

LISSON GALLERY

Frieze Week Magazine
15 October 2025

FRIEZE WEEK

FRIEZE WEEK LONDON

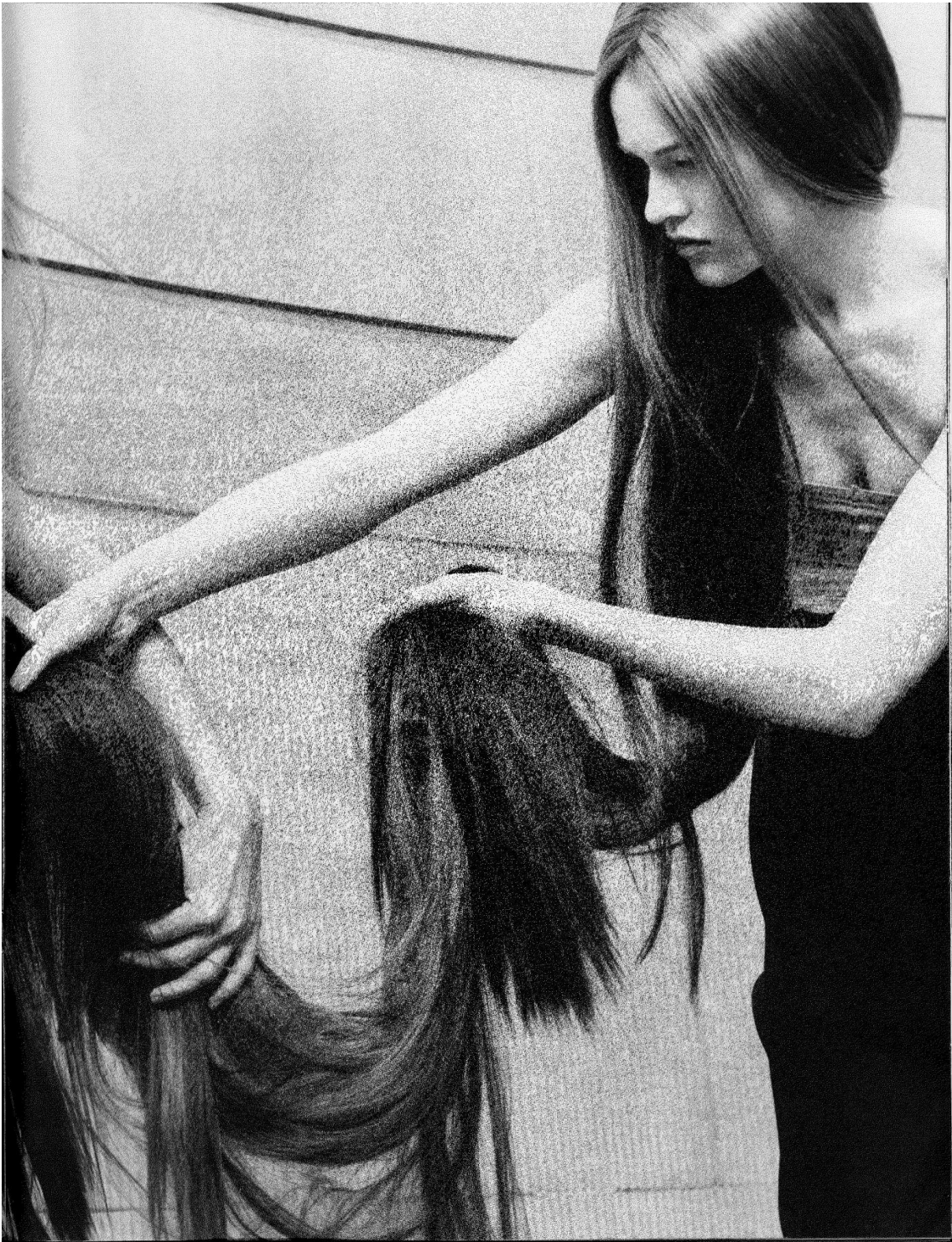
15-19 OCTOBER 2025

An homage to Tunga (1952–2016) and his iconic *Xifópagas Capilares entre Nós* (1984), 40 years after its first appearance in a magazine

Photography by Lara Angelil

DOUBLE TROUBLE







One of the most esteemed Brazilian artists of his generation, Tunga (1952–2016) produced a body of work that remains nonetheless hard to pin down. As curator Adriano Pedrosa wrote in a 1999 issue of *frieze* magazine, his art 'lures and deceives, slipping through your fingers, falling through the cracks, setting up tricks and traps'. Think of it, perhaps, like a knot of tangled hair, with skeins that can be traced but not unravelled.

Born into an intellectual family, Tunga drew on a diverse body of ideas, from psychoanalysis and science to alchemy. He worked across disciplines, focusing early in his career on drawing, before moving towards ambitious installations and sculpture, utilizing

bells, shells and braids as motifs, and elements such as lightbulbs and magnets. (Some of the more ambitious works are preserved in two dedicated pavilions at the prestigious Inhotim Museum – and, indeed, it was a meeting with Tunga which led founder Bernardo Paz to devote his collection to contemporary art.)

As Joseph Beuys did with his 'batteries', Tunga sought to unleash the energetic potential of materials. One strategy was what he called 'instaurations' – activations of his work through performance. The most iconic of these is *Xifopagos Capilares entre Nós* (Capillary Xiphopagus Among Us, 1984) performed by two adolescent girls whose hair is braided together, inspired by a Nordic

myth recounted in the writing of Danish-Brazilian palaeontologist Peter Wilhelm Lund about conjoined twins who unleash havoc. The following year, images of the performance were published with commentary by Tunga in the journal *Revirado*.

This work has been crucial to the artist's reception in the UK: it was performed in his first solo exhibition here, at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1989; in 2015, it was recreated at Frieze London as part of the curated programme; and, in 2018, it was staged over four weekends at Tate Modern.

The mystery of the piece is part of its power. But, whatever else he is doing, in joining the two performers' hair, Tunga creates a kind of infinite loop. Indeed,

in *Revirado* he connected the work to his 1981 film installation *Ào*, which imagines 'a tunnel without beginning or end'. Or perhaps, given the many allusions in his work to electricity, it's a circuit – an instance of material becoming a vessel for energy and its boundless flow. (MM)

Above
Tunga, *Xifopagos Capilares entre Nós*, 1984. Documentation of performance at Kanaal Art Foundation, Kortrijk, Belgium, 1989. Photo: Gilles Hutchinson. Courtesy: Estate of Tunga, Rio de Janeiro, and Lisson Gallery, London, Los Angeles, New York and Shanghai

Tunga is presented at Frieze London by Lisson Gallery (Stand D1). His estate is also represented by Almeida & Dale, São Paulo, Brazil, and Labring Augustine, New York, USA.

Artnet News
17 April 2025

artnet

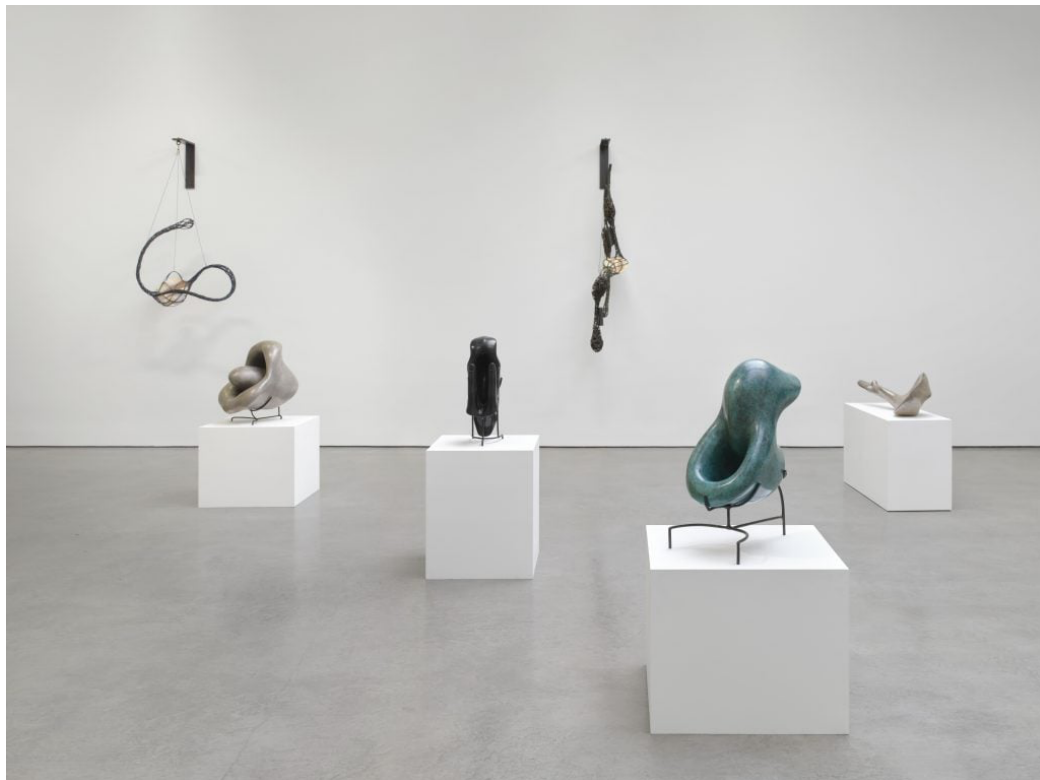
In a New London Show, Brazilian Artist Tunga's Sculptures Challenge the Medium's Possibilities

A solo show of the artist's work is on view at Lisson Gallery, who recently announced representation of the artist's estate.



Tunga, *Untitled (Morphological)* (2014). © Tunga Institute. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

For Brazilian artist Tunga (1952–2016), visual art was a transformative lens through which myriad fields of knowledge could be seen and understood in a new light—from philosophy and psychoanalysis to biology and even alchemy. Recognized as a pioneer of Brazilian contemporary art, and still considered one of the country’s best-known artists, Tunga’s conceptually multifaceted practice speaks to his unique view of reality, and, more specifically, its malleability.



Installation view “Tunga” (2025). Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

In September 2024, Lisson Gallery announced representation of Tunga’s estate and is currently staging the artist’s first solo with the gallery at its Lisson Street location in London. On view through May 17, 2025, “Tunga” also marks the first time the artist’s work has been shown in London since 2018, when Tate Modern presented *Xifópagas Capilares Entre Nós (Capillary Xiphopagus Among Us)*, one of Tunga’s iconic performances.

Taking sharp focus on the mature period of Tunga's career and practice, the show highlights work that exemplify his penchant for experimenting and diversifying his sculptures both materially and compositionally. While works from earlier periods are marked by more straightforward and pared back forms, here, Tunga's sculptures engage with multiple elements at once, lightness and density, balance, ephemerality, energy, and more.



Tunga, *Untitled* (2008). © Tunga Institute. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

Highlights from the show include *Fração de Luz (Fraction of Light)* (1981-2010), the show's earliest dated. Evoking the power system between marionette and puppeteer, an articulated cord is hung by a nail on the wall and holds in its terminating hook a bundle of long black hair. Gravitational force itself becomes a key component of the work, grounding the work in reality, yet its monochromatic blackness and unusual materials offer a sense of the uncanny. Here, Tunga's ability to work with invisible forces are underscored.

