

The term Bantu is a generic designation coined by a European linguist in the 19th century to group together a vast array of African languages that share common phonological roots. Under this classification, languages such as Quimbundo, Quicongo, and several others were recognized as members of the Bantu language family. Today, the Bantu languages – widely spoken in countries such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mozambique, among others – continue to represent its main linguistic base, both in terms of the number of speakers and territorial reach.

In addition to their importance in the African context, Bantu languages and cultures have played a decisive role in the processes of diaspora and cultural reconfiguration in the Americas, and are deeply intertwined with the formation of Brazilian society. Their presence in Brazil and various territories of the Americas is not limited to a remote heritage but is expressed in practices that organize time, space, language, and community life.

In Brazil, these modes of existence have shaped their own ways of marking time as a spiral – in which the past is not left behind but echoes in the present – and of creating living spaces traced by movement, sound, and encounter, as explained by Leda Maria Martins. In Bantu cosmology, time is not drawn in a straight line but pulses in cycles, returns, and activations. There is no rigid separation between what has passed, what has happened, what is happening, and what is yet to come. The past is not a fixed point behind us that continues to act, it revealed itself in the rhythms of the atabaques, in the murmured prayers, and in the everyday gestures that keep the links with ancestors alive. Time is inscribed in the body and in listening, in the terreiro (house of worship) parties, in the samba circles, in the greetings that invoke the enchantment of those who came before. It is a presence that continually remakes itself. In Brazil, this experience of time takes root in practices of reinvention and continuity, in which to exist is also to remember, and to remember is a way of keeping the world moving.

In studies of Brazilian Afro-diasporic thoughts, there has been an erasure of Bantu cosmoperceptions, which are present, for instance, in the terreiros (house of worship) of Angola traditions and umbandas. Between us, Bantu, affection is called dengo, mess is mafuá, confusion is fuzuê, enchantment is canjerê, and work is curimá. Amid the blurred lines between spirits and living beings, working can refer to the daily labor or to the moment when ancestral spirits go down to curimá, as in the verses of Dona Ivone Lara's song: "I walked, I walked, I walked to curimá".

The communication between the visible and invisible worlds runs through many of these expressions: the beat of the drums, the drawings on the earth, the melodies, the dances, and the objects charged with intention shape networks of meanings that connect what is seen and what is sensed. The body, more than matter, is a territory of passage, a guardian of stories and knowledge woven into gestures, rhythm, and celebrations. While the West thinks in static terms, looking at life from afar, as in a laboratory; Batu philosophy understands life as a flow: everything transforms, everything moves in a network.

From cultural practices that continually reinvent themselves, we find the musicality of the maracatus and congadas, the pontos riscados (sacred writing) from Afro-Brazilian religions, the circular dances, the circle games, the chant formulas, and the elements of spiritual protection and communication. There is no separation between what is and is not alive. Life is an expansion, a constant process of creation and re-creation. This exhibition invites us to recognize these practices as active ways of shaping time, territory, and life in common.

Curated by MAR

For some time now, many beings, despite the odds against them, have been urging us to dive into the Bantu liquids that shape our bodies, our culture, our dreams, and our times. After all, that is what we are: this collection of diverse "ntu" – at once an ontological event in relation and an autonomous force, not reducible to a mere two-way street of understanding – existing because stars, grasses, chlorophyll, waves crashing against rocks, a thundering tide, the invention of a trap and fiber optics, the breath of an instrument, and an active breeze. Over time, the plural form of Bantu has become widely known (at first, a linguistic classification from the 19th century), which, although translated Euro-occidentally as “people” or “folk”, seems more to include people rather than really enclose the idea.

On this side of the Atlantic, particularly in the territory that has been recognized as Brazilian for just over 200 years, the people who were systematically kidnapped, from the first cycles of the slave trade, already came from regions of the African continent situated within the Bantu-speaking world. At this immeasurably inhumane cost forged, as we know (we can only hope everyone knows this in these times of scandalous historical revisionism), whatever may be called Brazilian culture, with substantial Bantu influences regarding the African presence in this territory.

