

# Gustavo Nazareno Bará

6 - 29 March 2025



We are delighted to bring the visionary work of Gustavo Nazareno to Opera Gallery Bal Harbour for 'Bará', an exhibition of more than 30 charcoal drawings from the artist's ongoing series of the same name. This exhibition coincides with 'Afro-Latin Baroque,' a solo exhibition of the artist's paintings at Opera Gallery Miami and the artist's inclusion in 'One Becomes Many', a group exhibition at the Pérez Art Museum.

Nazareno, like many great artists, is notable for his ability to synthesize a number of disparate visual, cultural and conceptual influences into an image that exists wholly on its own terms. This paradoxical skill finds its most concentrated form in *Bará*, the body of charcoal drawings that bring together a number of the artist's most salient reference points.

Like all of Nazareno's work, these drawings are ultimately — as critic Oluwatobiloba Ajayi recently described them in Frieze magazine — acts of faith. Specifically, the *Bará* series honors the Orixá Eshu: a minor deity worshipped across a number of vernacular Afro-Latin religions, understood to be the conduit between the mortal world and the pantheon of Orixás. *Bará* can be placed somewhere between artistic practice and religious ceremony; each painstakingly-rendered, near-photorealistic drawing functions as both an artwork and an offering to Eshu, who is sometimes known as Elegbará. Alongside resonances of the spiritual and religious worlds that Nazareno grew up surrounded by in his birthplace of Minas Gerais, the *Bará* drawings are heavily influenced by fashion photography. The work of its late-20th century practitioners such as Irving Penn and Richard Avedon serve as important references for Nazareno's treatment of his subjects. They mobilized the medium, rendering bodies in stark monochromatic tones, as a vehicle for the kind of corporeal drama that defines these drawings.

These two disparate elements — an ancient religious system and contemporary photography — are just two points in the web of influences that stretches across the *Bará* series. Charcoal is an unforgiving medium. Its carbon-black marks are easy to smudge and, unlike paint, cannot be worked over repeatedly. There is a physical intensity to Nazareno's process, in which he stands over these images as they come together by candlelight, ever-aware that each mark is indelible. This intensity translates into the images themselves. They carry within them a high-stakes dynamic of tension and release brought on by their very process of creation.

Often, Nazareno uses his own body as an ad-hoc model for these works. He might hold out his hand, studying how it reflects and swallows the light in different places before returning to a drawing. In this respect, you might say that the *Bará* series contains some hidden self-portraits. Really, these drawings are representations of the artist himself in a way that goes far beyond the physical, drawing together the many artistic and spiritual interests and obsessions that make Nazareno the artist and person he is.



GILLES DYAN

Founder & Chairman

Opera Gallery Group

ALEXANDRE SARFATI

Director

Opera Gallery Bal Harbour



### Bará

Gustavo Nazareno's *Bará* series is an impressive collection of approximately 400 charcoal drawings meticulously crafted between 2019 and 2023. For the presentation at Opera Gallery in Bal Harbour, a group of 42 drawings were chosen for the exhibition, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in the realms of Afro-Brazilian spirituality, culture, and identity. This series is an impressive homage to the *orixá* Exu¹, known as Bará in certain Afro-Brazilian religions. Exu is not merely a deity but a vital guardian and mediator, seamlessly bridging the gap between the human realm and the divine. Embodying intricate dualities, he represents the interplay of light and shadow in life. Nazareno's portrayal of Exu transcends conventional images, offering a deeply nuanced exploration of this multifaceted and dynamic deity, illuminating his significance and complexity within the Afro-Brazilian belief system.

Nazareno's artistic journey is deeply intertwined with his personal spirituality. As a self-taught artist hailing from the historical region of Minas Gerais, Brazil, he has cultivated a unique practice centered on oil painting and charcoal drawing. His artwork draws inspiration from the Afro-Brazilian Yorubá pantheon, infusing his creations with a sense of mythical power and cultural resonance.

Since an early age, Nazareno has meticulously studied human anatomy, allowing him to translate his observations of the intricate human form into his pieces while adding layers of meaning through the poetics and politics of the body. Each brushstroke and line reflects a dialogue between the historical and the contemporary, as he combines influences ranging from the grandeur of Renaissance and Baroque iconography to the dynamic evolution of fashion history and diasporic narratives. In his art, he invites viewers to engage with a world where spirituality, culture, and the human experience converge. Beyond his inspiration from art historical periods, Nazareno melds elements of fashion history into his oeuvre, drawing mainly from the iconic imagery captured by legendary photographers such as Irving Penn and Richard Avedon, whose mastery of black and white photography serves as a powerful impact in these charcoal drawings. Notably, Penn's evocative portrayal of musician Miles Davis-focused on the graceful strength of his hands as they mimic the motion of playing the trumpet in the album artwork for Tutu (1986)—stands as a pivotal reference.

- ← Exú versus Ogum, João Pessoa, Brazil, 2014 © Leandro
   Neumann Ciuffio via Flickr
- 1 For a detailed discussion on the role of Exu in Afro-Brazilian religions and its transformation within Brazilian culture and identity, see "Exu's Journey from Africa to Brazil: Manifestations of a Religious Icon" available on Academia.edu. This essay explores how Exu's role has been shaped by social needs and African heritage, significantly impacting Brazilian cultural and religious identity.

The *Bará* series captivates viewers with its striking, high-contrast compositions, where deep black figures dramatically emerge against sharp white backgrounds. This vibrant interplay of light and shadow creates a sense of dynamism and intrigue. Nazareno skillfully employs charcoal powder while using his own body<sup>2</sup> to apply the powder with his fingertips on paper, which results in images that blend the immediacy of photography with the expressive fluidity of drawing. This technique allows for a reduction of form, abstracting figures that float within velvety fields of chromatic blackness—visually simplified yet rich with conceptual depth. The intricate balance of shadow and light, stillness and movement, along with the haunting obscurity of portraiture in these drawings, conveys powerful narratives imbued with ritual, dance, and introspection.

In this exhibition, Nazareno's extraordinary command of charcoal is on full display, as he wields it not just to outline forms but to breathe life into them, infusing his figures with an ethereal, spectral quality. They appear to oscillate between states of being, emerging from or dissolving into shadows, a poignant metaphor for the spiritual transitions embodied by Exu. Each artwork serves as a meticulous study in contrast and nuance, with the darkest areas acting as both form and void, intricately carving out physical and metaphysical spaces around the subjects and inviting viewers into a contemplative engagement with the unseen realms of existence.

In a captivating array of images, Nazareno's masterful technique captivates the viewer by emphasizing the fluidity of movement. The elongated and twisted limbs create a mesmerizing sense of motion, evoking an ethereal presence that feels almost alive. This artistic choice serves not only to mirror the kinetic energy inherent in Afro-Brazilian ritual traditions but also to embody the fluid identity of Exu, a figure who skillfully navigates between diverse worlds and narratives. The stark contrast between deep blacks and illuminated areas challenges the viewer's perception, drawing the eye toward the spiritual essence of the subjects. This focus elevates their presence beyond the confines of earthly attributes, inviting a deeper contemplation of the spiritual journeys they represent.

Nazareno's artistic creations are profoundly enriched by his thorough exploration of African Diasporic cultures. He embraces the identity of a lifelong learner, dedicating himself to scholarly pursuits that inform and shape his work. This ongoing educational journey infuses his artistic practice with a vibrant depth, enabling him to produce works that resonate on both personal and universal levels.

Through this series and the entirety of his art practice, Nazareno aspires to elevate the representation of Afro-Brazilian traditions, striving to dismantle the negative stereotypes that have often surrounded Afro-Brazilian religions. This mission is particularly significant in the context of neocolonialism and neo-pentecostalism, which have historically inflicted violence and oppression upon diasporic religions. By reclaiming and celebrating these cultural narratives, he seeks to redefine their significance, transforming perceptions while honoring their rich heritage.

2 In conversation with the artist on January 17, 2025, he explained that Exu represents both the internal and external forces of the human body. The unique method of applying charcoal with his fingers is deeply symbolic and intentionally chosen to align with the attributes of Exu, one of the orixás that guide him in his spiritual practice. Using his body as a tool not only physically connects him to his work but also serves as a homage to Exu's encompassing influence over both the tangible and intangible aspects of life. Nazareno's focus on detailed human body parts in these drawings further emphasizes the intimate connection between the artist, his spiritual guide, and the medium, resulting in a work with deep personal and cultural layers.

Gustavo Nazareno's *Bará* series is a noteworthy collection of drawings that intricately integrates spirituality, identity, and cultural heritage concepts. Utilizing the medium of charcoal, Nazareno effectively and skillfully captures the essence of Afro-Brazilian religious traditions through the orixá Exu, producing a striking visual representation that elicits profound emotional responses. Each work serves as an invitation for viewers to engage in a process of reflection and critical contemplation, facilitating an exploration of the complex narratives embedded within his artistic oeuvre. His artistic proficiency and cultural inquiry yield a compelling visual experience, underscoring the importance of art as a vehicle for cultural dialogue and understanding.

