



**Antonio Sergio Moreira: Okoto - J'existe!**

4 Decades of Art

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## The Concept

The exhibition OKOTO - J'existe! stands as a tribute to artist Antonio Sergio Moreira's four-decade artistic odyssey. Through his distinctive art practice, he casts a spotlight on the African diaspora, attesting its powerful impact. With his profound understanding of the Afro-Brazilian environment, the artist reshapes the historical essence of African culture in Brazil into the creation of precious artworks he developed since his first art show back in 1982.

The African diaspora in Brazil started during the early 16th century when the first enslaved Africans were brought to Brazil in 1501. It generated traumatic challenges associated with forced migration, violence and human brutality, which are always necessary to be addressed: forced displacement, social economic struggles, social and cultural lack of adjustments, family separation and disruption, exclusion, marginalisation, all provoked by brutal slavery policy.

Nevertheless, the diaspora has left an indelible imprint on Brazilian culture, music, dance, religion, and cuisine. African cultural traditions, such as Candomblé (Afro-Brazilian religion), and Capoeira (martial art form with African roots), have become an integral part of Brazilian identity as well as music and social identity.

The forced migration of people from Africa to Brazil has also brought us a significant social impact with innumerable positive sides associated with this historical movement, as for example a massive cultural enrichment, intellectual and social contributions - including integration and cohesion - human engagement and global perspectives.

But, uniting the continental word *Afro* to a unique country like Brazil is a big deal in itself. By doing so, we recognize the real power of that cultural miscegenation and assume that all those cultural layers of an entire continent were mixed in only one country, forming a unique version of the land called Brazil, integrated to local Indigenous and Europeans, for centuries.

The fusion of African, Indigenous, and European influences has helped to generate a unique cultural heritage that is celebrated and cherished throughout the world as Brazilian cultural characteristics.

In the fields of art, for instance, the African diaspora to Brazil has created its own path and enriched Brazilian culture in a unique, rich and precious way.

We are proud to present the fourth solo show by artist Antonio Sergio Moreira in Paris: paintings, sculptures, installations and important art pieces to celebrate his 40 years of art trajectory, above all, his many years of Afro-brazilian resistance through his important cultural research and artistic saga.

**Ricardo Fernandes, 2023**

## The Artist

Born in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in 1963, this self-taught artist works in drawing, painting, sculpture and installation.

He lives between Belo Horizonte and Paris, where he works as an artist and curator for cultural projects.

He attended art workshops at the Lasar Segall Museum and the Oswald de Andrade Oficina Cultural, both in São Paulo in 1986.

In 2006, organised by the Camões Institute of Lisbon, Portugal, Antonio

Sergio Moreira was one of the artists presented during the international and itinerant exhibition “Replica e Rebelia: Artists from Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde and Mozambique” curated by António Pinto Ribeiro and Antonio Sergio Moreira, himself.

In 2012, the exhibition Object Oriki: corpus and habitus = art in the MAC/UEPB, showcasing his artworks and installations received The Best Project Award from Palmares Foundation and the II National Prize for Afro-Brazilian Expressions).

In November 2021, he received the XI Prize “Zumbi de Cultura” by Cia Baobá Minas - Centre for Africanity and Afro-Brazilian Resistance (CENARAB) of Minas Gerais State in Brazil. He also received the Prize “Ancestral Knowledge” grant from Aldir Blanc Art Law to Cultural Agents and Collectives of Brazil.

The main institutional collections in which the artist has artworks are the AMBA Association (London, United Kingdom), Bayer Collection (São Paulo, Brazil), Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Lisboa, Portugal), Celma Albuquerque Gallery (Belo Horizonte, Brazil), Cérés Franco Museum



(Montolieu, France), Gilberto Chateaubriand Collection (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), Jean Boghici Gallery (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), Ricardo Fernandes Gallery (Paris, France), Ricardo Camargo Gallery (São Paulo, Brazil) and the Pretos Novos Research Institute (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil).