It is, indeed, our Bantu life that resides in the current lexicon – between *minhocas* (worms), *caçulas* (youngest sons), *caçambas* (buckets), and *quitandas* (homemade sweet and savory treats), in interchange of Ls and Rs, between consonants leaning on vowels, in redesigned syntax and phonetics, between semantic axes – in bodily games, and in the circle as a priori inscription of what lives and makes life possible.

There is no doubt, then, that we are *capoeira* and *capoeiragem*; *quilombo*, *quilombismo*, and *quilombagem* (with the complex strategies of refusal and emergence); what crosses path to sustain and invent – or *encruzilhada* (crossroads), as synthesis and multiplication; what, once crossed, becomes cosmogram, *pontos riscados* (sacred drawings) and sacred tool; we are *samba*, *jongo*, a spirituality that does not subtract the thickness of the body, the drum as a regulation (just as *lamba* once was, a polysemic term that can signify, for instance, *nkisi*-deity, an ancestor of a given community, a state of calm, locus, and a school of thought). Just as *nzambi* is in the community, as a proverbial saying from the Kongo people reminds us – and *nzambi*, like *kalunga*, is what exists – we are in the *reinados*, the *congados*, the *moçambiques*, the *vissungos*, the *calundus*, in the utterance of the word *candomblé* as an infinite event, we are in the *maracatus*, and in the banners that take time by the hand and wave it toward transformation. We are charcoal inscribing the density of the burning, the full moon: light and cataract of the skies, because it exposes and conceals everything, like an inner game and a public chant. And we solfège our childhoods in “Job's Slaves” (where Job is *ondjo*, *onjo*, *inzo*, *nzo*, or home, if you prefer). Will we ever be trees again, under the teachings of the *nkisi*-wind, with the same strength with which we ceased to be? *Mulemba*, *Imbondeiro*, *Yala Nkuwu*? *Mangueira* and *Salgueiro* already want us to be trees that *samba* so we may reopen the meaning of the sun each day.

Markedly Bantu (this name that resignifies itself and can, strange as it may feel familiar, reclaim and propose new lives) is to come from the African continent and, ethically, in the deepest, most important, and complex of relationships, to stand with the original peoples of this land, in order to modulate one's own ancestors, to make them *caboclos*, to re-dream the most intimate villages (those formed before form itself), to consecrate oneself to *jurema*, to cultivate what is clouded under this totality called the present and under hope, with colors of plumage, of the mantle-bird, suggesting the steady recurrence of what is yet to come.

A perspective that permeates much Bantu knowledge present in the Black diaspora is the understanding that, on many levels, there must necessarily be that which varies as it becomes established, and it is in the sense of what is established, and, for this very reason, varies that we have gathered, in this exhibition, subjectivities, and artistic actions, between Brazil (mostly), Angola, Cuba and Uruguay, dealing with Bantu presences from the standpoint of the now, happening in this instant molecule, and, in some way, forever, bearing in mind that forever is when the uncontainable now set off fireworks to celebrate its own birthday.

Thiago Costa

WHEN THE MOON ENTERS THE SUN

Thiago Costa returns to sculpture as if to defunctionalize matter: he loosens rods, marks the ground, and creates images like someone possessed by revelations, magnetized by premonitions, struck by enchantments. His forms evoke trances and crossings. The scales shift, and artistic knowledge reflects Bantu traditions and other sources. Snakes with two heads, knives, and rainbows become a synthesis of inapprehensible time. There is something in his sculptures that summons the invisible and reintegrates us into the cycle of nature – as if, by art, we could return to the forest.

CALUNGA MAIOR

Calunga maior, in the Bantu language, refers to the great sea crossed by enslaved Africans, but the term carries other layers of meaning. | Thiago Costa's film is anchored in this crossing, presenting a visual expression of one of Bantu philosophies, which relies not on Greek logos but on life vibrating, orality, and nguzu, the deepest forces. These are not images meant for mere contemplation; they require listening, initiation, and decryption. The symbolic structure of the Bantu cosmogram – with its four cardinal points representing the cycles of birth, life, death, and ancestry – serves here as a key for interpretation. This is not a linear narrative but a spiritual journey, a cinema of presence. A film that summons the body and invites us to listen to the invisible. A film for the initiated.

