

E X H I B I T I O N   C A T A L O G U E

# Cássio Markowski

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THERE WAS A TIME  
WHEN I COULD BE  
ANYTHING









THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE Contemporary Art Gallery is pleased to present in Lisbon "There was a time when I could be anything" - a solo exhibition by the Afro-Brazilian artist Cássio Markowski.

The show is curated by Katherine Sirois and incorporates about 12 unpublished works. These materialize the culmination of a process that the artist has been maturing over the past few years - that of returning to figurative drawing as the preferred means of expression. Within this body of work, a particular emphasis is also given to the large-scale pieces, the first produced by Markowski.







## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Cássio Markowski mainly works across drawing and painting, besides exploring video and installation as means of expansion of his practice. The artist's production encompasses a process of documentation on different socio-cultural aspects of Afro-Brazilian history. This approach relies on a constant search in archives, image databases and flea markets from where the artist collects ancient books, photographs, illustrations, newspapers, advertisements or old family albums. Markowski's visual universe, simultaneously auto-biographic and fictional, political and poetic, theatrical and oneiric fuses his own personal memories with collective experiences and trauma, while often referencing religious iconography, especially the Brazilian religious syncretism.

Concerned with issues of cultural identity and almost lost traditions, Cássio Markowski's work emphasises the tenuous remaining links between past and present. The artist's distinctive approach intertwines a search for beauty, elegance and delicacy with concerns linked to socio-political tensions and dynamics. Through his refined and multi-layered images, which simultaneously evoke fauna and flora, historical realities, collective aspirations and inner visions, the artist sparks a renewed perception of the human relationship with nature and the living world at large, while highlighting and enhancing their aesthetic, spiritual and universal value.





“The pieces produced for this exhibition reach a rigorous and sophisticated process that involves several layers of interventions. After preparing the raw linen canvas with a first stratum of acrylic plaster coating, Markowski draws the major lines of his preconceived compositions with graphite. The artist then applies a covering vinyl paint layer on which he intervenes with gouache for the non-human motifs, with charcoal and graphite for the drawn figures. This ultimate intervention overlaps all the chromatic elements.

In a subtle but effective way, Markowski brings in allusions to political issues regarding colonization and slavery. The artist's creative process goes through an exploration and a deconstruction of the past to shape some sort of ideal world imbued with touches of serenity, nostalgia and mystery. This imaginary time and space to which the title of this exhibition is related, either refers to childhood—a time of innocence prior to dealing with the harshness of socio-political realities—or to a dreamed, unspoiled and peaceful Africa. The characters depicted in a figurative and realist manner are mostly children and women who are amongst the most vulnerable members of society. In Markowski's world, they stand strong, in communion with nature, and bravely look the viewers in the eyes. A behavior that was strictly prohibited to black people under slavery and servitude. In other pieces, the children focus on reading and studying, activities that were equally inaccessible for black communities.

Needless to say that portraiture, even under photographic form, was almost nonexistent in Brazil for afro-descendants. Thus, the artist mostly appropriates Afro-American portraits captured during the first half of the 20th century. From an experience of suppression of his African cultural references,



Markowski willingly puts into practice a therapeutic relationship with these repressed dimensions of his own identity. The remembrance along with the supplement of beauty that is added to the conceptual and often minimalist images tend to perform some sort of cathartic or magical healing.

The human alliance with nature is another key element in Markowski's work. In this unreal world of his, the fragile and delicate flora and fauna stand in their grace and beauty and gently fuse with the characters. The dream-like atmosphere is enhanced by the unexpected juxtaposition of natural elements and motifs laden with symbolic meanings such as plants resting on majestic clouds, which evoke churches' traditional iconography or a blazing Sacred Heart hanging on a branch of a banana tree. The communion with a luxuriant and pristine nature contrasts with the persistent state of estrangement and the loss of connection with its cycles, its forces and frailties. For the artist, the natural world is a favorable wellspring, a space for silence and contemplation, a constantly renewing source of inner strength that can lead to meaningful and benevolent actions. How to accommodate one's poetry and lust for freedom, justice and beauty with the world we live in? Through a genuine reconnection with nature and selfhood. There lies perhaps the core of what Markowski is telling us through his drawings/paintings.

