



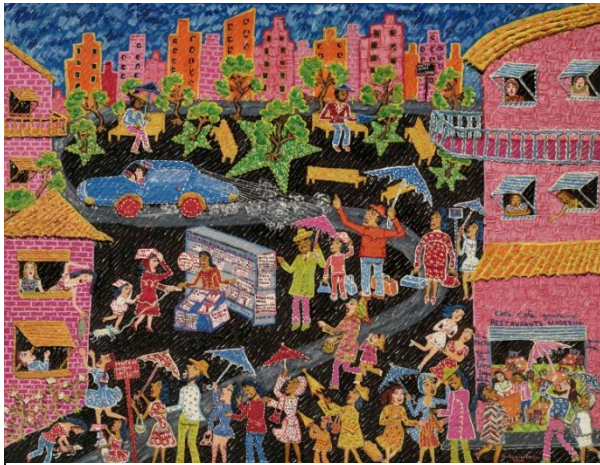
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**SAMBA SPIRIT COMES TO MFA, BOSTON, WITH EXHIBITION OF AFRO BRAZILIAN ART**

**Works by 20th-Century Artists from Brazil Debut in New England**



*Chuva Sobre Sao Paulo (Rain over Sao Paulo),*  
1971, Maria Auxiliadora da Silva

BOSTON, MA—For the first time in its history, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), presents a selection of works by 20th-century Brazilian artists of mostly African descent in *Samba Spirit: Modern Afro Brazilian Art*. Opening the weekend of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the exhibition is on view January 18–October 19, 2014 and includes 15 paintings and one work on paper by key artists including Heitor dos Prazeres, Maria Auxiliadora da Silva and Waldemiro de Deus, as well as two sculptures by Agnaldo Manoel Dos Santos. Rarely studied in the United States, these artists drew on a range of traditions and found inspiration in all aspects of Brazilian culture—religious rituals, urban and rural life, music and dance. Each has a distinct approach to

subject, style and iconography, creating a lively range of imagery on view in the Bernard and Barbara Stern Shapiro Gallery. Comprising recent acquisitions from The John Axelrod Collection, the works date from the 1930s to the 1980s and will be accompanied by a map of Brazil and wall labels in both English and Portuguese. *Sponsored by the Darwin Cordoba Fund for Latin American Art.*

“So many aspects of Afro Brazilian culture are vividly presented by these artists in their choice of subject matter and style,” said Karen Quinn, Kristin and Roger Servison Curator of Paintings in the Art of the Americas Department at the MFA. “We see both the celebratory and somber, and even images that remain enigmatic.”

In the 19th century, Brazil had the largest population of African slaves in the Americas and was the last to abolish the institution in 1888. The pervasive impact of slavery on subsequent generations led one sociologist to write, “Every Brazilian, even the light-skinned fair-haired one, carries with him on his soul, when not on soul and body alike...the influence of the African, either direct or

vague or remote.” The resulting blend of African, European and indigenous cultures can be seen throughout Brazil, from the world-famous choreography of the samba and the frevo to the practices associated with the Candomblé and Umbanda faiths. This influence extends to the visual arts as well, where the depiction of subjects and symbols related to the experiences of Afro Brazilians is prevalent.



*Plantação (Plantation)*, 1971, Maria Auxiliadora da Silva

Maria Auxiliadora da Silva (1938–1974) was a self-taught artist whose experience as a seamstress can be seen in the vivid patterns of color and tiny details that resemble stitching in *Plantação (Plantation)* (1971). The unusual technique of mixing paste into her pigments creates areas of relief on the canvas, resulting in a rich physical and visual texture much like embroidery. A keen observer with a strong sense of narrative, she captured the vibrant life of Brazil's largest city just after a rainstorm in *Chuva*

*Sobre São Paulo (Rain over Sao Paulo)* (1971). In the work, individuals with a range of skin tones wear clothing that is indicative of the country's diverse classes and ethnic heritage.

