

nara roesler

elian almeida



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

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.

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selected solo exhibitions

- *Pessoas que eram coisas que eram pessoas*, Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil (2023)
- *Antes – agora – o que há de vir*, Nara Roesler, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2021)

selected group exhibitions

- *Encruzilhadas da arte afro-brasileira*, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (CCBB), São Paulo, Brazil (2023)
- *Brasil Futuro: as formas da democracia*, Museu Nacional da República, Brasília, Brazil (2023)
- *Quilombo: vida, problemas e aspirações do negro*, Inhotim, Minas Gerais, Brazil (2022)
- *Atos de revolta*, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2022)
- *Nova vanguarda carioca*, Cidade das Artes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2022)
- *Crônicas cariocas*, Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2021)
- *Enciclopédia negra*, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2021)
- *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)

selected collections

- Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
- Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Instituto de Arte Contemporânea de Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil

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magazine covers

An important series within Elian Almeida's body of work consists of paintings he created by inserting historic or anonymous Black figures into covers of widely circulated magazines. Much of this series comprises reinterpretations of covers from Vogue magazine, a publication focused on the world of fashion and beauty. His initial encounter with the magazine was through his sister, who was a fashion student at the time, and Almeida quickly noticed the near absence of Black people on the magazine's covers and pages.

Dona Ester - Irmandade da Boa Morte (Vogue Brasil), 2021
acrylic paint on canvas
95 x 90 x 5 cm
37.4 x 35.4 x 1.6 in

Dona Ester - Irmandade da Boa Morte (Vogue Brasil), 2021 [detail]







In *Um defeito de Cor* (2021) [A color defect], the artist highlights this issue by covering a series of magazine covers with black paint and positioning them side by side. Simultaneously, he represents the covers through paintings and inserts Black female figures of historical significance to Brazil, such as actresses Ruth de Souza and Chica Xavier, the mother of samba Tia Ciata, and anti-slavery leaders from colonial and imperial periods, like Luiza Mahin and Esperança Garcia. Notably, all of these works draw attention to the absence of the subjects' faces. This absence speaks to a place of erasure, especially for those from earlier periods, as some of these figures have never had their faces known. However, as is recurrent in Elian Almeida's art, there is a facet of redefinition: the missing faces allow other Black individuals to identify with them.

Um defeito de cor (VOGUE), 2021
[detail]
acrylic paint on magazine copy
95 pieces of approximately
28 x 21 x 5 cm | 11 x 8.3 x 2 in



Um defeito de cor (VOGUE), 2021
[detail]
acrylic paint on magazine copy
95 pieces of approximately
28 x 21 x 5 cm | 11 x 8.3 x 2 in

→
instalation view
Um defeito de cor (VOGUE), 2021
Nara Roesler, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil





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

→
Tia Maria do Jongo
(Vogue Brasil), 2021 [detail]





*Mãe Beata de Iemanjá (Vogue
Brasil), 2021*
acrylic paint on canvas
104 x 100 x 4 cm
40.9 x 39.4 x 1.6 in



Thanks to the attention and circulation garnered by this series, Vogue commissioned the artist to create a cover. In the February edition, which celebrated the 100 years of the Week of Modern Art in 1922, Elian recreated the image of the famous photograph featuring intellectuals and artists of the event, but replaced them with Black women artists and intellectuals from various moments in national history, such as Maria Auxiliadora da Silva, Carolina Maria de Jesus, and Conceição Evaristo.

Cover created by the artist for the edition commemorating the centenary of the Week of Modern Art Week of 1922. *Conceição Evaristo, Carolina Maria de Jesus, Beatriz Nascimento, Maria Auxiliadora da Silva e Djamila Ribeiro (Vogue Brasil), 2022* acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas, 128 x 125 cm, of Elian Almeida (Authored by Elian Almeida; Photo: Rafael Salim; Courtesy of the artist and Nara Roesler; Art direction: Julia Filgueiras; Image processing: Helder Bragatel)

→ *Conceição Evaristo, Carolina Maria de Jesus, Beatriz Nascimento, Maria Auxiliadora da Silva e Djamila Ribeiro (Vogue Brasil), 2022 [detail]* acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas 128 x 125 cm 50.4 x 49.2 in