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Katherine Sirois





*Comigo ninguém pode #1, 2022*

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on linen  
60 x 50 cm  
(CMK24)



*Comigo ninguém pode #2, 2022*

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on linen  
60 x 50 cm  
(CMK25)







*Havia um tempo em  
que eu podia ser tudo, 2022*

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on linen  
85 x 60 cm  
(CMK26)



*Conselhos para meu eu quando jovem, 2022*

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on linen  
110 x 85 cm  
(CMK27)





***Sagrado Coração, 2022***

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on linen  
110 x 85 cm  
(CMK28)











*As Leitoras, 2022*

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on linen  
180 x 140 cm  
(CMK29)





*A Família*, 2022

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on linen  
130 x 170 cm  
(CMK31)







*A Flor do Mandacaru, 2022*

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on linen  
110 x 85 cm  
(CMK35)



*Virgem do Pranto Tirai Esse Quebranto, 2022*

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on linen  
110 x 85 cm  
(CMK34)









*Alice, 2022*

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on linen  
86 x 60 cm  
(CMK33)



*Jacaré, 2022*

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on linen  
40 x 50 cm  
(CMK32)



*Tapir, 2022*

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on linen  
50 x 40 cm  
(CMK23)







## ARTISTS INTERVIEW

**Sofia Tudela:** You began with drawings and collages and are increasingly exploring other techniques. How does that contribute to the evolution of your work?

**Cássio Markowski:** Well, I have always worked in favour of ideas and questions that instigated me to create and for that, during my path, I have used different means for creation, be it performance, installation, video, or collage. Drawing and painting have always accompanied me and have been a constant during the realization of these different theatre and visual arts projects. When I started displaying this material, which was, at first, secondary or simply illustrative, I got positive feedback. Then, I began to realize the potential that this could represent within my process as an artist. No longer just as part of the creation process but as a final work.

**As you go through various phases and distinct artistic techniques, do you feel that your work is getting closer and closer to a style of your own?**

My work shares an intimate relationship with my life trajectory, hence the different approaches and changes it has undergone over these fifteen years of production. Despite flirting with political and socio-cultural issues, I believe it took me a long time to begin to understand my place as a racialized individual, and this is now reflected directly in my production, not as a style, but much more as a reflection of my construction as a subject.

**Do you consider that the delicacy of your processes is related to the themes you explore?**

Yes, there are different ways to approach sensitive subjects in society, and it is up to each artist to find his or her own strategy. I feel comfortable approaching these issues from affections, memory, and the subtleties of the world around me. This is without leaving aside the historical processes that brought me here. I think about the transversality of

these processes. A work is not complete in itself, but rather belongs to a larger context in my production.

**Your work gravitates a lot around Symbolism. Where do these symbolisms present in your work come from?**

I understand that the part of the metaphor in art, whichever artistic practice in question, is generally to evoke a certain feeling, thought, or reflection in those who have a connection with that work. Metaphors use symbolism, associations, and comparisons to strengthen a point or a gaze and can also represent particular ideas or thoughts of the artist. This creative strategy has been with me since I was a boy writing short stories and poetry at school, and over time it has helped me in my creative process as a visual artist.

**And what is their importance for the context of your work?**

I think that just like in written tales and before that in the ancestral oral tradition - very important in Latin American and African countries - the articulation of certain images and sounds has the power to transport viewers with a connection to the work to a place outside the ordinary, out of the common. My grandfather, my father's father, who was a northeasterner from a small town called Caculé in the backlands of Bahia, Brazil, and my grandmother, the granddaughter of enslaved Africans, who was born and raised in the countryside of the state of São Paulo, were always enigmatic figures to me. They lived in a little "Pau a Pique" house in a farm far away from the city. This universe of kerosene lamp light, straw mattresses and the smell of beans cooked on a wood stove, was and is important to my affective memories. Today, it is reflected more and more in my work. As I went back in time and started researching the context in which they lived, I came across a plethora of beliefs, symbols, and fantastic narratives that permeate the lives of an entire rural Afro-Brazilian population, long forgotten and neglected. On the other hand, as a child of separated

parents, I was raised by my maternal grandmother of Portuguese and very catholic origins. I grew up going to churches with her, and within this childhood context, the iconography of the saints and sacred art has always impressed me a lot.

