



nara roesler

**elian almeida**  
before – after – what is yet to come  
curated by luis pérez-oramas

nara roesler rio de janeiro  
september 1 – october 23, 2021



Nara Roesler Rio de Janeiro is pleased to announce *Before – now – what is yet to come\**, Brazilian artist Elian Almeida's first solo exhibition, curated by Luis Pérez-Oramas. The presentation showcases the most recent developments in the artist's *Vogue* series.

[schedule your visit](#)

---

\*the title of the exhibition was inspired by the poem *I-Woman*, written by Conceicao Evaristo

---

**cover** *Dona Ester – Irmandade da Boa Morte (Vogue Brasil)*, 2021 [detail]  
**photos** Pat Kilgore

---

## elian almeida: before – now – what is yet to come

Luis Pérez-Oramas

### *Before*

Elián Almeida was born and raised by the sea, close to a port in the periphery of Rio de Janeiro. Through the years, as he became interested in questioning the processes whereby afro-brazilian memory has become concealed within collective culture—and from social protagonism—in Brazil, Almeida came to realize that the pier of Duque de Caxias had been the site of an event with dramatic foundational significance for the topics at the heart of his research: innumerable men and women of african origins had arrived to Brazil through this port, among other ones, to become the objects of slavery and since then, had formed the matrix for the afrobrazilian community.

### *Now*

The now feeds off time which, in being fleeting, makes the present, before fading into what remains as a before, as previous, as past.

But there exists an indeterminate antecedence in the experience of temporality, a prior time that we cannot define and that is, the ceaseless fluctuation of what we once were, spectrally reemerging like a ghost, like a phantasm of the past in the present.

Our modern languages have had this verbal tense amputated, which the ancient Greeks called *a-oristos*.

Pascal Quignard's sentence summarizes the possibility of a return, the potentiality of what may reappear from the indeterminate prior: 'What we have forgotten, does not forget us'.

The now may carry on as oblivion, or it may open itself to *What is yet to come*.

---

Elián Almeida's work—and notably the *Vogue* series, which forms the main body of the exhibition—emphasizes the return of that which has not only been forgotten, but also been concealed, through individual portraits: a painting that turns on what has been turned off, portrays what has been veiled.

Beatriz do Nascimento, Conceição Evaristo, Dona Ester, Esperança Garcia, Lélia Gonzalez, Mother Beata de Iemanjá, Luísa Mahin, Maria Firmina dos Reis, Mercedes Baptista, Ruth de Souza, Aunt Maria do Jongo da Serrinha, Aunt Perciliana, hereby represent this comeback, the pictorial agency for redressal.

Because representation presents itself as simultaneously transparent and opaque, each one of the names conceals (and, at the same time, reveals) a person, hereby depicted. And every one of these portraits comes to evoke the *necropolitical* violence of the collective language (and memory) that has forgotten them: their presence has been faded, veiled, concealed.

*However, what we forget does not forget us.*

What we forget is yet to come, and returns. '*Everything happens*' was the motto of Edouard Manet's personal stationery. Everything is to happen, coming back onto us like an unexpected wave.

Elián Almeida's recent work thus contributes to the laborious and patient operating of this return and redress: through an act of unveiling with a series of portraits produced like covers of *Vogue* magazine: an instrument for hypervisibility within the western and white apparatus of communications, an object that artificially sheds light, *à la mode*, *fashionable*, of fashion itself, from a fashion that in showing, also conceals. But above all, this magazine so recognizable and famous in its branding is also—or, necessarily, has been—a tool for racial markers, an agent for whitening and an inevitable operator of its own implicit racism through past concealments, iconographic omissions and in its redemptive *aggiornamento*.

---

The effigies—the portraits—that constitute this exhibition give back some of the essential protagonists of the (veiled) memory of afro-brazilian culture. Interestingly, none of them possess a face—strictly speaking—: in Almeida's paintings, their faces remain veiled due to the pictorial evidence of their racial condition: their color. These effigies, these portraits, are—strictly speaking—*imago*, which is how the ancient Romans referred to votive portraits, to effigies of the absent, to the images of family members who had passed away. Thus, the portraits that Elián Almeida presents to us, are—strictly speaking—emerging funerary images, *necro portraits*: they look at us, without eyes, from within their concealment, and return to the melancholic certainty that what does not forget us, cannot fully return either, in the fullness of a presence that was amputated.

