

ENCONTROS POLÍTICOS (POLITICAL ENCOUNTERS)...PART 2

September 15 - October 28, 2023



No Martins, Talk about Carolina, 2023.
Courtesy of Mariane Ibrahim

Mariane Ibrahim is pleased to present the gallery's second solo exhibition with No Martins entitled, *Encontros Políticos (Political Encounters)...Part 2*. The exhibition will be on view from September 15 through October 28, 2023.

A trip to the beach is one of life's simplest and most pleasurable experiences. But to whom is this pleasure given? For whom is it forbidden? While Brazil, unlike the United States, never had laws sanctioning racism and segregation, these practices were and are standard, customary, and enforced against Brazil's Black population. Going to the beach as a Black Brazilian brings to bare the question of personhood and, by extension, Black Brazilians' right to be self-possessed in public.

Brazilian beaches as the site of these kinds of encounters recalls the tragic history of the enslavement of Africans and their descendants. Africans first arrived in Brazil, having crossed the Atlantic by boat, as early as the mid 1500s. Rio de Janeiro, home to some of Brazil's most beautiful and elite beaches, was a major slave port. So was Salvador in the northeastern state of Bahia. Brazilian slavery ended only in 1888, leaving repercussions and legacies that still unduly influence Black Brazilian life. One can not help but to consider the policing of Black Brazilian bodies on Brazilian beaches in the 21st century as a continuation of the trading in Black bodies and the servitude forced upon Black bodies by the Portuguese and ruling white Brazilian elite. Time has certainly moved forward but the dial has not turned sufficiently towards racial democracy.

MARIANE IBRAHIM

No Martins' newest body of work confronts Brazil's aspirational thesis of racial democracy. Through a series of nine large scale canvases, Martins depicts dark skinned Black people of varying genders, body types, friend groups, and familial dynamics in varying states of repose and interaction. Their gaze is turned towards each other, the ocean, or whatever thing they're focused on - but never towards the viewer. Intentionally, Martins' figures have no concern for anyone but themselves and the experience of sun, salt, and sea. In this manner, Martins gifts the Black people in his paintings an agency that is not recognized by the broader Brazilian society.

In the work *Continuidade* (2023), two young children play in the sand just inches away from their grandparents' feet. The grandparents are keeping a watchful eye of their grandchildren while standing in front of a vendor selling beach toys. Attached to the vendor's cart is a Brazilian flag.

The actual Brazilian flag is imprinted with the phrase "Ordem e Progresso", in English, "Order and Progress". The notion of order implies, at a minimum, state sanctioned actions that allow order to be maintained. It also implies that the state can decide to enact and enforce order however and whenever it sees fit. Brazil's twenty-one year military dictatorship affirms this notion. The ongoing stigmatization put upon residents of Brazil's favelas and enforced, in the name of law and order, by police action in those communities, affirms this notion. The most recent government led by military trained, political conservative, President Jair Bolsonaro, most certainly affirms this notion.

Martins' Brazilian flag is imprinted with the Portuguese phrase "Progresso é liberdade ao povo", translated in English as "Progress is freedom for the people." Here Martins suggests that with liberation comes the potential for the relaxation of vigilance and subsequently, the possibility of actual joy and rest for Black Brazilians. In choosing freedom, Black Brazilians would cease being politicized subjects of a system seeks their demise. Their humanity would not be at stake.

Another work, *Vendedores* (2023), depicts five beach vendors, with their wares surrounding them, taking a break, and talking amongst themselves. In the background, three young women have entered the Atlantic Ocean. In a country like Brazil, where economic disparity is significant and ongoing, the most vulnerable of Brazilian society (who are often, though not exclusively Black Brazilians) have few viable, legal work options so they take on roles in the informal economy, such as the individuals Martins depicts in this work.

Martins' work questions head on the validity and the fragility of racial democracy in Brazil as evidenced by the day to day lives of Black Brazilians. By depicting Black Brazilian leisure on the beach - a key symbol of Brazilian cultural heritage - Martins confronts fundamentally racist and classist beliefs held by a society intent on performing Black subjugation. By affirming Black Brazilians' right to pleasure and rest, Martins disturbs the notion of racial democracy, and affirms that a country who believes in order as key to progress, and in the name of order and progress, suppresses liberation, can not and will not support and uplift Black Brazilian humanity. Only by inverting the promise of the nation state - and making freedom the desired outcome (rather than progress) - will Black Brazilians have the possibility to claim, occupy, and negotiate their humanity. Key in this negotiation, of course, is the choice of when, where, and how to rest. However, the converse may also be true: neither will Brazilian society be able to rest, until Black Brazilians are considered as and able to be whole humans.

Excerpt from a piece written on behalf of the exhibition entitled, *Política da praia, Política do povo* / Beach Politics, People Politics, by curator and writer Negarra A. Kudumu.