touched me a lot. Africa came to me with another paradigm, and I tried to seek an identity in everything I saw. I saw many things, including the sculptures by Susanne Wenger, who lived in Oshogbo; she created monumental terracotta sculptures in honor of Oshun.

HUO: *How did this trip to Nigeria lead you to abstraction?*

EA: I was already abstract. I used geometric reliefs, in fact, these works were for the Venice Biennale, but that year there was an international boycott to the Biennale and I could not participate. There was an artist that impressed me a lot, however the Africans sometimes expressed themselves geometrically, sometimes figuratively—a very typical African union, and they were also totemic. The Nigerian Yoruba are an extraordinary, creative people, especially in bronzes cast in lost wax.

HUO: *And these works in Zurich? They are absolutely incredible.*

EA: I work a lot with the issue of space, whether in monumental or public works, reliefs in painted wood are constructions with negative and positive spaces, a search for light and these contrasts, often this geometry could be a new idea of concretism. There was an exhibition of my house in Zurich, Switzerland, at the Barengasse Museum, curated by writer and philologist Hugo

Loetscher, who featured my collection of Afro-Brazilian works, which today is at the Afro Brasil Museum, in São Paulo.



Photo: Ding Musa

HUO: After the epiphany in Nigeria, what work came? You started making public sculptures in open spaces?

EA: I started public works long before I went to Africa. They even started in Salvador, in an attempt to integrate art and architecture—they were reliefs in concrete, cement, and marble. At that time I worked with architects—these works still exist in the lobby of the city buildings. Soon after came the carbon steel sculptures and stainless steel; these are also still there in Salvador.

HUO: *And here we are at your house which seems to be a very special kind of Gesamtkunstwerk ("total artwork"). Tell us about the history and genesis of this house.*

EA: This is a 1920s house made by Italian sculptor Joseph Cucci. She enchanted me with the artist's sculptures and paintings.

HUO: *The house is full of things, objects...are you a collector?*

EA: More than a collector, I am a person with many interests. I like to have objects around me, things from many origins—sometimes when I see an object, it calls me, or I think of a curatorship in which it would be part of the proposal. That's how the book and the exhibition *The Mão Afro Brasileira*, in 1988, came to fruition.

HUO: *Which brings us to the Museu Afro Brazil. There are very interesting museums founded by artists, often the most fascinating museums.*

EA: I made and worked in four museums in different ways. The Museu de Arte da Bahia, in Salvador, is an eclectic museum, a very common type in Brazil, which keeps objects from old families, such as Chinese dishes, furniture from different centuries and schools, academic paintings from regional artists, silverware, and jewelry. I looked for a building that could house all that collection, squeezed it into an old house, and gave it a new concept—that of a design museum. The Pinacoteca de São Paulo was in poor condition, especially the renovated building by São Paulo engineer Ramos de Azevedo, which housed the Liceu de Arte and Crafts in the 19th century that remained unfinished. Its collection was composed of academic art and modern art in style.

Faced with the abandonment of the building, I called the architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha to design a project for that framework, and we tried to restore a good part of the collection and fill in the gaps of paintings and sculptures. I was there for almost 10 years to consolidate the project, which also included Jardim da Luz, where I created a sculpture park for Brazilian artists. I also worked on the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende project in Chile, adapting the new space that would house the collection made by art critic Mário Pedrosa, who, as president of the International Association of Art Critics, won magnificent donations around the world for the creation of the museum.

As for the Museu Afro Brazil, it was born in 2004 at the Manoel Pavilion da Nóbrega, in Ibirapuera Park. It is Oscar Niemayer's project built for the celebrations of the fourth centenary of the city of São Paulo, and it housed the second International Biennial, which is considered the

most important exhibition of all time, in which Picasso's "Guernica" was exposed. So the museum was proposed by former mayor Marta Suplicy, who knew about my collection of art focused on this subject.