In their prodigious *sprezzatura*—in the difficult ease of their luminous execution, that is cursory in appearance only—Elián Almeida's portraits appear to know that the support they ironically imitate, and on which they themselves lie, like all lifeless portraits,—the magazine of white fashion, *Vogue*—has been part of the concealing veil, an accomplice to the impulsive violence that exiled them from our presence and from the present. Perhaps that is why Almeida commits to veiling the veiling, to concealing the front pages of *Vogue* magazine with covers that are rich in pigments, with pictorially black shade or skin, leaving them in the dark, luminously, behind his thick brushstrokes' massive geometry.

Veiling the face and veiling the veil that had veiled it: in all, veiling the veiling so that what is yet to come, may finally come in the form of memory, of name, of body, of work.







### **Mãe Beata de Iyemanjá**

1931–2017, Cachoeira, BA; Nova Iguaçu, RJ

Mãe Beata de Iyemanjá is known for her role as a *Mãe de santo* (a priestess), for having founded Ilê Omiojúârò, a terreiro (house of worship) in 1985, and for her relentless political activism. Indeed, Mãe Beata became a leading advocate for the inclusion of African and Afro-Brazilian culture in school curriculums, also battling for cultural diversity, equal access to healthcare, vehemently opposing racial, gender, sexuality, and religious discrimination. In the 1990s, she established an Institution for Cultural Development at her *terreiro*, which focused on culture and education. Mãe Beata is also the author and co-author of various books on Afro-Brazilian religious traditions.



---

*Mãe Beata de Iyemanjá (Vogue Brasil)*, 2021

acrylic paint on canvas

104 x 100 x 4 cm

40.9 x 39.4 x 1.6 in



### **Tia Maria do Jongo**

1920–2019, Rio de Janeiro, RJ

Maria de Lourdes Mendes was a fundamental figure in the process of conservation and expansion of Jongo—a folkloric afro-brazilian dance—in Rio de Janeiro. She notably recovered the tradition of *Tias*—or Aunts—dancing on the Praça Onze, later becoming a patron of Jongo in Rio de Janeiro. In the 1990s, she bolstered the proliferation of Afro-Brazilian circle dances as a genre, helping it reach following generations and contributing to the preservation of black heritage and traditions. Jongo belongs to the dance genre of *umbigadas*, which were introduced to Brazil by the Bantu people, originally from modern-day Angola. Jongo typically follows percussional rhythms, accompanying enigmatic songs that refer to the *jinongonongo*, a type of Angolan riddle game.

---

*Tia Maria do Jongo (Vogue Brasil)*, 2021  
acrylic paint on canvas  
94 x 109 x 4 cm  
37 x 42.9 x 1.6 in







## Conceição Evaristo

1946–, Belo Horizonte, MG

Dr. Conceição Evaristo has dedicated her work to Literary Studies, for which she has been widely celebrated worldwide, receiving invitations to present her research on the occasion of numerous events, publications and exhibitions. She has received notable acclaim for the versatility and potency of her work in fiction and poetry, as well as for her essays. In 2018, Conceição gathered significant support from the media in a campaign to win seats at the Brazilian Academy of Letters. However, she was later rejected in a move that further revealed the racist and misogynistic structures at play in the institution, which has only welcomed seven white women—out of hundreds of male writers and intellectuals—since its establishment over one hundred years ago. Nonetheless, Conceição has carved a place for her work in the literary canon, overcoming structural impediments through the sheer quality of her practice.



