

Gabriel Branco, Josi, Jefferson Medeiros, André Ricardo, Marcos Siqueira, and Luana Vitra
Six Artists
Curated by Lorraine Mendes

Transgressing the Frontiers of Refusal
Written by Lorraine Mendes

Those who set out to consider and historicize the peripheries of the world—the dispossessed, the subaltern, the enslaved—must address the power of narratives and archives, whose limitations define what can and cannot be known or acknowledged.

What is recognized as ‘Art made in Brazil’, has been shaped by notions of coloniality and the archive, drawing upon a white-centric view of the world rooted in European rationality. The artists, materials, languages, themes, references, and provocations recognized by this westernized gaze occupy the centrality of thought in the narrative that became the history of Brazilian Art. That said, we can understand and name, as did the Brazilian authors Igor Simões and Kléber Amâncio, the history of Brazilian Art as the history of white-Brazilian Art.

In Brazil, we have seen growing awareness for artistic practices unsubordinated to the limits imposed by this traditional way of thinking. This awareness does not subjugate itself to the agency of the archaic hierarchies that have long directed the field. Above all, these practices materialize the formation of another reality. The artworks presented here reflect this other gaze, coming from social and cultural actors implicated in, and sensitively committed to their environment. When we know and recognize the practices of these Brazilian artists, we have the opportunity to recognize the diverse strategies used to engage with and transgress the boundaries that determine who can think and produce art.

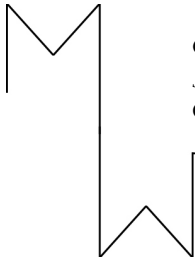
An artist that leads our gaze in this direction is **Jefferson Medeiros**. Born in the state of Rio de Janeiro, the teacher, musician, and researcher uses incisive language and common materials found in urban areas, such as bricks, plates, newspapers, tools, and bullet casings. He articulates his poetics with flags and maps, symbols which he transforms to remove connotations of exclusion and domination. Medeiros thinks and composes another territory, handmade by those who have always held the tools but have been excluded from official paintings and photographs.

The principal tool of photography, once denied to individuals in the periphery, is used in the hands of **Gabriel Branco** to portray everyday life without debasing or exoticizing the image of individuals or their customs. One way to move away from the condition of otherness imposed by coloniality is the possibility of choosing and defining how to be portrayed; image generates an archive, an archive is power. In this other dynamic, power moves away from ideas of conquest and domination and begins to be exercised in a logic of recognition of territory, nature, and traditions.

Luana Vitra is a visual artist, dancer, and performer. Through her work, iron—an element abundant in her home state of Minas Gerais—acts as a conductor between past and present. Amidst colonial mines and contemporary mining, the body is memory, it resists and breathes amidst soot, dust and devastation. Just as Vitra begins with an industrial region for the construction of her works, **Marcos**

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Siqueira is formed by his intimacy with the *cerrado*, the grasslands of eastern Brazil. A guardian of *Serra do Cipó*, an environmentally protected area in Minas Gerais, the autodidact Siqueira understands the richness present in the ground under his feet. Against the ethics of exploitation, he respectfully gathers the natural pigments of his paintings from the ground itself, from the paths and routes that he knows so well. His practice, deeply rooted in his environment, is formally similar to the paintings of seminal Brazilian artists such as Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato, Alfredo Volpi, and Heitor dos Prazeres. Through the themes he addresses, the saturation of his palette and the texture that takes over the canvas, Siqueira manages to establish a strong dialogue with an entire tradition of painting.

With her feet on the ground in the humble Vale do Jequitinhonha, in the northeast of Minas Gerais, **Josi** slowly carved her path to study Literature and Fine Arts in Belo Horizonte, combining hand crafts learned in her backyard and through housework with academic techniques and pictorial traditions. Similarly to Siqueira, Josi draws upon a form of poetic investigation borne of experimentation with the natural pigments she is familiar with; the water used to boil beans, the nuances and tones in coffee, earth, and cornstarch. That which should be at odds with a binary understanding of the world is reworked in gestures that bring together different kinds of knowledge, showing appreciation for her dual understanding of the world as she prints, forms, and draws lines with clay, cotton, and memory.

From São Paulo, **André Ricardo** is another artist who displaces and unfolds traditional practices in order to materialize his own poetics. In working with egg tempera, Ricardo manipulates time to transport the ancestral technique to the present, and thus, makes the preparation of the pigment, the surface, and his precise brushstrokes all part of the historical legacy of painting, all while observing his surroundings and the affections that constitute him.

These artists, as well as others in their generation, carry out a critical game of symbols, teetering between conventional art systems and their poetics and singularities. They revisit archives, re-elaborate aesthetics and redefine, not only the modes of representation of the black, poor, and peripheral, but the way the history of Brazilian Art was built. Together, they find a poetic agency that dares to go beyond the frontiers of refusal.

Lorraine Mendes has a degree in Arts and Design from the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais and is currently a doctoral candidate in Art History and Art Criticism at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. She was a professor at the Department of Theory and History of Art at School of Fine Arts-UFRJ until 2021. Mendes is currently curating and organizing *Dos Brasis: Arte Pensamento Negro* a group exhibition of over 215 Afro-Brazilian artists at SESC Belenzinho, Sao Paulo opening July 2023. Mendes' research is focused on the representations of Black people and Blackness in the history of white-Brazilian art. She conducts a review of the archive of images that form the idea of Brazil from contemporary black poetic agency. Mendes seeks ways to critically enunciate the unspeakable in publications and curatorial gestures.

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