HUO: *Does Museu Afro Brazil have a manifesto?*

EA: Yes, the manifesto is our history of a museum in perspective, which tells the story of Brazilian life from another point of view, from the side of self-esteem, through the memory, history, and art of those who built this country—a story that starts to be told from the point of view of the oppressed, of Afro-descendants who were a fundamental part in the construction of the national identity. A manifesto that shows the aspects of a *mestiza* society, that pays homage to Black people, that brings together the fundamental aspects of a people in spite of slavery, and that includes painters, sculptors, journalists, writers, poets, doctors, psychiatrists, teachers, editors, athletes, revolutionaries, and people who have overcome their adversity.

Brazil is a country where you cannot think about the future...we work in this perspective of an uncertain future—what interests us is really the present; the here and now.

HUO: *My friend Judith Benhamou, a French art critic, wrote a book about Aleijadinho [Aleijadinho: Le Bresil est un sculpteur metisse], a great book.*

EA: In France, a fellow countryman of hers, Germain Bazin, wrote an important essay on Aleijadinho—he was really a genius of *mestizo* Brazil. He was an architect, carver, sculptor, and creator of the most extraordinary soapstone façades. The sculptural set of the city of Congonhas do Campos, in Minas Gerais, is the greatest example of the magnitude of this artist—not only the outdoor sculptures of the apostles in soapstone, but also the chapels of the *via sacras*, which makes him an artist of the Baroque and the most extraordinary Rococo in Brazil.

HUO: *To what extent do you see the museum as a laboratory for the present and the future?*

EA: Brazil is a country where you cannot think about the future...[laughs], here memory is not cultivated, we work in this perspective of an uncertain future—what interests us is really the present; the here and now. Our rulers don't like culture—they don't like history or memory—we all struggle to make it happen. Nothing guarantees the continuity of these centers. Here, there are no people contributing money to the institutions, committed to improving the country—it always depends on the state, which lacks the perception of the importance of culture in the formation of new generations. That museum is very specific in that it silently protests with the muffled scream to be heard. In the almost 15 years of its existence, its actions have been very difficult to accomplish; the art educators service thousands of children, children with special needs, and public school teachers. History and memory merge to bring facts from the Brazil of the past and present, a history that includes the many contributions from heroes, social events, resistance from Afro-Brazilians, and contemporary and traditional African art exhibitions.

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HUO: *And how do you perceive the younger generation, nowadays? I imagine the museum is also helping provide visibility to young artists.*

EA: Based on the concept of this museum, these young artists, for this purpose we created A Jovem Mão Afro Brasileira. There are young artists in Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo. Of course, they are emerging artists in search of affirmation, space, and market.

HUO: *That's my question, who would they be?*

EA: Unfortunately, a very talented artist recently died, Sidney Amaral.



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HUO: *Returning to your work as an artist, I would like to ask you about your woodcuts. In the '70s, you started with this culture in Africa, which is abstract—but much earlier, in the '60s, you made some beautiful woodcuts. Where did this inspiration behind that come from?*

EA: I started out as a graphic artist—woodcuts had a great importance in Brazil, with them I had the most important exhibitions, not only in Brazil, but in Japan, China, and Italy. I went through many phases, from figuration to geometric abstraction, and engravings, with the ribbons that took the work from the plane to space, they were the transition from engraving to sculpture. It was also the moment of discovery of the work on paper, where great names such as Maria Bonomi appeared, and Fayga Ostrower, Ana Leticia, Rossini Peres, Renina Katz and my mentor Henrique Oswald, among other artists. It was also the time of the studio of engraving from the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro.

HUO: *Did you make posters? Were you also a graphic designer?*

EA: It was natural for an artist to turn his eyes to graphic design, posters, book construction, etc. In my artistic career, it was worth everything to survive—I did scenography and costumes for the theater, too. In between the '60s and '70s, I made many posters for theatre, cinema, and tourism.

