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isaac julien, elian almeida, virginia de medeiros

ao que vai nascer

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opening april 2

exhibition apr 2 – may 21, 2022



Isaac Julien. *Lessons of The Hour (Lessons of The Hour)*, 2019. Photograph on matt archival paper mounted on aluminum. 160 x 213,3 cm | 63 x 84 in. Courtesy of the artist and Nara Roesler.

Nara Roesler São Paulo is pleased to present *Ao que vai nascer*: Isaac Julien, Elian Almeida, Virginia de Medeiros, put together by the gallery's curatorial nucleus under the direction of Luis Pérez-Oramas. This exhibition brings together a collection of

distinguished works by British artist Isaac Julien and Brazilian artists Virginia de Medeiros and Elian Almeida. *Ao que vai nascer* will be open to the public from April 2, as a part of SP-Arte's official program and will be on view until May 21, 2022.

The exhibition is centered around a selection of photographs from *Lessons of the Hour*, a celebrated video installation by Isaac Julien. The piece, after being extensively presented in London, Los Angeles, and Amsterdam, will now be exhibited in Brazil for the first time.

Lessons of the Hour focuses on African-American Frederick Douglass, a key figure in American Abolitionism during the 19th century. These stunning and carefully staged portraits recreate and re-fictionalize the story around one of the most photographed personalities of 19th century America.

Julien's living portraits serve as monumental works that bring to light the urgency of Douglass's abolitionist legacy, which is summarized in his famous 1894 speech, *Lessons of the Hour*. Alongside Isaac Julien and his exemplary portraits, the exhibition includes works from Elian Almeida and Virginia de Medeiros, two Brazilian artists whose works serve to further reflect on portraiture through the discussion of racial, social, and historical issues.

Elian Almeida, a young artist from Rio de Janeiro, presents the first act of *O ouro afunda no mar, madeira fica por cima* (*The gold sinks into the sea, the wood stays on top*). The project, divided into three parts, focuses on the trafficking of African people to the Americas. Born in Rio de Janeiro, at Cais do Valongo, Brazil's main point of arrival for ships from Africa, Almeida works to highlight the idea of birth; both individual and collective, real and metaphorical, and to reflect and expand on the historical and media narratives of the subject, shedding light on violent aspects of the story that have been deliberately toned down or erased from mainstream narratives.

The iconic series, *Fábula do Olhar* (*Fable of the Gaze*), by Virginia de Medeiros adds another layer of meaning to the exhibition by looking at the broader social significance of the portrait and more specifically, individual yearning through image. The works are the result of the artist's encounters with people experiencing homelessness.

Medeiros collaborates with her subjects by recording their stories and images, documenting lives that society tends to render invisible. In addition to racial and social issues, Medeiros' work discusses the portrait itself: the active desire to see and project one's own image in the world as a way to claim the amplitude of our shared human dignity, the unceasing place for all that will be born.

Ao que vai nascer captures the power of individual gestures by Julien, Almeida, and Medeiros to create a collective portrait that encompasses, with the deserved respect, individuals and communities that experience racial and social discrimination. Above all, the exhibition aims to present our desire to see and project our own image in the world, as a way to claim the integrity of our human dignity.

isaac julien

Isaac Julien is one of the most important and influential British visual artists in the fields of installation and film. His work combines several disciplines, including cinema, photography, dance, music, theatre, painting and sculpture, which are captured in his audio-visual installations, documentaries and photographic pieces. The plurality of his work is not only present in the process of making, but also in the way in which it is exhibited, which includes several screens, with Julien being a pioneer in multiple-screen film installations.

The artist's works often emerge from in-depth investigations of historical personalities, including Langston Hughes, Frantz Fanon and Lina Bo Bardi, in a process that often aims to review history's official versions. Although films are the main form of his artistic production, photography also plays a fundamental role in Julien's oeuvre. In his photographs, he reinvents and redefines

the aesthetics of his audio-visual production using techniques such as collage and digital photomontage.

His film *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) was awarded the Semaine de la Critique prize in Cannes Film Festival. *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Mask* (1996), which the artist co-directed with Mark Nash, received the Pratt and Whitney Canada Grand Prize. Julien was also awarded the McDermott Prize from MIT and The Golden Gate Persistence of Vision Prize (2014) during the San Francisco Film Festival. In 2015, Isaac Julien obtained the Kaino Prize for artistic excellence.