NTOTO

Ntoto is a word-tapestry. When unrolled on the floor, it reveals the inscription: “Under this, other cities.” The simple and direct phrase calls for subterranean listening. In the Bantu language Kikongo, ntoto can be understood as “earth,” “soil,” and as a vital principle that connects the visible to the invisible. The layers of time, the city, and the body overlap and intersect. The tapestry does not adorn; it grounds. It is sacred ground, a map, and a portal. Like a fabric cosmogram, it suggests that, beneath the asphalt and modern pavements, another world still pulses, one that came before, one insistent.

Pakapim

Ku pemba portrays the interaction between worlds, drawing on Bantu-Kongo legacies in the diaspora. At the center of the composition, an elderly woman – enthroned in her chair – receives from the ancestors the designation to heal her people, here embodied by the child figure. The scene takes place at the feet of Oitindianganga, the sacred tree of Nkisi Ndembwa, its roots invoke the ancestral realm, and its canopy, the physical world. This link between dimensions is guided by the cosmogram Dikenga, which visually charts the cycles of existence. The figure of Tata Muilo – Father Ray of Sunshine – highlights the sun’s importance in Kongo-Angola cosmologies, where ritual timings and interactions with the invisible world follow its movement. For the Kongo people, the sun is the father of all worlds, the one who illuminates the paths between the living and their ancestors.

Mahku Collective

In a sensitive dialogue with Bantu philosophy, the works of MAHKU (Huni Kuin Artists Movement) are also built upon the circularity of time, the transit between worlds, and the centrality of ancestral presence as a living force. If, according to the Bantu thought, the Dikenga cosmogram guides the existence passages, then among the Huni Kuin, the ayahuasca reveals paths between the visible and invisible. Both systems recognize life as a relationship: between beings, territories, and distinct planes of reality. At this intersection, MAHKU not only creates images but conjures possible worlds. The aerial rivers and ethereal connections of present, past, and future dreams bring MAHKU, in artistic-performative terms, to an unprecedented convergence of times that, oneirically, are not measured, like the Black Bantu constructions in this territory.

Milena Manfredini

Blacksmiths of the Orixás, a film by Milena Manfredini, follows four iron masters – José Adário and Cláudio Bispo (Bahia), Olegário Lemos and Wuelyton Ferreiro (Rio de Janeiro) – whose crafts are crossed by the power of Ogum, the orixá of iron, technology, and protection in Yoruba culture, and of Nkosi, the lion-warrior-blacksmith-creator in Brazil's Angola-Congo Candomblé traditions. Between workshops and altars, anvils, and prayers, the film reveals how the forge becomes an extension of the body and faith, an ancestral heritage. The camera listens to the silence, gestures, and words of these men who keep alive a tradition that is at once technical, spiritual, and collective. More than documenting, the film evokes an embodied memory: a knowledge that pulses in the heat of the iron, in everyday rituals, and in the narratives that sustain the continuity of worlds. It is an ode to the paths opened by orality, by creativity, and the persistence of knowledge forged over time. It is also a poetic nod to the expertise, techniques, and Bantu knowledge regarding the forging of iron, which has been present on the African continent for a long time. What new forms have been forged in Brazil from these legacies, and in dialogue with other Afro-referenced cultural influences?

Luana Vitra

Musculature of Waiting is a gesture encounter between Luana Vitra and her father, Jorge da Costa. In this series, the trap is a body held taut in vigilance, only releasing its tension at the moment of capture. The work was born from the research project “Zanzado’s plot is a trap”, during which Luana designed sixty traps as a mean of exploring herself as a body armed for the world. Jorge’s mousetraps are part of a greater desire to weave knowledge with the same precision that hones the timing and technique of capture.

Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro

The memory, as Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro teaches us, is an ancestral mosaic – a fragment that preserves the gesture, the scratch, and the floor. **STILL WITHOUT A NAME** is an installation of 38 mosaics on wood – some made from a Jaqueira [tree of the fruit jaca] by the hands of the quilombo-la master Seu Manoel – arranged on the packed-earth floor, allowing visitors to step in, step out, and move around. Castiel writes: “I’m inviting people to look the ground they walk on and reflect on the historical layers that compose it.”