HUO: *Then something interesting happened. At some point, you translate these woodcuts into abstract sculptures, in a way. Here, it's like a hostility to 2-D, 3-D, they're no longer figurative—they are abstract. Can you tell why it seems that in these works, the abstract sculptures and woodcuts come together?*

EA: Of course, one thing was born from another when the prints were the search for space and no longer the natural dimensions of the wood, but the search for the relief determined the time to change support, and from there came the reliefs in wood and concrete, with panels and murals executed as the aid of the engraving matrix, to print above all on concrete. I think that change was a natural path.

HUO: *What advice you would give to a young artist?*

EA: This advice is very complicated—you have to work a lot and with a lot of resilience and determination. In my time as a young artist there were means to a smoother start, and I'm not apologizing for the past [laughs], but there were alternative spaces, there were the Art Salons, there were criticisms in the newspapers—now everything becomes perhaps more difficult, having talent and keeping with contemporaneity.

HUO: *Last question, do you have a dream?*

EA: A dream itself, no. I would like everything I've done to continue. That people who suffer from inequality and racism find a path of survival, that exclusion is fought by all, that education

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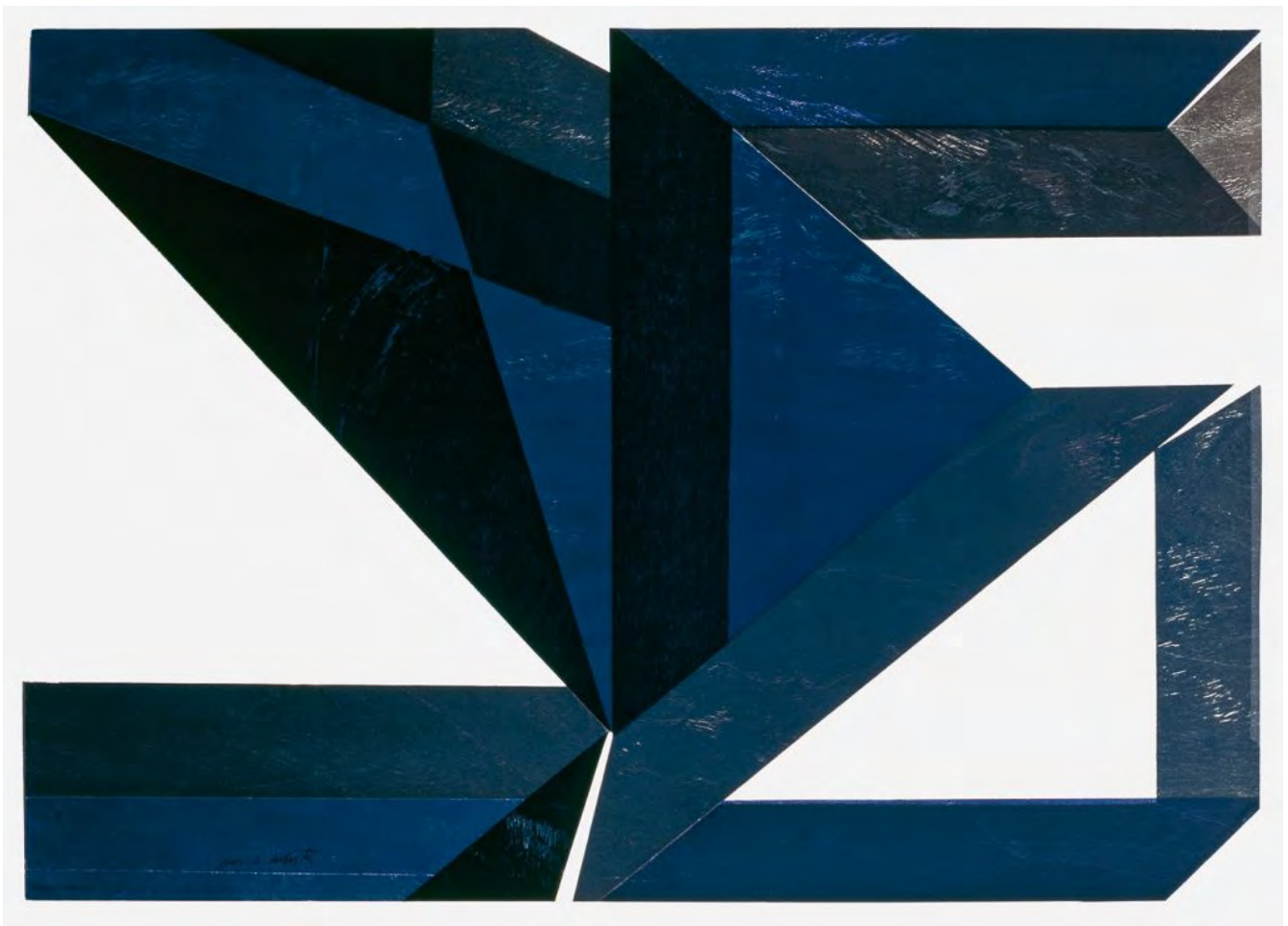
is an opportunity for all, and that social and university quotas will be a way of improvement and awareness of those who govern Brazil.

