

**New exhibition at Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo brings the uniqueness of Murilo Mendes' work as an art critic and cultural agent**

*With curatorship by Lorenzo Mammi, Maria Betânia Amoroso and Taisa Palhares, the exhibition brings together works by artists whose stories are intertwined with that of Murilo Mendes, including Cícero Dias, Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, Ismael Nery, Alberto Magnelli and Maria Martins*



Ismael Nery, *Untitled*, n.d. Murilo Mendes Art Museum Collection – UFJF. Photo: Alexandre Dornelas | Djanira da Motta e Silva, *Self Portrait*, 1945. Private collection. Photo: Jaime Acioli. Images at the link: <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjAShSZ>

**Murilo Mendes** (1901-1975) is among the most influential figures in Brazilian artistic life. He was an art critic, collector, exhibition organizer and poet, and influenced an entire generation of critics and artists. This facet will now be highlighted in the new **MAM São Paulo** exhibition: *Murilo Mendes, poeta crítico: o infinito íntimo* [Murilo Mendes, critical poet: the infinite intimate], on display from September 5 to January 28, 2024, at the Milú Villela Room.

With curatorship by **Lorenzo Mammi**, **Maria Betânia Amoroso** and **Taisa Palhares**, the exhibition recalls Murilo Mendes' critical activity through works by more than 50 artists whose stories are intertwined, in different ways, with that of the poet.

“It is with pleasure that the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo [Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo], as part of the celebration of its 75 years of cultural and artistic activities, hosts the exhibition *Murilo Mendes, poeta crítico: o infinito íntimo* [Murilo Mendes, poet-critic: the infinite intimate]. The exhibition has the invaluable support of the Murilo Mendes Art Museum, linked to the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, in Minas Gerais, the city where the writer was

born, and with its completion, MAM contributes to the research and dissemination of modern art, especially a chapter that is still little known, the remarkable performance of Murilo Mendes as an art critic and collector, both in Rio de Janeiro between the years 1920-1940, and in Europe from the 1950s until his death in 1975”, comments **Elizabeth Machado**, president of MAM, and **Cauê Alves**, chief curator of the museum, in a text that opens the exhibition catalog.

*Murilo Mendes, poeta crítico: o infinito íntimo [Murilo Mendes, the critical poet: the infinite intimate]* brings to the public a significant set of artworks, formed by works of Abraham Palatnik, Achille Perilli, Alberto da Veiga Guignard, Alberto Magnelli, Aldo Calò, Alexandre Eulálio, Alfredo Volpi, Almir Mavignier, Antonio Corpora, Arpad Szenes, Axl Leskoschek, Bruno Giorgi, Candido Portinari, Carla Accardi, Carlos Moskovics, Cicero Dias, Djanira da Motta and Silva, Ettore Colla, Fayga Ostrower, Flavio de Carvalho, Photo Feruzzi, Frans Krajcberg, Franz Weissmann, Gastone Biggi, George Rouault, George Braque, Geraldo de Barros, Gino Severini, Giorgio De Chirico, Giorgio Morandi, Giuseppe Capogrossi, Glauco Rodrigues, Hans Richter, Ione Saldanha, Ismael Nery, James Ensor, Jean Arp, Jesus Rafael Soto, Joan Miró, Jorge de Lima, Jose Medeiros, Lasar Segall, Livius Abramo, Li Yuan-Chia, Lucius Fontana, Marcelo Grassmann, Maria Bonomi, Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, Maria Martins, Max Ernst, Michelangelo Conte, Milton Dacosta, Oswaldo Goeldi, Pablo Picasso, Piero Dorazio, Sophie Tauber-Arp and Victor Vasarely . . .

Spread across newspapers and magazines, in many poems and poetic prose, Murilo Mendes' critical thought began to be organized only at the end of his life, when he compiled part of his critics in a volume published posthumously, *A invenção do finito [The invention of the finite]*. In 1994, his art collection was acquired by the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, which created the Murilo Mendes Art Museum (MAMM) and has since organized exhibitions and publications about the collection.