Elsewhere, an *Untitled* work from 2008 is the proverbial centerpiece of the show, and one of the most complex. Comprised of an aluminum weight hanging beside a fabric, floor-length curtain shrouding smaller hanging aluminum forms that look like teeth, the piece foregrounds ideas around illusion, perception, and the boundaries of physics.



Tunga, *Fação de Luz* (1981). © Tunga Institute. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

“My father’s work continues to challenge and inspire audiences around the world,” said Antônio Mourão, the artist’s son, and founder and director of the Instituto Tunga. “This exhibition at Lisson Gallery represents a crucial moment in preserving and extending his artistic legacy. Tunga always sought to create experiences that transcended traditional boundaries between sculpture, installation, and performance—inviting viewers into rich, symbolic worlds where the physical and metaphysical could engage in dialogue. I believe this exhibition captures the essence of what made his contribution to contemporary art so singular and enduring.”

LISSON GALLERY

The Art Newspaper France
19 July 2024



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Tunga, a strong comeback in Brazil and France

While the Tunga Institute has expanded near Rio de Janeiro, the artist's work will be hosted at the Château La Coste next fall.



Tunga in front of the installation *True Rouge*, 1997, Inhotim.
@Daniela Paoliello

When the Brazilian artist died prematurely in 2016 at the age of 64, his son Antônio Mourão was led to create the Tunga Institute in 2017, a non-profit organization whose goal is to study, preserve and disseminate his father's legacy. The challenge is considerable for this lawyer by training who did not operate in the art world. Eight years later, supported by the very experienced Clara Gerchman - daughter of the Brazilian artist Rubens Gerchman (and close friend of Tunga) who has directed the Instituto Rubens Gerchman since her father's death in 2008 - everything is finally ready for a strong comeback of Tunga's work.

Housed in the artist's former studio in Barra da Tijuca, 30 minutes from Rio de Janeiro, the Tunga Institute now has twelve professionals, including curators, museologists, researchers, archivists and the indispensable Fernando who, for 30 years, has been precisely assembling Tunga's installations. The team takes care of the collection that Tunga left, which includes everything from works of art to his materials and work tools, his notebooks, photographs, publications and an important library. Everything is preserved on site in optimal conditions.



Tunga, *Psicopompos*, 2008, at Château La Coste.
Courtesy Château La Coste

An authentication committee composed of three competent people close to the artist was also formed: art critic Paulo Venâncio Filho and artists Everardo Miranda and Waltercio Caldas. Certificates of authenticity are issued online by the Verisart platform - this blockchain certification is a first in Brazil for an artist.

An unpublished catalogue raisonné of the 2D works - drawings, photographs, engravings and works on fabric - which will be bilingual, in English and Portuguese, will be put online for free at the end of this year by Cahiers d'Art. The catalogue will also include texts by specialists and the "Tungian Glossary", a list of the meanings of expressions, elements and themes that appear in the artist's work. Organized by specialist Christina Gabaglia Penna and supported by the Brazilian bank Itaú Cultural and the water company Sabesp, the project focuses on no less than 10,000 works (9,000 preserved in the Institute's collection and 1,000 among collectors around the world).

Through Vincent Kieffer and in collaboration with the two galleries that currently represent Tunga - Luhring Augustine in New York and Millan in São Paulo - a major exhibition is being prepared in the south of France, at the Château La Coste in the sublime pavilion designed by Oscar Niemeyer, from the end of September 2024 to the beginning of January 2025. The first in France since the artist's death. It will present a set of drawings from the series "Angels with Makeup" produced in 2000, a "green" installation, sculptures from the series "Morphologique" and the unpublished sketches of the installation "Psicopompos" produced *in situ* in 2008 and placed precisely in front of the Niemeyer pavilion. An interesting dialogue is planned between the pieces installed inside the pavilion and the work outside. It will also be a meeting of two Brazilian giants, Pritzker Prize winner Oscar Niemeyer and Tunga, himself an architect by training.

Tunga is a monument in Brazil, but also in France. In his native country, he was behind the creation in 2006 of the extraordinary botanical and museum park of Inhotim by the collector Bernardo Paz, in the state of Minas Gerais. Two pavilions are dedicated to him, including the famous installation *Vrai Rouge* from 1997. The artist's many interventions in France, the country of his heart, are memorable: with "Modernidad: "Brazilian Art of the 20th Century" at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1987; at the Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume in 1992 with "Désordres" and also in 2001; at the Fondation Cartier in 1998; at the 5th Biennale de Lyon in 2000; at the CAPC Museum of Contemporary Art in Bordeaux in 2001 for a monographic exhibition... Tunga was also the first contemporary artist to exhibit at the Louvre Museum in 2005 with a monumental installation under the pyramid entitled *À la Lumière des deux mondes*. This was followed by the Palais de Tokyo in 2014 and the Chaumont-sur-Loire Festival in 2015.

The next project of the Tunga Institute? Reopening artist residencies on the site of the workshop in Rio as Tunga used to do for young talents. And looking to the future.

LISSON GALLERY

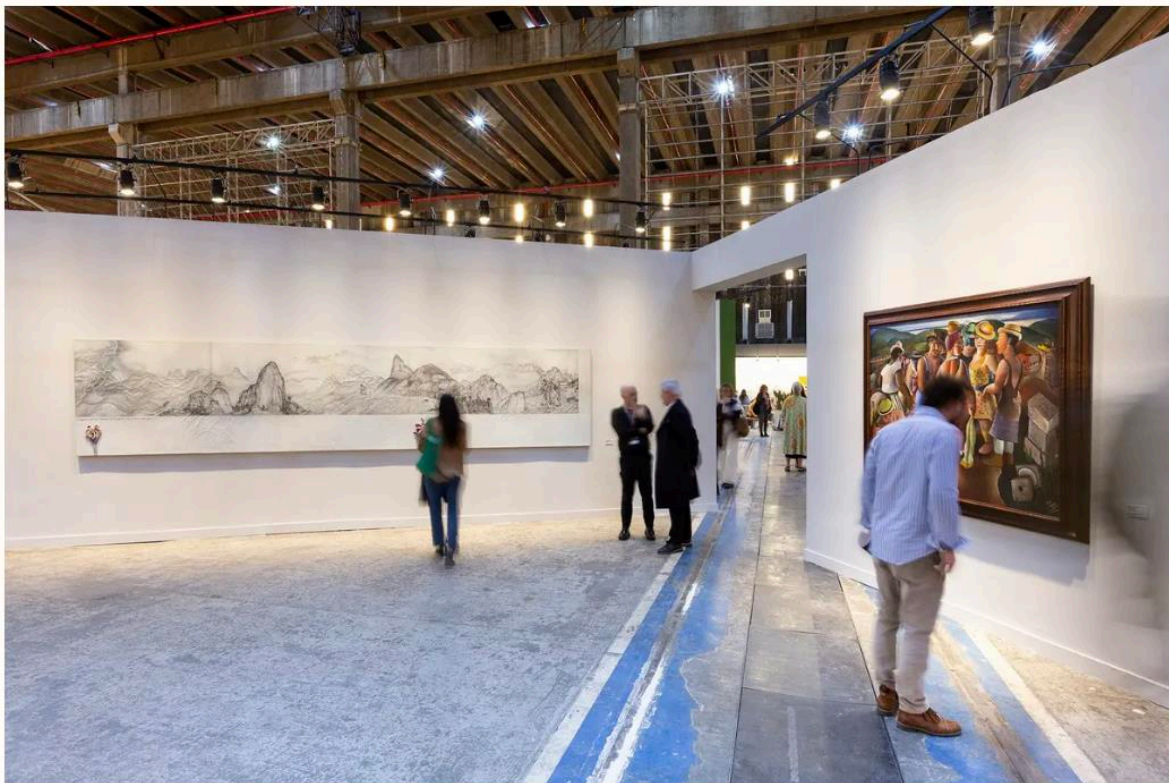
The Art Newspaper
30 August 2024



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Rotas Brasileiras spotlights the depth and diversity of Brazilian art

The São Paulo art fair's third edition adds a new section for monumental works while staying relentlessly focused on the national scene



A view of the 2024 edition of the Rotas Brasileiras fair in São Paulo
Courtesy SP-Arte

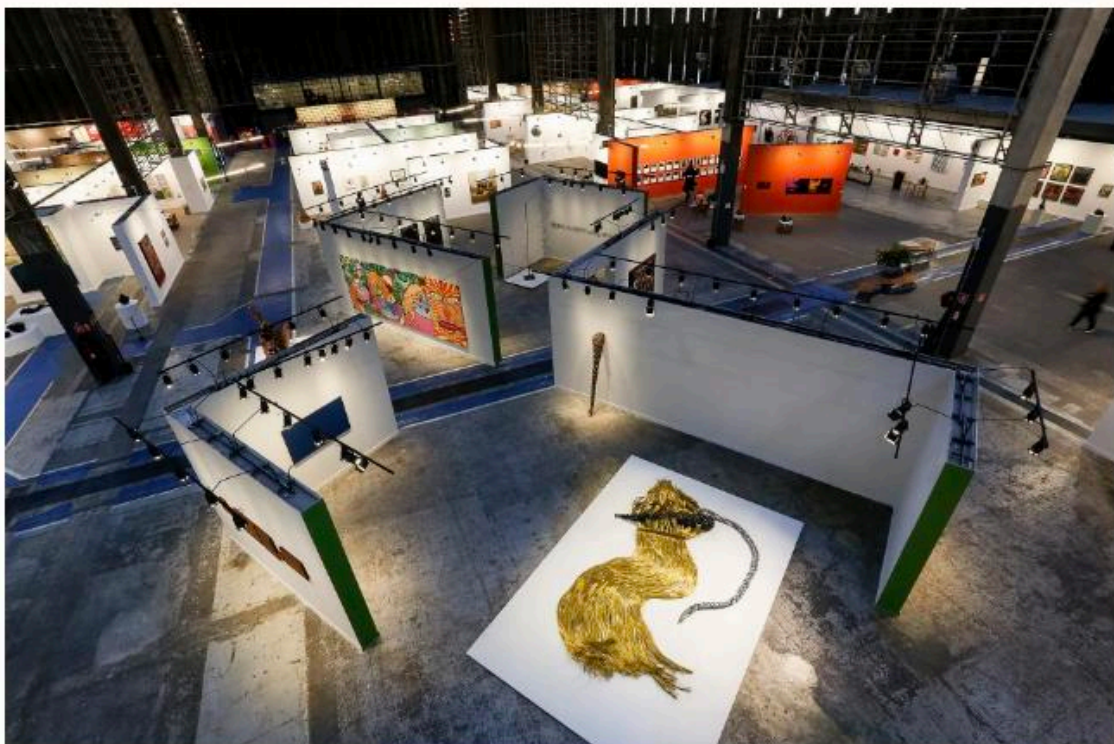
Around five months after São Paulo hosted the fair meant to bring the global art world to Brazil, it is hosting the sister fair focused on bringing Brazil's deep and diverse art scene into the light.

Rotas Brasileiras (until 1 September), now in its third edition, comes from the organisers of the larger, internationally inclusive SP-Arte fair staged each April. The main difference is that Rotas Brasileiras has a unique objective: to showcase the best established and emerging talent from across Brazil's 15 states. This year, that objective has filled São Paulo's Arca event space with 66 exhibitors offering works by around 250 artists.

"Rotas Brasileiras is an essential fair for anyone who wants to keep up to date with Brazilian art," Rodrigo Moura, the artistic director of this year's event, tells *The Art Newspaper*.

