

nara roesler

mônica ventura



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b. 1985, São Paulo, Brazil

Lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil

Mônica Ventura is a visual artist and designer, holding a degree in Industrial Design from FAAP and a master's in Visual Poetics (PPGAV) from ECA-USP. Her work investigates the complex intersections of femininity and race. Through in-depth research, the artist rescues and reinterprets pre-colonial cultural elements, such as the architecture and manual techniques of Afro-Amerindian peoples. For Ventura, this immersion in ancestral knowledge is a means of personal reconnection. "Ancestrality is a key to remembering who we are and continuing to break away from the colonial framework that seeks to polish individuality," she explains.

Her multidisciplinary practice spans video, sculpture, and painting, allowing her to navigate between the spiritual and the tangible, giving voice to the multifaceted experiences of Black women. With an approach that merges strength and feminine delicacy, Ventura challenges aesthetic formalism, creating a "beautiful, organized noise" that invites the audience to reflect on identity, memory, and power.

selected solo exhibitions

- *A Noite Suspensa ou o que posso aprender com o Silêncio*, Instituto Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil (2023)
- *O Sorriso de Acotirene*, Centro Cultural São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2018)

selected group exhibitions

- *Cantando Bajito: Incantations*, Ford Foundation, New York, USA (2024)
- *Encruzilhadas da Arte Afro-brasileira*, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (CCBB), São Paulo, Brazil (2023)
- *Brasil Futuro: Formas da Democracia*, Museu da República, Brasília, Brazil (2023)
- *Carolina Maria de Jesus: um Brasil para os brasileiros*, Instituto Moreira Salles (IMS), São Paulo, Brazil (2021)
- *Enciclopédia Negra*, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2021)
- *Histórias Feministas*, Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), São Paulo, Brazil (2019)

selected collections

- Instituto Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil

cover installation view

Daqui um Lugar, 2025

Pinacoteca do Estado
de São Paulo, Brazil

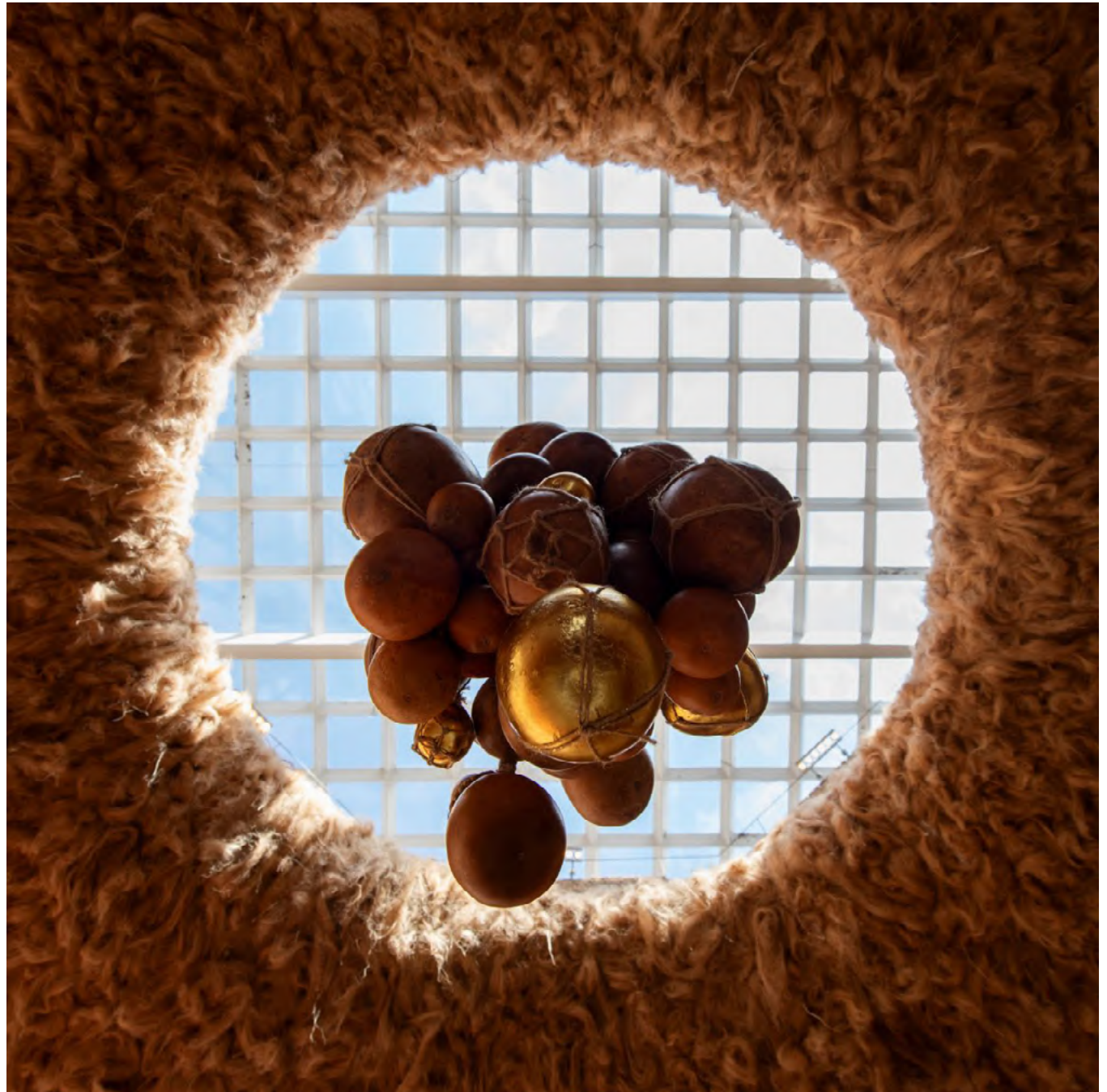
all images courtesy by the artist and Nara Roesler

