

INHABITED

28.05.26 — 17.07.26

RUBEM VALENTIM



L'APPARTEMENT

THEA MONTAUTI d'HARCOURT LYGINOS

Laís Amaral, Jaider Esbell, Sonia Gomes, Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato, Mestre Didi, Paulo Monteiro, Antonio Oba, Heitor dos Prazeres, Chico da Silva, Tadáskia, Rubem Valentim.

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The group exhibition, INHABITED, at L'Appartement Gallery brings together the work of eleven Brazilian artists active across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, tracing a set of shared concerns that persist through time: the relationship between form and belief, material and memory, abstraction

and lived experience. The central idea of the exhibition is that form is never neutral in the Brazilian context. It is always inhabited by something invisible: a belief system, a memory, a lived experience. Across painting, sculpture, and assemblage, form in the Brazilian context operates as a carrier of meaning—shaped by Afro-Brazilian religions, Indigenous cosmologies, and everyday experience. It becomes a site where material and immaterial dimensions intersect, where the visible holds within it systems of belief, ritual, and memory.

Rather than tracing a linear trajectory from modern to contemporary, INHABITED reveals a set of ongoing conversations. Bringing into dialogue key representatives of modern Brazilian art with contemporary artists who draw from and reactivate this legacy, the exhibition considers how artistic practices in Brazil are deeply intertwined with spiritual, cosmological, and vernacular systems of knowledge.

In the works of Mestre Didi and Rubem Valentim, abstraction becomes a structured spiritual language. Drawing from Candomblé and Yoruba symbolic systems, their practices transform geometry into a coded vocabulary, where repetition, rhythm, and sign articulate systems of belief. Valentim, in particular, took the free-flowing and syncretic universe of popular and spiritual traditions as a starting point to develop a precise and rigorous visual language. Integrating symbols such as the arrow, triangle, circle, and the double-edged axe associated with Candomblé deities, he translated sacred emblems into a refined geometric lexicon.

In his hands, these forms—removed from their ritual context—are reorganised into compositions of striking clarity, where colour and structure attain a sense of balance between the rational and the metaphysical. A deeply religious man who described himself as an “artist-priest,” Valentim understood his practice as a form of spiritual transmission. His paintings, sculptures, and reliefs become sites where making itself is an act of belief—where, as he stated, “there is no salvation outside of making.” Through this process, geometry becomes not only a formal device but a vehicle for spiritual elevation, where symbolic systems are both preserved and transformed. This lineage finds a contemporary resonance in the work of Antonio Obá, whose practice similarly engages with ritual, symbolism, and the body as sites of spiritual and cultural inscription, reactivating religious imagery within a critical and deeply personal framework.

This relationship between image and cosmology extends into the work of Jaider Esbell and Tadáskia. Engaging with Indigenous and Afro-diasporic perspectives, their practices collapse distinctions between figuration and abstraction, constructing images that operate simultaneously as narrative, map, and symbolic field. Their works propose other ways of seeing and understanding the world, grounded in relational and non-Western epistemologies, where the spiritual and the material are inseparable.

Alongside these practices, artists such as Chico da Silva, Heitor dos Prazeres, and Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato articulate forms of vernacular modernity. Developed outside dominant art historical frameworks, their works draw from landscape, imagination, and daily life, yet are structured through pattern, repetition, and intuitive systems. In their hands, modernism becomes something lived rather than theorised—rooted in experience rather than ideology, and often shaped by an underlying symbolic and spiritual sensibility embedded in everyday life.

Material itself becomes a site of memory in the work of Sonia Gomes and Laís Amaral. Through processes of accumulation, layering, and transformation, their practices foreground tactility and making as forms of knowledge. Fabric, pigment, and surface retain traces of gesture and time, carrying histories that are both personal and collective, where material becomes a vessel for memory, affect, and spiritual resonance. In parallel, the work of Paulo Monteiro explores the tension between materiality and form through a more restrained and introspective language, where subtle shifts in surface, line, and colour evoke a contemplative engagement with painting as both object and process.

Across these diverse practices, recurring themes emerge: the persistence of symbolic systems, the inseparability of material and meaning, and the continuity of cultural knowledge across generations. What connects these artists is not a shared style, but a shared understanding of form as something inhabited—by memory, by spirituality, and by lived experience.

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The artistic search is interior, it is part of a deep religiosity.