The 2024 edition of the fair (whose Portuguese name translates to "Brazilian routes") introduces a new sector, dubbed Mirante (watchtower), which unites large-scale and rarely exhibited works by 16 artists.

"I wanted to bring a new sector, presenting works of large ensembles or of truly large dimensions—those works that go beyond the usual scale for conventional fairs," Moura says. One noteworthy example comes from the Pernambuco-born Tunga (1952-2016), whose practice spanning design, sculpture and performance made him one of the leading Brazilian artists of his generation; the piece, an array of golden brass strings held together by a lead chain and magnets, measures six meters in length.



An elevated view of the Mirante sector of Rotas Brasileiras 2024, with *Êxtases (ecstasies)*, a 1987 sculpture by the late Brazilian artist Tunga, shown at bottom

Courtesy SP-Arte

One fair, many routes

According to Moura, who has served as the chief curator of El Museo del Barrio in New York since 2019, the Mirante sector was installed in the fair's central square because the location provides "an elevated point on the trail route, where one can see the landscape and find other routes".

And motivating visitors to explore different *rotas* is exactly what the organisers set out to do. "Routes of affection, routes of borders, routes of connection," says Fernanda Feitosa, the founder and executive director of SP-Arte. "This is an event that is focused on discoveries."

According to Feitosa, Brazil is a complex country with a complex history of cultural production. "There are many, diverse Brazilian identities. It is not a monotonous thing. We have the influences of colonisation and slavery—a country that has Indigenous people and popular contributions. There is not just one voice," she says.

The US-born, Asia-based collector and curator David Teplitzky, who describes himself as "a big fan of Brazilian art", seconds Feitosa's assessment. He tells *The Art Newspaper* that the fair has a "fresh feel" to it "whether one is looking at things that are 40 years old, or new works".

"There's a different flavour here, and it's a chance to explore younger artists and things a little bit more out of the mainstream," he adds. "I'm enjoying it tremendously."

No matter which routes visitors take through the fair, however, Moura believes there are a few "must-sees" among this year's exhibitors.

"I would definitely go to the Millan gallery stand, showcasing Indigenous artists from different parts of the country; Gomide & Co gallery, with a very beautiful project in which Lenora de Barros pays homage to her father, the artist and designer Geraldo de Barros; and Contemporary Albuquerque gallery, with a new project by artist Flávia Bertinato, with previously unseen works."



Vivian Caccuri, *Descompressão Metal* (metal decompression), 2023
Photo: Julia Thompson, courtesy Millan gallery

Close looking and close contact

Hena Lee, the general director of Millan gallery, says Rotas Brasileiras stands out from other fairs due to its unique approach, which “favours diversity, bringing galleries and artists from outside the Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo orbit, and facilitates contact with new productions and other agents in the circuit”. Millan has responded to this opportunity by bringing works from the Indigenous artists Daiara Tukano, Gustavo Caboco, Jaider Esbell and Joseca Mokahezi Yanomami on its stand.

Lee adds of the fair: “Its format also encourages closer contact between the public and the works on display, and differentiates Rotas from fairs with a more globalised character and a larger scale that always bring together the same galleries and artists.”

Other gallerists agree that Rotas Brasileiras spurs unusually deep engagements between its exhibitors and visitors. Marga Pasquali, the owner of the Porto Alegre-headquartered Bolsa de Arte gallery, is participating here for the first time after exhibiting at several international expos. “It is beautiful in size, and we are able to do things that are harder to do at larger fairs, like interact with artists, gallery owners and collectors,” she says of Rotas Brasileiras.

“Collectors here stop at the stands more, talk to gallery owners, to artists and try to understand what the artist’s research is,” Marco Antonio Lima, the owner of Lima Galeria in São Luis, Maranhão, tells *The Art Newspaper*.

Now exhibiting at Rotas Brasileiras for the third time, Lima, who also participates in SP-Arte each April, reinforces that the two fairs serve different purposes. He calls SP-Arte “a showcase for the world” with “much more visibility on a global level”, as curators travel from around the globe to take in the presentation. “Rotas, on the other hand, is focused on Brazil,” he says. “Here we are able to reach a larger number of smaller collectors, those who are just starting their collections.”

Lima notes that Rotas Brasileiras also gives smaller galleries the opportunity to champion Brazilian artists who are relatively unknown even in the larger art markets within their own country, such as São Paulo.



Luis Carlos Lima Santos, *Semente de Tamburi* (tamburi seed), date unknown
Courtesy Lima Galeria

"Take 85-year-old sculptor Luis Carlos Lima Santos," the dealer says. "He is very well-known in Maranhão, where he was very active in the 1980s and 1990s. However, we didn't have the internet or social media to promote him, so he was restricted to Brazil's North and Northeastern states."

Rotas Brasileiras, Lima adds, "clearly shows that there is a Rio-São Paulo axis, but there is also a whole context outside this axis".

LISSON GALLERY

Arte!brasileiros
13 January 2023

ARTE!BRASILEIROS

In New York, works by Tunga win the first exhibition in the USA after his death, in 2016

Curated by Paulo Venancio Filho, "Vê-nus" will open this Saturday (13th) at Luhring Augustine, the gallery that represents the artist since 1998; two-dimensional works predominate in the selection, which also has three-dimensional works, such as the sculpture that names the exhibition



The Brazilian artist Tunga (1952-2016). Photo: Daniela Paoliello

Starting this Saturday (13/1), New York will host the first exhibition of works by Tunga in the United States since his death in 2016. *Venus* curated by Paulo Venancio Filho, who between the end of 2021 and the first half of last year was in charge of a large **Retrospective** of the artist, held at Itaú Cultural and at Instituto Tomie Ohtake, in partnership with **Tunga Institute**. The show on North American soil takes place at Luhring Augustine, a gallery that has represented Brazilians since 1998, and brings together more than 60 works, many of them unpublished. The last Tunga exhibition held there took place in 2014.

According to Clara Gerchman, co-founder and manager of the Tunga Institute collection, created in 2017, and whose director is Antonio Mourão, the artist's only son, this is a great opportunity to be able to present Tunga's two-dimensional works, according to her a stage very important in the trajectory of the Brazilian, but little seen.

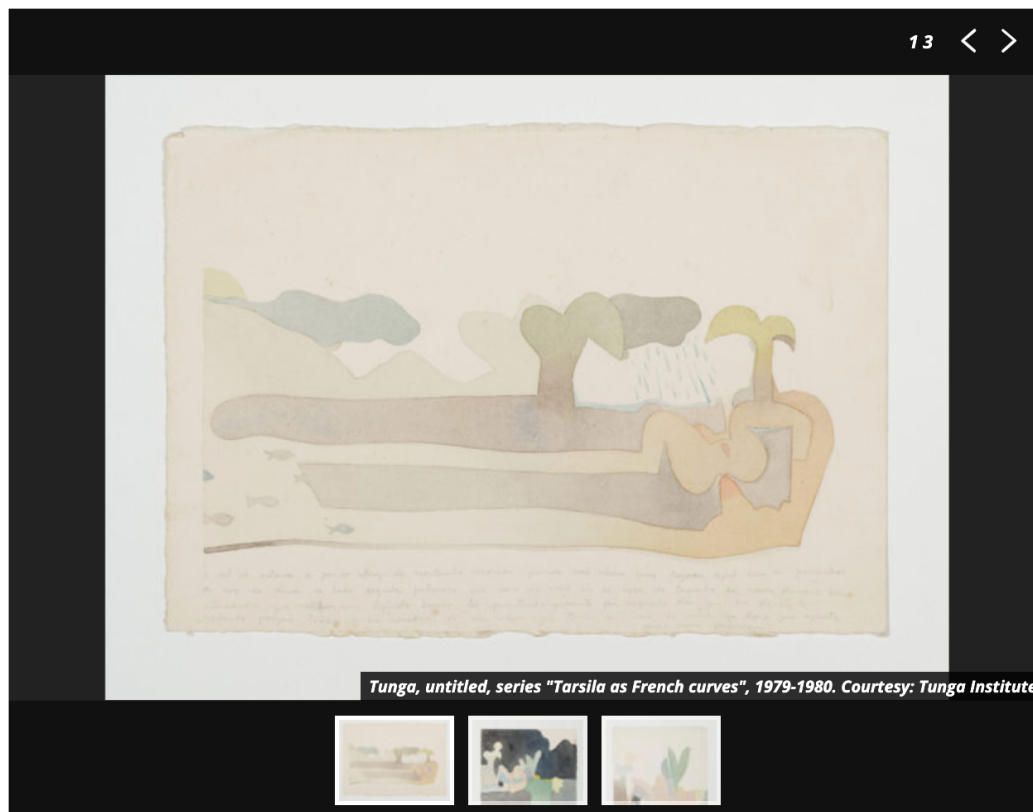
"The show occasionally features sculptural works, but the bulk of it is made up of two-dimensional works. As we are working with the collection, which is the primary source, we have discovered countless phases of a very diverse set. Our mission has been precisely this: to work with unpublished material for the public", explains Clara to arte!brasileiros, adding that later this year the raisonné catalog will be launched with the two-dimensional works of Tunga, a project started in 2021.

Venancio Filho points out that the Tunga Institute insisted on taking the sculpture to New York *Venus* (1976), which lends its name to the exhibition, and had been seen a few times, one of them in the North American city itself; another in São Paulo. “It is a very important work in his work, and I built a whole situation around this work, with drawings from the same period, mixing recent creations with older ones”, he explains. Some of the drawings present at Luhring Augustine, for example, had originally been shown in Tunga's first solo exhibition, held in 1974, at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio).

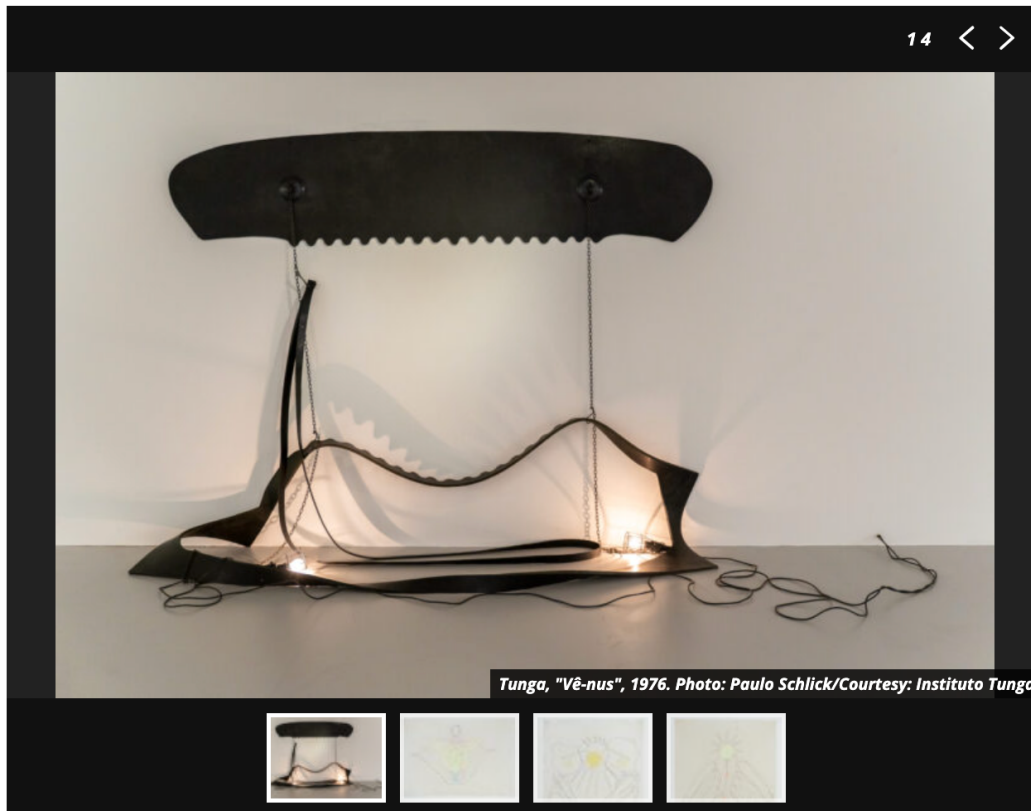
The curator also explains that, when he was invited to conceive the show last year, he thought of creating what would be “a Tunga museum room”, where the spectator could understand the fundamental aspects of his work, issues such as the body, sexuality and fetishes. “It is an exhibition that also brings the multiplicity of materials through which Tunga expressed his erotic imagination, a major driver of his creative process”, says Venancio Filho, who met the artist when he was just 19 years old.