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# Artworks





## *Bará* 2019-2022

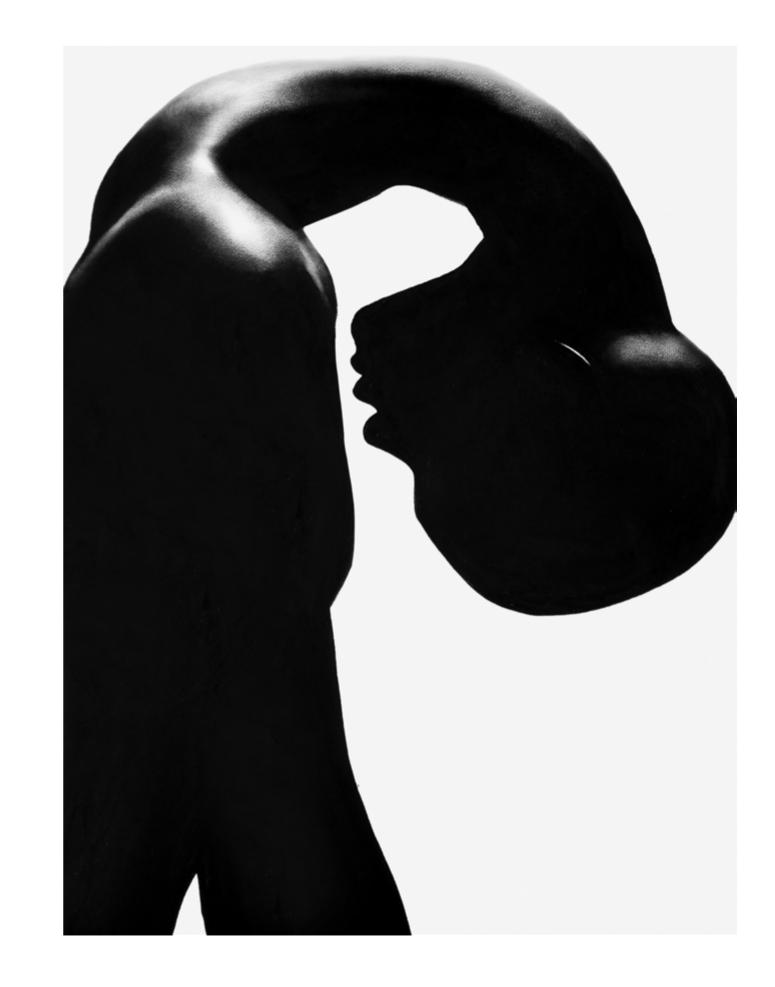
Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio



Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

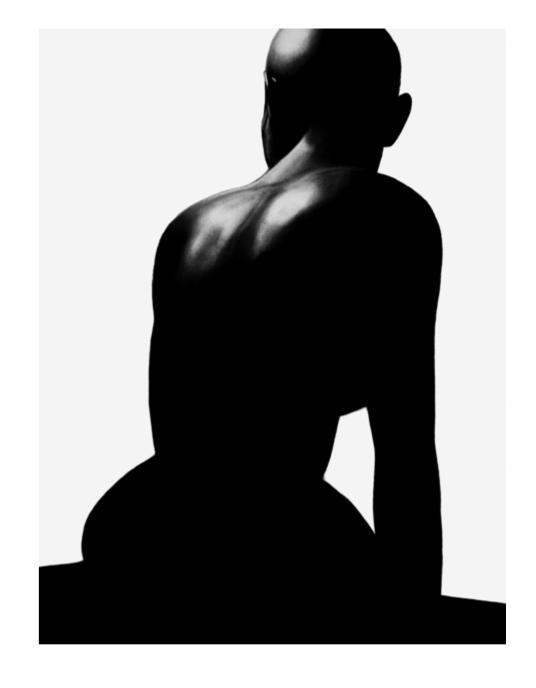




Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio





Bará #8

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio Bará #13 2019-2023

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio



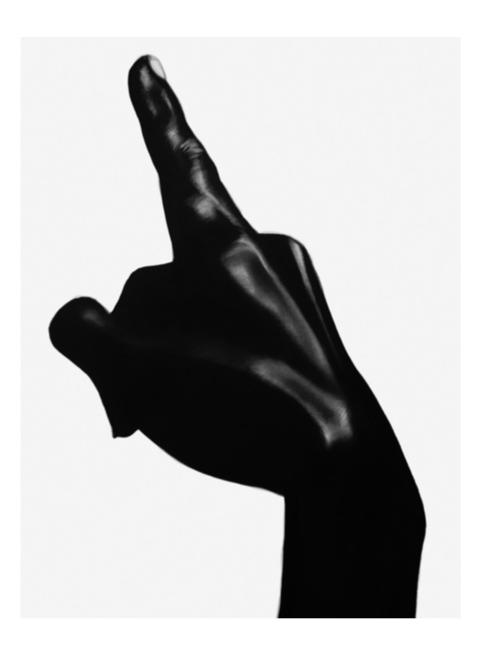


2019-2023

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

25

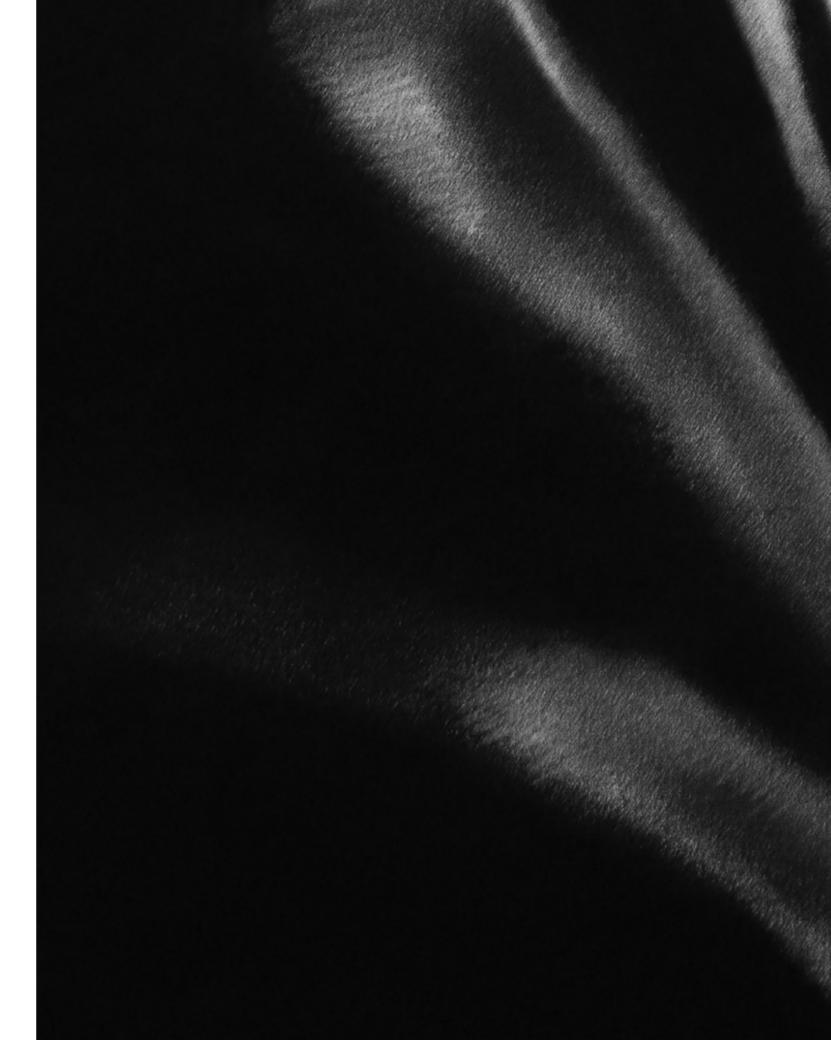
PROVENANCE Artist's studio





2019-2023

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

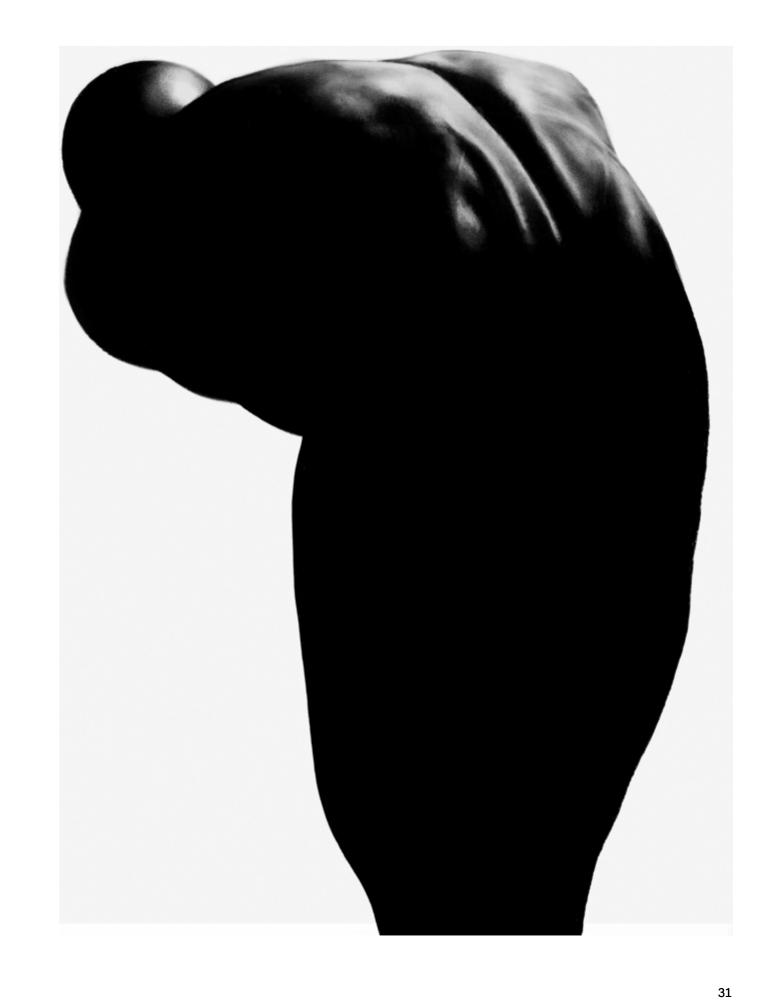




2019-2023

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio

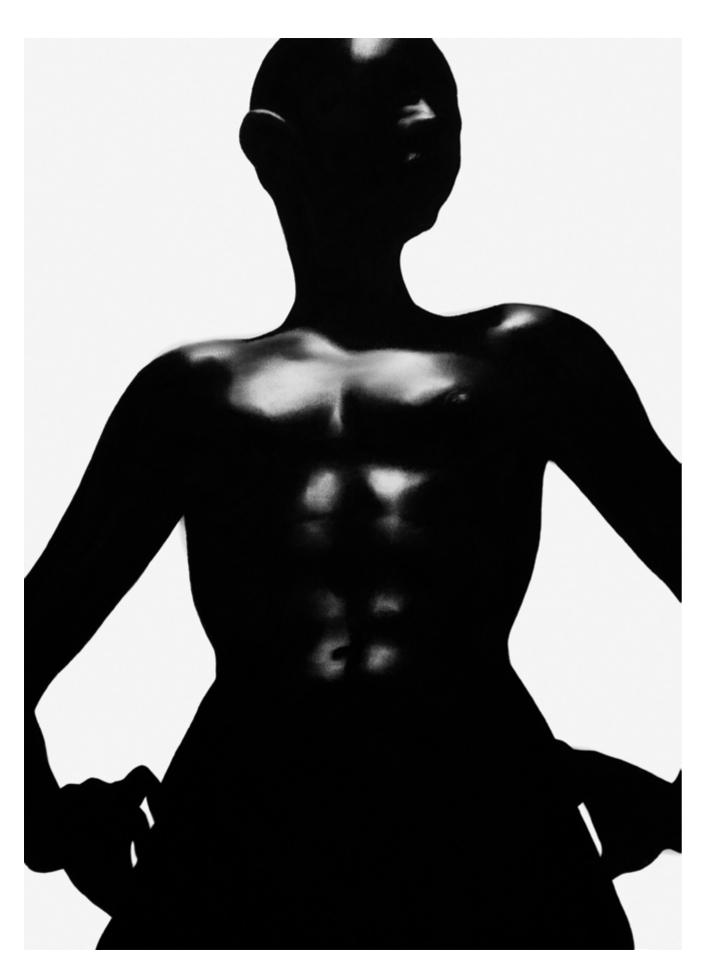


#### Bará #18 2019-2023

Charcoal on paper 66 × 50 cm |26 × 19.7 in

PROVENANCE Artist's studio





2019-2023

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio

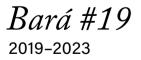


## Bará #22 2019-2023

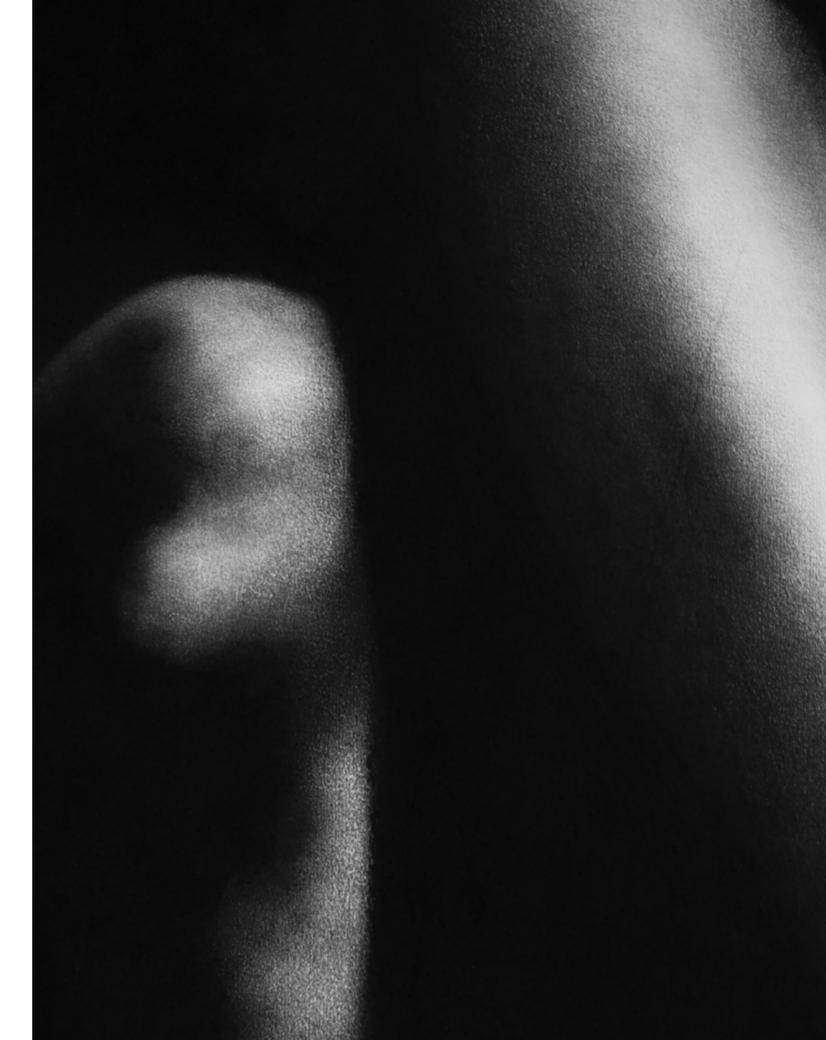
Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