# The Artist Statement

## **OKOTO - J'existe!**

Okoto (Òkòtó word in Yoruba) symbolises constant growth.

The resonances and Afro-diasporic influences present in my visual-plastic discourse are part of a whole process of experiencing and building my perspective on the universe of the formation of my identity. The experience of walking barefoot on the ground in the communities of religiosity of African origins, places which we call Terreiros, is to feel that others came before us who made this journey possible. That, added to the miscegenation of peoples in Brazil, questions - what are we? Afro-Americans! We must accept this so that we can decolonize ourselves! Find a balance! Balancing and centring are movements that are also at the core of the existence of the Okoto archetype!

For four decades, African and Afro-Amerindian heritages have been part of my research. They became a creative syntax for building dialogues through contemporary art. An entire iconographic system rich in ancestral symbology is incorporated into my speech and these resonances have become part of a whole process of creating and realising my works. I reappropriate it! I'm an anthropophagic being! I'm part of it too! I have to re-think my view every day!

Okoto is a kind of snail that is part of Exu's cult, with its more elongated shape, like a spinning top. Okoto, supported by a single point, rolls in a spiral and with each sequence of this movement, it will evolve to become a circle, open from the inside to the outside, which also represents infinity. Its expansion is the spiralling time of this dynamic of strength and transcendence between worlds. Exu Okoto is one. And at the same time, it is part of all and of a single essence.

From my studies and research, I made timeless immersions in Terreiros, when through them I found the values of ancestry. The images, the memories, the experiences, and the immeasurable guardian silence of knowledge: past, present and future. These elements are part of Okoto's point of balance and mirroring, and they are in my works. This learning enables my place of speech, for different audiences.

If these elements are part of Okoto's idea of expansion, which also represents continuity and multiplication, in that sense of growth I understood that I could insert this principle into my artistic identity. The reflections, perceptions and questions are inserted in the different media I work with: paintings, drawings, sculptures, graphic design and objects, transforming the support into a shelter for my discourse. My curatorial projects are created within these same concepts. In this way, each work brings a speech, the reason for its existence in this artistic dialogue. The proposal is not to create pictorial sequences, to be read or identified as my artistic label, but to align them at the beginning!

The figurative painting entitled “O Menino Kalunga” (The Kalunga Kid) is the black corporeality in the Congado Mineiro scene (African heritage of culture and religiosity ceremony), its posture and its look. What does he express? Waiting, uncertainty or distrust? From who? For whom? How far are we involved in this context? We need to be attentive and strong in the face of so much prejudice about our bodies, colors, genders, and our cultures of life. He, the Kalunga Kid, is involved, because he participates in the preservation of the Afro-diasporic cultures inherited from his elders, from the quilombola's terreiro. He is the process of continuity that Okoto proposes as the quantum movement of his existence.

The work “Exu”, unlike “Menino Kalunga”, brings in its centre the abstract image of the essence of divinity. The iconographic sphere of Exu also translates him as an element of cyclical movement of life and fertility. It could be everywhere. When we humans move between spaces and places, we are in consonance with this form of myth or divine essence. We can be building something, looking for paths, or simply living our life perspectives. Motion is time and space rolled into one.

The figurative-abstract artwork “Diaspora” was conceived based on the concept of spiralling time, from the inside out. It translates the movement of black people around the world and can also illustrate other forms of people's immigration. The canvas is also the oral reading of the feminine scream, the speech of women who are in this process of survival, themselves, and their children. Because walls and social barriers such as wars are the result of the male universe, construction of the idea of absolute power. But it is up to the feminine to negotiate the conflicts of scarcity and calm the feelings of their children.



The Envolucro series of suspended painting-installations are the perceptions of form and the representation of ancestors. It was in the dynamics of the movements and dance of the ancestors that rotate on an axis, mixing the colors of the Egunguns' clothes, that I found the volumes and shapes! The wrappers are the translations of my reflections on the transit of the ancestral line that is part of everything. The works rotate, sway in the wind, they are light, they are created to be like pendulums. Each work is a memory of the imaginary, translating myths in time and space. They are fragments of ancestral history.