As in the 2021-2022 retrospective, Venancio Filho was not concerned with establishing a hierarchy or a chronology between the works presented. “This goes against the spirit of Tunga's work, which is something like the Möbius strip [an infinity symbol, created in 1858 by the German mathematician and astronomer August Ferdinand Möbius], which goes back and forth, elements that appear and reappear throughout of its trajectory”.

On display are Tunga's first abstract drawings – “more gestural, less figurative”, emphasizes the curator –, to the artist's most emblematic works, such as the *Exogenous Axes*, female profiles cut from wooden trunks, until her last series of drawings, *From La Voie Humide* and the sculptures from the series *Morphological*, both from 2014. Among the surprises promised by the curator are three drawings inspired by the work of Tarsila do Amaral, “very rarely seen”, “very rare things”, created at the turn of the 1970s to the 1980s.



the sculpture *Venus*, which names the show, was Tunga's first large-scale work, recalls the curator. Composed of rubber, lamp, electrical material, metal and plastic fly, it measures 183 x 250 x 93 cm. "It has this title that reveals much of his erotic thinking, in an artifice with the name in which he separates 'see' from 'nude' with a hyphen. And, for me, when we talked about this work, I saw a certain relationship with *the big glass* [1915-1923], by Marcel Duchamp, in the separation between the bride and her suitors, which Tunga reconfigures. Because Tunga is from a period when Duchamp started to influence Brazilian art. However, the majority were influenced by the conceptual path, by readymades, as is the case with Cildo Meireles. While Tunga was touched by the surrealist side and the eroticism of Duchamp", he explains.



Venancio Filho hopes that the exhibition, after an absence of eight years of Tunga's works from the North American scene, and almost four, from the international scene – in 2019, the Franco Noero gallery, from Italy, held an individual with his works – will replace the Brazilian within the importance it has for contemporary art. And that the works presented there may be of interest to large institutions in the United States or Europe. It is worth remembering that Tunga is already present in foreign institutions such as the Guggenheim, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Reina Sofía, the Tate and the Pérez Art Museum Miami, among others.

For Roland Augustine, founding partner of the gallery alongside Lawrence Luhring, *Venus* marks a resumption and also a restart of the artist's representation by the gallery.

"We had five solo exhibitions by Tunga over the last 25 years. But we included his works in many collective shows during that time. The last one, from 2014, was a continuation of the work he was focused on at the time, with the use of crystals, ceramics, etc. Now, our goal was to show aspects of his work that many don't know about, namely his drawings, alongside sculptures that are somehow related to them", highlights Augustine, who also represents Lygia Clark in the USA.

The gallerist met Tunga on the recommendation of the French curator Marc Pottier, after the 22nd Bienal de São Paulo, in 1994, in which the artist had presented *milk caddies*, a gigantic set of cast iron pieces, in the shape of bells, bathed in a viscous and whitish matter. At the time, Augustine was helping the Halle family of collectors, from the USA, to assemble a collection of Latin American works, and the work was acquired. In 1997, it was loaned to the Bard College museum for an exhibition about the artist.

“That was a baptism of fire. Immerse yourself in Tunga's work. And, since my first experience and exposure to his work, his work has remained a mystery to me, because his works are not so accessible, due to their poetic nature”, says the gallerist. “When we started showing his creations in New York, we knew they were unique, esoteric and authentic. And they have not become less, but more complex over time. And there was never really a commercial market for them.”

According to Augustine, however, critical reception has always been positive in New York. Tunga was popular with curators, but not with collectors, which was a bit frustrating for the artist. In Brazil, Tunga's works still fetched good prices, he says, but not half of those figures were reached in the US. In the late 1990s, for example, the gallery sold just one work from the series *Axes exogenous*, for around US\$ 35 at Fiac (Foire internationale d'art contemporain), in Paris, an amount that the gallerist does not consider equal to the artistic production of the Brazilian.

The gallerist compares Tunga to Bruce Nauman, in marketing terms. In the 1960s, he says, the only people who liked the American artist's creations were his craft colleagues. It was only between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the following decade that Nauman's works began to be appreciated and acquired by museums. He imagines that, for Tunga, it will take another ten to 15 years for his work to be assimilated and understood to a greater degree.

“I've been hoping for many years that a museum in the US would embrace the idea of holding a Tunga retrospective. With this exhibition, we hope that the curator of one of these institutions will think, 'My God, now I understand why this man has to be shown in a meaningful way to the public,’” says Augustine.

A FIRST IMPRESSION

Since 2019 curator of Latin American art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), Beverly Adams has been following Tunga's career for over 25 years. In 1998, she had a solo exhibition by the artist at the Phoenix Art Museum, with drawings and sculpture. *Milk Cadents* (1994). Beverly has already been to the Luhning Augustine gallery and highlights the quality of the selection of works and the setting up of the new exhibition.

“It gives the viewer an insight into the arc of Tunga's career, many of his themes and concerns, but in a very subtle and intimate way, through the chosen drawings and sculptures. I learned a lot of new things”, says the curator. “It's great to have his work back in New York, at the gallery that has been an ardent supporter of Tunga over the years, and to allow more people to learn about this great artist and his poetic universe, which interweaves ideas and materials brilliantly in his unique approach to artistic making”.

Beverly also highlights the presence of two creations by the artist in the MoMA collection: *To e cooking crystals*. “There are two key installations by Tunga, one from 1981 and the other, made between 2006 and 2009. It's great to have works from two such different periods in his career. His creations enrich our growing collection of Brazilian art, which is in constant dialogue with other works in the collection”, he concludes.

LISSON GALLERY

e-flux
7 October 2023

Open call: catalogue raisonné

Instituto Tunga



Tunga, *Pitagoras*.

October 7, 2023

Open call: catalogue raisonné

www.tungaoficial.com.br

Instagram

Submission deadline: October 31, 2023, 8am

Tunga, whose actual name was Antônio José de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão, was a sculptor, draughtsman and performance artist, born in Palmares, Pernambuco, Brazil, in 1952. His erudition and philosophical background was reflected in an increasingly conceptual artistic output, which involved the intersection with research in different knowledge fields and a dialogue with literature, philosophy, psychoanalysis and theatre, and even with exact sciences and biology. His powerful, profound and self-referential work denies linear time and relies heavily on materiality, symbologies and processes of transformation and metamorphoses.

Tunga was one of the most important artists on the Brazilian art scene, and the first contemporary artist to exhibit a work in the Pyramid of the Louvre. He participated in key exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale, in 1982, and Documenta in Kassel, in 1992. Today the artist's work is part of museum collections, including MoMA, in New York; the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Houston; Centre Pompidou, in Paris; MACBA, in Barcelona; and Tate Modern, in London.

The Tunga Institute was created in 2017 shortly after the artist's passing, as a non-profit organization whose objective is to study, preserve and disseminate the artist's legacy. In the last 6 years, in partnership with galleries and museums, the Tunga Institute has realized 6 major exhibitions about the artist's work and actively collaborated on 4 publications.

The Tunga Institute's current challenge is the development of the artist's catalogue raisonné—a bilingual, online publication that offers free access to the complete two-dimensional works by the artist.

With the support of Banco Itaú and the Basic Sanitation Company of the State of São Paulo (Sabesp), Tunga's catalogue raisonné will bring together all two-dimensional works by Tunga, organized by theme, medium and chronology, as well as their references: citations and/or reproductions in books, newspaper clippings, letters, photographs, and exhibition catalogues.

The Tunga Institute has also started the certification of two-dimensional artworks by the artist, through a precise identification and authentication process.

Owners of two-dimensional artworks are invited to get in touch by e-mail at [cr \[at\] institutotunga.com](mailto:cr[at]institutotunga.com).

LISSON GALLERY

The Art Newspaper
14 December 2021



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Brazil's Black Art Museum takes up residence at Inhotim sculpture park

Founded by artist Abdias Nascimento, the institution will stage a series of four exhibitions at Inhotim over the next two years

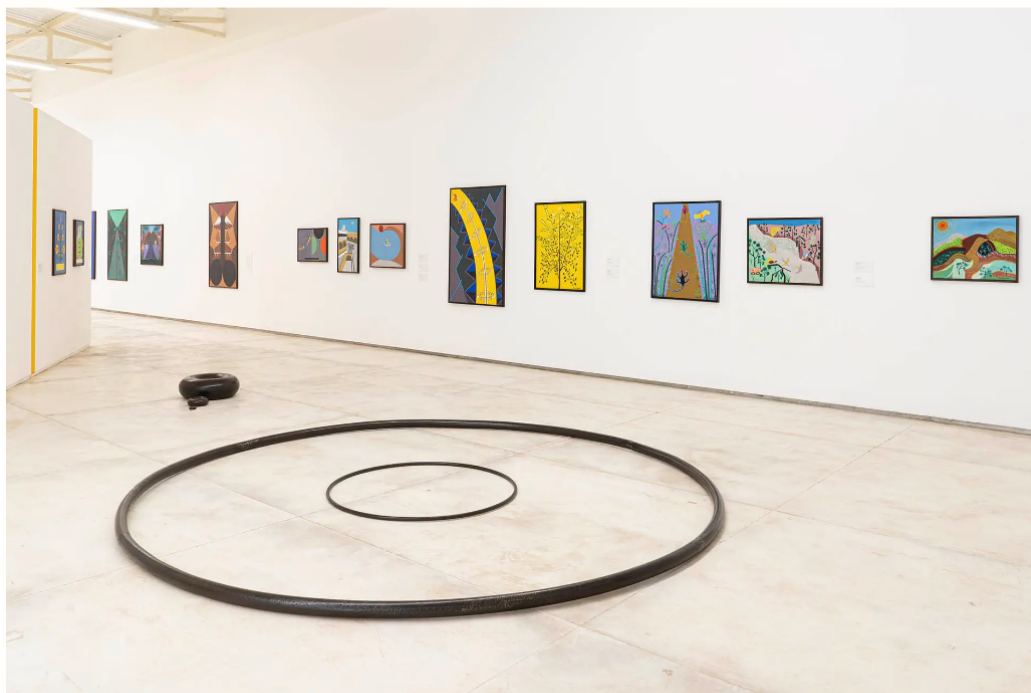


Abdias Nascimento, *Cafezal* (undated)
Courtesy Black Art Museum Collection - IPEAFRO

Ten years after the death of renowned Afro-Brazilian artist, activist, scholar and poet Abdias Nascimento (1914-2011), a two-year project will bring his legacy to Brazil's most popular contemporary sculpture park. The collaboration will introduce the Museu de Arte Negra (Black Art Museum) to a wider public and expand on Nascimento's legacy.