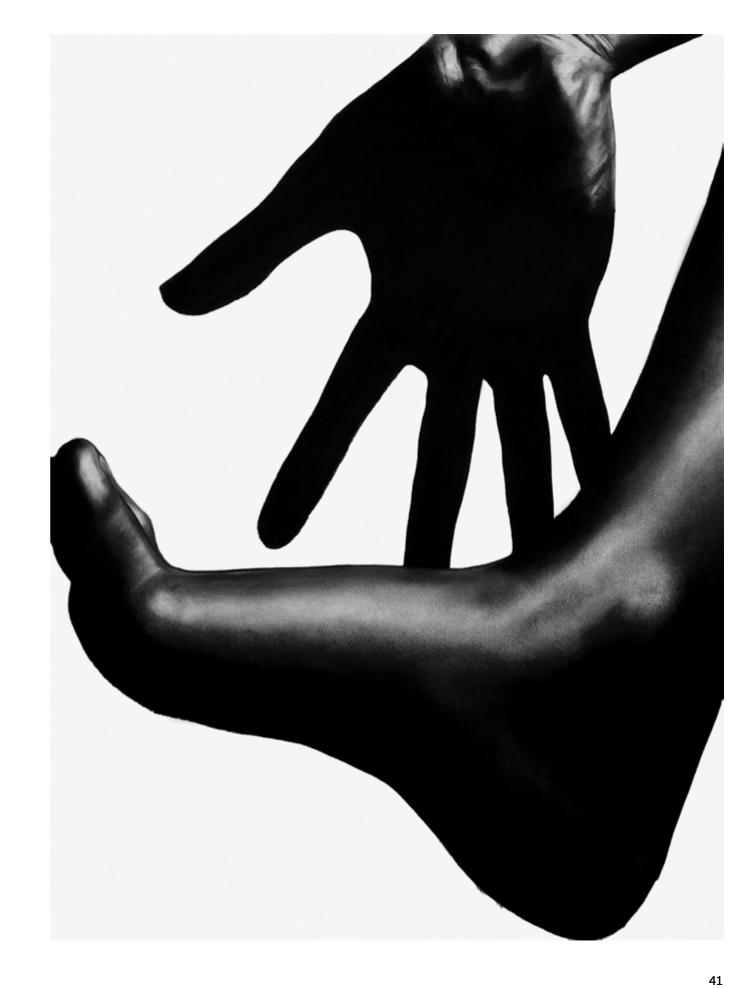
PROVENANCE Artist's studio





Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm





#### Bará #24 2019-2023

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

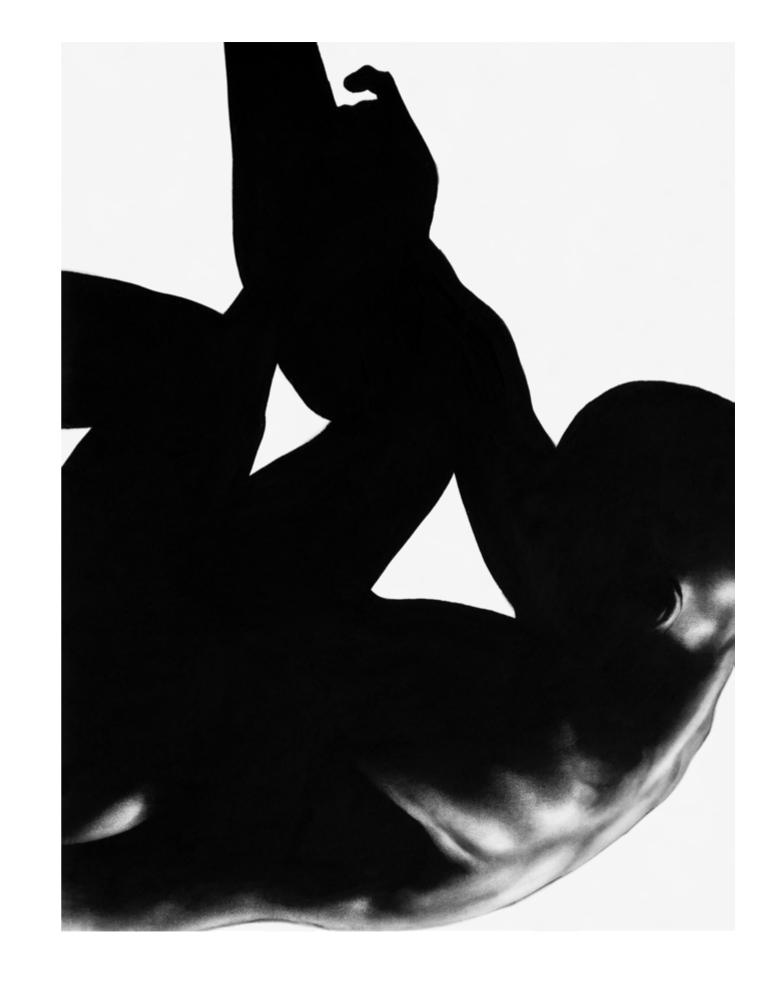
PROVENANCE Artist's studio





2019-2023

Charcoal on paper 26 × 19.7 in | 66 × 50 cm



## Bará #27 2019-2023

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio





Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm





## Bará #37 2019-2023

Charcoal on paper 26 × 19.7 in | 66 × 50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio

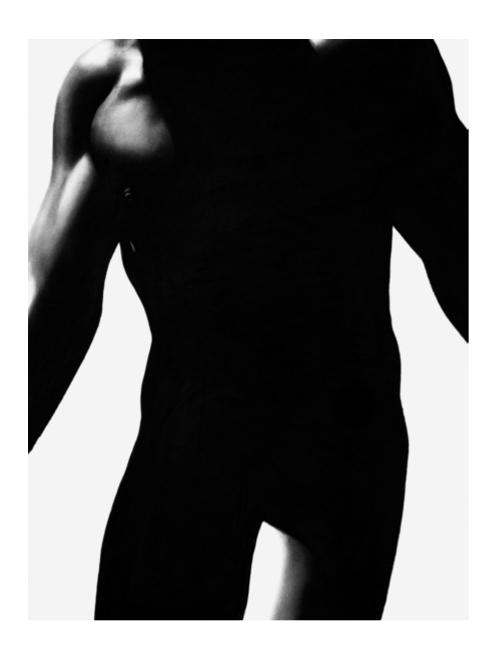


2019-2023

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio

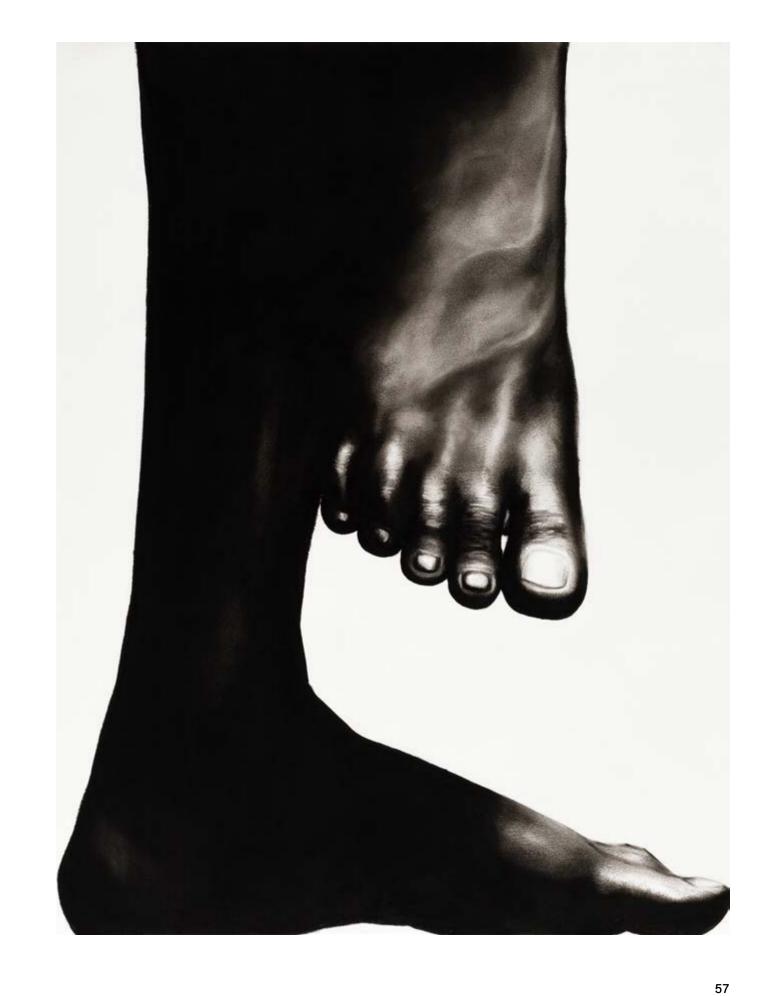






Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm



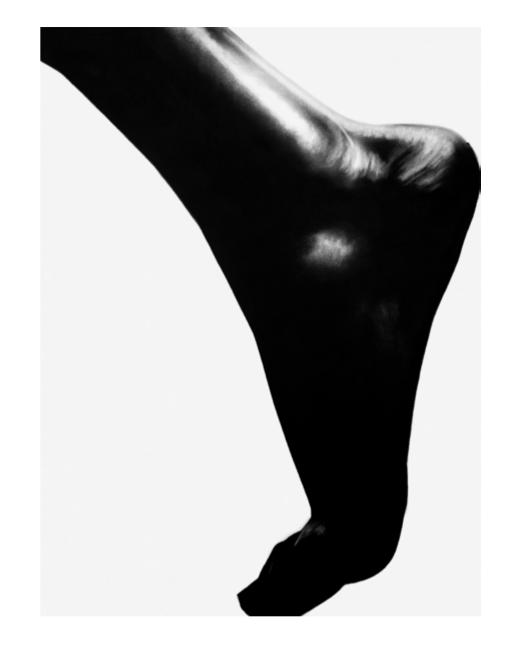


#### Bará #404 2019-2024

Charcoal on Hahnemühle cotton paper 190 g/m² Signed and dated 'G-2019/2024.' on the reverse 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio





Bará #406

Charcoal on Hahnemühle cotton paper 190 g/m<sup>2</sup> Signed and dated 'G-2019/2024.' on the reverse 26 × 19.7 in | 66 × 50 cm