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entities and structures

An expressive part of Mônica Ventura's poetry is charged with an ancestral spiritual component. Not in a religious or dogmatic sense, but as a rescue of other ways of seeing the world, of philosophies and knowledge that have long been erased or forgotten by the Western world. In the elements used in his installations, paintings and sculptures, there is a clear reference to the material culture and worldviews of non-Western peoples, such as Afro-Brazilian culture, which is present in several of his works, but also those of Amerindian and Eastern peoples, such as India.

installation details
Daqui um Lugar,
Octógono da Pinacoteca
do Estado de São Paulo, 2025





One of his first works with this approach is *O Sorriso de Acotirene*, conceived by Ventura in 2018, on the occasion of his first solo exhibition at the Centro Cultural São Paulo. The title of the work refers to Acotirene, one of the first leaders of the historic Quilombo dos Palmares, which existed in northeastern Brazil between the 16th and 17th centuries. This community was made up of enslaved people fleeing from mills and farms in the region and was one of the largest of its kind in the history of the Americas, becoming a symbol of the struggle against slavery and colonialism. Acotirene's role in this process was the equivalent of that of a matriarch, acting as a figure of reference and leadership, as was the case in many pre-colonial African communities.

The smile of Acotirene, 2018
gourds, sisal, straw, steel, iron
and various materials
240 x 200 cm
94.5 x 78.7 in



*The smile of Acotirene on the
exhibition Histórias Feministas,
MASP, 2019*



The structure of the work, almost totemic in appearance, consists of a set of gourds, beads, sisal fiber and other elements that, in the Afro-diasporic view, are widely linked to the feminine universe. In the words of anthropologist Lilia Schwarcz: “The relationship between the gourds and Acotirene is direct, because they carry with them the figurative notions of seed and counseling, often associated with the female figure. In this work, the gourds of different shapes and adornments together convey the image of a great entity, evoking not only the memory of Acotirene, but also the perpetuation of her legacy in different generations.”

detail of *The smile of Acotirene*, 2018
gourds, sisal, straw, steel, iron
and various materials
240 x 200 cm
94.5 x 78.7 in