---

*Conceição Evaristo (Vogue Brasil), 2021*  
acrylic paint on canvas  
102 x 106 x 4 cm  
40.2 x 41.7 x 1.6 in







**Dona Ester**

1907–2012, Cachoeira, BA

Estelita de Souza Santana, also known as Dona Ester, held the position of Perpetual Judge for several years at the Sisterhood of Our Lady of the Good Death, a centenary-old afro-catholic religious group. Founded in the early 19th century, the sisterhood is composed of mostly middle-aged women, all of which are descendants of enslaved Africans. In order to be eligible to join the sisterhood, women must be over 40 years old and be affiliated with one of the centers of Candomblé—Ketu, Gegê, or Nagô. As the eldest member of the group, Dona Ester occupied the highest seat at the sisterhood of the Good Death, whereby she was responsible for guiding the sisters through the preparations of the community's rituals and festivities.



---

*Dona Ester – Irmandade da Boa Morte (Vogue Brasil), 2021*  
acrylic paint on canvas  
95 x 90 x 4 cm  
37.4 x 35.4 x 1.6 in









**Tia Perciliana (Maria Constança)**

séc. XIX, Bahia; Rio de Janeiro

Perciliana Maria Constança was born in Bahia, and moved to Rio de Janeiro around 1870. Tia Perciliana was one of the various *Tias*—or Aunts—who led the cultural and religious scene of downtown Rio de Janeiro, in an area known as Little Africa at the time. The Aunts, all black women mostly from Bahia, played a fundamental role in developing a sense of community within their neighbourhoods. Over time, they established themselves as true leaders and articulators of their culture, possessing both theoretical and practical knowledge to help the population reconnect with their African heritage. Today, they are also recognized for having played a key role in developing samba, and have been honoured with a special aisle named the *Baianas* wing at samba schools.

---

*Tia Perciliana (Vogue Brasil)*, 2021  
acrylic paint on canvas  
106 x 75 x 4 cm  
41.7 x 29.5 x 1.6 in



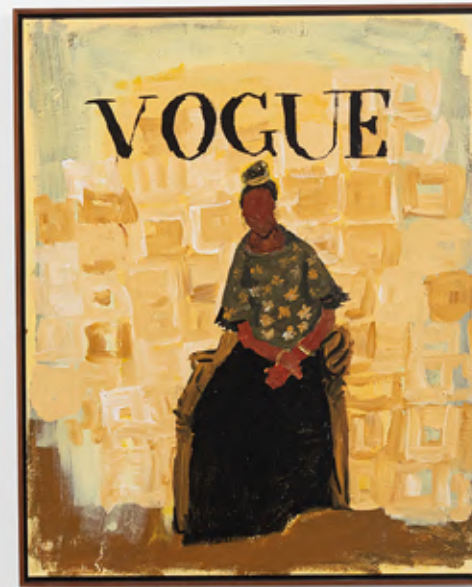




## Ruth de Souza

1921–2019, Rio de Janeiro, RJ

Ruth de Souza was a fundamental figure in amplifying and reshaping black representation in the media. She was the first Brazilian to be nominated for best actress at an international film festival— the Venice Film Festival, in 1954—for her role in *Sinhá Moça* (1953). She undertook acting early on in her life, joining the Teatro Experimental do Negro (TEN) by the age of 24, and shortly afterwards receiving a scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation to further her studies at Howard University, in the United States. Upon her return to Brazil in 1948, she made her first cinema appearance, also starring in various radio soap operas and televised plays throughout the following decade. It was through the Brazilian network TV Globo that Ruth eventually established herself as a symbol of her generation, becoming the first black protagonist on a soap opera *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1969-70).



---

*Ruth de Souza (Vogue Brasil)*, 2021  
acrylic paint on canvas  
95 x 78 x 4 cm  
37.4 x 30.7 x 1.6 in









### **Beatriz Nascimento**

1942–1995, Aracaju, SE; Rio de Janeiro, RJ

Maria Beatriz Nascimento was an intellectual, specifically a historian, who became a crucial figure within the black movement against discrimination in the 1970s. Along with the help of her students, Nascimento founded the Grupo de Trabalho André Rebouças (GTAR) in 1974, a university group that coordinated academic productions and political action, offering reflections and practices on the field of racial debate. In addition to her profession as a school teacher in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Nascimento also pursued studies on the matter of slavery, and particularly on that of *quilombos*—a term that referred to settlements established past slaves, both freed and having escaped. She is the author of numerous paramount texts on racism and culture in *quilombo* communities.