HUO: *Before we leave, I wanted to ask you to write something by hand, because handwriting is disappearing. And I'll post it on Instagram.*

EA: [Emanoel writes and reads aloud] An artist's life is an ongoing struggle.

Renaissance Man: Museu Afro Brasil Founder Emanuel Araujo Discusses His Career on the Occasion of his MASP Show

MAY 22, 2018 AT 8:42 AM BY CYNTHIA GARCIA



Emanuel Araujo, untitled, 1980, woodcut, 75 x 105 cm. Artist's Collection. Photo by Jorge Bastos

Emanuel Araujo is showing for the second time at São Paulo's [MASP](#). In 1981, already an acclaimed artist, the late museum's founder and director Pietro Maria Bardi exhibited a series of his metal floor sculptures on the MASP open space overlooking Paulista Avenue. Now displayed on the museum's grand sunken floor, Araujo stages a cross-section of his artwork in "A Ancestralidade dos Símbolos: África-Brasil" (The Ancestrality of Symbols) through June 3. The exhibition also comes with a comprehensive, well-documented bilingual Portuguese-English book.



General view of Emanuel Araujo's solo show at MASP. Photo Eduardo Ortega

As part of MASP's celebration of our Afro-Atlantic ties and 130 years of slavery abolition, the exhibition conveys an intense feeling of African and Bahian culture characteristically at the core of the artwork by this seventy-seven-year-old gay Afro-descendant who has always championed inclusivity and diversity. Among the seventy works organized in four themes—geometries, masks, ships and Candomblé orishas—are geometrically constructive floor and wall sculptures, some from 2017; large-format woodcut prints with overlapping geometric shapes highlighted by the wood grain of the printing blocks, from 1970-1980; as well as a selection of his internationally awarded poster design from the 1960s based on the cordel literature woodcut illustrations from Brazil's northeastern popular art.



Parallel to his eclectic visual art career, this cerebral native of Santo Amaro da Purificação—a village near Bahia's capital, Salvador—born from an Afro-descendant goldsmith father, has directed two major Brazilian museums. In the 1980s, he was at the helm of the Museu de Arte da Bahia (MAB), in Salvador, and in 2004 he founded the [Museu Afro Brasil](#) at Ibirapuera Park in São Paulo, to this day under his management and curatorship. In between these jobs, he headed the Pinacoteca do Estado and promoted a full architectural renovation in the 1905 neo-classic building by Pulitzer prize-winning architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha. Prior to that, in 1988 he was visiting scholar for graphic arts and sculpture at the Art College of the City University of New York. The following year, he participated in the collective show “Introspectives: Contemporary Art by Americans and Brazilians of African Descent” held in Los Angeles at The California Afro-American Museum (CAAM).



Artist Emanuel Araujo. Photo by Adenor Gondim

Araujo, himself a prominent collector of Afro-Brazilian and African art and artifacts, has exhibited his own artwork as well as his private Afro-Bahian collection several times locally and abroad. His art is found in prime private collections and major museums in the country.

