

# Mendes Wood DM introducing 'Linhas Tortas' | Thread 4

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**Mendes Wood DM presents *Linhas Tortas*, a multi-venue international group exhibition in São Paulo. Thread 4: *Can certain life events or twists of fate that seem like limitations open up new directions for creative expression?***

## ***Linhas Tortas***

curated by Diana Campbell

Opening September 2, 2023

**Mendes Wood DM** São Paulo

Rua Barra Funda 216

São Paulo, Brazil

## **Casa Iramaia**

By appointment only

Mendes Wood DM is proud to announce [\*Linhas Tortas\*](#), a multi-venue international group exhibition in São Paulo that explores the entanglements of journeys and the power of storytelling, celebrating a decade of the gallery's existence. The exhibition takes inspiration from the Brazilian aphorism "deus escreve certo por linhas tortas," which literally translates to "god writes straight with crooked lines" and metaphorically to "god works in mysterious ways."

While many of the 100+ works of art in *Linhas Tortas* formally contain curving lines, *Linhas Tortas* does not take the aphorism which inspires its title at face value. The exhibition asks questions while proposing other ways to read this complex and ubiquitous phrase.

The exhibition contains five interconnected, overlapping, and often knotted curatorial threads that stretch across an intimate domestic space which is a masterpiece of Modern Brazilian architecture and an expansive industrial space that is the headquarters of Mendes Wood DM in São Paulo. These threads are held together by the idea that lines of solidarity bound by commitment, trust and friendship form a powerful, intangible currency that can enable radical change in previously unimaginable directions. Ones that aren't straight, narrow, expedient, or singular.

## **Thread 4**

*Can certain life events or twists of fate that seem like limitations open up new directions for creative expression?*