"Abdias Nascimento and Black Art Museum" is a joint project between Inhotim and the Institute for Afro-Brazilian Research and Studies (IPEAFRO). "There was no unilateral decision, but a consensus between the two institutions," says Douglas de Freitas, curator of Inhotim. Beginning this month and through December 2023, the Black Art Museum (which ultimately hopes to secure a permanent home) will reside within Inhotim's gallery spaces, with a series of exhibitions divided into four acts.

The collaboration opened with the *Abdias Nascimento, Tunga and the Black Art Museum*, which presents a dialogue between Nascimento and his longtime friend, the late Brazilian sculptor Tunga. "The idea in this first act is to explore the Black Art Museum and Nascimento's work through Tunga, who is an extremely important artist in Inhotim's collection," de Freitas says. "Abdias Nascimento was longtime friends with the poet Gerardo Mello Mourão, Tunga's father, and Tunga grew up in contact with Nascimento and his work."

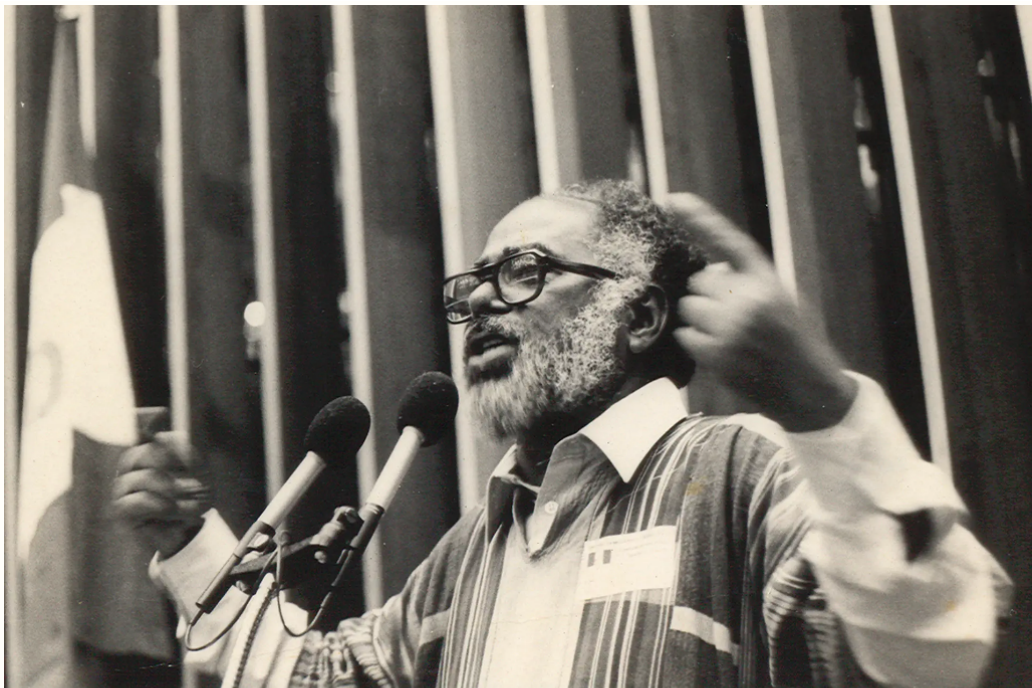


Installation view of *Abdias Nascimento, Tunga and the Black Art Museum* at Galeria Mata, Inhotim
Courtesy Inhotim Institute

Paintings, photographs, drawings, prints and installations are being exhibited in the shows “in addition to a rich collection of documents that tells parts of Brazilian culture, with Black people as protagonists,” says Deri Andrade, Inhotim’s assistant curator. The first act is an overview of the aesthetic and thematic connections between Tunga’s and Nascimento’s work, the second and third acts will be expansive presentations of the Black Art Museum’s collection and the fourth act will be a comprehensive exhibition focused on Nascimento’s work.

A 2010 Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Nascimento had a long trajectory in activism, fighting racism and promoting the multifaceted creations of Black artists from Brazil and beyond. IPEAFRO was created to bring Black heritage to the attention of schools, policymakers and educators. “The Black Art Museum collection has been under the care of IPEAFRO for more than 40 years,” says Elisa Larkin Nascimento, Nascimento’s widow and co-founder of the institute. “Abdias Nascimento and I founded IPEAFRO to deliver to Brazil his own works, created in exile, as well as pieces that African and African American artists donated to the Black Art Museum while he was in exile.”

Between the late 1960s and early 1980s Nascimento lived and worked in Nigeria and the United States in forced exile due to police oppression and Brazil’s authoritarian regime. “He had no choice in 1968 but to remain outside the country, given persecution against him in the form of multiple military police investigations at the time of the Fifth Institutional Act, which closed Congress and introduced a period of intense and violent repression, torture and political assassinations,” Larkin Nascimento says.



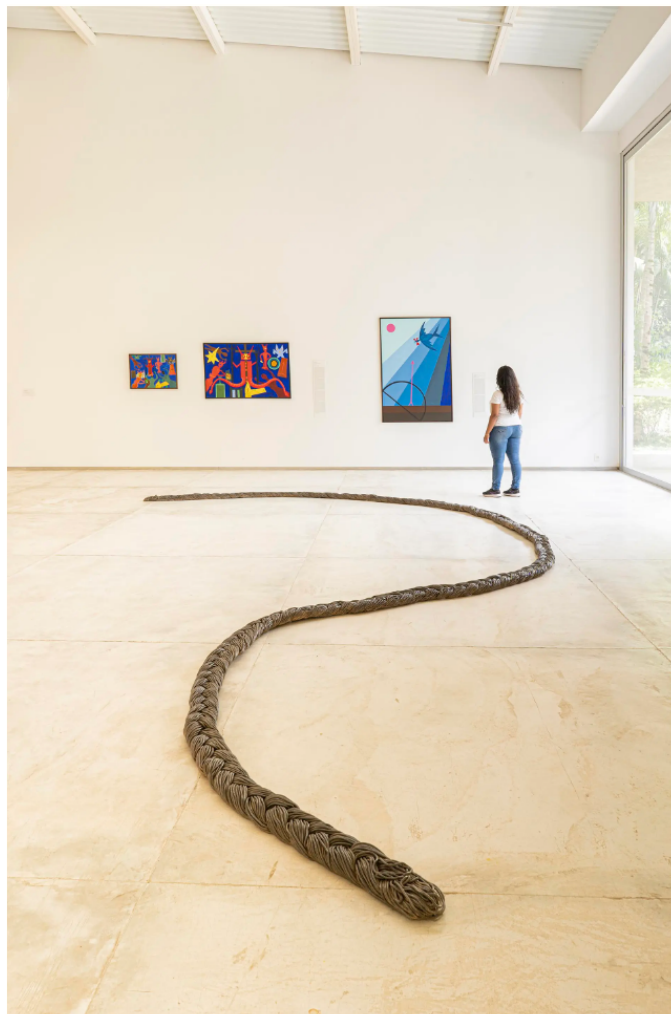
Abdias Nascimento in the gallery of the Chamber of Deputies, National Convention of the Democratic Labour Party, 1982

Photo by Elisa Larkin Nascimento, IPEAFRO Collection

During those periods he took an active role in the Pan-African movement, participating in social and political events in the fight for civil rights and highlighting issues Black people faced. Even though Nascimento's experiences outside Brazil "enriched and strengthened his artistic, political and activist work", his basic intellectual and political formation was already developed before leaving the country, Larkin Nascimento says. "He could speak freely and develop his thought more deeply outside the context of absolute hegemony of the 'racial democracy' myth that reigned in Brazil."

All of those experiences contributed to Nascimento's extensive work in the visual arts, raising awareness of the Black experience, addressing the religious cultures of the African diaspora and resistance to slavery and racism. "He developed his painting, incorporating African epistemological symbology like Adinkra, Haitian Veve, and Egyptian visual references," Larkin Nascimento says. The experience of life in exile was also pivotal in the creation of the Black Art Museum, which was founded in 1981.

"Colonialism and anti-African racism are essentially similar phenomena in Nigeria, Brazil and the United States," Larkin Nascimento adds. "Nascimento's experience and understanding of them in his homeland did not differ in essence but was informed by diverse contours in his experience abroad."



Installation view of Abdias Nascimento, *Tunga* and the Black Art Museum at Galeria Mata, Inhotim
Courtesy Inhotim Institute

For Inhotim, which is currently marking its 15th anniversary, the collaboration is an opportunity to connect with new publics in the surrounding region and beyond. “Inhotim and IPEAFRO seek to expand the discussions beyond the exhibitions scheduled, aiming for greater contact with the communities of Quilombola remnants in the region where Inhotim is installed,” says Andrade. “We also aim to provide the circulation of the ideas of Abdias Nascimento and other intellectuals of the Black movement, organising debates within a public program that is being developed as part of the project.”

Larkin Nascimento is optimistic the collaborative project will lead to changes not just in the art world but on a larger scale in Brazilian society. “We hope that this visibility will open new horizons for protagonists of Black arts and culture. But we also understand that this is a moment of enormous and growing inequalities,” she says. “Black and native people in Brazil are the hardest hit by neoliberal policies that spend billions to feed banks and financial speculation, while the population starves. We have called on Inhotim to engage with us in reparative actions capable of addressing some of these issues.”

- Abdias Nascimento, Tunga and the Black Art Museum *opened at the [Inhotim Institute](#)* [↗](#), Brumadinho, Brazil, on 4 December

LISSON GALLERY

Frieze

22 February 2019

FRIEZE

The Double Life of Tunga (1952-2016)

The late Brazilian artist's retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, is a delicate exploration of his multi-faceted practice



Tunga was born in two cities at the same time – or so he'd like you to believe. Throughout his prolific career, the late Brazilian artist (1952–2016) often said he was registered in two locations: Palmares in Pernambuco and the city of Rio de Janeiro. Might another Tunga, his double, still be roaming around? This kind of deliberate self-mythology, an important aspect of his practice, is clearly visible in this exhibition, curated by Luisa Duarte and Evandro Salles, which spans four decades of Tunga's work and includes extensive archival material across an entire floor. Rather than attempting a proper retrospective, this precise and thoughtful show focuses on the artist's process and references – from psychoanalysis and pure math to poetry and alchemy – by delving into his drawing practice. A quieter, but no less intense, version of Tunga – best known for his gimmicky and erotically charged large-scale sculptures and installations – comes through in delicate tracings of biomorphic forms. I could spend hours following the single lines that generate surrealist bodily images over the pale hues of handmade Himalayan paper in the series 'La Voie humide' (The Humid Way, 2011–14): female genitals become pearls that grow legs and then transform into wings. Tunga plays perverse mind games with an astonishing lightness of touch. Like a charming puppeteer, he seems to hold strings that guide us through his mysterious universe, letting us go only when he pleases.