Emanuel, you are a true Renaissance man. You are a sculptor, engraver, draftsman, painter, set and costume designer, graphic designer, museum director and curator... How did all these activities flourish?

These cultural manifestations are all very dear to me and each one came in its own time. I originally was a draftsman in my native town of Santo Amaro da Purificação. When I left for Salvador, I took on woodcut engraving as well as designing set and costume for the theater. It had to do with the work that was offered to me at the time and my own will to embrace new fronts of creativity.



Emanuel Araújo, untitled, 1972, woodcut, 104 x 71 cm. Artist's Collection. Photo by Jorge Bastos

When you arrived in Salvador in the 1960s, the capital of Bahia was a cultural melting pot and you were taken by its ebullience. Tell us about it.

I left for Salvador to finish high school and study architecture. Salvador was full of life; it was exploding with cultural manifestations and brilliant minds. Architect [Lina Bo Bardi](#) had just founded the Modern Art Museum. Theater director Eros Martim Gonçalves was at the helm of the drama department of the Federal University of Bahia, headed by another great guy, dean Edgard Santos. German choreographer Rolf Geleweski directed the most important dance school and avant-garde Maestro Koellreutter, also German-born, conducted the music school. Even the Department of Tourism was lucky enough to be directed by an open-minded man, writer Vasconcelos Maia, who was passionate about the culture of Bahia and gave a new approach to the religious feasts both Catholic and from the Candomblé cult. We had writers like Jorge Amado and Odorico Tavares, and poets like Carlos Anísio Melhor and Jair Gramacho. In the state's Press Agency worked samba composer Batatinha as well as my cousin Margarida, the first woman in Bahia to operate a linotype machine. Salvador was an ongoing celebration!



Emanuel Araújo, Oxóssi, 2007, polychrome wood, beads and stainless steel, 222 x 72 x 13 cm. Artist's Collection. Photo by Jorge Bastos

After Salvador, you moved to Rio.

As an art student of the Federal University of Bahia I was invited for my first exhibition in 1963 at Galeria Macunaíma in the art department of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. The event gave me the chance to get acquainted with Rio's artistic milieu. Rio was stunning: it was calm and vibrating at the same time, there still were many nineteenth-century buildings rendering the town a romantic

atmosphere. At Largo da Carioca square, one would bump into the great samba musician Pixinguinha and engraver Adir Botelho next to a baiana cook in full white garb with turban, lace and necklaces with her tabuleiro (tray) full of typical street food from Bahia. I still remember my first review signed by art critic and engraver Quirino Campofiorito, published in the old Diário de Notícias newspaper.



Emanuel Araújo, O Navio (The Ship), 2007, polychrome wood and carbon steel, 221 x 80 x 24 cm. Artist's Collection. Photo by Jorge Bastos

In 1977, you participated in the second edition of FESTAC (World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture) in Lagos, Nigeria. Was this a turning point in your life?

It was not exactly a turning point in my artistic thinking but more a desire to visit Nigeria that has influenced the culture of Bahia in so many ways since colonial times. It was a most unforgettable cultural experience in the great African continent. As soon as I returned to Brazil I realized the woodcut engraving series "Suite Afriquia" based on the Nagô cosmogony. It sealed my closeness to religious cults of African origin and my fascination with Dona Maria Bibiana do Espírito Santo, known as Mãe Senhora, the matriarch of Ilê Axé Opó Afonjá Candomblé cult in Salvador.



Then you also had the opportunity to visit the States.

In 1972, I went to the United States by invitation of the State Department to visit museums from coast to coast. I had the good fortune to meet the curators who showed me their museums as well as their storage spaces. I visited the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia with its collection of African and Native American art; the Winterthur Museum in Delaware with furniture from the 18th and 19th centuries; Frank Lloyd Wright's remarkable [Fallingwater House](#). At the [Preservation Hall](#) in New Orleans, I had the insight that would complement my cultural aspirations. Soon after the trip when governor Antonio Carlos Magalhães invited me to head the Museu de Arte da Bahia [Museum of Art of Bahia], I felt ready to accept the new responsibility.



