

PRESS KIT

# PORTRAITS FOR ENGLISH TO SEE

**RENÉ TAVARES** ————— 9-29 Oct 2023

Presented by **THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE** Gallery and **THE AFRICA CENTRE**



**THIS IS NOT A WHITE GALLERY AND THE  
AFRICA CENTRE  
PRESENT**

“PORTRAITS FOR ENGLISH TO SEE”

\*SOLO SHOW BY RENÉ TAVARES

**OCTOBER 9 - 29, 2023**

\*ARTIST TALK

RENÉ TAVARES (artist)

PAULA NASCIMENTO (curator)

PAUL GOODWIN (moderator)

**October 13, 7 pm**

**LOCATION: THE AFRICA CENTRE, LONDON (66 Great  
Suffolk St, London SE1 0BL)**

THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE

[www.thisisnotawhitecube.com](http://www.thisisnotawhitecube.com)

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TEAM

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Ribeiro

Curator and Co-Artistic Director | Graça Rodrigues  
Gallery Administrator | Francisca Vaz

Graphic Design and Audiovisual | Francisco Blanco

## PRESS RELEASE

**HIGH-RESOLUTION IMAGES:** <https://home.mycloud.com/action/share/fe69dc72-5e79-4872-9db1-9bf9396c2389>

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### **René Tavares Unveils Debut Solo Exhibition in the United Kingdom: "PORTRAITS FOR ENGLISH TO SEE".**

**London, United Kingdom – October 9th, 2023** – The Angolan-Portuguese art gallery, THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE, in partnership with THE AFRICA CENTRE, is proud to announce the debut solo exhibition of Santomean artist René Tavares.

Entitled "**PORTRAITS FOR ENGLISH TO SEE**", the exhibition will **premiere on October 9th at THE AFRICA CENTRE**, and is curated by the acclaimed Angolan architect and curator Paula Nascimento, winner of the 2013 Golden Lion for Best National Participation at the Venice Biennale.

The exhibition features seven new works that are part of René Tavares' most recent and iconic painting series – "Portraits for English to See" and "Cotton People Reloaded" – the result of a production and research process that crosses the fields of archive photography and painting.

The title comes from the old Portuguese saying "para inglês ver" (for English to see), which emerged in Brazil in the 1830s when Britain called on the country to enact legislation to restrain the slave trade. Unfortunately, the regulatory measures promulgated at the time had an insignificant impact. However, the expression has persisted over time as a synonym for superficiality, being revived by the artist with this very meaning to highlight themes that are deeply intertwined with the historical and socio-political issues that have moulded the construction of various African nations.

By questioning heritage that has been assimilated, neglected and forgotten and challenging the rigidity of categories and prejudices, René Tavares aims to raise awareness and trigger processes of resilience and social empowerment through his work.

The series presented in this exhibition are notable for their grandiose scale and the skilful manipulation of paints and powdered pigments, with which the artist creates landscapes with cotton fields and malleable surfaces, which often take on an earthy appearance. The persistence of the layer and miscegenation concepts define the capital structure of René Tavares' work, where the artist repeatedly introduces unavoidable conceptual combinations, cross-cultural and heritage references and composite plastic solutions.

René Tavares occupies a central position in the Santomean art scene and stands as a prominent figure within the contemporary art landscape of the Lusophone geographic space. In recent years, his visibility has surged both across Africa and internationally.

As part of the presentation of this exhibition, **on October 13th, at 7 pm, The Africa Centre will host an artist talk entitled "Unfinished Histories"**, through which we will delve into the core elements of Tavares' artistic practice. The event is a unique opportunity to meet Tavares and deepen the understanding of the central elements of his artistic practice, as well as to interact with some of the most relevant and influential curatorial and cultural voices working with Africa and the art scene of its diaspora: Angolan architect and curator Paula Nascimento, participating as speaker, and British independent curator, academic and researcher Paul Goodwin, acting as moderator.

The exhibition will be **on display until October 29th at The Africa Centre** (66 Great Suffolk St, London SE1 0BL), from Tuesday to Saturday, between 10 am and 6 pm, and on Sundays, between 10 am and 4 pm. Admission is free.