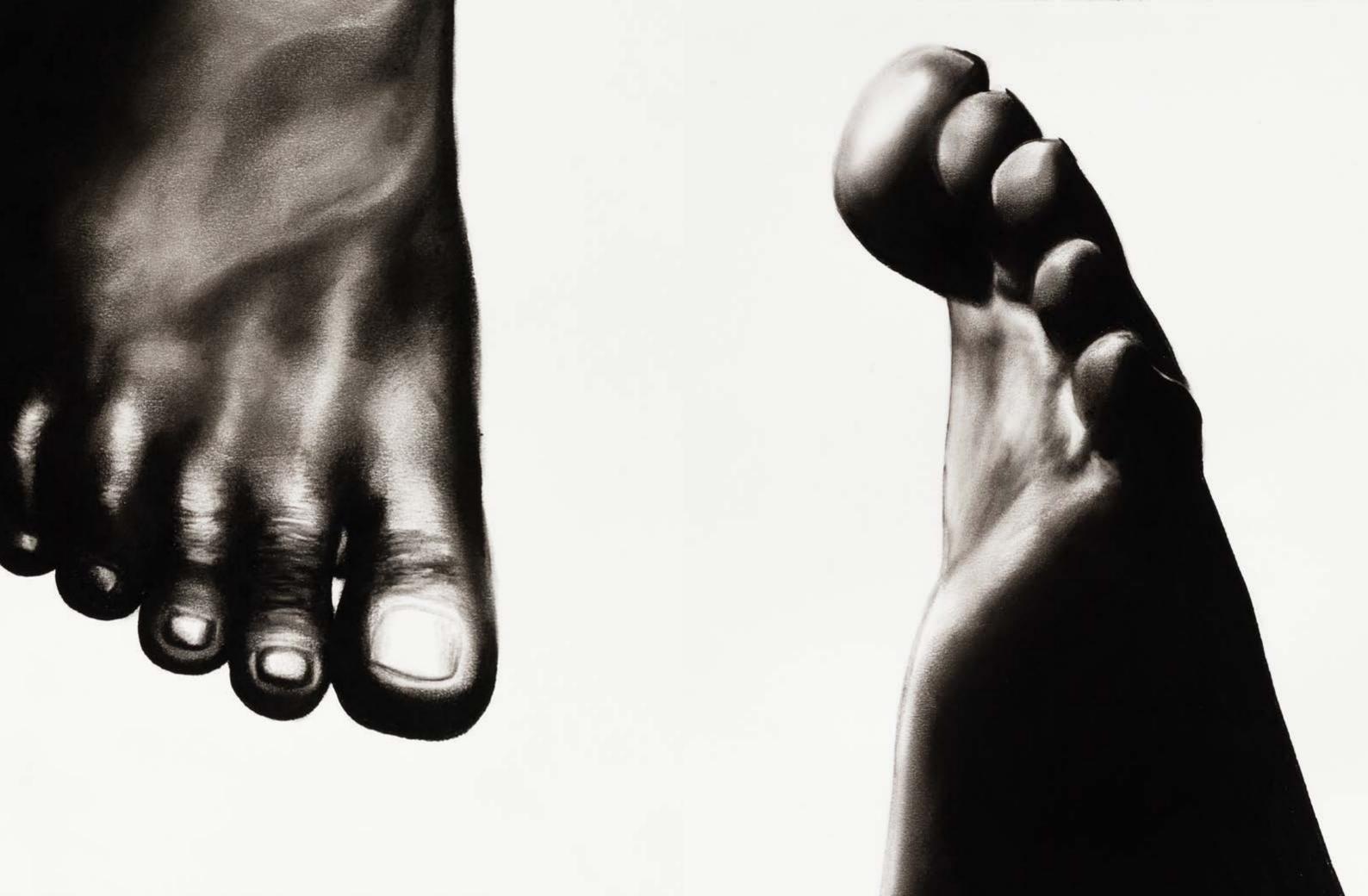
PROVENANCE Artist's studio

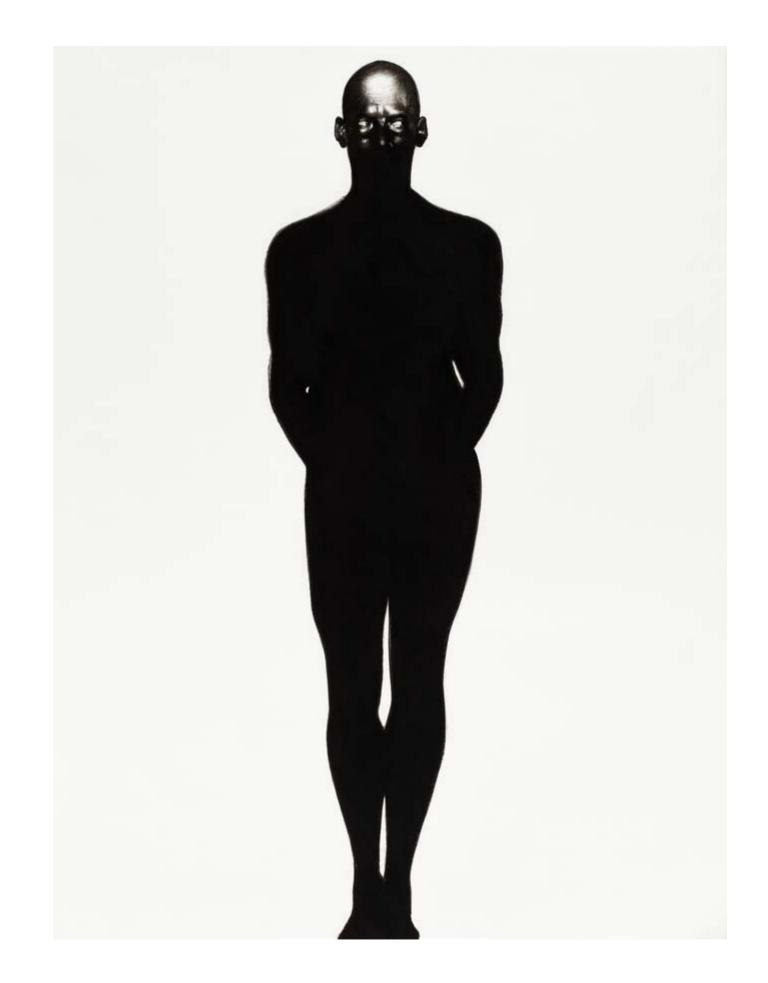
### Bará #119

2019-2023

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio





## *Bará #407* 2019-2024

Charcoal on Hahnemühle cotton paper 190 g/m² Signed and dated 'G-2019/2024.' on the reverse 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio





Bará #412

Charcoal on Hahnemühle cotton paper 190 g/m² Signed and dated 'G-2019/2024.' on the reverse 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio

### Bará #409

Charcoal on Hahnemühle cotton paper 190 g/m<sup>2</sup> Signed and dated 'G-2019/2024.' on the reverse 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio



#### Bará #414 2019-2024

Charcoal on Hahnemühle cotton paper 190 g/m² Signed and dated 'G-2019/2024.' on the reverse 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm





### *Bará #415* 2019-2024

Charcoal on Hahnemühle cotton paper 190 g/m<sup>2</sup> Signed and dated 'G-2019/2024.' on the reverse 26 × 19.7 in | 66 × 50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio

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Bará #417

Charcoal on Hahnemühle cotton paper 190 g/m<sup>2</sup> Signed and dated 'G-2019/2024.' on the reverse 26 × 19.7 in | 66 × 50 cm



### Bará #419 2019-2024

Charcoal on Hahnemühle cotton paper 190 g/m² Signed and dated 'G-2019/2024.' on the reverse 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio







*Bará #424* 2019 - 2024

Charcoal on Hahnemühle cotton paper 190 g/m² Signed and dated 'G-2019/2024.' on the reverse 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio

## Bará #426

Charcoal on Hahnemühle cotton paper 190 g/m² Signed and dated 'G-2019/2024.' on the reverse 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio



# Bará #427

Charcoal on Hahnemühle cotton paper 190 g/m² Signed and dated 'G-2019/2024.' on the reverse 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio

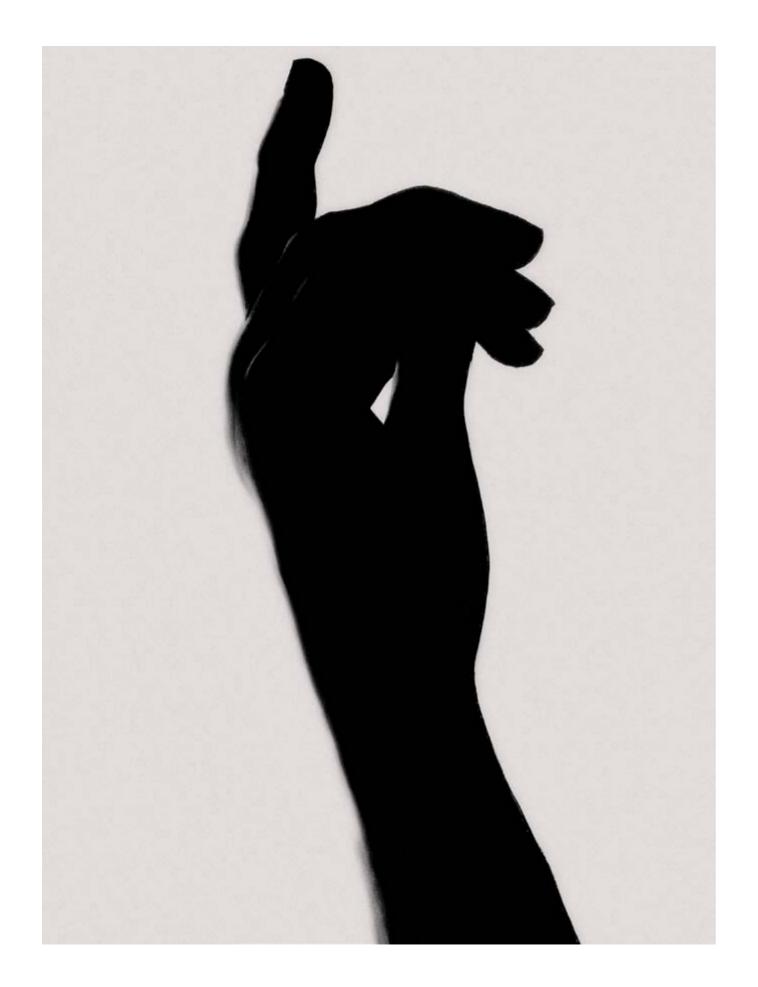


# Gira 1 2019-2020

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio





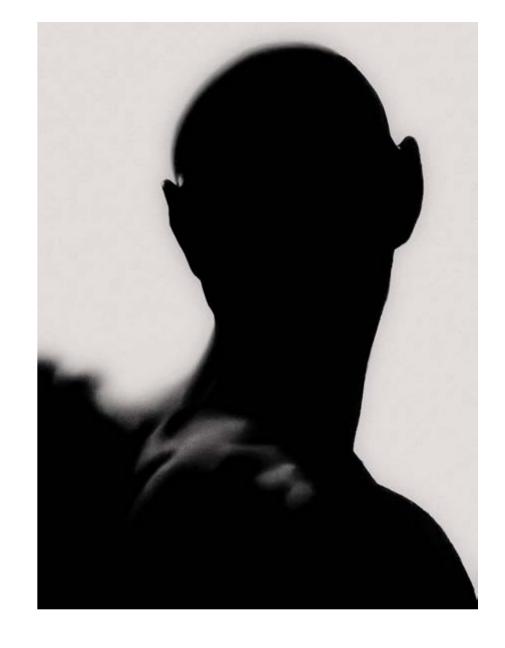
2019-2020

Charcoal on paper 26 × 19.7 in | 66 × 50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio







Gira 07

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

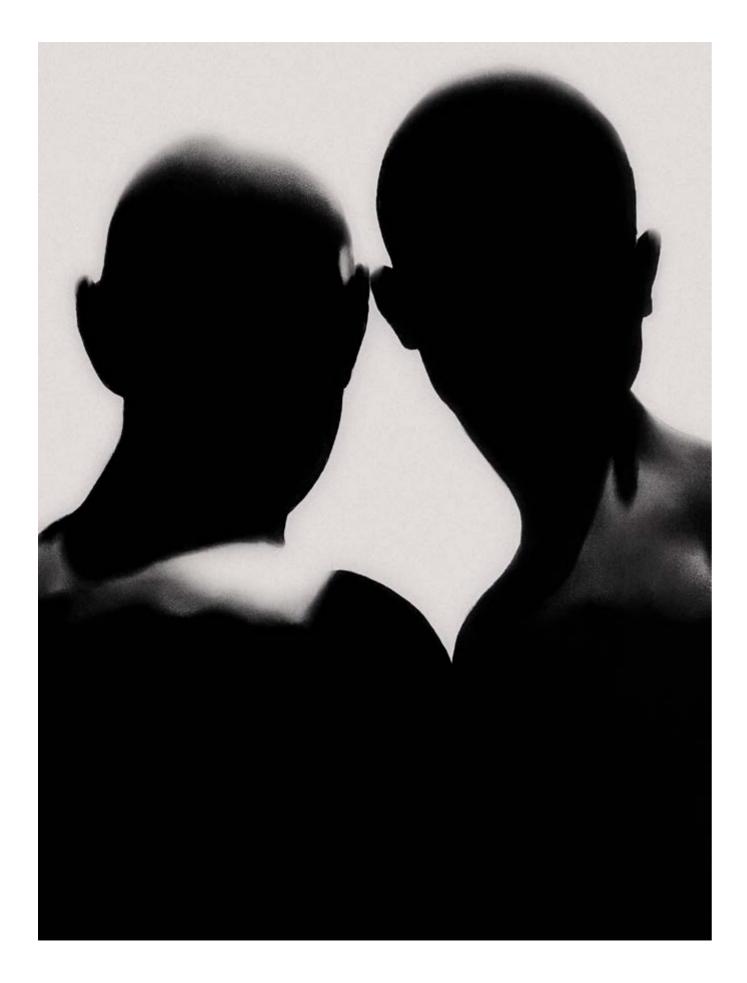
PROVENANCE Artist's studio

### Gira 10

2019-2020

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

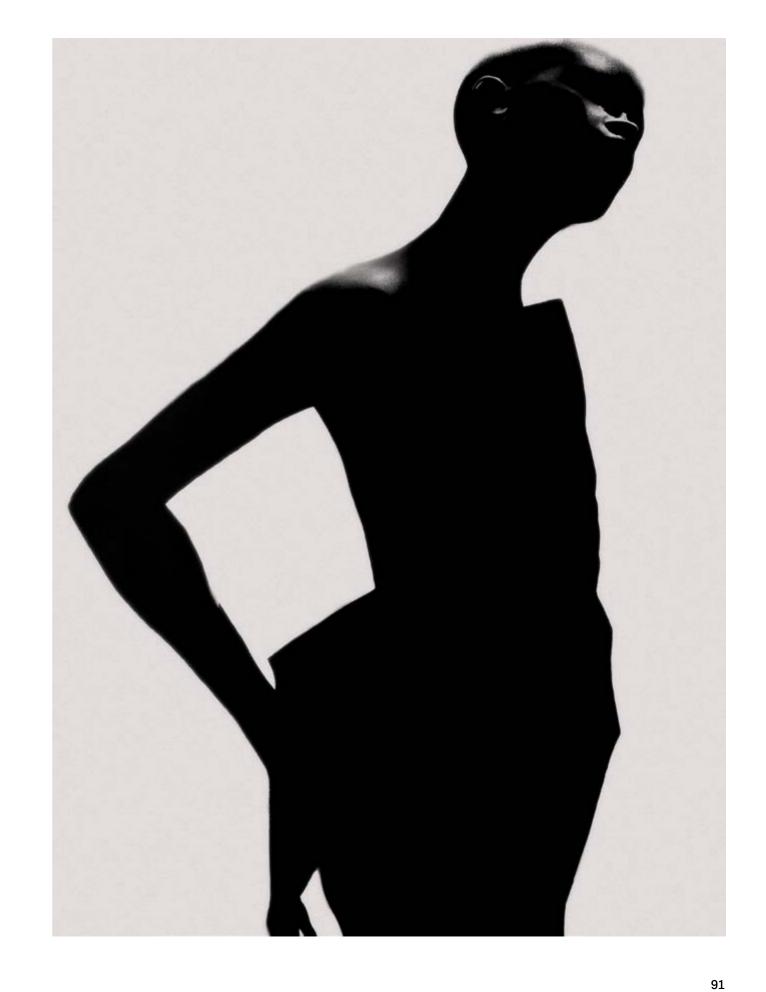
PROVENANCE Artist's studio



2019-2020

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

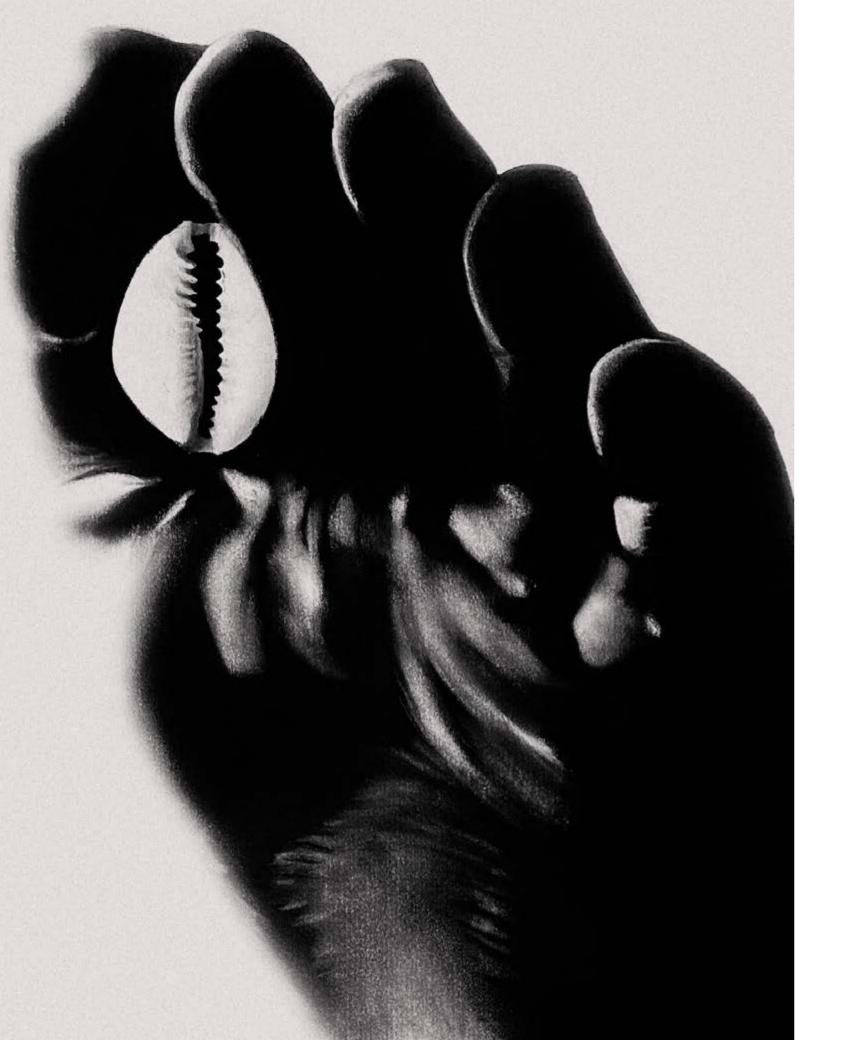
PROVENANCE Artist's studio



2019-2020

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio

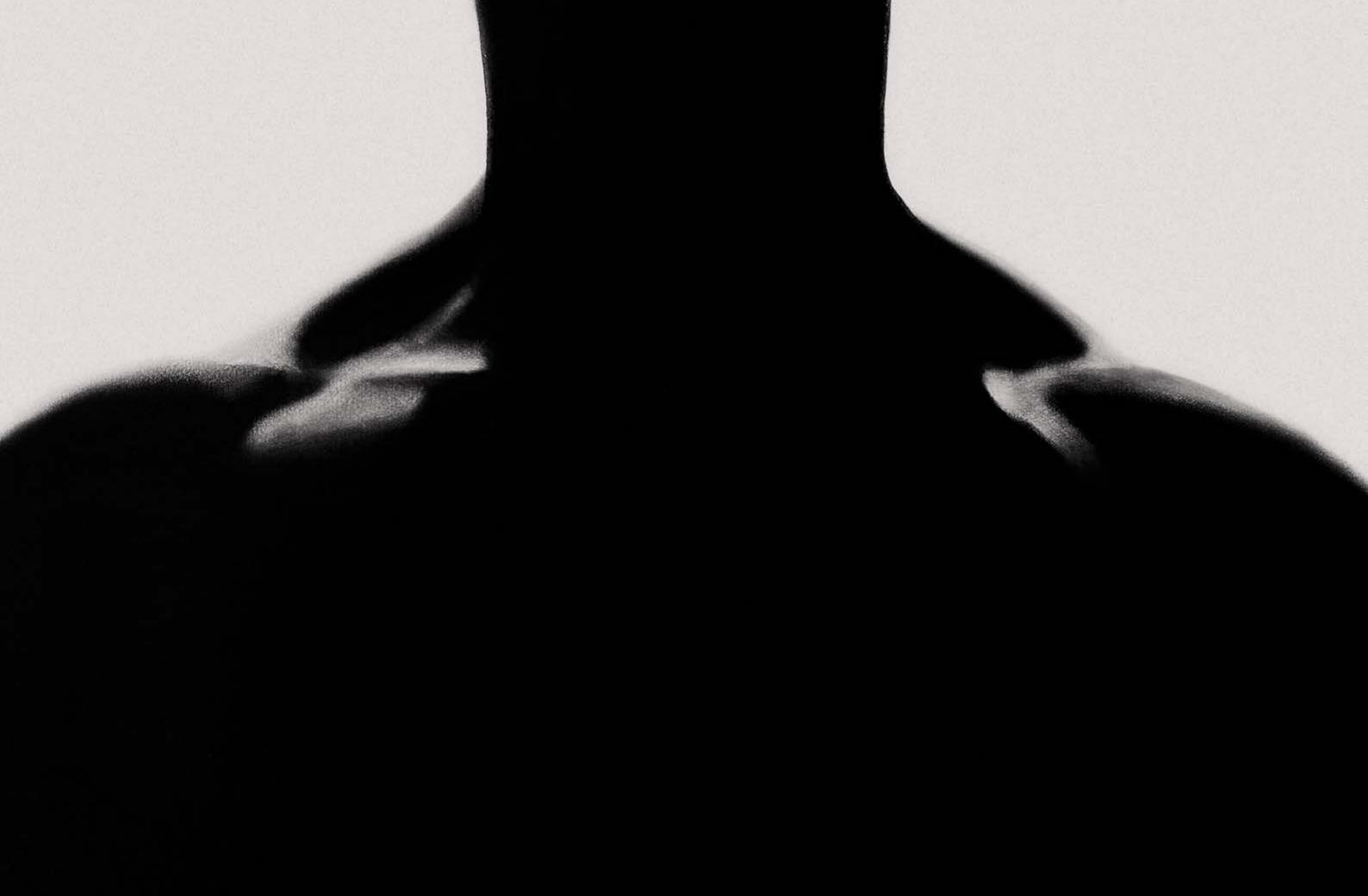


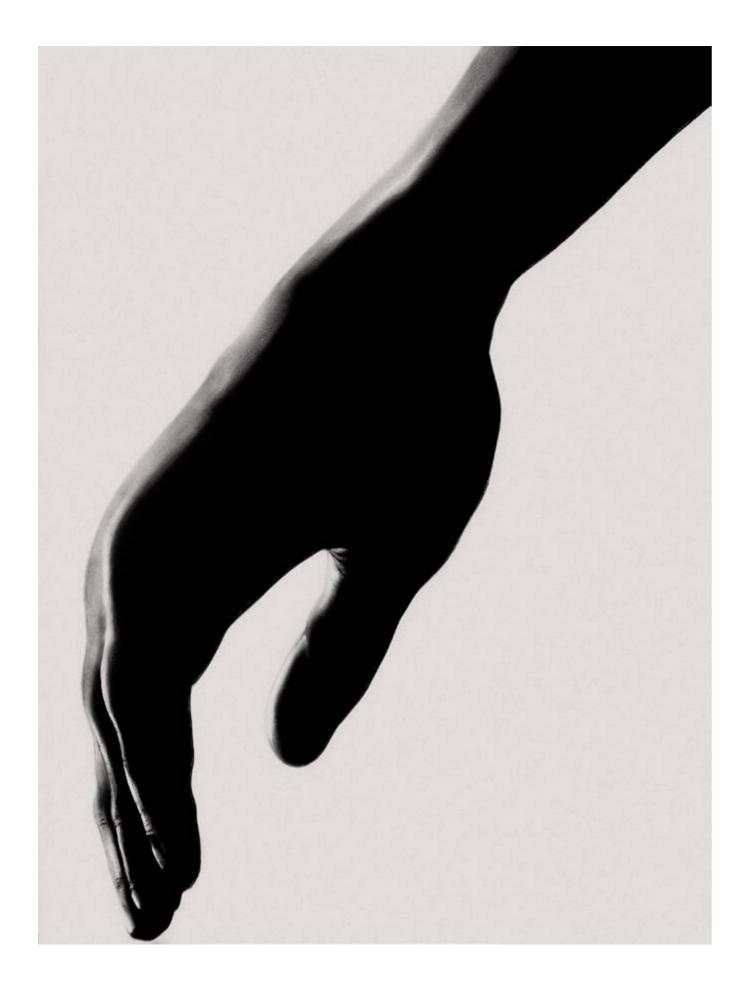


Gira 16 2019-2020

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio

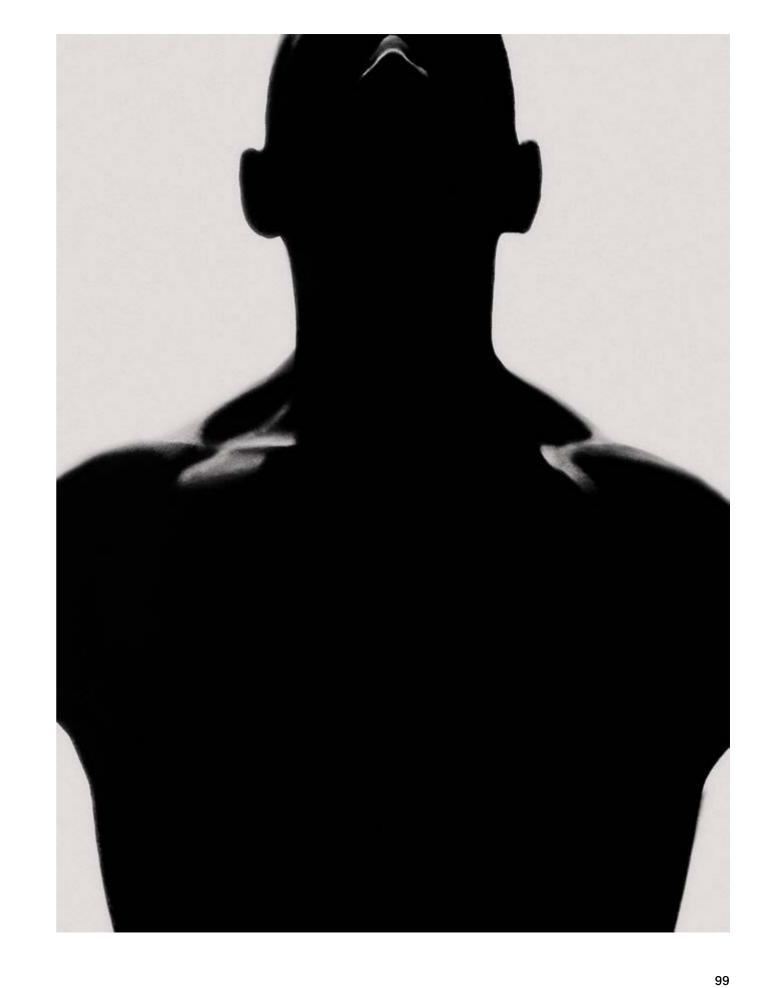




2019-2020

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio



2019-2020

Charcoal on paper 26×19.7 in | 66×50 cm

PROVENANCE Artist's studio





#### **BIOGRAPHY**

### Gustavo Nazareno

(b. 1994)

Gustavo Nazareno is known for the range of sources that his work draws on, from personal and cultural histories, fables and religious tales to Renaissance painting and fashion photography. His output mostly comprises oil paintings and charcoal drawings, both notable for the artist's deft manipulation of light and dark that recalls chiaroscuro, a technique of rendering illumination and shadow dating back to the fourth century. At Nazareno's hand, the dizzying breadth of his reference points, encompassing the cultural and spiritual histories of Africa, Europe and his home of South America, is distilled into enigmatic images that cannot be consigned to a single artistic category or movement.