Emanuel Araújo, Ibejis II, 2007, polychrome wood, beads and jacarandá wood, 231 x 90 x 21 cm. Artist's Collection. Photo by Jorge Bastos

So let us wrap up with an advice for a young aspiring Afro-descendant artist today.

Countless Afro-descendants have contributed with their talent to build our national identity. So be adamant, be obstinate, be stubborn.

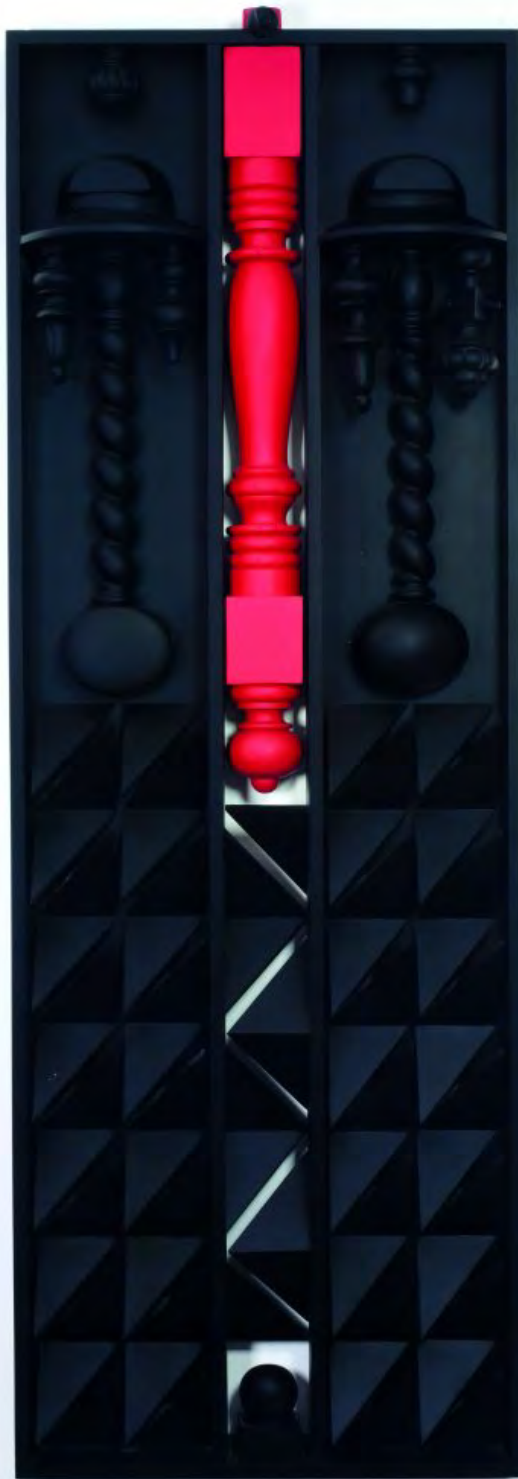
**Emanuel Araujo, A Ancestralidade dos Símbolos: África-Brasil (The Ancestrality of Symbols)
Curated by Tomás Toledo**

Through June 3, 2018

MASP, São Paulo



Emanuel Araújo, *Gravura de armar (Engraving to be Mounted)*, 1972, woodcut, 105 x 71 cm. Artist's Collection. Photo by Jorge Bastos



Emanuel Araújo, Exu, 2010, polychrome wood, 236 x 80 x 26 cm.

Artist's Collection. Photo by Jorge Bastos



Cynthia Garcia

Rio-born Cynthia Garcia is a respected art historian, art critic and journalist fluent in five languages stationed in São Paulo. Cynthia is a recipient of the 2023 APCA (Paulista Association of Art Critics) award as a contributing editor of Newcity Brazil since its founding in 2015. Her daughter America Cavaliere works in the