

Medium
Date
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Web
11.2024
<https://www.tidal-mag.com/issue-19-tadaskia>

Publication
Author

Tidal Mag
Nicole Froio / Arielle Bobb-Willis

Tidal Mag

MENU

CULTURE

ISSUE 19

Tadáskia: Mind's Eye

Brazil-based visual artist Tadáskia
talks about her existence as a Black trans woman, revitalizing her sense of
imagination, and finding play in her artwork.

FALL / WINTER 2024



WORDS Nicole Froio
PHOTOGRAPHY Arielle Bobb-Willis

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Tadáskia's first solo exhibition in the United States is an expansion of her unbound 2022 book *ave preta mística mystical black bird*. On the walls of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), loose pages of her drawings are pasted on a colorful mural lined with black charcoal that spans the whole room, surrounding two freeform sculptures. The artist—who is a Black trans woman from Rio de Janeiro—works across mediums, seeking to reveal the invisible and understand the space in between change.

NICOLE FROIO: Your exhibition at MoMA reminds me of being playful like a child, deviating from what we are meant to be as adults, particularly in a majority Christian capitalist society like Brazil. What is art's role in returning us to childlike mindsets?

TADÁSKIA: For me, the issue of colonization, control, and capitalism is very deep. And the issue of religion comes with that. We are taught not to imagine, not to love, not to notice, not to live, not to enjoy, not to contemplate. And it's important to contemplate, to enjoy, nourish ourselves, to take care. I wanted the sculptures at MoMA to be like they were in the São Paulo Art Biennial, where the public was able to take the distributed fruit home, but that didn't happen. [In the MoMA exhibit] the fruits and vegetables are constantly renewed...so for me the concept of renewal is important, [the idea] that things can be renewed.

In the art world, we have that possibility—of renewing our imagination, of renewing our belief in renewal— even if that's impossible in the world. Playfulness is very close to the concept of renewal for me, the concept of change. The world of imagination already exists, a priori—it is invisible, and we are able to materialize that invisibility somehow. The wall drawing is called *brincando animada* [animated play]. I close my eyes to draw whenever I start some of my drawings, so I can let go of control the best I can.



FULL LOOK Vintage

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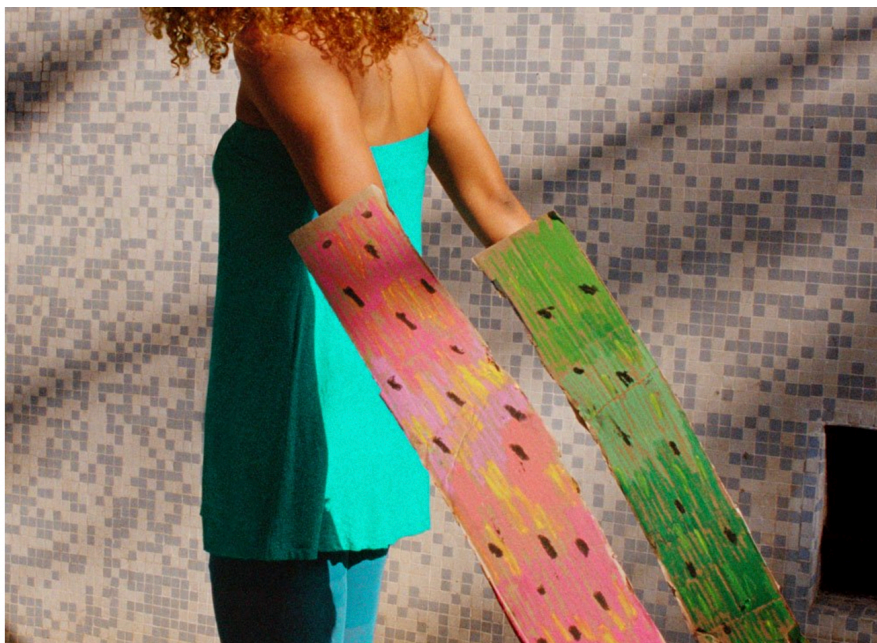
NF: Those drawings make me feel safe to dream, like something amazing is possible in the future. Was this your intention?

