

visit  
guide



18/01 → 30/04/2023



maat

# eye spark



curated by  
**João Mourão**  
**Luís Silva**



**Jonathas de Andrade**

Jonathas de Andrade's poignant practice takes advantage of the visual and narrative possibilities of media such as installation, photography, film and sculpture and is grounded in profoundly collaborative research processes. His ongoing reflection has been speculating on the shortcomings of late modernity's utopias, ideals and world visions, especially in the Latin American context, and more specifically in Northeast Brazil, where the artist is from and currently lives and works. The resulting works tend to conjure feelings and ideas that oscillate between nostalgia, eroticism, and historical and political critique in order to subjectively address themes such as labour and identity, almost exclusively through the representation of the male body.

Even though the presence of the male body has taken centre stage in de Andrade's practice throughout the years, it has never been perceived as a research or a topic in and of itself, but rather as a tool to inquire into other issues. **eye – spark** attempts to correct this by reversing that premise and focusing on the role men, their bodies in all their erotic splendour, as well as their clandestine meeting spots, have had in the construction of a very nuanced and ambiguous, at times conflicting and contradictory, homoerotic gaze.

While the exhibition revolves around the affirmation of a homoerotic gaze, and how it produces desire, it doesn't shy away from issues such as labour, class and education. It is by looking at men, by longing for their bodies and their touch, that a very delicate and fragile political position is put forth. Even though the works on view establish with the men they depict a relation predicated on difference, in terms of either class, race or even sexual orientation, it is desire which enables de Andrade to look these men in the eye, and subject himself to their own gaze in return, establishing a charged exchange which is both a place of fragility and exposure, defiance and courage. Who occupies each position remains uncertain and it is in such ambiguity that lies the possibility for de Andrade to trace an earnest commentary on relevant social issues without ever falling prey to the trappings of cliches such as the rough and rugged, working class men.

**eye – spark** is Jonathas de Andrade's first survey exhibition in Portugal. It presents a selection of works which are intended to be both thematic and monographic, spanning the entirety of the artist's career, allowing the audience to establish contact and become familiar with one of the most idiosyncratic and interesting contemporary artistic practices coming from Latin America. The show is co-curated by João Mourão and Luís Silva and is co-produced by maat with CRAC Alsace, in France, where it was presented during the Summer of 2022.

**Jonathas de Andrade** (Maceió, 1982) lives and works in Recife, in Northeast Brazil. He is one of the most important Brazilian artists of his generation, having already presented solo shows in institutions such as Pinacoteca de São Paulo, the Power Plant (Toronto, Canada), The New Museum (New York, USA), or MASP (São Paulo, Brazil). He has participated in numerous biennials and group exhibitions at renowned institutions throughout the world. His project *With the heart coming out of the mouth* was developed for the Brazilian Pavilion in last year's edition of the Venice Biennale.

