

## NÚ BARRETO

*Sensibilité*

Thursday 5 September - Saturday 19 October 2024



No Poxer, 2022. Acrylic, pencil, pen, semi-fat pastel and collages on recycled paper

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is pleased to present *Sensibilité*, Nú Barreto's fifth solo exhibition, showcased across both our Paris and Brussels galleries.

Originally from São Domingos in Guinea-Bissau, Nú Barreto is described by art critic Philippe Dagen in *Le Monde* as one of those artists who 'know how to embed contemporary reality in a singular, clearly symbolic form.' Ever since he was a child, drawing has been his medium of choice for all his expressions: Nú Barreto conveys his *sensitive* vision through a resolutely personal graphic repertoire. The exhibition features both earlier and recent works on paper, including drawings and collages, as well as a monumental flag titled *Transmissions* (2022). This work is a continuation of the *États-Désunis d'Afrique* series, which the artist began in 2009, featuring the American flag with its colours replaced by those of the majority of African states. *Traços Diário 1* (2020), a polyptych of 42 drawings conceived as a logbook during the pandemic, also forms part of this selection.

Throughout the body of works on paper human silhouettes, animals, fruit, and other objects are either sketched or cut out of the very material. To create his works, Nú Barreto uses raw, inexpensive materials such as fabric scraps, torn packaging, cardboard, and other recycled paper from supermarket pallets. Their anarchic patchwork-like arrangements embody a certain disorder: firstly, in the composition—where characters traverse the space 'without top or bottom'—and secondly, in a broader reflection of the world's disorder. In these dreamlike, fantastical worlds lie concealed the artist's 'dreams of reason.' Reality prevails in these works, and Nú Barreto manipulates it with great sensitivity. He deliberately creates a 'disruption of drawing', where humour, irony, and even burlesque underscore and denounce the instability of today's world.

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The fantasies suggested by the forms do not diminish the artist's awareness of the violence and disturbances of the third millennium. Through his drawings, Nú Barreto does not contradict reality; rather, he adds new nuances based on a lucid and sensitive vision of the world. While the motif of the three-legged chair symbolises the chronic instability of the state of the world, the broken bars represent the dysfunctional social mobility system, contributing to growing inequality. The human form recurs throughout the works as an obsessive figure, reflecting a deep questioning of the self and the other in relation to the world. The bodies of each figure are depicted in constant motion—bouncing, falling, embracing, or fleeing from imminent danger. In his most recent works, such as *Testemunho* (2022) and *Ami* (2023), the figures sometimes seem to emerge from the frame or advance toward us with a palpable sense of depth. In this face-to-face encounter, visitors experience the materiality as they observe the variations in scale and volume of the depicted bodies.

This dramaturgy of postures may echo those seen in the works of Francisco de Goya, particularly in *Les Désastres de la guerre*, a series of engravings created between 1810 and 1815. André Malraux, the former French Minister of Cultural Affairs, declared that the genius of the Spanish painter did not lie 'in abandoning the desire for harmony and embracing horror, but in responding to the irremediable through artistic creation, much as the great religious styles had done, without recourse to transcendence.' Nú Barreto, in turn, captures the human condition in his works; the crisis of the individual that Europe experienced at the end of the 18th century seems as profound as the one the world faces today.

The exhibition *Sensibilité* brings together a range of works with powerful symbolic resonance, both in their iconography and their colour palette. The characters and other objects, sometimes drawn, cut out, and arranged throughout the works, silently convey messages to us; a silence that screams up to the eyes.

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<sup>1</sup> André Malraux, *Goya*, Gallimard, 1978

*"Approaching the content of my creations requires a dose of sensitivity and accuracy. An ideology rooted in the perception inspired by society. Content that is Recovered, Recycled, and Restored (RRR). This is a perspective of a testimony illustrating the actions and behaviors on which human beings base their criteria for life and existence. The idea proposed in these works demonstrates how I use sensitivity and lightness on subjects often difficult to address, imposing what is appropriate to say, a personal touch. A well-thought-out practice. The precious presence of red and black, questioning their utility, remains a constant practice in my expression, using signs or symbols that facilitate the understanding of the pictorial gesture. Indeed, it is easier, more subtle, and complete, despite the complexity of the graphic elaboration that envelops morphology, volumes, perspectives, forms, and the color palette. Considering sensitivity as an instrument through which everything must be conveyed, it should be taken into account, especially in Art, as a vector through which artistic communication will make sense in its instructive scope. Sensitivity takes flight in a benevolent manner, allowing the tragic to be understood without tragedy. This is a duty and an exercise in reconciling horizons and ideologies".*