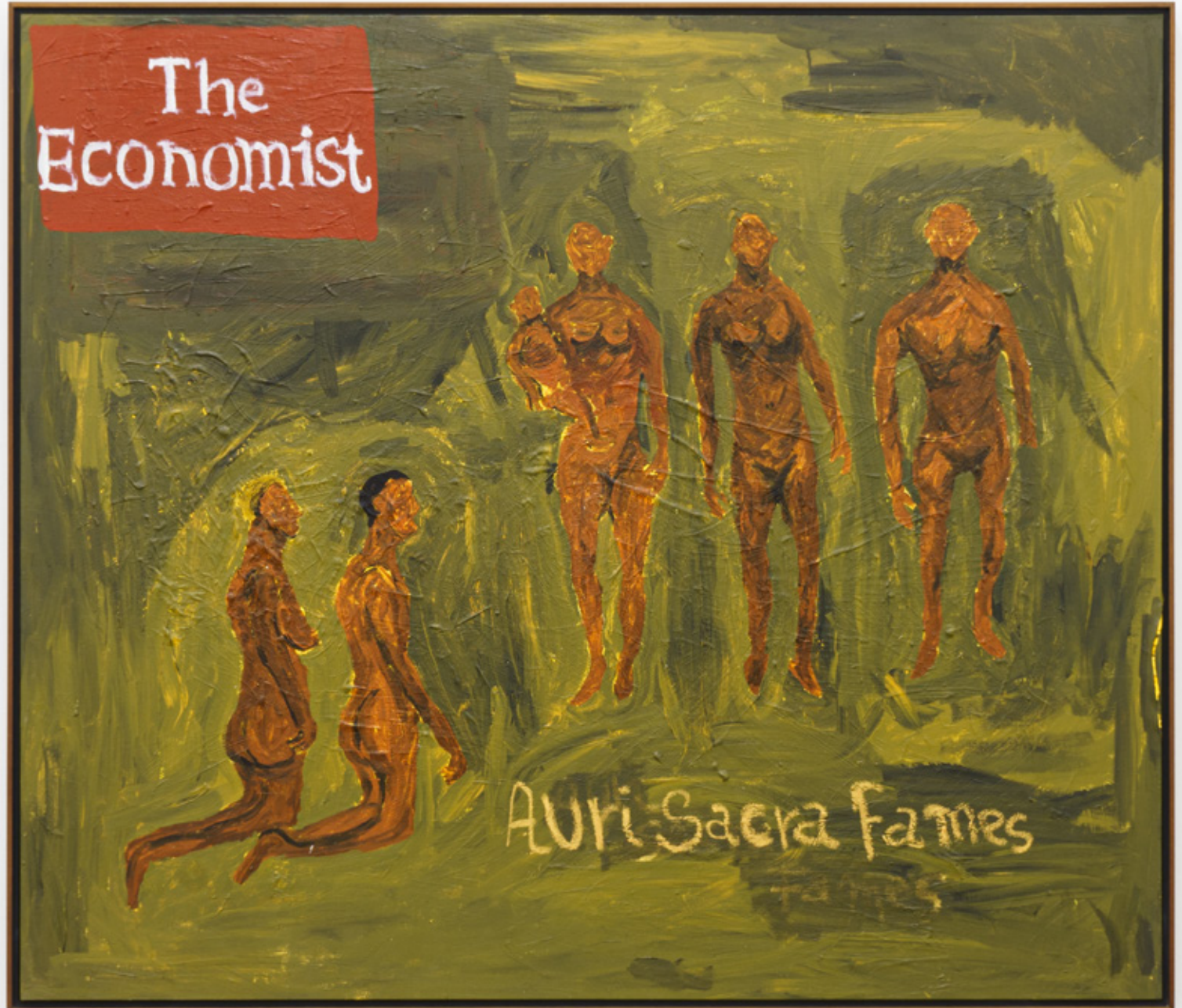


As a result of the Vogue series, other magazines, such as Forbes and The Economist, became part of the artist's oeuvre. While the Vogue series tends towards celebration and tribute (even with elements of critique), in the other two magazines, which focus on economic and business issues, the tone of denunciation is evident through works representing elements of perpetuating racism and inequality.

Clementina de Jesus (TIME), 2021
acrylic paint on canvas
100 x 90 x 4 cm
39.4 x 35.4 x 1.6 in

→
Clementina de Jesus (TIME), 2021
[detail]





Auri sacra Fames
(The Economist), 2022
acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas
130 x 148 cm
51.2 x 58.3 in



Elite do atraso, 2022
acrylic paint on canvas
126 x 130 x 5 cm
49.6 x 51.2 x 2 in

disputing the history of brazil

Considering that the narrative in Brazil's history is largely the result of social inequality and racism, Elian Almeida seeks to create new narratives from once-silenced voices of the past while also beginning to craft possible narratives for the future.



*O mais importante é inventar o Brasil
que nós queremos [ganhadeiras],*

2022

acrylic paint on canvas

160 x 215 cm x 5 cm

63 x 84.6 x 2 in



It is from this movement that the series *O mais importante é inventar o Brasil que nós queremos* (The most important thing is to invent the Brazil we want) emerges. The phrase, authored by anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, names some of the paintings in which groups of contemporary and historical Black characters create the Brazilian flag. In one of them, for instance, the characters are the so-called Ganhadeiras, Black enslaved women who provided services in cities and, through these services, earned enough money to eventually buy their freedom. Although freedom in such an occupation was difficult to achieve, the practice of this profession was a strategy for them to escape the violent yoke of their masters. The backgrounds also gain importance. In the most recent painting in the series, from 2023, we see a tile panel in the background that was originally found in the Casa do Rio Vermelho, a place located in the capital of Bahia where writers Jorge Amado and Zélia Gattai lived. This tilework, painted by Carybé, features emblems of two deities: Oxóssi, the deity of hunting and sustenance, and Oxum, the deity of rivers and waters.