Tunga, from the series 'Moforológicas' (Morphological), 2014-17, bronze. Courtesy: Museum of Modern Art Rio de Janeiro

Over the past few decades, almost all of the most prominent Brazilian art critics have written about Tunga; yet, there is still something about his work that seems impossible to articulate, a kind of pure presence. Duarte and Salles's non-chronological, coiled exhibition is a sensitive homage to the artist's highly aestheticized philosophical and mystical concerns. Beginning with Tunga's early arcane and open-ended symbolic forms from the 1970s, the exhibition also features landmark works from the 1980s and '90s, such as his seminal video *ÁO* (1981), in which a camera loops around an endless tunnel, and *Vanguarda viperina* (Viperine Avant-Garde, 1985), with its disturbing scenes of braided living snakes. A group of stunning 2014 studies for his final 'Morphological' series – dozens of small, bronze cast clay sculptures, hand-moulded and spread atop a large table – leads to a smaller, more intimate gallery, where a series of shape-shifting erotic drawings ('Ethers', 2010) exhibit a sensuality more explicit than in the artist's better-known installations.



Tunga, *Palíndromo incesto* (Palindrome Incest), 1991, mixed media on paper. Courtesy: Museum of Modern Art Rio de Janeiro

Although the exhibition focuses on Tunga's drawing practice, its largely two-dimensional display is punctuated by a few well-selected floor sculptures. One of the most remarkable pieces in the show, *Lucido nigredo (conjunto discreto)* (Discreet Group, 1999), features an array of dark materials such as felt, iron dust, magnets, sponges and bristle brushes, mixed with small glass balls and shards of blown bell jars. The contrast between matte black material and sharp, glistening glass transmits the energy of matter in transformation, a kind of alchemical effect the artist mastered throughout his career.

In Tunga's photographic records of a 1987 seashore performance titled *Seeding Mermaids*, we see the artist turned away from us as he spins a long-haired cast of his own head, before throwing it back into the sea. To explain this image, Tunga once wrote that he had taken a walk on the shore and discovered his own severed head attached to long strands of puddled hair. In his text, the idea of sowing mermaids is associated with the cultivation of the mandrake, a black-flowered plant that grows by gates to the underworld. The image is an amalgam of masculine and feminine in motion, somewhere between life and death, and – like the artist's own personal narrative – somewhere between reality and myth.

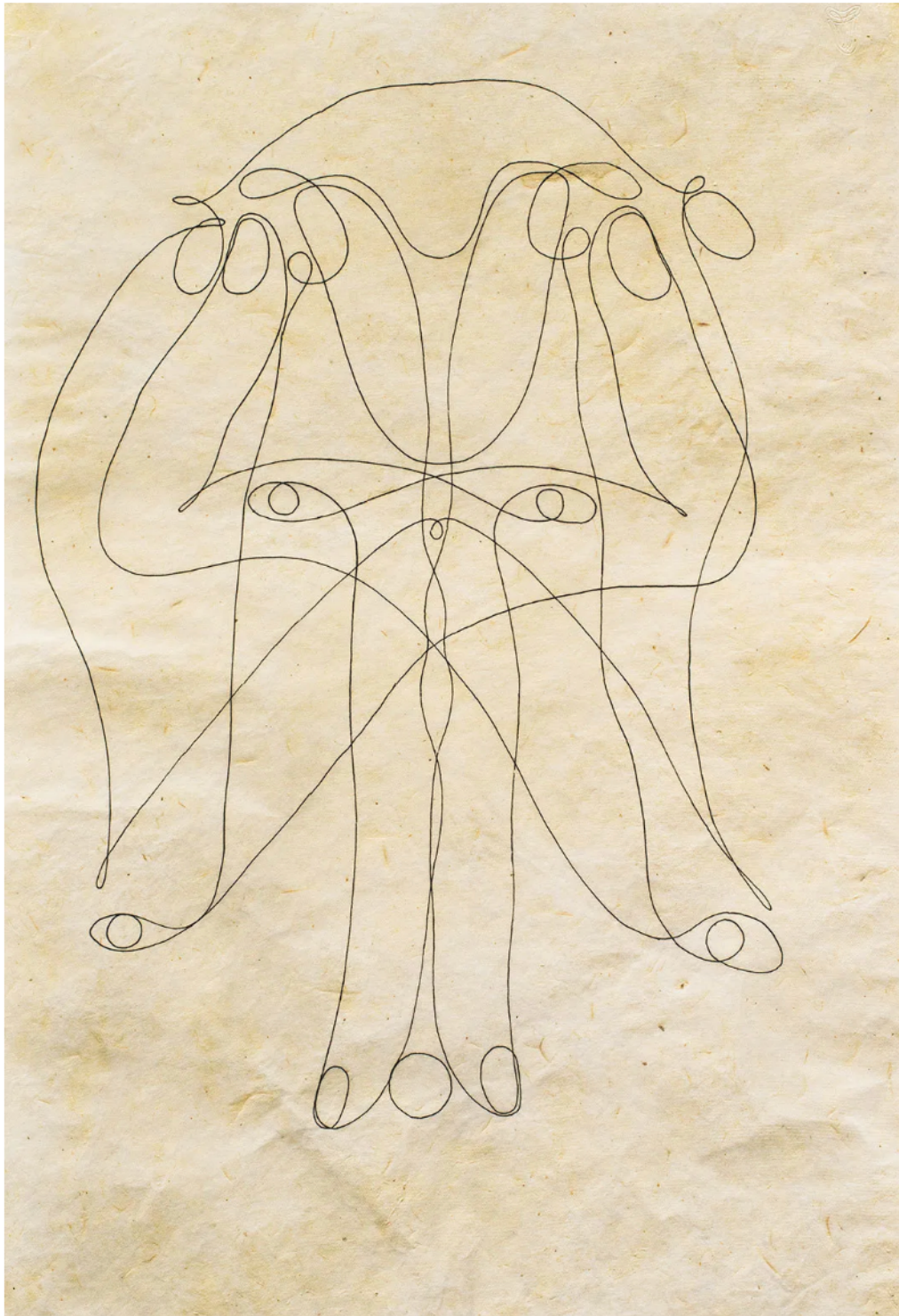
'Tunga: O Rigor da Distração' was on view at the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 30 June until 4 November 2018.

LISSON GALLERY

Artforum
1 October 2018

ARTFORUM

Tunga



Tunga, *Untitled*, 2011, ink on paper, 29 7/8 × 20". From the series "La voie humide," 2011-16.

There is a stark contrast between this exhibition, “*O rigor da distração*” (The Rigor of Distraction), and the first retrospective after Tunga’s death in 2016, “*O corpo em obras*” (The Body in Works), held earlier this year at the São Paulo Museum of Art. While the earlier show presented a conventional display organized around discrete sculptural works, the show in Rio de Janeiro, curated by Luisa Duarte and Evandro Salles, focuses on drawing and presents it as a generative force rather than a stable medium. Given the protean nature of Tunga’s oeuvre, with its plethora of materials, multiple media, and elliptical narratives forming an elusive but palpable cohesiveness, this is a productive emphasis that clarifies his work’s trajectory.

One way of making sense of the show, and of Tunga’s investment in drawing, is to track linearity itself as it becomes polymorphous. *O perverso*, 1974, for example, can be read as a series of meditations on drawn lines that are driven by energy rather than purpose: Instead of connecting two points or fulfilling a projective function, the lines seem always on the verge of either exhausting themselves or culminating in a cloudy diffusion of black ink. As for the drawings of the series “*Vê-Nus*,” 1976–77—whose title literally translates as *See-Nudes* and alludes to the Roman goddess of love—their saturated black oblong shapes hovering on the charcoal-stained paper might seem to have little to do with line, were it not for small sections of their contours traced in minute and regular zigzags. It is as if that wavy, linear regularity corresponds to a well-nigh erotic striation at the edge of an otherwise indistinct and deep black pool, so that our sudden awareness of it draws our attention away from the color field over which it might otherwise roam diffusely.

The reference to the nude in such a context might seem extraneous, but this dialectic of innervation and release is actually at the base of Tunga’s constant appeal to eroticism. At first sight, *Eixo exógeno* (Exogenous Axis), 1986, appears to be a perfectly symmetric, elongated and baroquely delineated wooden pillar with a chalice-like metal top. But its material shape is only half the story, for, once again, the erotically charged contemplation of the nude is fundamentally at stake: The sculpture actually materializes the negative space between twin female bodies facing each other. But we perceive their profiles only by focusing strictly on the sculpture’s contour, which draws our attention away from the work’s sensuous material surface.

Thus, the logic of drawing inflects Tunga's work in other media, such as sculpture, film, performance, and photography. To keep track of it is also to note the common thread that binds his many fictional displacements together. An untitled work from 1984 comprising a long hair braid sculpted in lead is yet another instance in which linearity is submitted to and emerges from a regular formal organization that is nevertheless haunted by an uncontrollable sense of excess. Likewise, the three snakes that are shown sedated and braided together in the photograph *A vanguardia viperina* (The Viperine Avant-Garde), 1985, are tokens of an obdurate potentiality that resists instrumental manipulation; the film *O nervo de prata* (The Silver Nerve), 1987, directed by Arthur Omar, follows the snakes as they wake up and zigzag away, thus undoing the arrangement.

In more recent drawings and objects—the latter often overtly erotic—Tunga's Surrealist affinities verge closer to the imaginary orbit of André Breton and Maria Martins, thus defusing some of the anti-representational, Batailleian charge that permeated his earlier production. The later objects, in particular, seem framed by a far more stable kind of symbolism than the sculptures from the 1970s and '80s. And yet, in the very late series "*La voie humide*" (The Humid Way), 2011–16, Tunga traced virtuoso ribald arabesques by pen, resorting only rarely to straight lines and broken edges. By describing figures whose symmetry nevertheless fails to contain the flowing energy of the line, Tunga ultimately deflated the very symbolism he sometimes flirted with, and, in precisely this way, he remained faithful to the libidinal thrust of drawing.

Hyperallergic
08 June 2016

HYPERALLERGIC

Tunga, Brazilian Artist Known for His Alchemical and Monumental Work, Dies at 64



Detail of Tunga's "Portals" (2011) at the Chateau La Coste sculpture park in Provence, France (photo by Benjamin Sutton for Hyperallergic)

On Monday, [Tunga](#), one of Brazil's most prized artists, [died](#) of cancer at the age of 64 in Rio de Janeiro, where he resided for most of his life. Born Antônio José de Barros de Carvalho e Melo Mourão in 1952 in Palmares, in the northeastern state of Pernambuco, Tunga moved to Rio after living in exile with his parents in Chile during the Brazilian dictatorship — his mother was a social activist and his father the famous poet [Gerardo Melo Mourão](#). Tunga trained as an architect but jumpstarted his visual art career at the early age of 22 with a typically daring and sensual exhibit, *Museu da Masturbação Infantil* ("Museum of Childhood Masturbation"), at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro. The exhibition consisted of abstracted and figurative drawings of genitalia and bodies titled "O Perverso (The Pervert)" or "Pensamentos (Thoughts)."

While Tunga continued to make drawings throughout his career, it is his sculptures and installations that have captured attention in their unlikely yet fluid assemblages, combining lead, lamps, bones, iron, glass, hair, and liquid. “To make art is to join things,” he often [said](#). In his works, nets spill into flasks and tubes weave through lamps, making connections between things generally seen as distinct until material boundaries dissolve.



One of Tunga’s installation at Inhotim in Minas Gerais, Brazil (photo by [Josep/Flickr](#)) (click to enlarge)

“In the aggregate of experiences, even the most banal ones, one finds a built-in poetry; this is how in washing one’s hands successive times one can consider a bar of soap a sculpture,” Tunga [said](#) in an interview.