---

*Beatriz Nascimento*, 2021  
acrylic paint on canvas  
121 x 101 x 4 cm  
47.6 x 39.8 x 1.6 in









---

Esperança Garcia, Luisa Mahin  
e Maria Firmina dos Reis (*Vogue Brasil*), 2021  
acrylic paint on canvas  
109 x 91 x 4 cm  
42.9 x 35.8 x 1.6 in



**Esperança Garcia**

18th century, Piauí

Esperança Garcia marked Brazilian history as the author of the oldest document ever written by an enslaved person in the country. The object itself is a letter dated from the 6th of September 1770, in which Esperança expresses her dreams and desires. The document not only serves as a testimonial to the colonial history of Brazil, but also reinforces the subjectivity of these individuals who were commercialized as objects. The epistle was addressed to the governor of Piauí, and presented Esperança's wishes to be reunited with her family and friends, while also detailing the punishments that she had received following her attempts to escape. In addition, the letter pleaded for religious and worker rights. The document became a key reference for researchers in expanding their understanding of Brazil in the second half of the 18th century.

**Luísa Mahim**

19th century, ?

Luísa Mahim is arguably one of the best examples of society's erasure of black figures from history. To this day, it is difficult to confirm her existence due to the lack of documentation. The information about her and her actions come mainly from oral and literary sources, positioning her at an intersection between fiction, reality, and myth. Though her origins remain uncertain, it is believed that she either came from the African "Gold Coast", or from Bahia. After purchasing her own freedom in 1812, she participated in protests and uprisings in her province, such as the Malê revolt and the Sabinada. As a result, she was persecuted, leading her to flee to Rio de Janeiro, where she was later found and deported to Angola. Her alleged son, Luís Gama, was an important abolitionist poet, and many intellectuals believe that Mahim is in fact a heteronym for the writer. In 2006, Ana Maria Gonçalves published the novel *Um Defeito de Cor*, whereby she narrated the heroine's trajectory, delving into her life from the age of five up until her death.

**Maria Firmina dos Reis**

1822–1917, São Luís e Guimarães, MA

*Úrsula*, a novel published in 1859, narrates the story of a forbidden love through which the author makes a strong case for abolitionist ideas. The novel is not only radical in the themes it addresses, but is also groundbreaking as it is the first published fictional writing piece by a Brazilian woman. The text was written by Maria Firmina dos Reis, a primary school teacher who would later become a leading figure in the strive to diffuse literature throughout her hometown during the second half of the 19th century. Despite her importance within the Brazilian cultural scene, little is known about her life. It is believed that she was in touch with various abolitionist associations, having notably written the lyrics for Hymn of the Liberation of Slaves, which read: "At last the chain is broken/ From nefarious Slavery!/ Those you have oppressed before,/ Today shall be your brothers!"









---

*Um defeito de cor (VOGUE), 2021*  
acrylic paint on magazine copy  
12 pieces of 28 x 21 x 5 cm  
11 x 8.3 x 2 in









### **Lélia Gonzalez**

1935–1994, Minas Gerais; Rio de Janeiro

In the second half of the 20th century, Lélia Gonzalez became a leader of Black feminism through her work, which focused on investigating the intersectionality of gender, race, and social markers in political struggles. Lélia developed a vast academic curriculum, having studied history and philosophy at the Rio de Janeiro State University, and later teaching at numerous high schools and higher education institutions in Rio de Janeiro, including the Pontifical Catholic University at Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), where she was named head of the Sociology department. She was affiliated with various black organizations and participated in public debates, eventually running for and being elected as a federal and state representative. Lélia was a pioneer of black feminism in Brazil, and remains an unequivocal reference for black women, having notably exposed whitewashing practices in Brazilian society.