The importance of the gourd is also noticeable because of its shape: circular and enclosed within itself, referring to the beginning of life. In the *Incorpóreo* series, also from 2018, Ventura uses this object as a starting point, but instead of using it as a constituent part of something larger, here these pieces are conceived as separate entities. Made up of three gourds, dyed black by a handmade process, the artist engraves a different ancestral graphic on each one with gold leaf. The first I (*Atalaia*), which means guardian, features the Ashtánga yantra symbol of protection, whose origins go back to the cultures of Ancient India and which, curiously, is used in Brazil in some lines of Umbanda as a symbol of the guardians. The second is an Adinkra symbol from the Akan people, entitled II (*Profusion*), indicating prosperity, abundance, also known as the 'ashanti swastika', used as a symbol of currency, expressing power, money, wealth and integrity. The third III (*Ethereal*) has a meaning linked to the invisible, the subtle field and the soul. Called Thouwai, it is the symbol given by the Wang-u-Pa, philosophers of ancient Kangleipak, now Manipur, to represent the soul of human beings that resides in the body.

II (*Profusion*), from
Incorporeal series, 2018
natural dyeing and
gold leaf on gourd
40 x 20 cm
15.7 x 7.9 in





II (Profusion), from
Incorporeal series, 2018
natural dyeing and gold
leaf on gourd
40 x 20 cm
15.7 x 7.9 in



III Atalaia (series Incorpóreo), 2018
tingimento natural e folha
de ouro sobre cabaça
40 x 20 cm



In *From Tomorrow to Yesterday*, conceived in 2021, the image of the ancestral figure appears here through the reference to the Egungun: originally from Nigeria and Benin and present in Afro-diasporic religions, this entity is widely present at festivals and symbolizes the spirits of ancestors who return to earth during specific celebrations. Egunguns always appear dressed in very colorful and often adorned costumes, and their real identity is not revealed.

From tomorrow to yesterday, 2021
Centro Cultural São Paulo,
São Paulo, Brazil

→
From tomorrow to yesterday, 2021
Centro Cultural São Paulo,
São Paulo, Brazil



In this installation work, Ventura creates a structure similar to an Egungun in the center of the space, surrounded by colored sticks. Its title is based on the theory of relativity and its conception of time, which is in line with many Afro-diasporic ideas, given that, according to the physicist: “The distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion, albeit a persistent one”. For the artist: “The choices we are yet to make are already imprinted on the fabric of reality. Following the same reasoning, we can consider that the layers of past, present and future are aligned and overlapping. It seems to me that African philosophies understand Einstein’s theory of relativity very well and have been practicing connections that break the barrier of the Cartesian understanding of temporality for time immemorial.”

The reference to Egungun is also present in other works, such as *Pepita*, from 2022.



Pepita, 2022
bamboo, straw and beads
160 x 200 cm
63 x 78.7 in



Historical events and events of great impact are also given new meanings in Ventura's poetics. This is what happens in the installation *Sábado*, from 2022, created in partnership with portuguese artist Rita Gaspar Vieira at the Consulate General of Portugal in São Paulo. The work in question was conceived on the occasion of the celebration of the Bicentenary of Brazilian Independence. As a way of commemorating the episode, the Brazilian government had the heart of Emperor Dom Pedro I brought from Portugal. With this episode in mind, Monica Ventura thought of a work that dialogued directly with the building's architecture.

According to project's curator, Isabella Lenzi: "With black roots and those of the original peoples of what we now call Brazil, Mônica Ventura starts from the recent arrival in the country of the embalmed heart of D. Pedro I to create a pulsating work that capillarizes throughout the space and transforms itself throughout the exhibition period. In a move opposite to that of the Emperor's heart, kept under lock and key in Porto, the vital organ idealized by the artist rejects the idea of permanence and eternity. Her piece is ephemeral and disobedient. Constructed in a ritual action from the joining and interweaving of natural elements, it infiltrates and expands to build a rhizomatic web. If, on the one hand, the Brazilian artist brings ancestral Amerindian and African references and knowledge linked to an ecological conscience, Rita Gaspar Vieira uses organic elements to evoke ghosts and touch on issues of national identity and borders".

