ALMINE RECH

AUTODIDACT

Jan 16 — Feb 20, 2025 | London

Almine Rech London is pleased to present 'AUTODIDACT', a group show with works by Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato, Heitor dos Prazeres, Chico da Silva and Rubem Valentim, on view from January 16 to February 20, 2025.

Trained outside of conventional artistic structures, the self-taught artist exercises a unique freedom. These artists challenge accepted ideas and traditions regarding the role of the creator and the contexts in which talent can flourish. The result is art with a distinct point of view and a singular aesthetic. Each of the four artists presented at Almine Rech London followed a different path that led them to create. Their work is a testament to the idiosyncratic power and cultural influence of the autodidact.

Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato was a master of texture and color. He grew up in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, the son of Italian immigrants. His family moved to Italy in 1920, where Lorenzato worked as a wall painter, helping to reconstruct post-war Europe. In 1948 he returned to Brazil. It wasn't until 1956 that Lorenzato fully dedicated himself to painting. In 1967 (at 67 years old) Lorenzato had his first solo show at the Minas Tênis Clube. In 1971, he represented Brazil in the Third Triennale of Bratislava. The Museu de Arteda Pampulha in Belo Horizonte held a retrospective of the artist's work in 1995. Lorenzato painted evocative depictions of daily life. Mixing his own pigments, he created geometric, vivid compositions. A Lorenzato work is easily recognizable due to its unique texture, the result of his use of combs and forks as well as brushes. In an interview, he described his artistic process: "I leave home, pick up a piece of paper and draw on it, then I note down the colours more or less and then, when I have the scale models, I paint. I have to see the landscape and the things thereon. If I do not see it, then I am unable to paint."

Lorenzato. Circuito Atelier, Belo Horizonte: Editora C/Arte, 2004, pp. 30–31

Heitor dos Prazeres was a multidisciplinary artist who personified early 20th century Rio de Janeiro. Dos Prazeres grew up in a creative home, his mother was a seamstress; his father was a woodworker and clarinetist in the National Guard band. His first artistic projects were musical, creating the Grupo Carioca in the 1930s and playing percussion with the Rádio Nacional and Cassino da Urca. Dos Prazeres began painting in earnest in 1936. His paintings examined Afro-Brazilian traditions and life in a post-slavery society, depicting festivals, samba circles, each work imbued with a sense of musicality and vigor. In 1951, dos Prazeres won an award in the "national painting" category at the First São Paulo International Biennial. Then president Getúlio Vargas offered to pay for dos Prazeres' formal training. The artist declined, maintaining his self-taught status. In 1953, at the Second São Paulo International Biennial, dos Prazeres was honored with a special room.

Chico da Silva's work brought to life colorful, otherworldly animals. Da Silva was born in Alto Tejo, Brazil, to a Brazilian mother and an Indigenous Peruvian father. He later lived in Pirambu, a neighborhood in Fortaleza, Brazil. In the 1940s, this was where his artistic practice began, drawing murals on local fishermen's cottages. Soon after, he met the Swiss artist and writer Jean-Pierre Chabloz. Captivated by his murals, Chabloz provided da Silva with materials and introduced him to the Brazilian artistic scene. Later Chabloz prompted da Silva in Europe as well. Da Silva rose to great acclaim both in Brazil and internationally, culminating in him representing Brazil in the 1966 Venice Biennale. Journalist and critic Oliver Basciano characterizes da Silva's oeuvre as a place where "The human, animal, and spirit are rendered indivisible, what anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro called the "cosmological perspectivism" of "multinaturalism"... Typically, the subjects are depicted out of place, out of time, against a monochrome background or a richly patterned but ultimately abstract space; a visual of an unfathomable worldview (to non-indigenous human animal eyes) that integrates space, the forest, water, fire and wind."

Rubem Valentim used geometry and a variety of religious and cultural references to create representations of freedom and strength. Born in Bahia, Brazil, he worked as a dentist and trained as a journalist for before becoming an artist full-time. Valentim was a key figure in the1940s cultural revival of Bahia. He moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1957, where he taught art history at Instituto de Belas Artes. In 1963, Valentim won a travel grant from Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna and moved to Rome. Valentim became renowned both at home and abroad; in 1972 he was commissioned to paint a mural for a governmental building in Brasília. The Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia opened the Rubem Valentim Special Room at its Sculpture Park in 1998. In 2018, the São Paulo Museum of Art held a major retrospective of his work. Themes of spirituality and were crucial to Valentim's art. His paintings draw from symbols associated with Brazil's African heritage, the Candomblé religion, as well other Afro-diasporic cultures. In 1976 the artist declared: "The Afro-Amerindian-Northeastern-Brazilian iconology is alive. It is an immense source—as big as Brazil—and we must drink in it with lucidity and great love."

Rubem Valentim, "A Manifesto Albeit Late [Manifesto ainda que tardio]," *Rubem Valentim: Afro-Atlantic Constructions*, eds. Adriano Pedrosa and Fernando Oliva (São Paulo, Brazil: Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, 2018), 132-134.

— Louisa Mahoney, Researcher