Julien was born in 1960 in London, where he lives and works. He has had various solo exhibitions at institutions such as: *Lessons of the Hour*, at Metro Pictures and Memorial Art Gallery (MAG) (2019), both in New York, USA; *Western Union: Small Boats*, at ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum (2018), in Aarhus, Denmark; *To the End of the World*, at Galerie Forsblom (2018), in Stockholm, Sweden; and *Ten Thousand Waves*, at Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niterói (MAC-Niterói) (2016), in Niterói, Brazil. Julien's work has been included in 57th Venice Biennale, Italy (2017); at Paris Triennial, France (2012); at 7th Gwangju Biennial, South Korea (2008), and participated in group shows such as *Coming Out: Sexuality, Gender and Identity*, at Walker Museum, in Liverpool and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (2017), in Birmingham, UK; *The Shadow Never Lies*, at Minsheng Museum (2016), in Shanghai, China. His work appears in collections around the globe, such as: Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA; Tate Modern, London, UK; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA.

elian almeida

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.

Elian Almeida was born in 1994, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He currently lives and works in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and in Paris, France. His works have been exhibited in numerous group shows, including: *Enciclopédia negra*, at Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (2021), in São Paulo, Brazil; *Amanhã há de ser outro dia / Demain sera um autre jour*, at Studio Iván Argote and at Espacio Temporal (2020), in Paris, France; *Esqueleto – 70 anos de UERJ*, at Paço Imperial (2019), in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; *Arte naif – Nenhum museu a menos*, at Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage (EAV Parque Lage) (2019), in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; *Mostra memórias da resistência*, at Centro Municipal de Arte Hélio Oiticica (CMAHO) (2018), in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; *Bela verão e Transnômade Opavivará*, at Galpão Bela Maré (2018), in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; *Novas poéticas – Diálogos expandidos em arte contemporânea*, at Museu do Futuro (2016), in Curitiba, Brazil; amongst others.

virginia de medeiros

Virginia de Medeiros uses investigative processes to transgress hegemonic narratives as a means of giving voice and visibility to neglected, or marginalized histories. In order to do so, Medeiros employs methodologies that are common to both, art and documentary work, including displacement, participation and fabulation.

In her work, Medeiros does not seek to capture or represent the *Other* but rather depicts punctual aspects of certain individuals,

in order for their condition to become axiomatic. The artist has often employed photography and video to represent and showcase identities and existences that have historically been omitted, such as that of transgenders, transsexuals, women or the homeless. Her work emerges from an intense immersive process, where she familiarises herself and co-exists with her research subject in an attempt to free herself from an ethnographic approach, annulling possible underlying layers of prejudice, and allowing instead for intimacy and organic narratives to emerge.

Virginia de Medeiros was born in 1973 in Feira de Santana, Brazil. She lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Clamor*, at Instituto Tomie Ohtake (ITO), in São Paulo, Brazil; 29th Programa de exposições, at Centro Cultural São Paulo (CCSP) (2019), in São Paulo, Brazil; *Alma de bronze*, at Ocupação Nove de Julho (2018), in São Paulo, Brazil; *Studio Butterfly e outras fábulas*, at Galeria Fayga Ostrower, Complexo Cultural Funarte (2018), in Brasília, Brazil. She has featured in biennials as: Jogja Biennale 14, Indonésia (2017); 27th and 31th Bienal de São Paulo, Brasil (2006 e 2014). Recent group shows include: *Love and Ethnology. The Colonial Dialectic of Sensitivity (after Hubert Fichte)*, at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) (2019), in Berlin, Germany; *Arte Democracia Utopia – Quem não luta tá morto*, at Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR) (2018), in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; *Forms of Resistance*, at Golden Thread Gallery (2017), in London, UK, and *Histórias da sexualidade*, at Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) (2017), in São Paulo, Brazil. Her works are included in the collections of: Associação Cultural Videobrasil, São Paulo, Brazil; Instituto Itaú Cultural, São Paulo, Brazil; Instituto Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil; Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

nara roesler

Nara Roesler is a leading Brazilian contemporary art gallery, representing seminal Brazilian and international artists who emerged in the 1950s as well as preeminent mid-career and emerging artists who dialogue with the currents put forth by these historical figures. Founded by Nara Roesler in 1989, the gallery has consistently fomented curatorial practice while upholding the utmost quality in art production. This has actively been put into practice through a select and rigorous exhibitions program created in close collaboration with its artists; the implementation and fostering of the Roesler Curatorial Project, a platform for curatorial projects; and continued support to artists beyond the gallery space, working with institutions and curators in offsite shows. In 2012, the gallery doubled its São Paulo exhibition space, in 2014 it expanded to Rio, and in 2015 it opened in New York City, continuing its mission to provide the best platform for its artists to show their work.

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