These and several other works are reflections that are also present in the works of the series "Reensaques" (2018-2022), elaborated on packages for repackaging cement. They address prejudice and racism against the body, religion, and black culture. The infinite circumference that Okoto builds at all times can be defined here as a space of resistance, the need to reinvent ourselves at all times in the face of the adversity of racism fuelled by such an unequal and exclusive society.

Therefore, this set of works that I present at the exhibition Okoto - J'existe! are part of a whole! A translation of the dialogue with Okoto, reframed and enhanced by the different ways of expressing my vision and my speech, for the different bodies that fight against structural racism. Struggling and resisting must be an endless process.

And my art speaks of life! I am part of it...

These marks and knowledge are part of my artistic practice, they are mine by experiences translated into art and resistance, where my cry is: I am!

**Antonio Sergio Moreira 2023**

## The Curator

For over 30 years Ricardo Fernandes has built a respected international career as an expert in contemporary art and design. He has lived in Germany, Switzerland, and Denmark. Since 2006 he has been firmly rooted in Paris, France.

Based upon his extensive international experience working as an art dealer, consultant, curator, scenographer and writer, Ricardo also organises exhibitions in Museums, and institutions – worldwide. He has collaborated as curator, scenographer, and light designer for artist Sérgio Bello’ solo exhibition at the Art & Crafts Museum (MAO BH), as well as for Lucia Adverse’ solo show at Inimá de Paula Museum (MIP BH) both in Brazil. He promoted Brazilian Museum Inhotim internationally in 2015 and became the co-curator of the Brazilian Photography Collection of Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF) in 2015.



He has collaborated with some important international Museums like the Victor Hugo Museum of Paris, France, The Qingdao National Sculpture Museum, China and the residence program for the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, organising exhibitions and promoting Art in all its levels, selecting and curating artists to specific art projects.

In 2023 he collaborated with Palais de Tokyo for the solo show Tupi or not Tupi by Brazilian artist Lívia Melzi. He has also collaborated many times with the Brazilian Embassy of Paris, France, also connecting artists and institutions as well as placing artworks at Museum collections.

Ricardo actively promotes contemporary art - which includes painting, sculpture, photography, installations, and all existent art media. He has produced contemporary art events in Brazil, China, England, France, Germany, and the Ukraine, among others.

## The Curator Statement

Okoto - J'existe! is the fourth solo show by artist Antonio Sergio Moreira in Paris, celebrating his 40 years of career and artistic expressions that together are a signature of his historical trajectory in Brazil. Coming from a poor neighbourhood from the southeast region of the country, the artist was born in 1963 and developed what today we can consider a life of artistic resistance expressed through his artworks and art projects. Self-educated and aware of the racial challenges from the Brazilian historical past, born and raised at a time of dictatorship, racial slurs and inequality, the artist learned very early in his life how to survive and face racism with his art and intellectuality.

With a rich tapestry of artistic expressions, the exhibition serves as both a retrospective and a forward-looking celebration of his journey. Through a diverse range of mediums including paintings, sculptures, and installations, Moreira masterfully weaves together narratives of struggle, resilience, and triumph that are deeply rooted in the history of Brazilian black communities. Therefore, our show is a powerful statement of Moreira's dedication, also becoming a conduit for acknowledging the significant contributions of Afro-Brazilians to the country's cultural fabric, while also challenging societal perspectives on identity and representation.

Through his art practice, Antonio Sergio Moreira transforms his personal journey into a collective experience, emphasising the importance of acknowledging and preserving the narratives of those who have been marginalised and celebrating their enduring spirit of resistance, this universal fight for equality and justice.

This fourth solo show of Antonio Sergio Moreira in Paris stands as a remarkable testament to his four decades of artistic prowess and commitment to portraying the enduring spirit of Brazilian black resistance.

