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# ON THE OCCASION OF PROJECTS: TADÁSKIA

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Auttrianna Ward



Tadaskia, *Choreographies of the Impossible*  
35th Bienal de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil, 2023  
Courtesy the Artist and Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro. Photo: Eduardo Ortega

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On the occasion of *Projects: Tadaskía*—Afro-Brazilian artist Tadaskía's upcoming site-specific installation in the Museum of Modern Art's Projects space—writer and independent curator Auttrianna Ward provides an overview of the artist's practice and exhibition history.

Tadaskía's art is an invitation to the audience to question and wander through the plane she presents. Tadaskía is a Black trans artist from Santíssimo, a neighborhood on the periphery of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, engaged in a practice that spans photography, works on paper, installation, and performance.

This spring, her work will be featured at the Museum of Modern Art in collaboration with the Studio Museum in Harlem. *Projects: Tadaskía* opens May 24, 2024, at MoMA, and audiences will have the opportunity to explore the world-building through Tadaskía's *ave preta mística mystical black bird*.

*"I saw my father building the house wall alone; my mother always liked taking care of plants; my mother also thanked the beings she couldn't see, she spoke to angels, saints, and stars."*

The artist, who is based between Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, attributes her roots and inspiration to her family, the land where she was raised, and the land she has yet to discover. A particular experience sparked her enchantment with text, literature, and the act of reading—Tadaskía suffered an injury that left her hospitalized at a young age. While in the hospital, one of the visiting clowns gifted her a copy of La Fontaine's *Fables*, which use

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concise, plain language and vivid imagery to espouse moral lessons. Though she was inspired by the days she spent imagining life through Fontaine's tales, she was equally influenced by the Pentecostal church, her public-school community, and, after that, her studies at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). Throughout her practice, one can see how these inspirations, alongside mysticism and animal encounters, are central to her practice.

A common tenet of the contemporary Afro-Brazilian artist is to bring the voices and experiences of those at the margins to the center. As an artist from overlapping marginalized communities, Tadaskía succeeds at bringing these stories to the forefront. From the story of Matheusa Passareli (1) seen in her 2018 sculpture *Behind the wall (tribute to Matheusa Passareli)*, to the documentation of her Afro-Guarani matrilineage in her 2018 photo series "Familiar constellations," the stories of those on the margins form the scope of her work.

She is also keenly aware of the context in which she creates work. In her installation at UERJ, she wove in personal and broader histories, honoring the lives impacted during Brazil's military dictatorship.(2) The installation consisted of her placing sixty-eight white arrows throughout the UERJ to mark the year 1968, a heightened year of political repression and resistance during the twenty-one-year dictatorship.

"I dedicate it to [the] black sisters and black brothers de fora  
to black women and black trans people  
to the people who care about children  
and to people who are equally children at heart."

—Introduction to *ave preta mística mystical black bird*

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Tadaskia, *ave preta mistica mystical black bird*, 2022. From a series of sixty-one sheets with pencil, colored pencil, pastel, and spray paint on torn paper. Each approx. 25 11/16 x 19 11/16" (65.2 x 50 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Fund for the twenty-first century, 2024. Courtesy the Museum of Modern Art, Department of Imaging Services. Photo: Martin Parsekian © 2024 Tadaskia.

Tadaskia introduced her work *ave preta mistica mystical black bird* in 2023 at *choreographies of the impossible*, the 35th São Paulo Biennial, under the curation of Diane Lima, Grada Kilomba, Hélio Menezes, and Manuel Borja-Villel. For this installation, Tadaskia transformed a room of the pavilion, adorning it with floor-to-ceiling, colorful pastel and charcoal drawings depicting her mystical black bird and its world. An integral part of the installation featured walls decorated with loose pages from a book she crafted that featured bilingual poetry varying between one to four sentences. Through these poems and texts, viewers were invited to immerse themselves in the symbolism of the black bird. Tadaskia never explicitly defines the black bird, but with references to Audre Lorde and Afro-diasporic symbols, one could understand the bird as a stand-in for Black freedom, expression, and

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personhood. Additionally, sculptures of cattails—made with bamboo, fruits, eggshells, and colored powder—richly laced with nods to Afro and Indigenous Brazilian culture, further enhanced the world created by Tadaskía.



Tadaskía. Courtesy the artist and Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo/Rio De Janeiro. Photo: Ruy Teixeira

This spring, Tadaskía will expand the universe of her black bird by bringing the installation to MoMA's Projects space in New York City. The work explores themes of the outsider, the poetics of blackness, and freedom. She briefly mentions Sankofa, the Akan symbol that represents recollecting the past to build a better future through the symbol of a bird turning its back on itself while its feet move forward. But her ave preta is not Sankofa; it is a distant cousin, existing in a similar universe but in a different constellation. In Brazil, the work is easily placed within the context of such Afro-Indigenous future and past, but in New York, new

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conversations will undoubtedly emerge. She will continue her style of presentation from *choreographies of the impossible* while developing a new wall drawing throughout the gallery.

The storytelling method she uses brings to mind Faith Ringgold's *Tar Beach*. This children's book, penned and illustrated by Ringgold in 1991, takes readers on a journey, flying across Harlem rooftops, and recounts the story of an Afrodiasporic family in New York City. Similarly, Tadaskía's text takes visitors on a journey across spaces through the pairing of text and image; further, she employs pronouns such as "us," "me," and "we," yet she never fully clarifies the identity of the bird. According to Tadaskía, the use of "us" is "relational," signifying the interconnectedness of all things.

*"I believe that every trip I take and every place I go influences me. The trips I took as a child: I saw myself with wings, being a winged horse; I saw myself being a star."*

Tadaskía's intricate recollections of heritage, personal experience, and Afrodiasporic symbology merge to create a dynamic space that transcends the material world and speaks to the connections throughout the Afrodiasporic experience. Her work belies singular locations, existing in the spaces between, above, and beyond. Through her work, she beckons viewers to explore the depths of their collective consciousness as she navigates the realms of imagination, memory, and cultural identity. As her installation expands from São Paulo to New York, it carries with it not only the story of a mystical black bird, but also the spirit of resilience, imagination, and redefined freedoms.

This essay originally appeared in the Spring/Summer 2024 issue of *Studio*.

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