Sábado, 2022
installation carried out in
partnership with the artist
Rita Gaspar Vieira,
Consulate of Portugal,
São Paulo, Brazil

→ → →
Sábado, 2022

→ →
Sábado, 2022





In the monumental installation *A Noite Suspensa/O que posso aprender com o Silêncio*, 2023, designed to occupy the central space of the Praça Gallery at the Inhotim Institute. Mônica Ventura alludes to different religious practices of ancestral origins, and the public is invited to unravel the layers of the installation, whose form is associated with the zangbetos, ancestral spirits worshipped in some religions in the Gulf of Benin, responsible for protection and warding off evil, and also with the *praiás*, fundamental elements of the Pankararu cosmology, an original Brazilian people whose traditional territory lies near the São Francisco river. For the Pankararu, the *praiás* mark the presence of the Encantados, living entities linked directly to the spiritual plane. Both are manifested through dance and the use of a type of full-body mask made of straw. In both cases, who occupies that body remains unknown; they observe, but cannot be observed.



A Noite Suspensa/O que posso aprender com o Silêncio, 2023
Instituto Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil





Like an enclosure made of straw, the installation has a blue-colored dome and its earthen base affixed to the ground resembles a Yoni, a form that refers to the feminine and whose meaning in Sanskrit refers to the notions of “divine passage” or “source of life”. The sculpture itself refers to the Lingam, a phallic symbol that refers to the masculine. The combination of the two forms, if seen from above, refers to Shiva Lingam, the synthesis of the energies of the universe.

At 4 meters high and 9 meters wide, the artist used earth from the region to make both the central sculpture and the rammed earth works displayed on the adjacent wall.

From this installation work came the series of paintings *A Noite Suspensa*, from 2025. From the immersive experience provided by the work, Ventura expresses the desire to transpose its monumentality to the surface of the canvas - not as a simple formal exercise, but as an attempt to preserve the dreamlike and spiritual power of the original space. In the paintings that make up the series, the night appears as a symbolic time of dreaming and listening, while the object-bodies evoke presence, rite and transformation.

I (Beginning), from *Suspended Night series*, 2025
oil paint on canvas
200 x 200 x 4 cm
78.7 x 78.7 x 1.6 in





*II (Nugget), from Suspended
Night series, 2025
oil paint on canvas
200 x 200 x 4 cm
78.7 x 78.7 x 1.6 in*



*III (Jar of life), from Suspended
Night series, 2025*
oil paint on canvas
200 x 200 x 4 cm
78.7 x 78.7 x 1.6 in

Another large-scale intervention was the site-specific *Daqui um Lugar*, which occupied the octagon of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo in 2025. In the exhibition space, a set of gourds hang from a circular structure. Each gourd, although representing a unity of meaning, converges in a collective hanging from the sky to follow, through the reflection of a water mirror, on the reverse side of the earth floor where the public is invited to step. The circular roof introduces a different horizontality to the space, creating an atmosphere of intimacy, protection and shelter, while also evoking the construction of a magnetic field. The experimentation between the space created and the public is enhanced by the use of copper, a material with a high capacity for conducting energy, which covers the structures that support the sky created by the artist.