## ABOUT RENÉ TAVARES

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Caption | René Tavares @ Nuno Lopes

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René Tavares' work is based on a research process spanning through archives, photographs, and literature while bringing to the front stage themes related to historical and socio-political issues which affected different African countries. With a predilection for painting and drawing, Tavares' artistic practice also includes photography, video and performance. The artist's work evolves and expands in the form of projects and series which develop over time according to his own experiences of transition between different artistic languages, between the African and European continents, between insular and continental Africa, but also between the local and the global, the individual and the collective. By questioning assimilated, neglected and forgotten heritages and by challenging the rigidity of categories and prejudices, the artist's works are produced in an impulsive and engaged mode to raise awareness and to trigger processes of resilience and social empowerment.

Using a palette of rich, deep and earthy colours and working the canvas in layers and all over, Tavares' figurative universe, with its dreamlike atmosphere, is filled with memories and human presence, faces and gazes that look at us throughout space and time. The works also emphasise iconographic and symbolic elements such as cotton flower fields and plantations, specific animals, objects and housings along with the depiction of group portraits. These collective pictures of men and women, either standing peacefully or shown in their interactions and daily activities, aim to reflect on the historical processes of hybridisation and miscegenation happening between several ethnic groups, communities and cultures including components assimilated during the colonial and post-colonial eras. Either through his paintings or multi-medium installations which often included striking words referring to racism and discrimination, Tavares fuses references taken from ancestral practices and belief systems, collective memories and heritage with contemporaneity and globalisation. Thus, the whole work highlights the processes of appropriation, integration and merging of heterogeneous religious, social and cultural components that compose many African cultures.

In compelling previous series - such as "In Memory We Trust", "Thinking About Africa's Future" or "New State of the Atlantic" - the viewers are challenged by the necessity of a critical review of the preconceived

and dystopian conceptions of African identities, and by the pressing demand to value the diversity, the richness and the multiple dimensions of the several Africas within the continent and its diaspora.

Tavares holds a Bachelor's in Fine Arts and Visual Arts from the Dakar School of Fine Arts (Senegal), a postgraduate degree in Visual Arts, Painting and Photography from the Rennes School of Fine Arts (France), and a Master's in Art and Heritage Sciences from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon (Portugal). Highlights of his career include the selection as a finalist for the EDP Foundation New Artists Award (2022), the Public Vote Prize for the Norval Sovereign African Art Prize (2022), the nomination for Africa's most influential new artistic talent (FNB Joburg Art Fair, 2018), and the Artist Revelation Prize at São Tomé and Príncipe's biennale of Art and Culture (2002).



Caption | René Tavares, "Making Memories in front of Memories", 2023,  
Oil, pigment, charcoal, acrylic and gold paper on canvas, 198x210cm

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Caption | René Tavares, "This Land Belongs to Us", 2023  
Oil, pigment, charcoal, and acrylic on canvas, 175 x 205 cm

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# ARTIST TALK | UNFINISHED HISTORIES

October 13th | 7 pm | The Africa Centre

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## **Moderator**

Paul Goodwin (British independent curator, urban theorist, academic, and researcher)

## **Speakers**

René Tavares (Artist)

Paula Nascimento (Angolan curator and architect)

## **Synopsis**

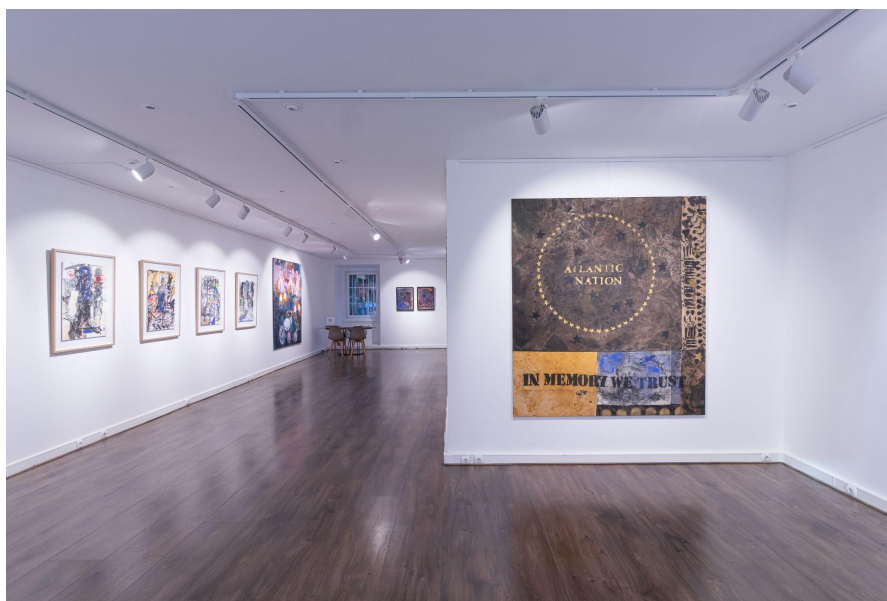
As part of the presentation of René Tavares' exhibition, on October 13th (7 p.m.), the Africa Centre will host an artist talk entitled "Unfinished Histories" through which we will delve into the core elements of Tavares' artistic practice. One of his defining features is the concept of layering, both material and conceptual, which he introduces into each of his artworks. This layering process reflects an archaeological gaze, uncovering and reinterpreting ancestral Santomean culture in a contemporary context. Tavares' ability to bridge personal narratives with broader historical ones invites us to explore the collective memory of peoples and the rich heritage resulting from their voluntary and involuntary crossings. This exclusive artist talk is also a unique opportunity to engage with some influential artistic, curatorial and cultural voices working with Africa and its diaspora art scene: the Angolan architect and exhibition curator, Paula Nascimento, and the British independent curator, academic and researcher Paul Goodwin.