In some ways, he took after the [Neoconcrete artists](#) of Rio de Janeiro a decade earlier, particularly [Hélio Oiticica](#) and [Lygia Clark](#), with a shared emphasis on texture, physicality, and enveloping installations. Only Tunga’s work is rougher, busier, tenser, baroque — in a positive and provocative sense. From his [hanging installation](#) in the Louvre’s Pyramid in 2005 — the museum’s first contemporary art installation — of hammocks, hair, and hanging skulls, to his installation at [Inhotim](#) of dangling glass containers seemingly filled with blood, Tunga’s constructions are often compared to alchemy experiments while also evoking and almost longing for the human body; indeed, he made a number of performance works that involve moving through and manipulating his sculptural works.

While Tunga has received international acclaim, representing Brazil at the Venice Biennale as early as 1980 and exhibiting at museums like [MoMA PS1](#) in New York, the Jeu de Paume in Paris, and Whitechapel in London, he isn't as widely known as perhaps he should be. In revisiting images of Tunga's dynamic installations, which seem to continually create openings for the viewer to see more and more, [the artist's words](#) come to mind: "there is more mystery in light than in darkness, in death."

ARTnews
07 June 2016

ARTnews

Tunga, One of Brazil's Most Important Contemporary Artists, Dies at 64



Tunga.

COURTESY THE ARTIST

Tunga, the Brazilian artist known for his work about the body and its relationship to its surroundings, died yesterday afternoon of cancer-related causes. He was 64.

Though Tunga has been working since the '70s, it wasn't until the past few years that American audiences have come to appreciate his work. New York's **Luhring Augustine** gallery, which currently represents the artist, cemented Tunga as one of Brazil's most important contemporary artists with several shows of his recent sculptures. Many combine industrial forms with natural ones and feature allusions to genitalia, arms, and hair. Tunga's work draws comparisons to the shamanistic German artist Joseph Beuys, but Tunga's work was less didactic. Drawing on the legacy of Surrealism, his combinations of forms are mysterious and hard to penetrate.

In interviews, Tunga often highlighted the importance of his work's spiritual content, which allows viewers to consider the connection between their bodies and the universe. He said that he preferred this to a drier philosophical or scientific approach, explaining, in **a 2014 interview**, "Each method of transforming matter corresponds to spiritual change. According to alchemical theory, everything we do to matter has repercussions in the spiritual world."

Born in 1952 in Palarmes, Brazil, Tunga studied architecture, but went on to do work in sculpture, performance, and installation. In 2005, he became the first contemporary artist to have a show at the Louvre in Paris.

"Tunga was a tremendous force both personally and artistically, and was as firmly rooted in Brazilian aesthetic, cultural, and philosophical traditions as he was in their international counterparts," Luhring Augustine director Donald Johnson-Montenegro said in a statement. "He was both rigorous and curious in his investigations, and he leaves behind a remarkable legacy through a complex and sensual body of work that is equally distinctive and evocative."



THE ART NEWSPAPER

Brazilian artist Tunga has died aged 64

Known for his surreal sculptures and performances, he was the first contemporary artist to exhibit work at the Louvre

The Brazilian artist Tunga—the first contemporary artist to exhibit works at the Louvre in Paris—died yesterday (6 June) in Rio de Janeiro, aged 64.

“The news came in last night and it was devastating,” says Irina Stark, the sales director at Pilar Corrias gallery, who represented the artist in London from 2008 until last year. Tunga, who was suffering from cancer, had “been in intensive care for the past couple of days. We are all in mourning”.

Art world tributes have begun pouring in for the artist who worked with sculpture, performance and video, and never shied away from the body in his often-surreal works. In interviews with the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, the artist Adriana Varejao called him “a visceral artist, an alchemist” while the sculptor Waltércio Caldas said that Brazil has lost one of its great artists. The curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist posted a tribute image on Instagram while on twitter the Frieze director Victoria Siddall wrote: “Sad to hear of the death of Tunga, Brazilian artist who was only 64 and was still making great work.”

At last year’s edition of Frieze London, a recreation of Tunga’s *Xifopagas Capilares* (conjoined twins) performance from 1984—where two twin girls are joined by their hair—proved to be one of the most memorable works at the fair, scandalising some critics but delighting visitors and Instagrammers alike.

One of Brazil’s best-known contemporary artists, Tunga was born Antonio José de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão in 1952 in Palmares, Brazil. He represented Brazil at Documenta 10 in 1997 with the performance *Debaixo do meu chapéu* (under my hat) where seven women dressed in white moved around the city of Kassel carrying a giant hat—the work was reportedly one of the most talked about and photographed at the exhibition. He was also one of the four artists representing Brazil at the Venice Biennale in 2001. Tunga’s *A la Lumiere des Deux Mondes* (the meeting of two worlds) installation at the Louvre in 2005 was the first exhibition by a contemporary artist in the Paris museum.

Art in America
21 June 2016

Art in America

A Tribute to Tunga (1952-2016)

Inspired by Hellenistic poetry and medieval alchemy, Brazilian artist **Tunga** created sculptures, installations, and performances over the past three decades that made him one of **Brazil's** best known and most influential artists. Acclaimed for his imaginative and sensuous works using unorthodox materials and novel means of display, plus erotically charged performances that sometimes featured dozens of nude performers, Tunga was a pioneer. He remained conscious, however, of his work's position among the traditions of Western art, and of his place within **Latin America's** avant-garde. He showed all over the world, and was, notably, the first contemporary artist invited to create an exhibition for the Louvre in Paris—"The Meeting of Two Worlds," 2005. He had been ill for the last year, but his death from cancer on June 6 at age 64, in **Rio de Janeiro**, seemed sudden and shocking to many.

Since his passing, a myriad of art-world tributes have appeared in the international press as well as on social media. Many regard Tunga, born Antônio José de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão, as an "artist's artist." Proof of that assessment came in the form of recent emails to *A.i.A.* from a number of his art-world friends following a memorial service they attended June 15 at the Centro de Arte Contemporânea Inhotim, a contemporary art museum and vast sculpture park located in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. A large pavilion devoted to Tunga's work opened there in September 2012.

"Tunga was essential to the development of contemporary Brazilian art," artist **Beatriz Milhazes** wrote. "His work influenced a generation, including artists such as **Jac Leirner** and Ernesto Neto. Tunga was an alchemist, an eternal inventor. His ever-changing process was organic. He made his life his work, and his work his life. He was a performer, a character without limits, always 'acting.' It feels strange to consider that we will no longer see him circulating in the art world."

Representative of a younger generation of Brazilian artists, **Nuno Ramos** added, "Tunga brought lots of fresh air to Brazilian art. I'd describe his legacy as a unique mix of Brazilian constructivism and pure imagination. He brought forth images in a way that no one before him did. To my mind, he used two main forces as organizing principals in his work: a kind of recycled entropic energy—the sense of Mobius movement that he learned from [leading Brazilian Constructivist and Tropicália artist] **Lygia Clark**—and a centrifugal force that his imagination allowed him to access. This was something absolutely original."

Adding to the tributes, Tunga's longtime New York representative and dealer, Roland Augustine of **Luhring Augustine** gallery in Chelsea, wrote from Basel, Switzerland, where Tunga's massive 2014 installation *Eu, você e a lua* (*Me, you and the moon*), made of iron, steel, petrified wood, bronze, plaster, ceramics, glass, and quartz crystal, was featured at this year's edition of Art Basel.

"My first encounter with Tunga's work," Augustine said, "was when I saw his celebratory yet solemn bronze bells lying in the weeds in a São Paulo park, left adrift for months following the São Paulo Bienal of 1994... What separated Tunga from his contemporaries was his singular and ferocious investigation into the mythological, the alchemical, and the poetical springs that foreground our histories. The man was a true artist in every sense—unimpeachable and uncompromising, thoughtful and generous of spirit. He veered into realms that are so vital to our understanding of humankind."

Still struggling to come to terms with Tunga's death, his longtime friend and colleague, Rio-based artist José Damasceno remarked, "I met Tunga twenty-four years ago, precisely when I was beginning my own investigations into art. Tunga was an extraordinary personality and someone who had at his disposal wisdom and erudition that was unusual, always coupled with wit and brilliant critical thinking. From Tunga I learned to consider space differently—its limits, continuities, and qualities. I learned that the unknown is essential for structuring thought—a factor that conducts and transforms the spirit. Tunga showed by example that an artist must embody a unique synthesis of the theoretical and the practical. Above all, poetry must always prevail in one's work as a vital parameter. And none of this can be contemplated or realized without a sense of unrestricted humor."

Humor was always central to my own interactions with Tunga, and we laughed a lot. He was charming and eloquent, and, even with limited skills in English, nonchalantly charismatic. But he could be shy in certain social situations. When I accompanied him and his then-wife Cordelia to Pace Gallery's fiftieth anniversary bash in 2010, in Chelsea, he was interested in meeting some of his heroes who were there, such as John Chamberlain and Claes Oldenburg; but he felt rather diffident at the event, and became anxious to leave after a short time.

He was most comfortable when focused on his work. Tunga was a voracious reader—favoring history, philosophy, and psychoanalysis—and he had great respect for writers. One of the most rewarding experiences I had with him was when we collaborated on a 2012 article for *A.i.A.*, "**Poetic Glue.**" During visits with him in Rio and in New York, he patiently showed and discussed his new projects—large-scale sculptures being produced in his studio on the outskirts of Rio, or intimate and ethereal watercolors he created in his spacious and airy house nearby, with its meandering terraces overlooking a luxuriant, verdant garden. He was, however, equally generous with his time and attention to younger artists, and being with him usually included visits to exhibitions or studios to see works by young or emerging artists that he felt were strong and significant. To those artists, Tunga's formidable legacy will certainly be felt for many years to come.

Artforum
October 2016

ARTFORUM

TUNGA

By Sérgio B. Martins



Tunga, *Xifópagas capilares* (Capillary Siamese Twins), 1984. Performance view, Kanaal Art Foundation, Kortrijk, Belgium, 1989. Photo: Gilles Hutchinson.

LEGEND HAS IT that the Brazilian modernist master Alberto da Veiga Guignard was a guest in the house of an eminent Rio de Janeiro politician when he produced one of his best-known works, a large portrait of his host's twin daughters, *As gêmeas* (The Twins), 1940. The painting is an enigmatic study in likeness and difference: The sisters wear identical dresses and similar hairdos, yet their faces remain distinct. They are linked most of all by the ornate colonial settee on which they are perched, its carved wooden swirls merging with their curls. It is an uncanny image, all the more so with the retrospective knowledge that one of the sitters was the future mother of the groundbreaking artist Tunga (full name: Antonio José de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão), whose recurrent motif of prepubescent twins connected by their hair—most famously explored in the performance *Xifópagas capilares* (Capillary Siamese Twins), 1984—catalyzes a series of visual, material, and fictional slippages that run through his multifaceted oeuvre. Tunga was reportedly wary of the anecdote, fearing that it might provide an all-too-easy interpretive crutch for his seductively hermetic work. Yet what if we conceive of Guignard's painting not as a point of origin or primal scene, but as a screen or a diversion against originality per se, in which the search for meaning might be detoured rather than satisfied?