installation view
Daqui um Lugar, 2025
Pinacoteca do Estado
de São Paulo, Brazil





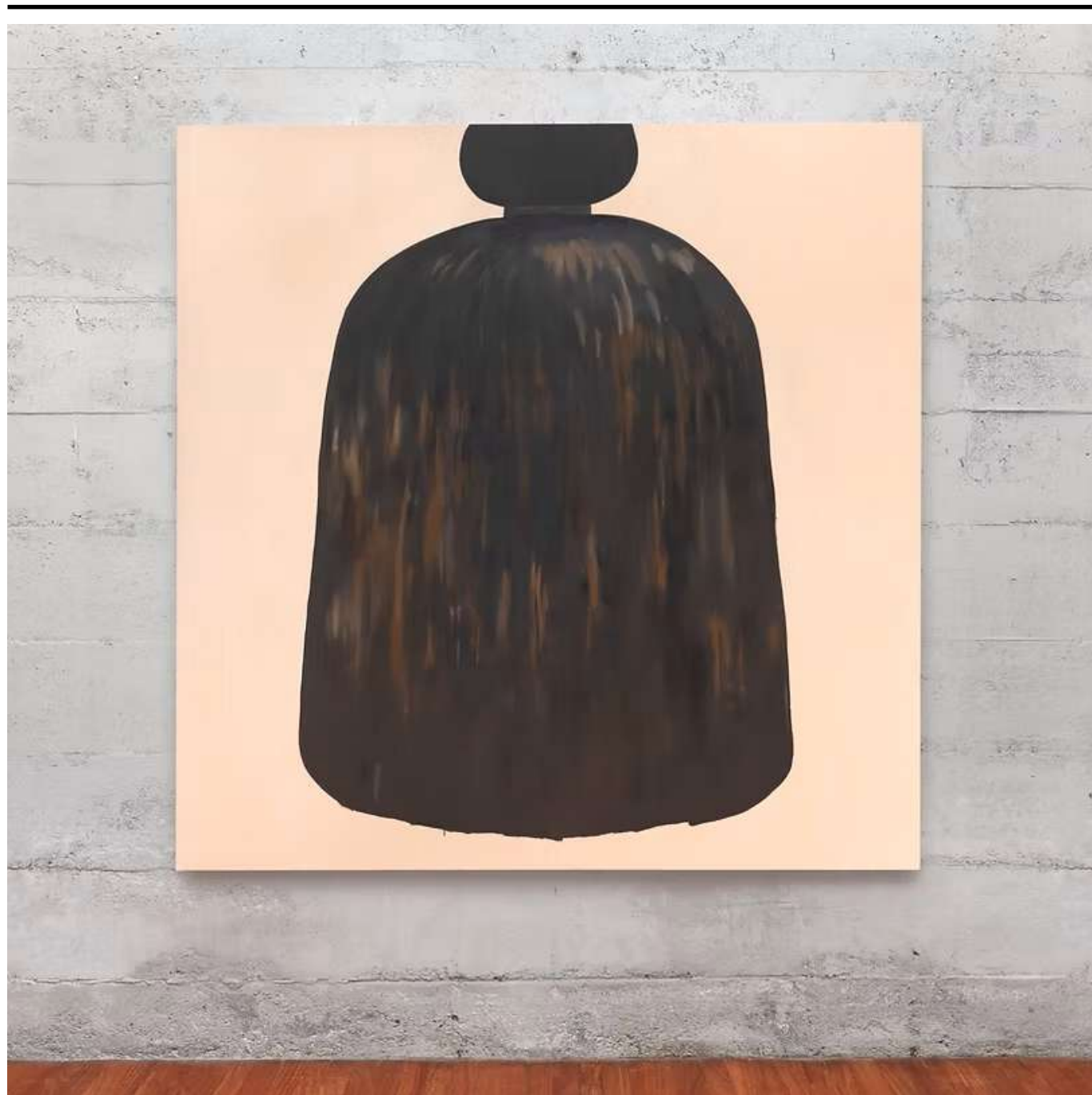
Research into spiritual entities and female forms is also present in pictorial works, such as those in the *Alteia* series from 2024, in which the artist depicts the Zangbetos: voodoo guardians of the night in Yoruba cults. These entities move through music and protect the beings around them. In *Alteia*, the Zangbetos are projected against monochrome backgrounds and in front of the viewer.

alteia series, 2024
óleo sobre tela
200 x 200 cm
78,7 x 78,7 in





alteia series, 2024
óleo sobre tela
200 x 200 cm
78,7 x 78,7 in



alteia series, 2024
óleo sobre tela
200 x 200 cm
78,7 x 78,7 in

The gourd shape reappears in the series of ceramic sculptures entitled *Passarinhas*, from 2025. These structures appear here in a fragmented and recombined form. Created from liquid porcelain moulds, the shapes are dismembered and reorganized like a puzzle, in an intuitive gesture that investigates the links between memory, matter and affection.