The cosmograms that my aunt scratched are like my mosaics: Afro-Brazilian memories of an ancestral and present-day aesthetic experience, of places where the beautiful was something that could enchant life”. The work reflects the Afro-Brazilian oracular practice of the Bantu origin – the pontos riscados (sacred drawings) – and draws on the rituals of curandeirismo (healing rites), Black Catholicism, Umbanda, jurema, and benzimentos (blessing practices).

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NGANZA – The Whole World Spinning Inside the Ganzá. The Maracatu Dance-Life

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Like stones and seeds spinning on the ganzá, the maracatu images – dancing feet, touching hands, calungas, and banners – echo the memory of this play of life. Recorded during the sambadas at the headquarters of maracatu de baque solto in Pernambucos’s Zona da Mata: Cambinda Brasileira (Engenho Cumbe), Estrela Brilhante (Nazaré da Mata), and Leão de Ouro (Condado).

Aline Motta

This animation investigates the possible origins of the children’s game “Escravos de Jó” (Job’s Slaves), which may be linked to the period of slavery. Research suggests that the name “Jó” derives from nzo (meaning house in Quicongo), referring to the enslaved women in the household playing “caxangá” – perhaps a cowrie-shell game. The song encodes both caxangá and the zigzag of the enslaved fleeing from the bush captains, reflecting the rhythmic and circular elements typical of Afro-Brazilian culture.

Siwaju Lima

The work explores the idea of the fortress as a symbolic and spiritual space of safeguarding, memory, and power. Inspired by Afrodiasporic ancestry, Àjà is presented as a magic portal through which bodies and consciousnesses reconnect with paths that were previously denied or diverted from them.

It is a magnetized territory where time bends, and destiny is reenchanting. In Black thought, especially in Yoruba and Bantu cosmologies, a fortress is not just a physical defense but a living structure of hospitality, protection, and reconnection with the *axé* – the vital force that sustains the being. In this sense, a fortress does not isolate; it anchors, protects, and propels. Look at Me, Time proposes an inversion. Instead of mastering time, the work yields to it, acknowledging it as both shelter and a living entity. Here, time is spiral and ritualistic, woven into layers so that bring past, present, and future into conversation. The work proposes to think of the space as an ancestral body and existence as a radical gesture of belonging and remembrance.

André Vargas

The assembled work evokes memory, spirituality, and language drawn from Afrodiasporic heritages. In *Luanda Became Aruanda* (2023), the artist sings of Luanda's transformation into Aruanda, the mythical realm of freedom in the *terreiros* (house of worship) of Umbanda and Candomblé. Nkisi Said (2025) gives voice and color to Bantu deities, reclaiming their names through poetry. In *Grandma Calunga and Father Café* (2025), the gesture of offering coffee to the *pretos-velhos* (an entity) reimagines the Atlantic crossing and affirms the Black body as a vital force, as Ney Lopes sings. *Black and Bantu Prayer* (2025) celebrates ancestry as listening, guidance, and affection, positioning Umbanda as a territory of Bantu and indigenous resistance. The works assert that remembering, naming, and singing are acts of existing, resisting, and re-enchanting history.

Cipriano

The installation is based on the *ngoma* – drum, in the Bantu language – as an ancestral technology for communicating with the invisible. In the *terreiros* (house of worship), the sound is not just rhythm; it is language, invocation, and memory. Here, leather is replaced by starched cotton fabric, inscribed out with dots sung in charcoal. From inside the drums, speakers intone these songs, creating a sound and vibrational sculpture. The work evokes knowledge from Bantu cosmology and Umbanda, proposing art as a means of connection between worlds, between the visible and invisible. The materiality of the installation – canvas, fabric, charcoal, sound – inscribes a sensitive writing that pulses like the heart, like the beat that moves the body and activates memories. Art here is a territory of enunciation, enchantment, and permanence.

Eustáquio Neves

In Arturo's series, the symbolic layers transcend the idea of representation. Through his visual research into Afro-Brazilian communities, the artist ratifies that, in these territories, it simply doesn't make no sense to separate what is sacred from anything else. His imagery practice is committed to the syncretism between the profane and the divine, proposing multiple interpretations and straining the fixed boundaries of meaning. The work's intricate construction – with overlapping layers, subtle gestures, and plural signs – reveals a visual universe in which every detail carries a dual significance.

