

Gallery 1957

Gallery 1957, London

Gustavo Nazareno: Fables on Exu

Curated by Deri Andrade

29 May – 24 June 2021



Gustavo Nazareno, *Sangue de Papagaio (Parrot Blood)* (detail), 2021, oil on canvas. Courtesy the artist and Gallery 1957.

Gallery 1957 are pleased to present *Fables on Exu*, its first solo exhibition by Afro Brazilian artist Gustavo Nazareno (b.1994), curated by Deri Andrade, on view in the London gallery from May 29 to June 24 2021.

Fables on Exu builds on the artist's interest in Orixá (deity) Exu and in religions of African origin in Brazil, a recurring theme in his works.

Exu is the divinity of African religions who opens the paths. A central character in Nazareno's poetic narrative, the orisha is the great messenger of Yoruba mythology. The guardian of spaces, he is also the mediator between the earthly and the spiritual realms.

Produced in a state of meditation and prayer, the symbolic oil paintings featured in the show depict a triumphant Exu - the opposite of his usual negative representation perpetuated by colonialism. He is swathed in a plot of beauty, sensuality and mystery, whether due to the

Gallery 1957

subtlety of the shape of the artist's strokes, or the opaque contrast of the backgrounds in intense hues.



Gustavo Nazareno, *Gira*, 2020, charcoal on paper.
Courtesy the artist and Gallery 1957.

Nazareno has developed his unique painting and drawing techniques through detailed studies of anatomy and his concern for the human form and its myriad configurations.

In the vividly coloured paintings, which play with classic Renaissance canons and contemporary visual language, Nazareno explores the many-faceted figure of Exu. Whether through his elongated neck or the lightness of his hand, these dignified and delicate portraits invite the viewers to move their eyes across his body, discovering new forms, textures, colours and dimensions.

In the intimate silhouette drawings from the *Gira* series, created by the artist by applying charcoal with his fingers, Exu appears to dance, assuming poses that refer to queer culture and fashion photography.

Shadows, contrasts, contours and neutral tones are painstakingly composed in this body of work. Just as duality is recurrent character of Exu, light and dark, night and day, clarity and shadow, human and shapeshifting, male and female, or the fusion of these dualities, make up the visual narrative of these drawings.

The black figure depicted by Nazareno arises from the crossroad between the African Diaspora and the pantheon of Yoruba orishas in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé and Umbanda religions. In the artist's vision and interpretation, Exu is a hybrid deity, a dynamic force between divine and human that symbolizes black culture. Unbridled, he is the very potency of life, a catalyst for change and allegory of beauty, sensibility, and accomplishment.

Eshu - Yoruba: also spelled, Eshu, Èṣù, and Echú

Gallery 1957

About the artist

Gustavo Nazareno (b. 1994) was raised in Minas Gerais, Brazil, and is now living and practicing in São Paulo. Self-taught, the opportunity to work as an artist appeared in 2018 during his move to São Paulo.

His family practices the Afro-Brazilian religion of Umbanda and during a visit to the family 'terreiro' - the place where ceremonies are done - he was ordered by the 'Pai de Santo' (the spiritual father), to make seven pictures of the male Orixás (deities).

In a prayerful meditative state Gustavo creates the imagery of the deity Exú (Eshu - Yoruba: also spelled, Eshu, Èṣù, and Echú). Rendered as a poetic and lyrical dance, depicting both the light and the shadow of humanity, Exú is the god of multiplicity, constantly shape shifting between man, woman, child, non-binary androgyny, and animal forms.

Gustavo presents Exú as a divine being wearing haute couture clothing, highlighting both the sacred and the profane elements within life's experiences. With imagery that looks like high fashion photography, but is hand drawn with the artist's fingertips applying charcoal dust to paper or oil on canvas in a dark studio lit by only candlelight, Gustavo creates a sumptuous visual narrative in black and white that leaves space for those who view the work to enter with their own form of humanity.

Solo exhibitions include: Bará, Luis Maluf Art Gallery and Histórias sobre Ifá, 358, both held in São Paulo, Brazil in 2019.

Gallery 1957 first presented Nazareno's work in the group show Collective Reflections: Contemporary African and Diasporic Expressions of a New Vanguard, Accra, Ghana, 2020.

About Deri Andrade

Deri Andrade (b.1987) is a Brazilian art researcher, independent curator, and journalist. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in Aesthetics and Art History at the University of São Paulo (USP). He is specializing in Culture, Education and Ethnic-Racial Relations at the Center for Latin American Studies on Culture and Communication (CELACC-USP), where he has expanded his research on Afro-Brazilian art, investigating the correlation between content and form in the narratives of black artists. He developed the Projeto Afro platform, the result of a nation-wide mapping effort of black artists in Brazil, as he understands art as an important field of reach, and also a catalyst in the anti-racist struggle.

He has worked at major Brazilian cultural institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo, Unibes Cultural, and Brincante Institute.

Gallery1957

About Gallery 1957

Based in Accra, with a London outpost opened in 2020, Gallery 1957 has a curatorial focus on West Africa. Presenting a programme of exhibitions, installations and performances by the region's most significant artists, the gallery serves as a vital platform, promoting West Africa's presence within the art scene by hosting ambitious exhibitions, providing resources for residencies and participating in international art fairs. Founded by Marwan Zakhem in 2016, Gallery 1957 has evolved from over 15 years of private collecting. The gallery now hosts two spaces in Accra – one in the Kempinski Hotel and another in Galleria Mall – and a London outpost in Hyde Park Gate.

Artist: Gustavo Nazareno

Title: *Fables on Exu*

Dates: 29 May – 24 June 2021

Opening: Saturday 29 May, 3-6pm

Address: Gallery 1957, 1 Hyde Park Gate, London

Email: london@gallery1957.com

www.gallery1957.com

@Gallery1957

For press information and images please contact Alison Andrea Lopez at Pelham Communications:

Email: alison@pelhamcommunications.com

Tel: +44 (0) 208 969 3959