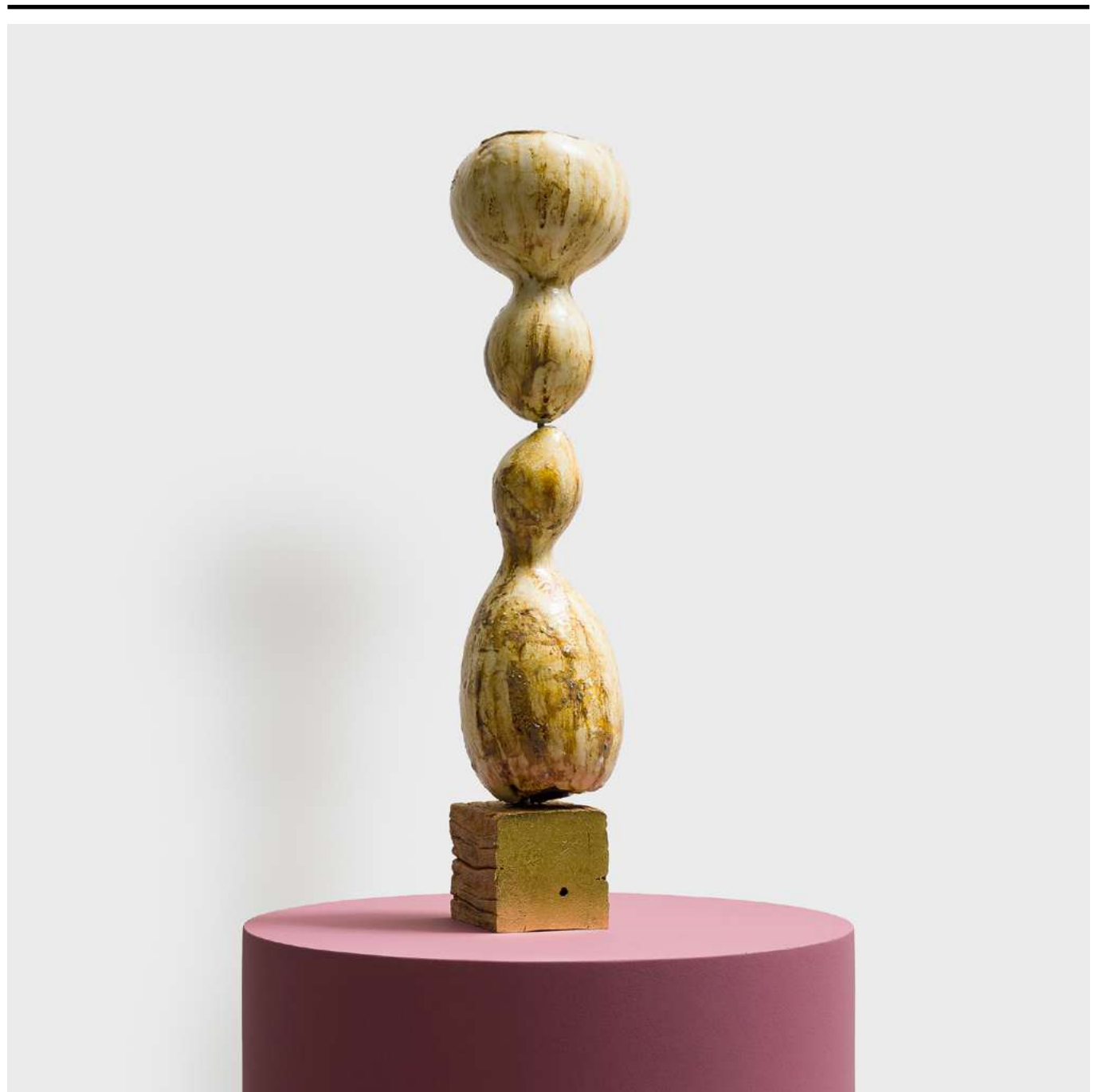
Passarinhas, 2025
porcelain, brass,
wood and gold leaf
46 x 18 x 20 cm
18.1 x 7.1 x 7.9 in





Passarinhas, 2025
porcelain, brass,
wood and gold leaf
45 x 13 x 17 cm
17.7 x 5.1 x 6.7 in

Passarinhas, 2025
porcelain, brass,
wood and gold leaf
52 x 13 x 13 cm
20.5 x 5.1 x 5.1 in



performances

Although a very significant part of Mônica's work is related to spiritual elements and ancestral wisdom through totemic structures, the artist has also explored works in performative language, especially at the beginning of her career.