O mais importante é inventar o Brasil que nós queremos III, 2023
acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas
145 x 170 cm x 5 cm
57.1 x 66.9 x 2 in

→
O mais importante é inventar o Brasil que nós queremos III, 2023 [detail]



beliefs and rituals

Elian Almeida's interest in Afro-Brazilian cultures leads him to delve into aspects of religious nature and worldviews. Some of these elements were already present in his earlier works, such as his magazine covers featuring important Black spiritual leaders, including Mãe Beata de Iemanjá and Dona Ester of the Irmandade da Boa Morte. In his more recent works, however, the artist expands his research into new themes. Architectural monuments like the Church of Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos in Salvador, as well as the Terreiro do Gantois, also in the capital of Bahia, are now featured prominently in his canvases as essential elements given their historical importance in Afro-Brazilian spiritual practices. Similarly, Elian begins to depict ceremonies and spiritual festivities, such as the Lavagem do Bonfim, capoeira circles, and drumming for orixás, along with collective portraits of members of Black Catholic brotherhoods.

Igreja Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos, 2023
acrylic paint on canvas
193 x 170 x 5 cm
76 x 66.9 x 2 in

→

Igreja Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos, 2023 [detail]











← ←

Promessa ao Gantois, 2023
acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas
160 x 240 x 5 cm
63 x 94.5 x 2 in

←

Promessa ao Gantois, 2023 [detail]

Lavagem do Bonfim, 2023
acrylic paint on canvas
170 x 144 x 5 cm
66.9 x 56.7 x 2 in



A noteworthy element in this series of paintings is religious syncretism, in which the artist combines elements of African religions and Catholicism in his works. Alongside drums, rhythms, musical instruments, and attire, you'll find crosses, saints, and architectural elements, specifically tile panels reminiscent of colonial architecture.

Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos, 2023
acrylic paint on canvas
170 x 144 x 5 cm
66.9 x 55.1 x 2 in

→
Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos, 2023 [detail]



Tia Carmem do Xibuca, 2023
acrylic paint on canvas
140 x 120 x 5 cm
55.1 x 47.2 x 2 in

→
*Saidas e bandeiras (igreja e
convento de São Francisco)*
(Salvador), 2023
acrylic and oil paint on canvas
165 x 220 cm
65 x 86.6 in







Kindred I, 2023
acrylic paint on canvas
135 x 120 x 5 cm
53.1 x 47.2 x 2 in



Senhor da Bonfim, 2023
acrylic paint on canvas
140 x 160 x 5 cm
55.1 x 65 x 2 in



Aguéré de Oxóssi, 2023
acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas
170 x 170 x 5 cm
66.9 x 66.9 x 2 in

→
Aguéré de Oxóssi, 2023 [detail]



map of the recôncavo of bahia 2023

Elian Almeida's artwork *Map of the Recôncavo of Bahia* (2023) is based on an official map of the region dating back to the 1970s. The painting is constructed to mimic a Baroque tile panel, in which the map is represented concurrently with key landmarks in the history of enslaved people in Brazil, such as the inauguration of Cais do Valongo in Rio de Janeiro and the date of Bahia's Independence, still widely celebrated today. The artwork encapsulates historical revision and an investigation of Brazilian visual culture by addressing tiles, an artistic/architectural element prevalent in the colonial architecture of Brazil, as an indicator of the erasure of the presence of Black people in the construction of Brazil's cultural heritage.



Mapa do Recôncavo da Bahia, 2023
acrylic paint and oil pastel on canvas
160 x 200 x 5 cm
63 x 78.7 x 2 in

→

Mapa do Recôncavo da Bahia, 2023 [detail]



The Recôncavo encompasses not only the city of Salvador but also the entire surrounding area of the Baía de Todos os Santos, coastal regions, and part of the interior. This fertile land area has a significant African influence and was the birthplace of nationally significant cultural expressions, such as samba de roda and capoeira. The region was also a starting point for the Bahian diaspora in the second half of the 19th century, which included spiritual and cultural figures that helped solidify Afro-Brazilian culture in other parts of the country, like Rio de Janeiro.

Map of the Recôncavo of Bahia is part of the collection of works presented in the exhibition *People Who Were Things That Were People* (Nara Roesler Gallery, May 2023), which showcases Elian Almeida's most recent works created between 2022 and 2023. In these works, the artist focuses on elements of Afro-Brazilian culture that flourished between the Bahia-Rio de Janeiro axis from colonial times to the 20th century and now constitute central elements of Brazilian culture.

→
exhibition view
People Who Were Things That Were People, 2020 Nara Roesler,
São Paulo, Brazil







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