---

*Lélia Gonzalez (Vogue Brasil), 2021*  
acrylic paint on canvas  
114 x 95 x 4 cm  
44.9 x 37.4 x 1.6 in



VOGUE





### Clementina de Jesus

circa 1900–1987, Valença, RJ;

Rio de Janeiro, RJ

Through her music, Clementina de Jesus had a fundamental impact on developing and strengthening the bond between Brazil and Africa. Though her professional career only began after reaching her sixties, Clementina eventually rose to prominence as one of the greatest voices of the Samba genre. The artist began to develop her relationship with music early on in her childhood, quickly becoming an integral part of Rio de Janeiro's samba scene. At the age of 12, she started participating in her city's Carnival parades, marching and rehearsing with various samba schools, also leading the Unidos da Riachuelo's march. Though she was a fan of the Portela school, Clementina paraded with her husband's Samba school *Mangueira* for many years. As a result, the singer encountered numerous musical masters such as Heitor dos Prazeres, Ismael Silva and Paulo da Portela. Clementina collaborated on 13 LP records, both solo and group albums, notably including *O canto dos escravos* (1982), which worked to recover music sung by slaves during labor, and thus retrieve the musical heritage of Central Africa. The singer also collaborated with other main figures of the Brazilian music scene, among them, Beth Carvalho, Elizeth Cardoso, Milton Nascimento, Paulinho da Viola and Pixinguinha.

---

*Clementina de Jesus (TIME)*, 2021

acrylic paint on canvas

100 x 90 x 4 cm

39.4 x 35.4 x 1.6 in





TIME





---

## elian almeida

b. 1994, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where he works and lives

Elian Almeida's practice is characterized by a convergence of different techniques, such as painting, photography, video and installation, functioning as part of a new generation of artists whose works revindicate protagonism to agents and bodies that have been traditionally marginalized in our society and in the history of art. His body of work addresses decolonialism, exploring the experience and performativity of the black body in contemporary Brazilian society, through a process of recuperating elements from the past—imagens, narratives, characters—as a means of contributing to the process of empowerment and dissemination of afro-brazilian historiography.

On one hand, Almeida's research engages with the biographies of black personalities whose importance has been erased through history, striving to restore the notability that they deserve. On the other hand, the artist also addresses the violent ways in which police approach racialized bodies, exploring matters of privilege within Brazilian culture and society, while also denouncing the myth of racial democracy. In his series *Vogue*, Almeida appropriates the visual identity and aesthetics of the famous fashion magazine, integrating them into the composition of his portraits of black individuals. With this, the artist demonstrates the ways in which his different lines of work have come to converge as a means of encouraging the public to question the ways in which these subjects have been represented and circulated within Brazilian visual culture.

---

### exposições individuais selecionadas

- *Before – now – what is yet to come*, Nara Roesler, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2021)

### exposições coletivas selecionadas

- *Enciclopédia negra*, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2021)
- *Amanhã há de ser outro dia / Demains sera um autre jour*, Studio Iván Argote and at Espacio Temporal, Paris, France (2020)
- *Esqueleto – 70 anos de UERJ*, Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2019)
- *Arte naïf – Nenhum museu a menos*, Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage (EAV Parque Lage), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2019)
- *Mostra memórias da resistência*, Centro Municipal de Arte Hélio Oiticica (CMAHO), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2018)
- *Bela verão e Transnômade Opavivará*, Galpão Bela Maré, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2018)
- *Novas poéticas – Diálogos expandidos em arte contemporânea*, Museu do Futuro, Curitiba, Brazil (2016)



---

nara roesler

---

---

**são paulo**

avenida europa 655,  
jardim europa, 01449-001  
são paulo, sp, brasil  
t 55 (11) 2039 5454

---

**rio de janeiro**

rua redentor 241,  
ippanema, 22421-030  
rio de janeiro, rj, brasil  
t 55 (21) 3591 0052

---

**new york**

511 west 21<sup>st</sup> street  
new york, 10011 ny  
usa  
t 1 (212) 794 5034

---

[nararoesler.art](http://nararoesler.art)

[info@nararoesler.art](mailto:info@nararoesler.art)