Indeed, for more than four decades, Tunga consistently worked to undermine any single interpretation of his practice by following a strikingly antisciplinary approach, one that pulled together and reoriented diverse fields of knowledge—from the scientific to the philosophical to the mystical. By generating a string of virtuoso mythopoeic displacements, the artist explored affinities between varied strands of thought that run utterly counter to the safe manipulation of knowledge by “legitimate” specialists such as scholars, even those who claim to be experts in interdisciplinarity itself. If Tunga repeatedly appears in his own works, it is not as an authority figure or Beuysian spiritual leader but, as curator Carlos Basualdo neatly put it, as a “philosophic clown, the master of ceremonies in a circus of incarnate ideas.” Nothing could be further from the post-Conceptual tendency to turn artistic production into quasi-academic research: Although ostensibly critically oriented, the works that result from such processes are often deeply conservative in their reliance on the authority of disciplinary knowledge, presenting viewers with safely packaged and largely predetermined meaning. Tunga, by contrast, immobilizes and disconcerts viewers who cannot bear to face his works without unpacking them first.

Laminadas almas (Laminated Souls), 2004, for example, might be read as an exuberant parody of scientism. In one version of the performance, the conjoined sisters of his earlier works gave way to twin male scientists, their roles performed by artists Thiago and Matheus Rocha Pitta. These researchers sat at lab benches and carefully studied fly maggots under microscopes, surrounded by the hubbub of thousands of adult flies, as nude dancers performed a dance meant to evoke the process of a larva metamorphosing into an adult insect. The brothers’ secluded position amid this chaos felt ambivalent: Did it imply scientific detachment or demiurgic transcendence? Such visions of excess are common in Tunga’s oeuvre, but so is the concision of works such as *Ão*, 1981, a mixed-media installation that includes a film shot in a curved section of a tunnel in Rio and then edited into a continuous loop. This endless cycle is redoubled by the actual film strip, which, after exiting the projector, runs through rollers scattered around the room, encircling viewers before feeding into the projector once again. In its spatial engagement with the mechanics of projection itself, *Ão* may recall structural film. But it is rather an imaginative, mathematically

inflected meditation on the relationship between the film and the site of its production, with the loop of celluloid suggesting a torus-shaped hollow carved out from a twin-peaked Rio mountain fittingly named Dois Irmãos (Two Brothers). As the artist's longtime friend and critical champion Paulo Sérgio Duarte argued, this work is the utmost example of the singularity of Tunga's "inside out" sculptural logic, with forms that precipitate out of vertiginous relays between narrative and image. References to Brazilian Baroque art and architecture, to Lygia Clark's "phantasmatic of the body," and to Lacanian topologies all come to mind, and yet the work remains steadfastly resistant to the sway of influence.

Tunga's untimely death this past June sent shock waves across Brazil and abroad, which are bound to resonate through the realm of contemporary art history as well. How the field will begin accounting for an oeuvre that is as central as it is eccentric remains to be seen. Tunga's defiant voice may have faded, but the challenge posed by his work to the insularity of disciplinary thought remains as urgent as ever.

Sérgio B. Martins is a professor in the history department of the Pontifícia Universidade Católica in Rio de Janeiro and the author of Constructing an Avant-Garde: Art in Brazil, 1949–1979 (MIT Press, 2013).

LISSON GALLERY

The New York Times
22 May 2014

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

Tunga: 'From "La Voie Humide"'



"Element S," a piece in "From 'La Voie Humide,'" an exhibition by the Brazilian artist Tunga at Luhring Augustine. Tunga and Farzad Owrang/Luhring Augustine, New York

Luhring Augustine

531 West 24th Street, Chelsea

Through May 31

Art is full of surprises, and so are artists. I have never been a big fan of the Brazilian artist Tunga, a sculptor, performance artist and filmmaker now in his early 60s who is best known for extravagant installations that intimate alchemy and use exotic materials like orbs of colored glass.

In fact I confess to not keeping up with his New York shows. So his latest exhibition is a pleasant shock and by far the most convincing display of his work I've yet seen.

The pieces are pared down, concentrated and clearer — less gimmicky and altogether lighter in color and mood. They don't seek to overwhelm. They suggest an artist who has turned back to art history not just to grab motifs but to transform them in fruitful ways. They maintain certain signature Tunga forms, including the steel tripods and allusions to caldrons and alchemy. (The series' title, "La Voie Humide" or "The Humid Way," pertains to the more romantic, less scientific side of alchemy.) But mainly these pieces build on the vocabularies of body-oriented Surrealist types — young Dali, Yves Tanguy, Hans Bellmer and Balthus — abstracting them into suggestive three-dimensional shapes that seem both benign and perverse. Pinkish flesh tones prevail in unglazed terra cotta bowls and pieces of rubber. These contrast strikingly with the dark metal structures supporting them, which form a kind of drawing in space: the greenish bronze implements and raw materials like quartz crystal and gum Arabic.

With titles like "Aurora," "Eros" and "The Bather," these new pieces invite feminist objections, but they are vastly preferable to Tunga's performances, which in photographs at least, indicate an overuse of naked women. The latest Tungas are best taken as belated Surrealist sculptures that nonetheless feel contemporary.

LISSON GALLERY

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Art in America

Alchemical Procedures: An Interview with Tunga



Brazilian artist **Tunga** has, in recent years, developed an elaborate, idiosyncratic cosmology. Grounded in literary sources such as Poe and Mallarmé, his work reflects the artist's psychoanalytic research and features an imaginative interpretation of esoteric sciences, especially alchemy. Encompassing a wide array of materials, forms and processes, often with a performative component, his complex sculptures and installations appear to result from some arcane ritual activity.

Not quite an artist-shaman in the mold of Joseph Beuys, the **Rio de Janeiro**-based artist, 61, is less didactic and more lyrical in his approach. "From 'La Voie Humide,'" a show of his most recent sculptures and drawings now on view at New York gallery **Luhring Augustine** (through May 31), includes nine multipart sculptures, which are more like compact installations. In each work, a steel tripod-shaped armature averaging 7 feet tall holds various organic shapes in bronze and plaster that recall body parts like ears and fingers. Large terracotta vessels often filled with crystals, sponges and pearls hint at beguiling narratives.

Lining the walls of a rear gallery is a group of sensuous line drawings in ink on vellum-like parchment. These mandalalike compositions show abstracted nudes, body parts and sexual organs that correspond to similar shapes and contours in the 3-D works. All of the pieces in the show hover between abstraction and figuration. Tunga recently invited *A.i.A.* to tour the exhibition.

DAVID EBONY Why did you title the show “From ‘La Voie Humide’”?

TUNGA It’s a reference to alchemy, from ancient Greece through Medieval times: “the humid way,” or “the wet way.” There are two basic techniques to transform matter: first is the humid way, with organic or fluid materials and use of the senses. The second, the dry method, would be through the intellect. Philosophy and science, for instance, would result from this process. Each method of transforming matter corresponds to spiritual change. According to alchemical theory, everything we do to matter has repercussions in the spiritual world.

EBONY What are we seeing in the new sculptures?

TUNGA We are looking at bodies, basically. Each is a figure presented in different ways—in morphological and topological terms using varied organic shapes. But they are not recognizable as bodies at first. I’m trying to suggest a moment just before that recognition. The idea relates to the pre-mirror stage in psychoanalytic theory, the moment just before a child recognizes his or her body reflected in a mirror. The child doesn’t yet have an identity, or its identity is not yet fully formed.

EBONY *From the Skin* features a large terracotta bowl filled with blocks of makeup of various skin tones. It recalls some of your earlier works, in which performers smeared makeup all over the sculptures and themselves. Is this the residue of a performance?

TUNGA Here the makeup is dry. It simply refers to the skin of the sculpture, and in a symbolic way to the skin of the body. There wasn’t a performance that went with the new pieces, although most of them do imply a performance.

EBONY How do you start? Can you talk a bit about your process?

TUNGA I start with a drawing, usually using ink on linen. The drawing suggests a visual narrative that I transpose to sculptural form. Sometimes the source drawing becomes part of the work, loosely attached to the tripod. The drawings indicate body parts and abstract symbols. Disk shapes representing the moon or the sun reappear in the sculptures. The white ceramic bowl-like objects represent the sun, and the blue ones the moon. You can regard the drawings as a kind of musical score that guides the sculptures. They might look spontaneous, but in fact they’re carefully constructed.

EBONY The materials are very strange and interesting. How do you choose them?

TUNGA Most are organic materials, minerals or substances derived from plants. *Elixir*, for example, contains a terracotta vessel filled with tree resin used to make gum Arabic, and another for the sponges and pearls—they're real pearls. There's a sexual symbolism to the materials. Pearls, for instance, have an easy association with sperm. I try to push the materials as far as possible in assigning them a symbolic function.

EBONY Is there a progression to the works? One sculpture seems to evolve to another.

TUNGA Not a progression. There is a congregation, though. In that sense they communicate with one another. One sculpture does evolve from the other. But I've always seen my work as a continuum.

LISSON GALLERY

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ArtReview Tunga



Tunga, *À la Lumière des Deux Mondes*, 2005. Courtesy Mendes Wood, São Paulo

Tunga's 1974 debut exhibition, *Museu da Masturbação Infantil* (*Museum of Childhood Masturbation*), at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, gathered five series of drawings with titles such as *O Perverso* (*The Pervert*) or *Pensamentos* (*Thoughts*), which set out the sharp, provocative tone he would employ throughout his career. Exploring multilayered and often emblematic subjects, the artist scrutinises the poetics of desire, seduction, enigma and ritual. Indeed, he consistently refers to his practice – which spans sculpture, installation, performance, photography, video and drawing – as poetry rather than art. 'I place myself in the poet's role,' he says, 'because I think that poetry is not only something written, spoken or sung. I refer to what is behind poetry, and that's text in any shape, in any language.'

Born Antônio José de Barros de Carvalho e Melo Mourão in the northeastern city of Palmares in 1952, Tunga is the son of notorious writer, poet and journalist Gerardo Melo Mourão and a social-activist mother. The family was forced into exile in Chile by Brazil's military dictatorship, and it was not until the early 1970s that Tunga returned to Rio de Janeiro to pursue a degree in architecture while developing his artistic practice. Since then, the artist – a gentle, well-mannered man who still lives in the urban rainforest of Rio – has gone on to exhibit worldwide, having participated in the Venice (1982, 95) and São Paulo (1981, 87, 94, 98) biennials and Documenta (1997), as well as numerous solo shows.

Tunga has constantly sought to provoke and to challenge the viewer. With *À la Lumière des Deux Mondes* (*At the Light of Both Worlds*, 2005), a site-specific work created for the Louvre's glass pyramid – the first time a contemporary artist had exhibited in the institution – Tunga used one of the building's columns as a pivot on which various symbolically charged objects were balanced: gold and black skulls and a giant walking stick intertwined with braided hair on one side; a chain of skulls caught in a dark net falling towards a floor littered with golden and black reproductions of heads from the Louvre's classical sculptures on the other. Uniting the two poles was a headless skeleton lying in a hammock. Recently the artist has been developing a new series of large-scale untitled sculptures in which magnets fix a diverse range of objects – such as crystals or bottles – to a dark, rectangular doorlike structure. This new series brings together elements from two earlier bodies of work that explore similar materials and symbols: the ominous iron blocks in the artist's various *Lezart* (1989) sculptures, and the magnets, also used in *Lezart* as well as in the later, smaller, more delicate run of assemblages titled *Lúcido Nigredo* (1999). All in all, this new series furthers the restless strategy that Tunga has deployed since his first exhibition: to bring together different elements in a work so that they might be charged with new values.

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