Nú Barreto

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**Born in 1966 in São Domingos in Guinea-Bissau, Nú Barreto has been living and working in Paris since 1989.**

Graduated from the École Nationale des Métiers de l'Image des Gobelins (Paris, France), Nú Barreto has forged a language of his own and developed a multidisciplinary and political practice. His original work was quickly spotted. In 1998, he represented his country at the Lisbon World Fair (Portugal). His work has since then received international exposure and Nú Barreto has established himself as one of the most prominent artists of African contemporary art.

As evidenced by the many solo and group exhibitions dedicated to his work, among which: Flags at the Fondation Boghossian (Belgium) in 2022 ; the touring show EUROPA, Oxalá at the Mucem (France), at the Fondation Gulbenkian (Portugal) and at the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Central (Belgium) from 2021 to 2023; Reclaiming Magic at the Royal Academy (UK) in 2021; AFRO, Rencontres avec l'art de l'Afrique contemporaine at the Centre culturel de l'Escale in Levallois-Perret (France) in 2019 ; 0.10 RELOADED Avant-Garde at the Sabine Knust gallery in 2018, in Munich (Germany) where he exhibited alongside William Kentridge, El Anatsui and Isaac Julien ; the great exhibition entitled Lumières d'Afrique, which, between 2015 and 2018, travelled to the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, (France), the Donwahi Foundation in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), the IFAN Museum in Dakar (Senegal), the Palace of Nations in Geneva (Switzerland), the African Union of Addis-Abeba (Ethiopia) and at the EUMETSAT in Darmstadt (Germany) ; Hommage à la Biennale d'Art contemporain africain de Dakar in Martigny (Switzerland), and Convergences held at the headquarter of the West African Economic and Monetary Union in Ouagadougou (Burkina-Faso) in 2016. In 2015, the artist enjoyed his first solo show in China entitled Ressonância at the Taipa House Museum of Macao (China), and took part in Rastros at the Capixaba do Negro Museum (MUCANE) in Vitória (Brazil). Before, in 2013, he was exhibited at the Boribana Museum of Dakar (Senegal) ; at the Arpád Szenes and Viera da Silva Foundation in Lisbon, PLMJ, (Portugal) in 2012 on the occasion of Fundação PLMJ, 100 obras - 10 años ; at the Latin American Foundation of São Paulo (Brazil) in 2011 ; at the Biennale of São Paulo (Brazil) in 2010 ; at the Cité des sciences et de l'industrie de la Villette for the exhibition Quand l'Afrique s'éveillera, in Paris (France) in 2007. In 2006, he took part in the famous Biennial of Contemporary African Art of Dakar (Senegal), as well as in Afrique Europe – rêves croisés, an exhibition organized by the EU Commission at Les Ateliers des Tanneurs in Brussels (Belgium).

Nú Barreto's works are featured in major public collections such as the Musée Capixaba do Negro Museum (MUCANE) in Vitória, Brazil ; in Europe, at the Africana Foundation in Geneva (Switzerland), the Fondation H in Paris (France), the Fondation Pro-Justitiae in Porto (Portugal), and the Fondation Arpád Szenes et Viera da Silva (PLMJ) in Lisbon (Portugal); in Africa, the Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest-Africain (UEMOA) in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), the Fondation de la Société Générale in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire), the Collection de la Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (BCEAO) in Bissau (Guinea-Bissau), the Fondation Gandur pour l'Art in Geneva (Switzerland), the Fondation H in Antananarivo (Madagascar) ; in China, the Taipa House Museum in Macao; in the United States, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Art in Washington D.C.

Nú Barreto has been represented by the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels, since 2018.

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### **Nú Barreto**

*Sensibilité*

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