## ABOUT THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE GALLERY

PORTUGAL & ANGOLA

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Caption | THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE (Lisbon), "In Memory We Trust", solo show by René Tavares, 2020

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THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE is an international contemporary art gallery simultaneously based in Luanda (Angola) and Lisbon (Portugal). Representing and collaborating with emergent and established artists, the gallery focuses primarily on narratives associated with the African continent and its diaspora. Beyond its deep connection to Africa – and with a pioneering spirit of de-compartmentalization and inclusiveness, favouring intercultural dialogues – it is the first African gallery in Portugal to open its collaborative circle to both local artists and artistic productions from the Global South, including Brazil and non-lusophone African countries.

THIS IS NOT A WHITE CUBE extends its dynamic activities to several institutional and independent spaces with the organization of ambitious collective exhibitions outside the gallery's walls. On these occasions, the gallery invites external curators, associations or other art galleries to collaborate, thus promoting innovative associations and cultural enrichment while providing unexpected opportunities for artists.

Founded in Luanda by Sónia Ribeiro in 2016, the gallery quickly became a leader in Angola's artistic and cultural panorama. It was in 2019 that the project expanded to Chiado, one of Lisbon's most emblematic neighbourhoods. Given Portugal's historical relationships with Africa and its strategic location as a gateway to Europe, the country's capital was considered a natural location for this first growth stage.

Both exhibition spaces have independent programs, offering collectors and amateurs a relevant and compelling selection of contemporary artists working across a wide diversity of media and techniques. Since its creation, the gallery has remained true to one of its primary goals, that of allowing artists to share, through their work, their unique perspectives on the World. Throughout an extensive yearly program that includes regular exhibitions in Portugal and Angola along with constant participation in numerous international art fairs, attention is drawn to topics such as globalization, identity, memory, cultural heritage, and social changes.

Its two directors, Sónia Ribeiro (CEO) and Graça Rodrigues (Curator) have a singular entrepreneurial and artistic vision based on a solid curatorial and collaborative approach. In 2019, the gallery founded "O

CUBO", a non-profit platform that seeks to boost experimentation and research through the development of artistic residencies, editorial projects, archive mapping, and the establishment of a network of local and international partnerships. While furthering its expansion and the development of its fruitful connections worldwide, the gallery presented several international exhibitions, including South Africa, France, Italy, Serbia, Morocco and the UK.

## ABOUT THE AFRICA CENTRE

LONDON, UK

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The Africa Centre is a UK-registered charity that celebrates the diversity of Africa and its diaspora. It promotes social cohesion, education, thought leadership, and innovation in art, culture, and entrepreneurship. The Centre first opened its doors to the public in 1964 and has a rich and vibrant history of bringing Africa's cultural diversity to the fore and promoting greater awareness about political and socio-economic developments affecting the continent and its diaspora.

With an original remit to foster non-governmental relations between newly independent Africa and Britain, The Africa Centre's mission today is to educate, connect, and advocate for Africa and its global diaspora, creating a home away from home for Africans in the UK and a warm and welcoming space for anyone with an interest in Africa.

The Africa Centre opened its new headquarters in Southwark, London in June 2022. The new HQ is a beautifully transformed, former 1960s office block that now serves as a new hub for contemporary African culture and heritage in London.