

SONIA GOMES

I Rise - I'm a Black Ocean, Leaping and Wide

Museum Frieder Burda | Salon Berlin (Part 1)

7 September 2019 – 22 February 2020

Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden (Part 2)

12 October 2019 – 8 March 2020

(simultaneously with the Karin Kneffel exhibition)

Press conference: 11 October 2019, 11 am

"My work is black, it is feminine, and it is marginal. I'm a rebel."
Sonia Gomes



***I Rise – I'm a Black Ocean, Leaping and Wide* is the first institutional solo exhibition in Europe of work by the Brazilian artist Sonia Gomes. The first part of the exhibition has been on show at Museum Frieder Burda's Salon Berlin since 7 September. Part 2 will see the exhibition continued on the mezzanine of Museum Frieder Burda, from 12 October 2019 to 8 March 2020.**

Upside-down, intertwined bodies reminiscent of lynchings or shriveling vegetables. Nerve tracts, internal maps, dream-catchers: Sonia Gomes' biomorphic sculptures have an eerie, almost magical presence. Gomes was born in 1948 as the extramarital daughter of a black mother and white father in Caetanópolis, a center of the Brazilian textile industry. Following the death of her mother at a young age, she grew up in the white, Catholic family of her father, a textile businessman. The African culture and spirituality of her mother and grandmother and a great interest in rituals, processions and myths were to have a lasting influence on her life and later work. As a teenager, Gomes had already begun to deconstruct textiles and clothes with a view to inventing her own style and creating new items of everyday use or works of art and craft. However, it was not until she was 40 years of age and attending the Guignard art school in Belo Horizonte, encouraged by her teacher, that she decided to devote her work to contemporary art. Today, following her involvement in the 56th Biennale in Venice in 2015, she counts among the most influential artists in Brazil.

In her works, Gomes transforms found or gifted materials, such as old textiles, driftwood, furniture or wool, into sculptures or room-sized installations, blending crafts skills traditionally associated with women such as embroidery, wrapping, sewing or tying with a range of references. In the process, Gomes draws on African folk art and spiritual traditions, along with the form languages of surrealism, Brazilian modernism and the latest contemporary art. At the same time, her work also features references to *Black Atlantic* culture, a hybrid and polyphone "counterculture of modernity", as the historian and academic Paul Gilroy described it in 1993, "not specifically African, American, Caribbean or European, rather all these together".

"Sonia Gomes' textile artworks assume their own idiosyncrasy, virtuosity and materiality of form that can be compared to the works of Louise Bourgeois. They possess incredible force and, at the same time, a poetic magic that immediately enchanted me. Sonia Gomes is not directly politically active in the Afro-Brazilian movement but her works make visible the female black body and hence also her (personal) story. Gomes allows us to feel how extremely important it is to question the prevailing narrative, the privileges and hierarchies of life with regard to more justice and humanity – and to go to great lengths to help achieve this," says Patricia Kamp, artistic director of Salon Berlin and curator of the exhibition.

The exhibition *I Rise – I'm a Black Ocean, Leaping and Wide* combines works from the early 2000s with Gomes' latest mixed-Media sculptures. The poetic title of the exhibition was inspired by passages from the eponymous poem by the Afro-American writer and civil rights activist Maya Angelou (1928-2014). *Still I Rise* is an anthemic protest against racism, sexual violence, the marginalization of black

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women and the history of slavery. The exhibition documents how Gomes uses traditional handcraft techniques to create objects that blend extreme physicality with the sacred and the transcendental. Her later works, especially, refer in multi-faceted way to oppression, violence and the eternal existential cycle of life and death.

For example, the intricate chain hanging from the ceiling entitled *Cordão dos Mentecaptos* (2016) seems like a symbiosis of umbilical cord, climbing plant and chain of thought; the title “The Cord of the Fools” points simultaneously to the slave trade and colonial carnival traditions. The organ-like shapes nestling in a net in *Hiato* (2019) are also ambivalent. They could represent a breeding ground or grave, a mother’s womb or withering seeds or intestines. At first glance, sculptures such as *Aninhado* (2019) or *Picaré* (2018) appear to be devoted to the incarcerated, tortured female body.

Stretched or twisted to the extreme, Gomes’ surreal figures resist physical violence and the role of victim with all their might, signaling escape, departure and a spiritual indomitability, as also evoked by Maya Angelou in the first lines of her poem *Still I Rise*: “You may write me down in history / With your bitter, twisted lies, / You may tread me in the very dirt / But still, like dust, I’ll rise”. This poem – entitled “Eu Me Levanto” in Portuguese – not only provided the title of the exhibition, it also denotes one of Gomes’ central works, which is now on display in Baden-Baden: a piece of burl wood that hugs the ground grows upward like an organic mushroom in one of Gomes’ typical textile creations, with all its knots and whorls. Furthermore, as an additional contribution to the exhibition in Baden-Baden and treatment of one of the Museum Frieder Burda’s iconic pieces, the painting *Untitled XV* by Willem de Kooning, the artist has specially created the wall sculpture *To De Kooning*, 2019. Sonia Gomes’ choice of colors and the interwoven complexities of her work establish a fascinating dialogue between the two works.

The exhibitions are accompanied by a publication from Edition Cantz, which includes photographs of the installations and an introduction to the artist, her life and her work.

Opening hours

Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden: Tuesday to Sunday, 10 am – 6 pm

Museum Frieder Burda | Salon Berlin: Thursday to Saturday, 10 am – 6 pm

Currently showing at Museum Frieder Burda | Salon Berlin

Simultaneously: SONIA GOMES, *I Rise - I’m a Black Ocean, Leaping and Wide*:

Rwandan Daughters by Olaf Heine (7 September 2019 – 22 February 2020)

Information and photographs:

www.museum-frieder-burda.de “PRESS / Login”.

Please log in with your email address and existing password or register a new account. You will immediately receive a password via email with which you can access the download area.

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Credit: Sonia Gomes, *To De Kooning*, 2019. Mixed Media, 180 x 90 x 60 cm © Sonia Gomes; Courtesy of Mendes Wood DM São Paulo, Brussels, New York; Photo: Bruno Leão