

Antonio Obá
Outras Águas / Other Waters
17/11 2022 – 21/01 2023



Antonio Obá, *Fata Morgana no1*, 2022, oil on canvas. Courtesy of Mendes Wood DM.

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Outras águas / Other waters
Mendes Wood DM New York
November 16, 2022 – January 21, 2023

You go, you stay, you never come back!

—João Guimarães Rosa, “The Third Bank of the River” (1962)

Mendes Wood DM New York is pleased to announce the second solo exhibition by Antonio Obá at the gallery. Bringing together Obá’s recent work, *Outras águas/Other waters* intimately explores a panorama of references across the histories of Brazilian literature, music, and painting. The exhibition places his figurations into these histories, at once representing and engaging the worlds embedded in them.

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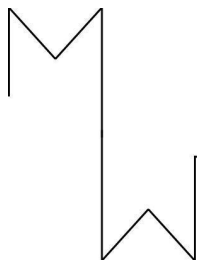
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Outras águas/Other waters starts with the seminal writing of the Brazilian author and diplomat João Guimarães Rosa, in particular his short story “The Third Bank of the River” (1962). The story tells of a man who decides to isolate himself from society, his family, and his friends and live in a purpose-built canoe, sailing up and down the local river. Guimarães Rosa explores the concept of solitude as a return to the self, defending the idea that the real encounter between a person and themselves happens within silence, in the observation of nature and through the unknown. This search for isolation is Antonio Obá’s premise here.

Obá revisits places and stories from his childhood, while also representing unknown figures. His approach is biographical but from an oneiric perspective, one that has always been present in the artist’s images. Dream and painting replace documented reality, with memory as his practice’s central axis; he remembers and redesigns his past as a way of building a future. In some works, Obá refers to the West African Akan symbol Sankofa, a bird with its head turned backward and its feet facing forward. It means do not fear or feel ashamed of going back to something that has been lost. In *Sankofa: horseman* (2022), a man rides his horse facing backward in a landscape where fireflies flicker at dawn.

Such symbols in Obá’s work are a way of seeking in nature the meaning of existential feelings and thoughts. Like Guimarães Rosa, the artist looks at his local environment in order to subvert it, attempting to universalize the subversion in images. We find in Obá’s practice references from across time and place, from the Brazilian Baroque through late twentieth-century Black American painting to recent Brazilian popular music. All these references, however, are freed from their roots and rendered equally accessible to any observer. This universal meaning results from his gazing toward the unknown, and the exhibition draws precisely on this path.

In *Pintura do homem chorando mariposas* (Painting of a Man Crying Moths; 2022), the portrayed man is laying down on a hammock crying moths; he is covered in a deep green, surrounded by a landscape that suggests the Brazilian hinterland as described by Guimarães Rosa—the no-place, a place that is deserted but mysteriously full of possibilities. The moths refer to the species named *Gorgone macarea*, known for feeding on the tears of birds. In nature, Obá’s surrealism finds a fertile ground to represent abstract human feelings. While crying, the man rests by an abyss, which could be his own shadow or an unknown pit. Obá’s compositions always point in a direction opposite to the image, their perspectives’ subverting the natural order of things.



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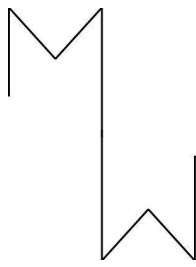
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Antônio Obá places himself in a position to re-write his narrative. Like the nameless character in Guimarães Rosas' short story, he also questions his reality. "So I think," Obá says, "the idea of compositions that emblematically play with this situation—where what appears to be, what is apparently there is sometimes not—sometimes bifurcates, sometimes throws you into a visual trap that subverts the plot of things." In his work's, Obá constructs improbable shadows and secret symbols, looking toward the past and promisingly building a future, a new river, a landscape that lies in the unconscious.

Antonio Obá (Ceilândia, 1983) lives and works in Brasília.

His works have been included in exhibitions such as *Path*, **Oude Kerk**, Amsterdam (2022); *Antonio Obá: Fables*, **X Museum**, Beijing (2022); *Carolina Maria de Jesus, um Brasil para os brasileiros*, **IMS Paulista**, São Paulo (2021); *Enciclopédia Negra*, **Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo**, São Paulo (2021); *TUYMANS – CAHN – OBA*, **Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection**, Paris (2021); *Possédé-es*, **MO.CO**, Montpellier (2020); *36º Panorama da Arte Brasileira*, **MAM**, São Paulo (2019); *Histórias Afro-Atlânticas*, **MASP / Tomie Ohtake**, São Paulo (2018); *Arte Democracia Utopia - quem não luta tá morto*, **MAR**, Rio de Janeiro (2018); *Pele de Dentro*, **Mendes Wood DM**, New York (2018); *Pipa Prize 2017*, **Museu de Arte Moderna**, Rio de Janeiro (2017); *entre*, **Casa da América Latina**, Brasília (2016); *My body is a cage*, **Galeria Luciana Caravello**, Rio de Janeiro (2016); *ONDEANDAAONDA*, **Museu Nacional da República**, Brasília (2015); *OCUPAÇÃO*, **Elefante Centro Cultural**, Brasília (2014).

Mendes Wood DM was founded in São Paulo in 2010 by Felipe Dmab, Matthew Wood, and Pedro Mendes to exhibit international and Brazilian artists in a context conducive to critical dialogue and the cross-pollination of ideas. Inspired by a belief that artistic practices broaden the scope of human agency and have the power to change the world, the gallery cultivates a program premised on conceptualism, political resistance, and intellectual rigor. Central to the program is a concern for regional difference and individuation while still fostering cosmopolitanism and collaboration.



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In 2017, Mendes Wood DM inaugurated its first European exhibition space in Brussels, founded in partnership with longtime friend and collaborator Carolyn Drake Kandiyoti. Located on three floors of a historic townhouse, the gallery lends itself to panoramic curatorial projects and comprehensive monographic exhibitions.

In 2022, Mendes Wood DM opened an exhibition space in New York's Tribeca neighborhood. The expansion is a natural evolution of the gallery's presence in North America, emphasizing a meaningful conversation with the Global South and affirming the gallery's commitment to mounting significant exhibitions for a wider audience.

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