**Where do you get your influences and inspirations from?**

It comes a lot from my life experiences, mainly from my childhood. For this to emerge with more strength, a work of self-knowledge was and still is necessary. These experiences from my past, my family, the cities where I lived, daily relationships, music, books, and comics are the basis for my creations. During college, where I received formal art education, I always looked for images and works by artists that somehow affected me, that aroused my curiosity and interest. From this comes a particular knowledge of art history that is generally Eurocentric. In the last four years, even as a personal maturation and of my process, I became interested in artists from the African diaspora, and I noticed an influence in my current work.

**In what does your creative process consist of?**

At the moment, I can say that I work within a narrative system that is essentially based on three pillars: the fictional narrative, the personal narrative, and the historical narrative. What happens is that these three ways of thinking are mixed together during my creative process. Basically, everything starts with an idea that can emerge from a song, a phrase, a story I have heard, or a memory. Driven by a desire to go deeper into this theme, I start researching photographic archives, books, magazines, and family albums. I gather information and then begin to compose. For my most recent project, "There Was A Time When I Could Be Anything", I combined different images using the computer and an editing program to build a sketch for each piece. From this sketch, I started the paintings and drawings. These are my first works in large format.



**You explore a lot the relationship between Man and Nature. Would you say that this is the crucial element for your creative process?**

Through personal experiences, I could understand the importance of being connected with nature. I understood how enriching this relationship can be for human beings. For me, it seems a little obvious that this relationship of respect should exist, and I talk about it a lot in my work. In my most recent research, I could notice that leaves, plants, and nature, in general, are always present in the ceremonies and are fundamental to the religions of African matrix. The Afro-Brazilian religions are based on a nature matrix, context in which nature has central importance.

**The narrative is a point that elevates the magic of your work into reality. What do you seek with these same narratives?**

If I understand the question correctly, I think of narratives as an effective way to access different audiences. As I said before, certain fantastic narratives have the power to transport people to a place outside the ordinary, the commonplace. I see it as a powerful way to approach certain themes and lead the public to reflect, and why not, propose a space for discussion.

**You worked as an illustrator in Poland. Did it influence your drawing?**

I think this phase influenced a lot my return to studio work. Living there with the language and climate barriers brought me closer to my personal anguishes and questions. Today, I see that these issues are also relevant for the collective and are fundamental themes in contemporary debates.

**You worked as a set designer. What do you take from this experience for your artistic work?**

A greater understanding of space and the relationship of my work with the other in that space.

**What relationship do you intend to create with the final materiality of your works?**

I think that more than a final, closed goal, the important thing is to raise questions. I believe that my work, if looked at more closely, should raise some important questions for the society in which we live, yes, and without losing its charge of mystery.

**What kind of relationship do you seek between your work and the space?**

This depends a lot on the project I am working on, but, in general, it is important that there are moments of silence, where there can be a dialogue between the work and the public.

**What do you look for in your works relationship with the spectator?**

I think I answered that in the previous question. When I think about the space for the work I already think about the public.

**The past and the present are unconsciously present in your paintings. Would you say that this is related to the questions of cultural identity that you explore? And why?**

Totally related. To answer this question I ask for permission to quote the Brazilian writer Conceição Evaristo: "Working the past is to claim a position of dignity in the present." At this moment, as an

artist, that is what I claim through this new series of works. Dignity!

**What are you most interested in exploring in the future?**

I hope for the overflow of these last works. That more questions come to me, and we find more spaces for debate and reflection on themes that are so relevant to our society.

**Tell me a little about this project entitled - *There Was A Time When I Could Be Anything*.**

This project arises from a work I did earlier this year. In this first work where I combined drawing and painting on linen and no longer on paper, the central element is the figure of a boy who stares at the spectator. He holds an orchid with bashful hands and has on his head a branch with plants and a deer. In him, I reflect on the innocence of childhood and the possibilities of existing in a place where all this power is blossoming. In this place, I create a kind of ideal world, impregnated with touches of serenity, nostalgia, and mystery. Through research, I take this first plunge into my family memories in search of lost or erased ancestry.