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RUBEM VALENTIM

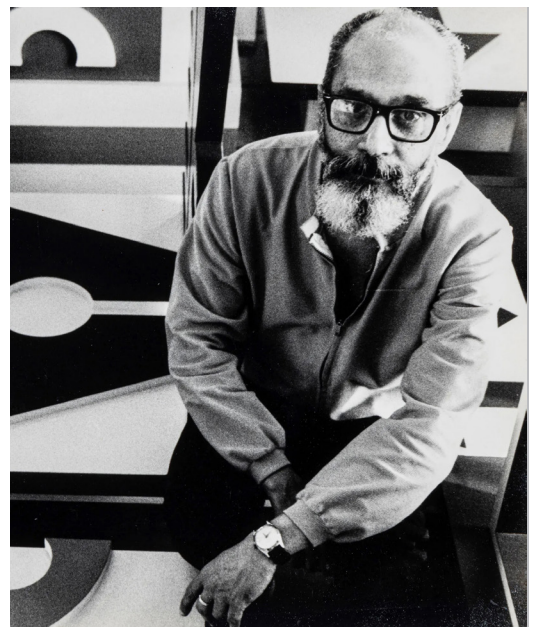
Rubem Valentim (1922–1991) was a Brazilian painter, sculptor, engraver and teacher whose artistic practice uniquely combined Afro-Brazilian spiritual symbolism with geometric abstraction and modernist ideas. Born in Salvador, Bahia, Valentim began painting in the 1940s as a self-taught artist, initially producing figurative work before developing a distinctive abstract language rooted in ritualistic and cultural references. He graduated in dentistry in 1946 but soon left the profession to focus on art, later earning a degree in journalism from the Federal University of Bahia and publishing essays on artistic theory.

In the late 1940s, Valentim participated in the Movement for the Renewal of Plastic Arts in Bahia, exploring new visual languages alongside contemporaries such as Mário Cravo Júnior and Carlos Bastos. In 1963, he moved to Rome where he further developed his artistic vocabulary and participated in international exhibitions. In 1966, he represented Brazil at the World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar, Senegal, emphasizing his commitment to Afro-Atlantic cultural dialogues.

Upon returning to Brazil, Valentim settled in Brasília, teaching at the University of Brasília and producing major public works, including a marble mural for the NOVACAP headquarters in 1972 and the large concrete sculpture “Syncretic Structure of Afro-Brazilian Culture” at Praça da Sé in São Paulo in 1979. His visual language is defined by geometric forms such as lines, circles, cubes and arrows, derived from the iconography of Afro-Brazilian religions like Candomblé and Umbanda. These abstract signs function as a unique system of symbols that bridges the sacred and the rational, reflecting Brazil’s cultural miscegenation and addressing historical and political themes from colonial legacies to 20th-century authoritarianism.

Valentim exhibited widely in Brazil and internationally, including repeated participation in the São Paulo Biennials. His work is held in major collections such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Museu Afro Brasil, Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, and the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros. He died in São Paulo in 1991, leaving a body of work that remains foundational to Afro-Brazilian abstraction and its dialogue with global modernism.

Rubem VALENTIM





Rubem **VALENTIM**

Emblema Logotipo-Poetico [Poetic Logo Emblem], 1974

Acrylic on canvas

69 x 49 cm

27 1/8 x 19 1/4 in.

(RVA-01)

Price (excl. VAT): 150'000 USD

Provenance

The Estate

Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo

Private collection

Emblema Logotipo-Poético, 1974 is part of Rubem Valentim's Emblema series, in which he develops a formal vocabulary based on Afro-Brazilian religious symbolism. Executed in acrylic on canvas, the work exemplifies his synthesis of geometric abstraction with signs derived from Candomblé and Yoruba cosmology. Valentim's practice is characterized by the construction of a systematic repertoire of symbols, often described as "emblems" or "logos" that translate spiritual and ritual elements into a structured visual language. These compositions combine principles of constructivist abstraction with references to orixás (deities), integrating Afro-Brazilian religious knowledge into a modernist framework.

At the centre of the composition, the double-axe form corresponds to Shango, a recurrent symbol in Valentim's work and a key attribute of the orixá associated with power and justice. This central element is enclosed within a circular form rendered in gold, which can be associated with Oshun, the orixá linked to water, wealth and fertility. The presence of directional, arrow-like elements above the circle refers to Eshu, the messenger deity responsible for communication between spiritual and earthly realms.

Rather than functioning as purely abstract compositions, Valentim's works operate as structured symbolic systems. His use of symmetry, repetition, and geometric reduction reflects an attempt to formalize and universalize these signs, positioning Afro-Brazilian spiritual imagery within a broader discourse of modern abstraction while maintaining its cultural specificity.



L'APPARTEMENT

THEA MONTAUTI d'HARCOURT LYGINOS



Our overarching ambition is to cultivate a dynamic community that engages both seasoned collectors and younger generations, while revitalising the Geneva art scene.

Founded by Thea Montauti d'Harcourt Lyginos, L'Appartement is a space dedicated to hosting focused exhibitions that highlight specific artists projects and dialogues.

Through diverse exhibitions, collaborations and off-site projects, L'Appartement Gallery, Geneva aims to create a dynamic podium for emerging and established artists worldwide and to create a dialogue between modern, contemporary art and design. At the core of the gallery's vision is the nurturing of emerging talents alongside historically significant artists.

Embracing a modern, hybrid gallery model, L'Appartement seeks to build connections between the art industry and other sectors, thus expanding the influence of art on diverse audiences. Nestled on the second floor of a historic building in Geneva, the gallery offers an intimate setting for collaborative initiatives, involving artists, international galleries and independent curators. Complementing the gallery's presence in Geneva, in July 2026, the gallery will host an off-site exhibition in the cycladic island of Antiparos, curated by Craig Burnett.