The curator **Lorenzo Mammi** explains that the exhibit at **MAM** was designed based on the poet's collection available in Juiz de Fora, his hometown, and which was complemented by other artists who marked his career. “In addition to the names present in this collection, we did thorough research on the works of Murilo Mendes and added other important artists who were not there, such as Jorge de Lima and Maria Martins”, says the curator. He adds that the trio of curators realized the importance of including artists such as Djanira da Motta e Silva, Lasar Segall, Milton Dacosta, Jesús Rafael Soto and Lucio Fontana, given the relationship they had with Murilo Mendes. According to Mammi, these were some of the relevant names discovered throughout the research, both in Brazil and abroad. In addition to Soto and Fontana, outside the country Murilo also had contact with other artists, such as the Italian Alberto Magnelli, who helped him think of an abstraction that was not constructive in the sense of concrete art, one of his differences with Mário Pedrosa .

### Murilo Mendes in three blocks

The exhibition is organized in three blocks, starting by highlighting **the circle of Murilo Mendes and Ismael Nery in Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s and 1930s**, with some developments in the following decade. During this phase, Murilo lived with a group of artists such as Nery himself, Cícero Dias, Alberto da Veiga Guignard and Jorge de Lima, who cultivated a close relationship between visual arts and poetry, close to surrealist and metaphysical poetics, but with differences. On the other hand, the critic opposes the dominant trends at the time, which were

realistic and advocated a return to *métier*, in the service of nationalism and social engagement. It's Murilo's "rebellious" phase.

"It is notable how his private art collection, which began in the 1920s with works by Ismael Nery and artists who more directly surround the surrealist aesthetic, in the following decades opened up to other names, mostly artists in full swing at the time when the critic collects the works", comments **Taisa Palhares** in a text that is part of the exhibition catalog.

The second block of the exhibition spans from mid **1930s until his moving to Italy in 1957**, when Mendes is already a famous poet and a well-known critic. His range of interests expands: Lasar Segall, Bruno Giorgi, Maria Martins, Alberto Magnelli. He began to build an art collection that brought together several works acquired on his trips to Europe. This contour also portrays the relevant coexistence with artists who arrived in Rio de Janeiro from Europe fleeing Nazism, in particular the couple Maria Helena Vieira da Silva and Arpad Szenes. The circle formed around these artists includes Milton Dacosta, Djanira, Ione Saldanha, Almir Mavignier, Oswaldo Goeldi, Fayga Ostrower, among others. Murilo became interested in abstractionist poetics, but did not adhere to concretism.

The third block includes the **period in which Murilo lived in Rome, from 1957, where he teaches Brazilian literature at the university**. There, he approached the art critic Giulio Carlo Argan, with whom he shared an interest in Italian artists who practiced non-geometric abstraction, without adhering to informalism at all. This is when he also became interested in optical art and kinetics and collaborates with artists such as Alberto Magnelli, Lucio Fontana and Soto in exhibitions and publications. At this moment, "invitations to write about exhibitions follow one another and are recorded in the texts of the catalogs; Murilo himself organizes exhibitions at the Casa do Brasil belonging to the Brazilian Embassy", says the curator **Maria Betânia Amoroso**. In the exhibitions he organizes, he includes contemporary Brazilian artists, such as Volpi, Weissmann, Mavignier, among others.

From this last phase, the curatorship of the Brazilian representation at the 1964 Venice Biennale stands out, the first in which Brazil has its own pavilion: "With this exhibition, it is hoped that the space reserved for Murilo Mendes, art critic and collector, both in its biography and in the history of Brazilian criticism, asserts itself and expands", states the trio of curators in a text about the exhibition.

On the large wall that connects the exhibition space from beginning to end, a set of Murilo's archives is displayed in panels, which includes photographs, publications and other documents. The exhibition project, designed by the **UNA barbara e valentim** bureau, establishes dialogues between each panel with the nuclei that are parallel to them. The exhibition ends with the documentary *Poesia em Pânico [Poetry in Panic]* (1977), by Alexandre Eulálio, recorded in Rome between 1971 and 1974. The 21-minute feature contains one of the poet's only filmed statements.