Throughout the world, Afro Brazilian culture is closely associated with samba and frevo—potent combinations of music and dance—which are frequently depicted in visual art. Samba originated in the Afro Brazilian slave culture of the late 19th century and is most commonly associated with Carnival—the street festival that precedes Lent. Heitor dos Prazeres (1898–1966) was a pioneering composer of samba music who turned to painting in the 1930s and based many of his lively, rhythmic works on this experience. In the painting *Roda de Samba (Samba Circle)* (1957), he is probably depicting a performance associated with the Candomblé religion (a Brazilian faith based on African beliefs), while the painting *Frevo da Casa Verde* (1958) illustrates a uniquely Brazilian form of music and dance that is closely related to capoeira (an Afro Brazilian martial art).

Paintings by Afro Brazilian artists frequently lack a straightforward interpretation, and many take inspiration from both Christian and African faiths. “Boizebú” can be translated from the Portuguese as “devil,” which likely refers to the central figure in *Boizebú* (1981) by Waldemiro de Deus (born 1944). The relationship between boizebú and the wingless figure below it could represent a transition between one existence and the next, such as reincarnation in the Afro Brazilian Umbanda religion or the transference of a soul to Satan in Catholicism. Wood sculptures by Agnaldo Manoel Dos Santos (1926–1962) also draw from multiple cultures in order to create singular works of art. *Homem com Cachimbo e Chapéu (Man with a Pipe and Hat)* (1950s) could simply represent a man with a pipe and hat (as the title implies), or the artist may be alluding to the



*Homem com Cachimbo e Chapéu (Man with a Pipe and Hat)*, 1950s, Agnaldo Manoel Dos Santos

messenger god Exú, an “orixá” or deity of the Candomblé religion, who is often depicted smoking a pipe.

Other paintings featured in the exhibition include works by José Antonio da Silva (1906–1996), Jenner Augusto da Silveira (1924–2003), Paulo Pedro Leal (1894–1968), Rubem Valentim (1922–1991), Antenor Vaz (20th century) and Sergio Vidal da Rocha (born 1945). Antonio Bandeira (1922–1967)—one of Brazil’s most important abstract painters—is represented by *Portrait of Maria Pretinha* (1943), an early realistic work of graphite on paper.

All of the art on view in the exhibition is part of The John Axelrod Collection of Works by African American Artists, a 2011 gift of 67 objects created by artists of African descent from North America and Brazil. John Axelrod, an MFA Honorary Overseer and long-time supporter of the Museum, has given nearly 700 works to the MFA, comprising several collections of 20th-century European decorative arts—nearly 140 pieces of Schneider glass, numerous examples of Memphis Group designs and some 377 pieces of American decorative arts from the 1920s and 1930s from the Axelrod Collection of American Modern art and design.



*Portrait of Maria Pretinha* 1943, Antonio Bandeira

*The MFA would like to thank professors Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw and Tamara J. Walker and their students who researched most of these objects for their exhibition Samba Sessão: Afro Brazilian Art and Film at the Arthur Ross Gallery at the University of Pennsylvania, April 7-July 2012.*

*The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), is recognized for the quality and scope of its encyclopedic collection, which includes an estimated 450,000 objects. The Museum’s collection is made up of: Art of the Americas; Art of Europe; Contemporary Art; Art of Asia, Oceania, and Africa; Art of the Ancient World; Prints, Drawings, and Photographs; Textile and Fashion Arts; and Musical Instruments. Open seven days a week, the MFA’s hours are Saturday through Tuesday, 10 a.m. – 4:45 p.m.; and Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. – 9:45 p.m. Admission (which includes one repeat visit within 10 days) is \$25 for adults and \$23 for seniors and students age 18 and older, and includes entry to all galleries and special exhibitions. Admission is free for University Members and youths age 17 and younger on weekdays after 3 p.m., weekends, and Boston Public Schools holidays; otherwise \$10. Wednesday nights after 4 p.m. admission is by voluntary contribution (suggested donation \$25). MFA Members are always admitted for free. The MFA’s multi-media guide is available at ticket desks and the Sharf Visitor Center for \$5, members; \$6, non-members; and \$4, youths. The Museum is closed on New Year’s Day, Patriots’ Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. For more information, visit [mfa.org](http://mfa.org) or call 617.267.9300. The MFA is located on the Avenue of the Arts at 465 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA 02115.*

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