Márcia Falcão

Capoeira in High Palette presents a series of compositions grounded in capoeira's aesthetic and political foundations. Built on these gestures – a living legacy of Bantu cultures in Brazil –, the drawings depict bodies in suspension, stretching and twisting, reinventing the forms and the forces that sustain them. Here, capoeira appears as a method: the ginga becomes a line, the flourish, a curve, and the dodge, strategic voids. These figures push the boundaries of conventional anatomy, assert alternative physical possibilities and evoke memories of resistance inscribed in movement. By proposing "impossible drawings to improbable bodies," the series inscribes a choreography of delirium on canvas, in which capoeira is both an insurgent past and the plastic power of the now.

José Bedia

José Bedia's oeuvre mobilizes the spiritualities of Bantu, Afro-Cuban, and Amerindian origin, with particular emphasis on the Minkisi – Bakongo sacred entities. In the series Simba Nkisi Yombe, Sundi Nkisi, Nkisi Manyangu, and Nkisi Vili Loango, Bedia summons these forces as graphic, living, and ritualistic presences that can cross over into contemporary art, among other things. His incisive lines operate as instruments of healing, protection, and resistance. By articulating spirituality and politics, Bedia situates Black cosmologies in a place that suggests a powerful interpretation and a present narration.

Pedro Figari

Pedro Figari (Montevideo, 1861-1938) was one of the great names in Latin-American art, whose work redefined painting as a vehicle for memory, affection, and identity. Self-taught and deeply rooted in Uruguay's popular culture, Figari depicted scenes of Afro-descendant daily life, folk festivals, and rituals. With loose brushstrokes and earthy palettes, his canvases reject European academicism in favor of a sensitive expression of ordinary life. His painting does not seek realism but rather a collective memory, somewhere between dream and memory. For Figari, art was a way of affirming the dignity of bodies and knowledge silenced by official history. Through poetic renderings of dances, terreiros (house of worship), processions, and the domestic interiors, his work endures as an essential testimony to Latin American cultural resistance and fabulation, in this case, powerfully embodied by the Bantu-rooted tradition of candombe (Uruguay folk dance).

Ana Pi

Metal sculpture, pastel drawing, and films with drone-generated images shape the installation **NEITHER OLD BLACK — NOR NEW BLACK: How many Manicongos?**, that establishes a continuous dialog between Ana Pi and her father, the artist Julio de Oliveira. It explores the tensions in the relations between presence and disappearance, life and death while elaborating on grief and Black dignity both politically and poetically. Julio, “made disappeared” in 2018, inscribes in his own features the faces, gestures, and memories of Black people as if restoring a lineage, a pantheon, an interrupted archive. Ana, in her turn, choreographs absence as presence, using the body and gesture of *gira* to bridge the void and mobilizing affections. The notion of “vulto” permeates every layer of the work evoking the Bantu essence in the spiritual and cultural fabric of Brazilian formation: Who preserves? Where is it? When does it shine? The installation serves as an altar, garden, or monument, a space of contemplation and celebration, where the freedom and continuity of Black people, old and new, become visible, alive, and vibrant.

Walemba: The Story of Lwanzo wa Mikuba narrates technical-inventive flows of Basanga people and their spiritual relation with copper. The work documents the tradition of casting Mukuba crosses, symbols of value and memory of South Congo, and reactivates knowledge that resists colonial extractivist logic. Lwanzo wa Mikuba – “the deep water current” – evokes the underground rivers of history, guided by nganga rituals and songs that summon the bakisi forces to reveal the mysterious veins. The malachite, formed by scintillant liquid in ovens made from termite mounds, reveals a sacred alchemy. More than technique, casting is cosmogony, a communion gesture between humans, earth, and the invisible ones. Walemba rewrites sustainable practices of extraction and production, activating a collective memory where art and spirituality meld together. Presented in this exhibition, in dialogical braid with the film *Ferreiros dos orixás* (Blacksmiths of the Orixás), the work recalls the ancient relationship that many Bantu cultures have with metalworking and leads us to the fundamental question about the how these knowledges were brought to Brazilian territory by those who crossed the great ocean from these same Bantu lands.