T: I am actually more interested in the present rather than the future, like looking beyond the future in a present future or even a past present. When we think about the future, commonly we want to control everything. Our anxious society [thinks], *What's going to happen? How will we do better in the future?* and we forget about the present. When I was a part of a church, I felt that way. I had a desire to go to heaven so I could see paradise, but Earth is a paradise that we are destroying in the present. So for me, *ave preta mística mystical black bird* is more about feeling the crossroads of time.

NF: How do your representations of the in-between reflect your experiences as a Black trans woman in Brazil and in the world?

T: I don't really work with representations. When you see my work, especially my drawings, you can feel several layers. You can see a sun and all of a sudden, it looks like a mountain—after that, it's a ladybug in the sun. So my work is not a representation of my life, but there are layers within it of people in my life, people I meet, the places I go. I abdicate the need to represent my life in my work.

I need to have the most freedom I can when working, but sometimes my work can free itself through my layers. So, in general, what you will see in my works are these landscapes, these layers that relate both to what we, in some way, understand in the figurative sense—in the sense of the figure, in the sense of the form—as well as what we don't understand, because we need to, somehow, imagine it together.



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NF: Your work frequently features the Black women in your life—family, friends, literary and feminist references. What do these women bring to your work?

T: Women in my family and women writers influence my work to see change in an expansive way, calling me to embrace change and my emotions. To embrace the emotional parts of me that are more hidden and mysterious, which to me is very entangled with coexistence, especially with my mother Elenice Guarani, my aunt Gracilene Guarani, and my grandmother Maria da Graça.

It's about having these conversations with the stars, with plants, with divinity—with what we don't see but can believe in. It's also about being open to the sensitive world, open to what appears suddenly out of nowhere and changes your path, so it's a very close look at emotions and intimacy. Among my female friends, my sister, my aunts, I am able to see the intimacy cited by bell hooks, who theorizes about the ingredients of love. And she writes that intimacy is very important for love—not romantic love, but a kind of love for life. ♥

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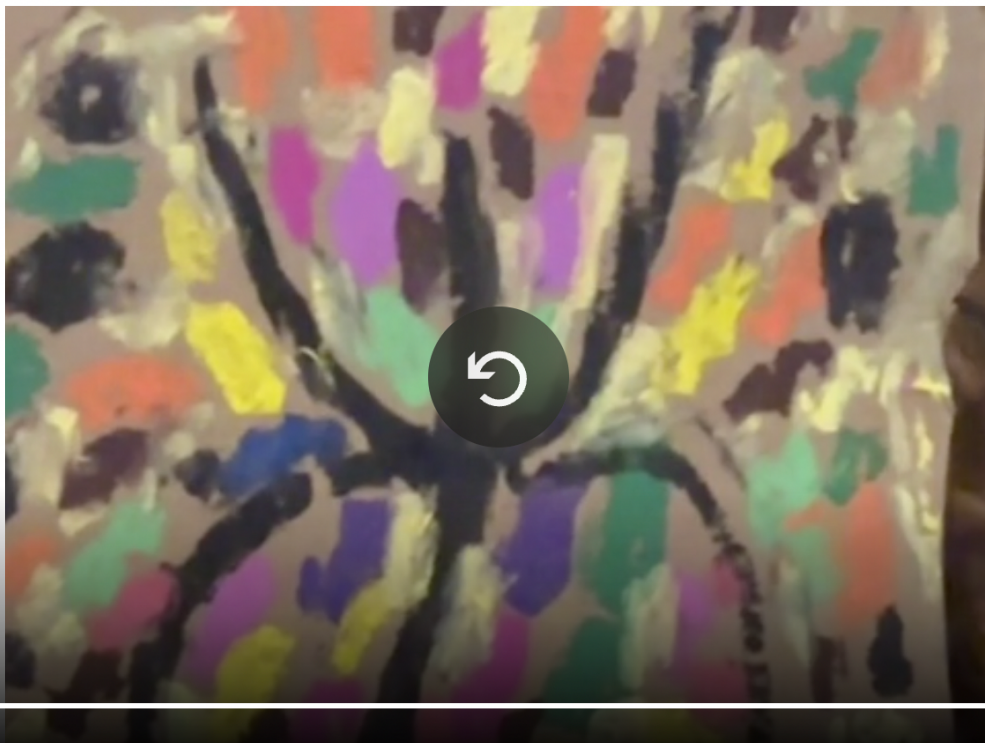


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STORY CREDITS

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