Recorte de um Desejo, from 2015, is one of her first experiments, consisting of a performance based on the novel *O Quarto de Despejo*, by Carolina Maria de Jesus, one of Brazil's first black writers. The artist in this work is dressed in yellow, and the other objects that accompany the scene: a table with plates, cutlery and bowls, are also yellow. The use of color comes from a passage in the novel in which the author describes the color of hunger as "yellow". In this way, Ventura makes visible a striking passage of Afro-Brazilian literature, while also discussing a striking reality that continues to affect many black families in the country.





Ayzen - Irmandade da Boa Morte, from 2017, was another performance work by the artist, which took place in the MASP hall. The inspiration for it was the Irmandade da Boa Morte, located in the municipality of Cachoeira, in Bahia's Recôncavo region, which arose in the 19th century and was a defender of abolitionism. The performance consisted of six women, whose heads were joined together in structures that formed two overlapping triangles. United, they gave birth to an ephemeral spiritual entity.

*Ayzen_irmandade
Da Boa Morte, 2017
performance
Vão do Masp, São Paulo, Brazil*

Another reference visited by the artist is that of the Martinican thinker Frantz Fanon, a pioneer in the field of decolonial studies and author of the work *White Masks, Black Skin*. In the video-performance *Remoção*, from 2019, the artist removes a facial mask from her face, which alludes to a particular social mask that operates within the logic of race, applied by a dominant hegemonic class that determines social rules and structures.