## Publication

Available at MAM's physical store, the exhibition catalog ***Murilo Mendes, poeta crítico: o infinito íntimo [Murilo Mendes, critical poet: the infinite intimate]*** brings together texts signed by Elizabeth Machado, president of MAM, Cauê Alves, chief curator of the museum, the

trio of curators Lorenzo Mammì, Maria Betânia Amoroso and Taisa Palhares, Aloisio Arnaldo Nunes de Castro, superintendent of the Murilo Mendes Art Museum - UFJF and an illustrated chronology of Murilo Mendes' activity as an art critic. One of them, written by the Italian art historian Giulio Carlo Argan, addresses Murilo Mendes' art criticism as poetic work. Another is a text by Mário Pedrosa followed by letters from Murilo Mendes to Pedrosa, which allow the reader to follow a rich conversation about art and criticism in Brazil.

## About MAM São Paulo

Founded in 1948, the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo [Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo] is a non-profit civil society of public interest. Its collection has more than 5,000 works produced by the most representative names in mostly Brazilian modern and contemporary art. Both the collection and the exhibitions favor experimentalism, opening up to the plurality of global artistic production and the diversity of interests of contemporary societies.

The Museum maintains a wide range of activities that include courses, seminars, lectures, performances, musical shows, video sessions and artistic practices. The content of the exhibitions and activities is accessible to all audiences through visits in Libras [Brazilian Sign Language], audio description of the works and video guides in Libras [Brazilian Sign Language]. The collection of books, periodicals, documents and audiovisual material comprises 65,000 titles. The exchange with museum libraries in several countries keeps the collection alive.

Located in Ibirapuera Park, the most important green space in São Paulo, the building housing MAM was adapted by Lina Bo Bardi and in addition to the exhibition rooms it has a studio, library, auditorium, restaurant and a shop where visitors can find design objects, art books and a line of products from the MAM brand. The museum spaces are also visually integrated with the Sculpture Garden, designed by Roberto Burle Marx and Haruyoshi Ono to house works from the collection. All facilities are accessible to special needs visitors.

## Information:

***Murilo Mendes, poeta crítico: o infinito íntimo [Murilo Mendes, critical poet: the infinite intimate]***

**Curatorship:** Lorenzo Mammì, Maria Betânia Amoroso and Taisa Palhares

**Opening:** September 5, Tuesday, 7:00 pm to 9:30 pm

**Exhibition period:** September 6, 2023 to January 28, 2024

**Location:** Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo (Milú Villela Room)

**Address:** Ibirapuera Park (Av. Pedro Álvares Cabral, s/nº - Gates 1 and 3)

**Schedules:** Tuesday to Sunday, 10am to 6pm (last entry at 5:30pm)

**Tickets:** R\$25.00 full and R\$12.50 half price. On Sundays, entry is free and visitors can contribute whatever amount they want.

\*Half price tickets for students, only with identification; for low-income youth and elderly people (+60). Free tickets for children under 10 years old; people with disabilities and companions; teachers and directors of São Paulo's state and city public school systems, with identification; members and students at MAM; employees from partner companies and museums; members of ICOM, AICA and ABCA, with identification; SPTuris employees and employees of the Municipal Secretariat of Culture.



Contact: +55 11 5085-1300  
Access for people with disabilities  
Restaurant/Cafe  
Air conditioning  
More info:

**MAM São Paulo**

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**press information:**

**a4&holofote comunicação**

Marcus Vinicius Magalhães | [marcusvinicius@a4eholofote.com.br](mailto:marcusvinicius@a4eholofote.com.br) | +55 11 99295-7997  
Gabriela Marçal | [gabrielamarcal@a4eholofote.com.br](mailto:gabrielamarcal@a4eholofote.com.br) | +55 11 96864-4263  
Neila Carvalho | [neilacarvalho@a4eholofote.com.br](mailto:neilacarvalho@a4eholofote.com.br) | +55 11 99916-5094