Born in Três Pontas, Brazil, in 1994, Nazareno moved to São Paulo in 2018 on the advice of his Aunt, a practitioner of the Afro-Brazilian religion Umbanda, who had experienced a vision from a minor deity known as an Orixá. Self-taught as an artist, he has spent the remainder of his career painting and drawing scenes that originate in fables that he writes about Orixás from the Candomblé and Umbanda religions. Within Nazareno's practice, the boundary between faith, fiction and research is intentionally blurred, allowing him to call on all three to inspire his work. Each of his paintings begins with a sketch, which he then recreates in the form of *tableaux vivants*. For these, he dresses miniature wooden mannequins in garments that he creates, influenced equally by Haute Couture and traditional religious dress. When a sense of balance has been achieved, the image is painted, completing Nazareno's elaborate process.

Ambiguity and duality are two cornerstones of Nazareno's work, which seeks to interrogate tensions and similarities within various perceived binaries — fact and fiction, good and evil, God and man. The fables that his artworks reflect are set in a world where Orixás walk among us. "I do write about Orixás that exist, but I usually invent characters as well — not deities, but characters to create this syncretism between the human and divine", he says. His allusions to fashion photography deepen this relationship between spirituality and everyday life, imbuing his subjects' clothing with transcendental resonances.

Nazareno has been the subject of numerous institutional solo exhibitions in Brazil, most recently at the Museum of Modern Art Aloisio Magalhães in Recife (2024) and the Museu Afro Brasil Emanoel Araújo in São Paulo (2023). His work has also been included in group exhibitions at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (CCBB) in São Paulo, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art in New York and the Inhotim Institute in Brumadinho, among others. He will be the subject of a forthcoming solo exhibition curated by Danny Dunson at the DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center in Chicago, scheduled for 2026.

#### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2025	'Bará', Opera Gallery, Bal Harbour, USA
	'Afro-Latin Baroque', Opera Gallery, Miami, USA
2024	'Orixás: Personal Tales on Portraiture', Opera Gallery, London, UK
	'Star of a Hero', Cassina Projects, Milan, Italy
	'Bará', Museu de Arte Moderna Aloisio Magalhães, Recife, Brazil
2023	'Bará', Museu Afro Brasil Emanoel Araújo, São Paulo, Brazil
	'Pombagira', Selma Feriani Gallery, Tunes, Tunisia
2022	'Personal Notes on Faith', Cassina
	Projects, Milan, Italy
2021	'Fables on Exu', Gallery 1957, London, UK

#### COLLECTIVE EXHIBITIONS

2024	'One Becomes Many', Peréz Art Museum Miami, Miami, USA
	'Mirror of the Mind: Figuration in the Jorge M. Pérez Collection', El Espacio 23, Miami, USA
	'Dos Brasis', SESC Quitandinha, Petrópolis, Brazil
	'Encruzilhadas da Arte Afro-Brasileira', Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Belo Horizonte, Brazil
	'Brazil Now Vol. I', U-Art-P, Bergamo, Italy
2023	'Encruzilhadas da Arte Afro-Brasileira', Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, São Paulo, Brazil
	'Etérea', Instituto Colaço Paulo, Florianópolis, Brazil
	'Dos Brasis', SESC Belenzinho, São Paulo, SP, Brazil
	'NOW', Museu Inimá de Paula, Belo Horizonte, Brazil
2022	'Quilombo: vida, problemas e aspirações do negro', Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil
	'Between Nothingness and Infinity', Cornell Biennial, Johnson Museum of Art, New York, USA
	'The Storytellers', Gallery 1957, London, UK
2021	'Outros Ensaios para o Tempo', Galeria Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil
2020	'Collective Reflections: Contemporary African & Diasporic Expressions of A New Vanguard', Gallery 1957, Accra, Ghana

#### **PUBLICATIONS**

2024 2023	Brazilian Homo, Issue 1, Brazil, 15 June 2024, ill. International Journal of Fashion Studies, Volume 10, No. 2 2023, Intellect Journals,	2023 2021	1-54, Galeria Portas Vilaseca, London, UK SP-Arte, Galeria Portas Vilaseca, São Paulo, Brazil
	Bristol, ill. in colour on the cover	2020	Legacy Brothers Lab, Chicago, USA
	Gustavo Nazareno, <i>BARÁ</i> , Editora Act., São Paulo		
2022	Serrote, Volume 42, IMS, ill. in colour on the cover	2024	Winner of the Jabuti Award for the
2022	Ekow Eshun, <i>In the Black Fantastic</i> , Thames and Hudson, London, ill. in colour p. 258	2024	book <i>Bará</i> for graphic design, Brazil
2021	Elle Brasil, Volume 6, 16 December 2021, São Paulo, ill. in colour on the cover		

#### RESIDENCIES AND SPECIAL PROJECTS

2023	1-54, Galeria Portas Vilaseca, London, UK
2021	SP-Arte, Galeria Portas Vilaseca,
	São Paulo, Brazil
2020	Legacy Brothers Lab, Chicago, USA

#### **AWARDS**

2024	Winner of the Jabuti Award for the
	book Bará for graphic design, Brazil







*Bará #7* 2022



19

Bará #3 2022

16

24

35



Bará #8 2022

20



*Bará #24* 2019-2023



*Bará #26* 2019-2023



*Bará #27* 2019-2023



*Bará #30* 2019-2023



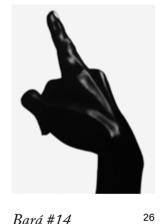
*Bará #13* 2019-2023



*Bará #16* 2019-2023

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*Bará #14* 2019-2023



*Bará #17* 2019-2023



*Bará #37* 2019-2023



*Bará #32* 2019-2023



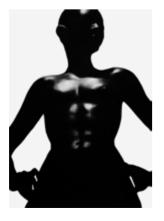
*Bará #47* 2019-2023



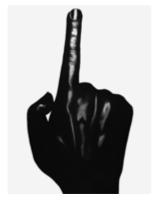
*Bará #404* 2019-2024



Bará #18 2019-2023



*Bará #20* 2019-2023



37

*Bará #22* 2019-2023



Bará #19 38 2019-2023



*Bará #406* 2019-2024

58



*Bará #119* 2019-2023



*Bará #407* 2019-2024

59



*Bará #412* 2019-2024

63

64







Bará #414 2019-2024



Bará #415 2019-2024



Bará #417 2019-2024

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86



Gira 13 2019-2020



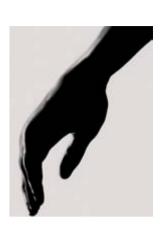
Gira 14 2019-2020

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Gira 16 2019-2020



Gira 24 2019-2020



Bará #419 2019-2024



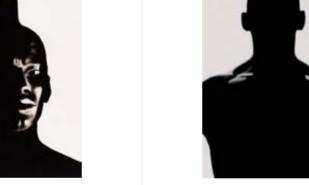
Bará #424 2019 - 2024



Bará #426 2019-2024



Bará #427 2019-2024



79

71



2019-2020

Gira 23

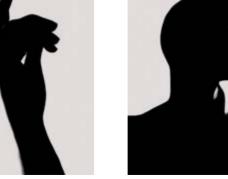


Gira 1 2019-2020



Gira 08 2019-2020

80



82

Gira 07 2019-2020



Gira 10 2019-2020

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This exhibition catalogue is created upon the occasion of the exhibition Gustavo Nazareno, 'Bará' Presented by Opera Gallery Bal Harbour from 6 – 29 March 2025.

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#### CURATOR

Alexandre Sarfati

#### **AUTHOR**

Alexandre Sarfati Jennifer Inacio

#### COORDINATION

Louise Bassou

#### ICONOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Anaïs Chombar

#### PROOFREADERS

Louise Bassou Anaïs Chombar Aurélie Heuzard Gary Schimmel-Bauer

#### **GRAPHIC DESIGN**

Patrice Pellier

#### PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS

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#### COVER

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#### OPERA GALLERY

The St. Regis, Bal Harbour Resort, 9703 Collins Avenue, Bal Harbour FL 33154 T +1 305 861 9022 balharbour@operagallery.com operagallery.com