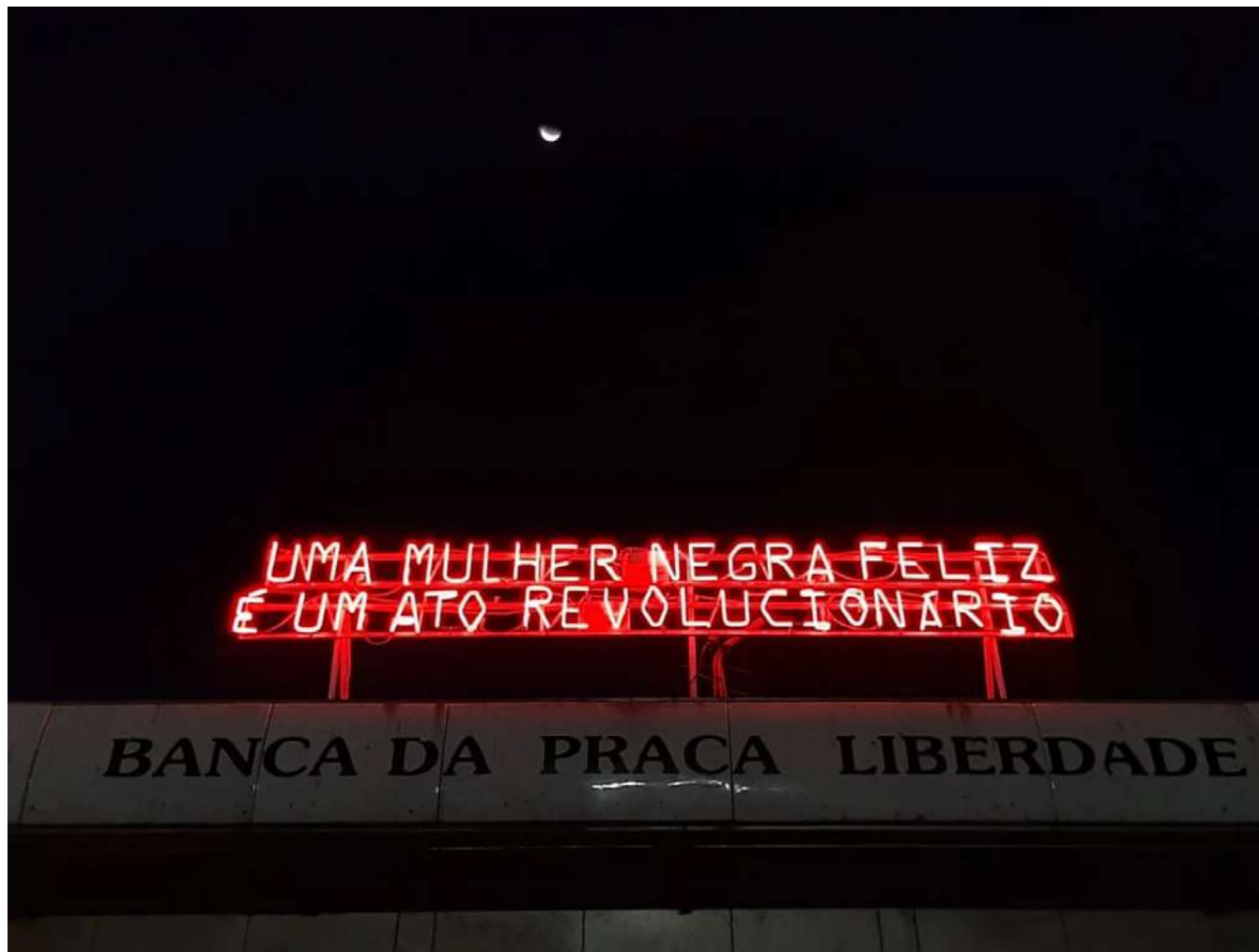


afro-diasporic narratives

In a context in which Brazilian artistic production has turned to Afro-diasporic themes, Monica Ventura's work focuses on possible narratives linked to the Afro population in Brazil that escape stereotypes of violence, misery and exploitation.

In *Luz Negra*, from 2019, the issue of contemporary black women appears through an optimistic lens. Through a neon sign, Ventura displays the phrase: "A Happy Black Woman is a Revolutionary Act", written by writer Juliana Borges. According to the artist: "this phrase also leads us to reflect on how the body of women of African descent is still included in advertising campaigns today, sometimes with some misconceptions. And I go back a bit, looking at newspaper clippings from the 19th century, almost at the end of the period of slavery, and I find a clipping that says the following, something like this: "For sale a black woman, 30 years old, great cook, good looks. Contact Rua da Alfândega, etc".





This newspaper clipping also makes me think about how the body of Afro-descendant women has been objectified since the period of slavery and makes me wonder how we can reverse this way of thinking about this body. So the work *Luz Negra* is an affirmative piece that brings the positive idea to try, in some way, to change this stigmatized view of the black female body.”

Luz Negra, 2019
neon sign

Another work that works in this direction is the painting *Dona Afra*, from 2021, conceived for the *Enciclopédia Negra* exhibition, held at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo. The exhibition was an offshoot of the publication of the same name, organized by Lília Schwarcz, Flávio dos Santos Gomes and Jaime Lauriano, and was aimed at making known black characters from Brazilian history whose faces and roles remained invisible. In this way, a new version of history would be presented, taking into account important actors who had been made invisible. Mônica's painting, which was on the cover of the publication, consists of a portrait of the character Dona Afra, who lived in the 19th century and was a rare case of a wealthy black woman. Afra is portrayed against a neutral blue background and is well dressed. Her outfits combine European clothes with a characteristically African turban.

Dona Afra, 2021
acrylic paint on canvas
80 x 50 cm
31.5 x 19.7 in





Mônica Ventura, 2023
galeria Praça, Inhotim,
Brumadinho, Brazil
photo: Icaro Moreno

nara roesler

são paulo

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

rio de janeiro

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

new york

511 west 21st street
new york, 10011 ny
usa
t 1 (212) 794 5038

info@nararoesler.art

www.nararoesler.art