*What do geometries of liberation look like?*

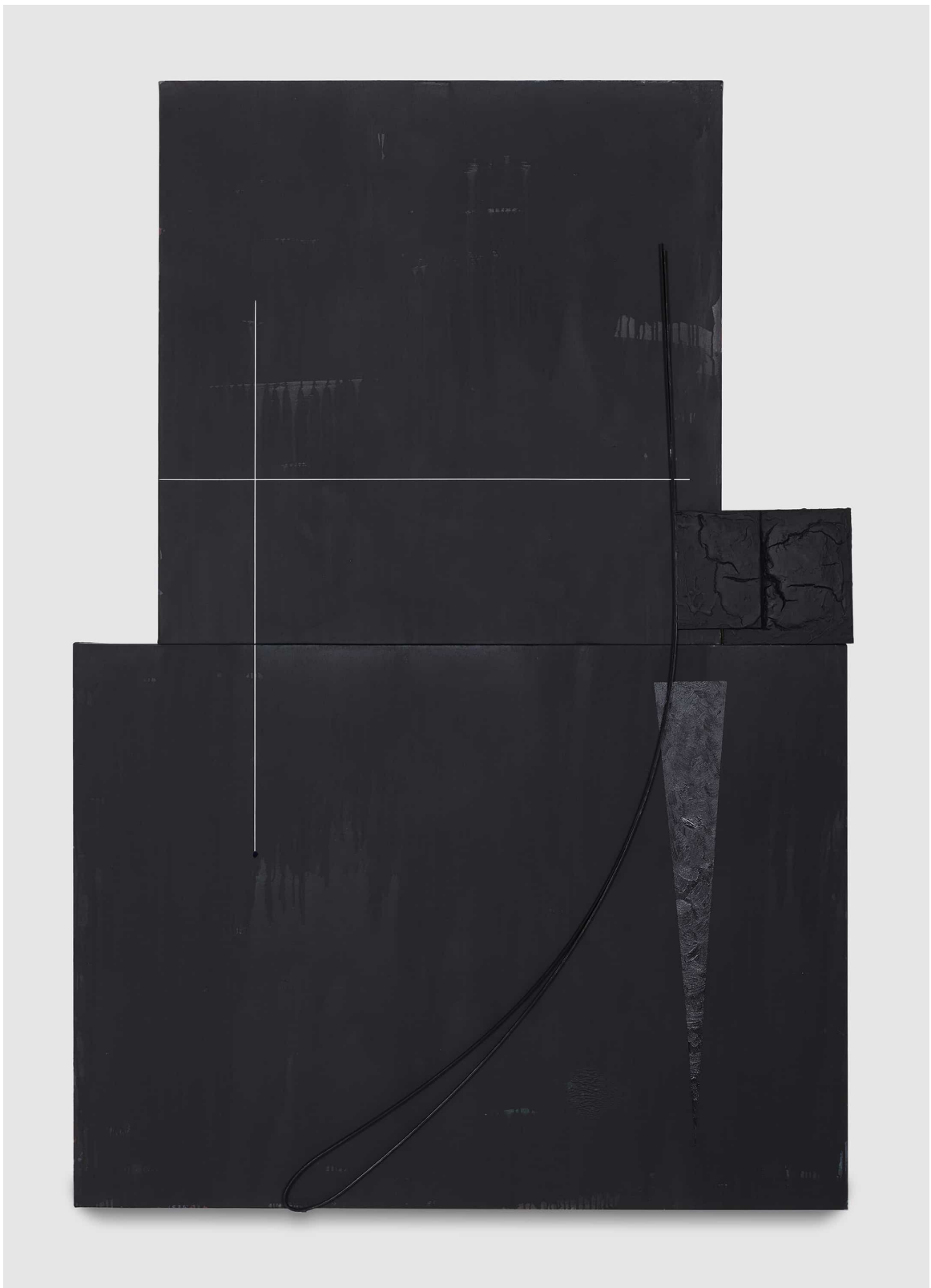


Image: Torkwase Dyson, *Indeterminacy #1*(Black Compositional Thought), 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York.

*Linhas Tortas* celebrates how artists have collaborated with changes in their own life-path to transform the way they make art, refusing to have their creative impulses defeated by doubt – neither internal nor external. Some of these changes are physical, others political, but always personal. Several involve drastically shifted career paths taken by choice, others involve accidental discoveries in the process of building a life, discoveries that open up spaces of freedom and possibility that might have previously been unimagined.

The American artist **Torkwase Dyson's** painting for *Linhas Tortas* honors a term that she describes as

'geometries of liberation' which she considers across her practice within the framework of her continually evolving philosophy of [Black Compositional Thought](#). Her work defies the violent legacy of Modernism and leads us into spaces of freedom built and inhabited by brown and black bodies in order to be able to survive and defy the worlds constructed to destroy their sense of agency. Squares, curved lines, triangles, and trapezoids in her work are connected to the history of black resistance and liberation. For example, the square in her work is connected to the true story of [Henry 'Box' Brown](#), an enslaved man who freed himself in 1849 by mailing himself in a crate to Philadelphia. The triangle – to [Harriet Jacobs](#), who wrote in her 1861 narrative of her escape from slavery by hiding in a slant-roofed garret for the better part of a decade.



Image: Rubem Valentim, Untitled, 1991. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York.

Also working with geometry and liberation, **Rubem Valentim**, a self-taught artist from Salvador, Bahia, grew into artmaking in the late 1940s from a professional background in journalism and dentistry to reimagine and reinscribe representations of *orixás* (gods) in Brazilian art and to create an artistic language to be able to evoke Brazilian cultural syncretism. Valentim's works are structurally organized and composed of abstract signs made from horizontal and vertical lines, circles, cubes and arrows. These elements are geometric reductions of Orixá, or deities, from the Afro-Brazilian religions Candomblé and Umbanda brought to the Americas by enslaved Yoruba peoples from West and Central Africa. Once in Brazil, Candomblé and Umbanda developed further from the presence of indigenous groups and the influence of the Roman Catholic Church installed in Brazil by Portuguese colonizers. Alongside his notion of pictorial space and chromatic investigations, Valentim's work generates a new language whose iconography is revealed both to those that are familiar and not familiar with Afro-Brazilian religious references. His works also incisively refer to the constant threat to a progressive and humanist awareness during the military dictatorship in Brazil, which are still prevalent today.



Image: Sonia Gomes, *Untitled (Torção series)*, 2004-2021. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York.