**Ricardo Fernandes, 2023**

Suggested Bibliography:

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## The Gallery

Ricardo Fernandes Gallery opens the doors of the international Contemporary Art market to talented artists. It is a continuation of a work of more than twenty-five years which began with the inauguration of a first gallery in Brazil and gave birth to an international career during which Ricardo Fernandes was actively involved, attached to the promotion of his selection of contemporary artists.



In a seamless continuum of this legacy, the gallery presently embodies a pivotal facet within the panorama of international contemporary art. It thrives within the throes of a dynamic, cosmopolitan movement that resonates with each exhibition, meticulously articulating its values—both artistic and international—in resounding clarity.

Central to the ethos of the Ricardo Fernandes Gallery is its unwavering commitment to representing artists hailing from both South America and across the globe. This distinctive approach engenders a cross-cultural dialogue, fostering an exchange of ideas that enriches the tapestry of contemporary artistic discourse. By nurturing a diverse stable of talents, the gallery transcends geographical boundaries, forging a harmonious fusion of artistic perspectives.

Bearing witness to an eclectic array of mediums including painting, sculpture, photography, performance, and installation, the gallery functions as an immersive tapestry of contemporary artistic expressions. It prides itself on its boundless embrace of diverse creative conduits, encapsulating the dynamic essence of contemporary artistry.

The gallery's resonance extends far beyond the confines of its physical spaces. Through unwavering advocacy for artists of international origins, and through active participation in the burgeoning global art market, the Ricardo Fernandes Gallery becomes an interwoven strand within the vibrant cultural fabric of Paris. Its role engenders a pivotal role in the multifaceted interactions that characterises the city's artistic milieu.

## Indicated Bibliography:

"In our engagement with the international contemporary art market, we recognize the significance of offering a curated bibliography. Think of it as a compass, guiding you through the intricate art landscape. Much like artists draw from diverse influences, this bibliography assists collectors in accessing critical insights and historical context that shape contemporary art. By providing this resource, we extend our role as not just a gallery, but as advisors committed to informed dialogue and learning. These texts enrich your understanding, providing a sturdy foundation for comprehending artistic expression, market trends, and cultural significance. This bibliography transforms our presentation, inviting you to explore international contemporary art with depth and insight, bolstered by knowledge." - Ricardo Fernandes

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## General Information

<b>Title</b>	Okoto - J'existe!
<b>Artists</b>	Antonio Sergio Moreira
<b>Description</b>	Individual contemporary art exhibition.
<b>Curator</b>	Ricardo Fernandes
<b>Scenography</b>	Ricardo Fernandes
<b>Opening</b>	September 9, 2023 (from 2pm to 6pm)
<b>Exhibition</b>	From September 2 to October 30, 2023
<b>Horaires</b>	<a href="http://www.ricardofernandes.biz/contact-us/">www.ricardofernandes.biz/contact-us/</a>
<b>Adresse</b>	Ricardo Fernandes Marché Dauphine (galerie 95) 132 - 140 rue des Rosiers 93400 Saint Ouen France
<b>Access</b>	Metro : M4 (Porte de Clignancourt station), M13 (Garibaldi station), et M14 (Mairie de Saint Ouen station) Bus : 85 (Marché aux Puces station) Parking : 142 rue des Rosiers 93400 Saint Ouen
<b>Information</b>	<a href="http://www.ricardofernandes.biz">www.ricardofernandes.biz</a>
<b>Email</b>	<a href="mailto:contact@ricardofernandes.biz">contact@ricardofernandes.biz</a>
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<b>WeChat</b>	RFernandesGallery
<b>Twitter</b>	rf_artgallery

## Partners



**Dorinha e Rainer Brockerhoff (Art patrons, Brazil)**

## Press Kit

For further information and high-definition photos for the press, please contact us:

[contact@ricardofernandes.biz](mailto:contact@ricardofernandes.biz)

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## Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Dorinha and Rainer Brockerhoff for their contribution as patrons and great intellectual supporters of this project. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the Brazilian Embassy of Paris for their collaboration and support.

Our deep thanks to everyone who helped us to make this exhibition possible.