In the words of the curator Katherine Sirois, "This imaginary time and space to which the title of this exhibition is related, either refers to childhood — a time of innocence prior to dealing with the harshness of socio-political realities — or to a dreamed, unspoiled and peaceful Africa." And I would say idealized by many of us children of the African Diaspora.

**INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY:**

**Sofia Tudela**







*Nossa Senhora do Banzo, 2022*

Vinyl paint, graphite pencil and gouache on cotton paper  
122 x 82 cm  
(CMK30)





***Secret Garden 1, 2022***

Graphite and watercolor on cut-out paper  
pinned on wood panel  
60 cm (diameter)  
(CMK22)



***Secret Garden 2, 2022***

Graphite and watercolor on cut-out paper  
pinned on wood panel  
80 cm (diameter)  
(CMK21)











*As Leitoras, 2020*

Drawings with marker on 300 g Canson paper, cut and fixed with entomological pins on a panel;  
wood and glass frame  
70 x 50 x 7 cm  
(CMK11)



*Mãe, 2020*

Drawings with marker on 300 g Canson paper, cut and fixed with entomological pins on a panel;  
wood and glass frame  
70 x 50 x 7 cm  
(CMK12)





*Tierra y libertad, 2020*

Drawings with marker on 300 g Canson paper, cut and fixed with entomological pins on a panel;  
wood and glass frame  
70 x 50 x 7 cm  
(CMK13)



*Ilusão, 2020*

Drawings in graphite, synthetic enamel and vinyl paint on  
paper cutouts fixed with entomological pins  
on a wood and glass panel  
70 x 50 x 7 cm  
(CMK14)







*Carrossel #1, 2019*

Drawings and painting with acrylic paint and pencil on Fabriano paper 300 gr  
67 x 52 x 3 cm  
(CMK9)



*Carrossel #2, 2019*

Drawings and painting with acrylic paint and pencil on Fabriano paper 300 gr  
67 x 52 x 3 cm  
(CMK10)





Il nostro è un mondo in cui la natura è sempre più presente e importante. In questo senso, l'arte ha il compito di rappresentare la natura in modo che essa sia sempre più presente e importante. In questo senso, l'arte ha il compito di rappresentare la natura in modo che essa sia sempre più presente e importante.





THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE is an international contemporary art gallery with exhibition spaces in Luanda (Angola) and Lisbon (Portugal). Representing and collaborating with established and emerging international artists, the gallery's programme focuses on relevant narratives and debates associated with the African continent and its diaspora. Despite its deep connection with Africa, it is the first African contemporary art gallery in Portugal that focuses not only on Lusophone circles, but also on the emerging aesthetics of cultural and artistic productions from the Global South. The gallery maintains a regular and significant presence in important international art fairs.

The intervention of THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE extends beyond the physicality of the gallery space, through exhibition projects that enhance the expansion of the art world to a multiplicity of locations, inviting curators and artists in occasional collaborations that provide enriching insights and dialogues.

Founded in Luanda in 2016, by Sónia Ribeiro, - current CEO - and, having quickly become one of the most prestigious art galleries in Angola, the project expanded in 2019 to one of Lisbon's most emblematic neighbourhoods, Chiado. Given the historical connection between Portugal and Africa, Lisbon was considered the natural location for this first expansion of the gallery, and is also an important gateway to the European market. Both exhibition spaces develop an independent programme, offering collectors and enthusiasts a focused view of contemporary artistic production from the African, South American continents and their diaspora.

Since its foundation in 2016, the gallery has represented, exhibited and collaborated with emerging and established artists. Since then, the



gallery has remained true to one of its main objectives - to provide artists with the opportunity to share their unique perspectives through their work, thereby creating and promoting discussions around relevant historical and contemporary narratives in the context of globalisation. As such, within an extensive annual programme that includes regular exhibitions in Lisbon and Luanda, collaboration in various cultural projects and a consistent presence at numerous international art fairs, attention is directed towards issues such as identity, memory, heritage, cultural heritage and social change. The gallery's artists frequently appear in the programme of important international platforms such as museums, biennales and other significant exhibitions in the art world.

The gallery presents numerous exhibitions in Angola, South Africa, France, Italy, the UK and Portugal, and continues to expand and develop its connections around the world.

## CONTACTS

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