Born at the same time that Valentim started making art, and equally committed to resisting cultural erasure in the face of oppressive political regimes, **Sonia Gomes** left behind a career in law at 45 to devote

herself to art, refusing to be bound by the historical limits placed on Afro-Brazilian women or by myopic definitions of what constitutes art. Fabric is a material that is found in many of her sculptures and installations, often in the form of articles of clothing that are given to the artist by people who wish to contribute to how she cuts, twists, stitches, and stretches this material into abstract forms that pulse with life and new potential emerging from tension and struggle. In the words of the artist, [in conversation with Fernanda Brenner](#), *"I am a Black woman working from a peripheral context, and this, of course, informed my working opportunities, methods and ethics. But it is not all; it does not define me. My work saved me; the committed – compulsive even – labor of mending, unknotting, sewing and wrapping existing materials is what keeps me grounded and going. It is my fuel. I always did that; at first, it was clothes and accessories for myself, and that led me to do more abstract work. It was never my plan to become an artist. The first show I did was a catharsis, as if the pieces needed to exist somehow."* Gomes's relationship with the gallery predates its founding, and is a core part of its coming into being, and *Linhas Tortas* presents multiple works by the artist that speak to her resistance to predetermination in art and in life.



Image: Anni Albers, *Untitled*, 1982. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York. Photo credit: Marten Elder.

While the role of weaving and textiles in art is undeniable today, such was not the case in the time of **Anni Albers** and many of her peers and predecessors. As Albers entered old age, it was impossible for her to

weave anymore due to a tremor that she developed in her hands. Albers began collaborating with this tremor, taking her shaking hand to paper and working with the tremor to make beautiful drawings. Sometimes the tremor in her hand and in her heart would go together hand-in-hand when she created vulnerable and intimate works for people within her inner circle. Interestingly, Albers wrote that suddenly when people saw her drawings on paper, they considered her work to be art rather than craft. One of these beautiful works graces the walls of Casa Iramaia, and is hung in dialogue with a contemporary textile installation by the Brussels based artist **Hana Miletić**. Like Albers, Miletić's migration is related to the history of war. In Miletić's case, the Yugoslav wars in the early 1990s. Nearly twenty years after settling in Brussels in the wake of violence in present-day Croatia, Miletić attended a residency program at the Albers Foundation in Senegal, which continues to inspire her work which furthers the conversation on weaving in contemporary art.



Image: Hana Miletić, *Materials*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York.

While Miletić and Albers fled war to build new lives, **Alma Allen** ran away from a conservative Mormon upbringing as a teenager in Utah, finding his way from squat houses in Joshua Tree to New York City. Inspired by the wonder found in nature, he began his journey with art by creating small objects from carved stone and wood to leave behind and materially communicate with the indigenous people connected to the land he was moved by. He continued to create small sculptures and struggled to sell them on the streets of SoHo to make a living, where he found a fan base in clients who helped him and his work grow in scale and ambition. That ambition took its toll, as repeated injury from obsessive over-carving left Allen unable to use his hands for extended periods of time. This led the artist to develop and build a robotic system out of spare assembly line parts with proprietary software as a mechanized extension of his hands. Linhas Tortas presents both hand-carved and robotically-carved sculptures by the artist, speaking to the interconnection between these processes in his ongoing work, also paying homage to the hand of Louise Bourgeois.





Image: Alma Allen, *Not Yet Titled*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York.

Nearby in Casa Iramaia, work by **Solange Pessoa** is inspired by the hands, the life, and the legacy of Antônio Francisco Lisboa, known popularly as Aleijadinho ("little cripple"), a prominent Brazilian artist born in 18th Century Minas Gerais to a Portuguese architect father and an enslaved Brazilian mother.

While known as one of the foremost contributors to the development of the Brazilian Baroque which inspires Pessoa, Aleijadinho worked under severe constraints due to physical deformities resulting from disease that reduced his hands to stumps and deformed his feet, which he later lost. He allegedly tied working tools to his hand and pads to his feet to create magnificent religious sculptures, churches, and architectural designs. Whether Aleijadinho actually existed is up for debate, but his existence in the Brazilian imagination is not.

The curatorial threads within *Linhas Tortas* are:

**Thread 1:** *Who has the power to write? Who do we imagine this writer to be? What lines might have not made it onto the page, only kept alive through oral traditions and memory, art and culture?*

**Thread 2:** *What can the role of writing be in artistic expression? How do we sign what we write into the world?*

**Thread 3:** *Can unexpected journeys change who we are? What is the impact of encountering and engaging with a place outside of mainstream itineraries?*

**Thread 4:** *Can certain life events or twists of fate that seem like limitations open up new directions for creative expression? What do geometries of liberation look like?*

**Thread 5:** *Can we visualize time and space in ways and forms other than linear?*

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