

Exhibition

For the second part of the France–Brazil 2025 Season (3-28 September), the Studio presents a project by the Brazilian artist Val Souza. Composed of more than 800 images, *Vênus* examines the notion of the photographic image and its ambiguity as both a tool of domination and a space for self-determination.

The basis for this work is the iconographic research that the Brazilian artist has been conducting for years on the representation of black women in Brazil and around the globe. Val Souza draws from a variety of sources (magazines, the Internet, books, social media, personal archives, etc.) and combines historical images with contemporary photographs to better question the underlying violence of traditional representations of black bodies.

Portraits of pop culture icons such as Beyoncé and Kim Kardashian cohabit with those of Val Souza, the writer and activist Sueli Carneiro, Nina Simone, and many others, as well as with anonymous photographs and ethnographic images. Val Souza's *Vênus* portrays a composite goddess, embodied both by the distressing representation of Saartjie Baartman, an enslaved woman who was exhibited and exploited in France under the stage name "Hottentot Venus," and by joyful faces and bodies who seem free of pain. Val Souza addresses symbols and narratives that form the basis of Brazilian social imagery and mechanisms of racialization and oppression; she offers alternative modes of representation that serve as tools of emancipation and potential gateways to other possible futures.

Val Souza was born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1985. The holder of a Master's in Dance from the Universidade Federal da Bahia (Salvador) and a degree in Pedagogy from Mackenzie Presbyterian University (São Paulo), she is the recipient of the ZUM Photography Scholarship from the Instituto Moreira Salles (2020), the "Life Before Colonialism" Prize from PLACE for Africa, MeineWelt e.V. and the Goethe-Institut Mannheim (2022), and the Alliance Française Photo Prize for Estudos *Vênus* #1 on the occasion of the Rencontres d'Arles Festival (2023). Souza was also selected in the "Nova Fotografia" program of the Museu da Imagem e do Som de São Paulo (2023), and awarded the First Prize in the Performing Arts section of Preta Hub's Potências Negras (2023). In 2024, her artwork *Vênus* was included in Foam Magazine #65 Talent. That same year, Souza took part in the 2nd edition of Almeida & Dale Gallery's "Contra-Flechade" program. She is currently short-listed for the 9th edition of the Pampulha Scholarship.

Curators

Clothilde Morette, MEP
Thyago Nogueira, Head of the Contemporary Photography Department at the IMS, São Paulo, Brazil

Production manager

Élisa Monteillet, MEP

This exhibition was produced in partnership with the Instituto Moreira Salles (Brazil) and is part of the France–Brazil 2025 Season.



This exhibition is organized with the support of

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The MEP supports young creators

In conjunction with the exhibition program of the Galleries (floors +2 and +3), offering large-scale exhibitions of renowned and established artists every four months, the Studio (floor +1) welcomes emerging artists on a shorter rotation, giving them the opportunity to hold their first institutional solo exhibition.

Cover image:

Val Souza, *Vênus*, detail, 2022, Instituto Moreira Salles Collection

© Val Souza

#ValSouza

#StudioMEP





Val Souza, *Vênus*, installation, 2022
© Thyago Nogueira

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Director : Simon Baker

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The MEP wishes to thank the MEP's Collectors Circle and the Society of Friends of the MEP for their continued support.

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Useful information

MEP — Maison Européenne de la Photographie

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Metro stops: Saint-Paul (Line 1) and Pont Marie (Line 7)

Opening hours

Wednesday–Friday: 11 a.m.–8 p.m.

Thursday: 11 a.m.–10 p.m.

Saturday–Sunday: 10 a.m.–8 p.m.

(Exclusive access for members on Sunday mornings, 10 a.m.–11 a.m.)

Monday–Tuesday: closed

Admission

Full price: €13

Discounted admission: €8

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