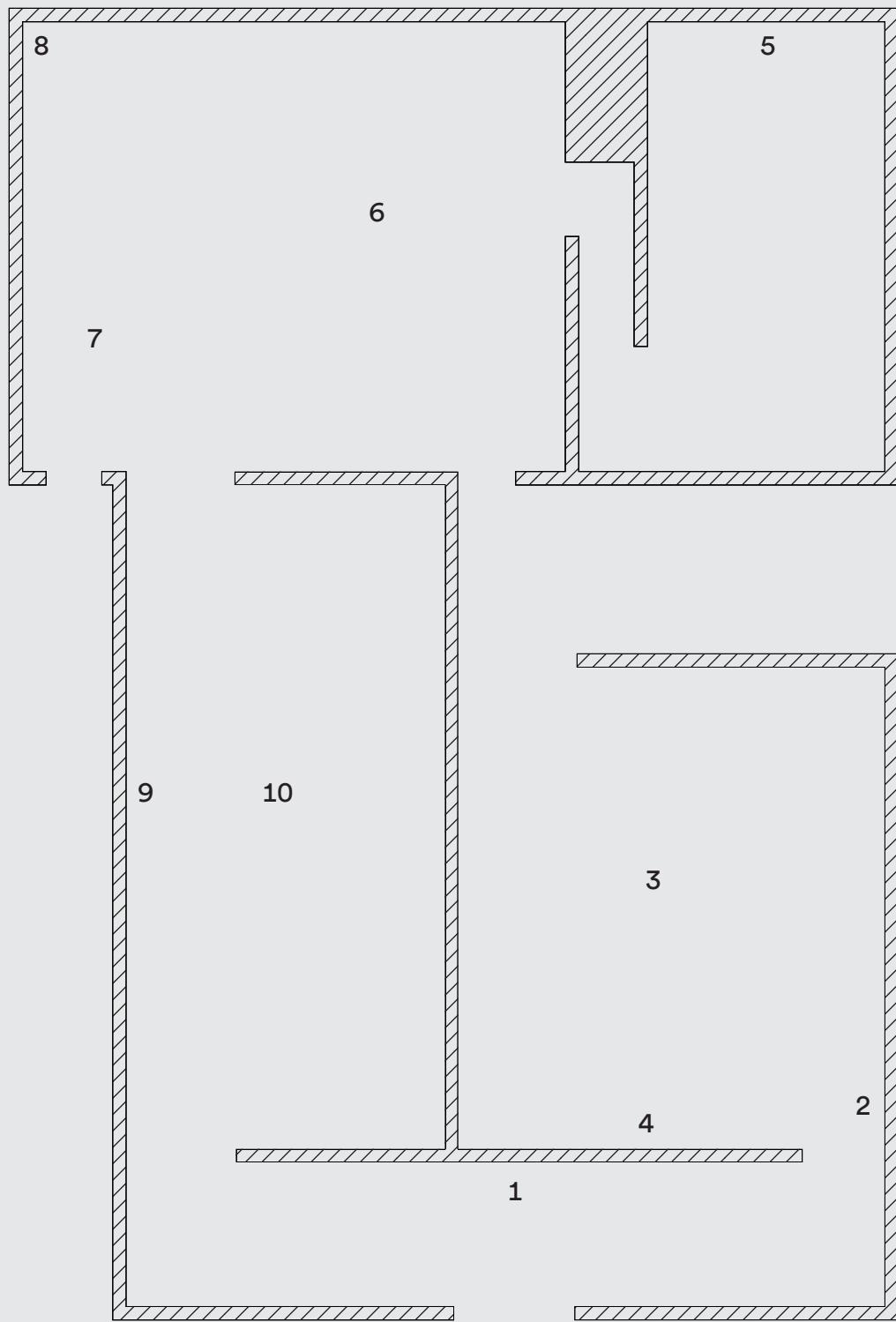
Programming	Technical support
<b>João Pinharanda</b>	<b>Versátil Partilha</b>
Curators	Construction
<b>João Mourão</b>	<b>J.C. Sampaio Construções</b>
<b>Luís Silva</b>	
Production	Shipping
<b>Ana Fryxell</b>	<b>Starmuseum</b>
<b>Nuno Fernandes Paula</b>	
Editorial coordination	Insurance
<b>Nuno Ferreira de Carvalho</b>	<b>Hiscox</b>
Exhibition design	Graphic production
<b>Nathalia Duran</b>	<b>Logotexto</b>
Graphic design	Translation
<b>Márcia Novais</b>	<b>Gonçalo Gama Pinto</b>
Mural painting	Proofreading
<b>Madalena Guerreiro</b>	<b>Manuel Alberto Vieira</b>
<b>Daniela Rocha</b>	
Installation	Printing
<b>Maria Torrada</b>	<b>Louresgráfica</b>
Audiovisual installation	
<b>GGS Productions</b>	

maat - Museum of Art,  
Architecture and Technology  
Av. Brasília, Belém  
1300-598 Lisbon

+351 210 028 130  
+351 210 028 102  
maat@edp.pt

Go to our website  
for more information  
[www.maat.pt](http://www.maat.pt)  
[ext.maat.pt](mailto:ext.maat.pt)

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1

## **Looking for Jesus, 2013**

Wall painting, photographs  
on copper board, acrylic  
handwritten white boards, tray  
with dates, wooden box; total  
dimensions variable

Enea Righi Collection

During a residency in the Darat Al Funun Foundation in Amman, Jordan, Jonathas de Andrade collected 20 photos of local men. He then went to the streets of Amman and approached people about the possibility of any of the depicted men being a better candidate for a more realistic representation of Jesus Christ. While the main narrative of the piece revolves around the need for a more accurate representation of the Christian messiah, it is impossible to shy away from an ambiguous and latent reflexion on male beauty and on the illicitness of the male homoerotic gaze.

2

## **Tide, 2014**

UV prints on sumáuma-maple  
plywood, handwriting, copper  
wire; total dimensions variable

Coleção Teixeira de Freitas

Presented as a tide chart of sorts, and using a ruin by the sea as its backdrop, this work intersects the influence between the rise and fall of tides, the different moon phases and desire. It traces the number of men who used the derelict building for furtive sexual encounters, during one full moon cycle of 28 days, as if they were responding to the combined pull of the moon, the sea, and their own instincts.

3

## **Lost and Found, 2020**

Men's swimwear, fired clay;  
total dimensions variable

Courtesy of Galleria Continua;  
Galeria Nara Roesler

For the past decade Jonathas de Andrade has collected men's swimwear that were left or forgotten in the locker rooms of swimming clubs in Recife. As the collection grew de Andrade commissioned local clay artisans to sculpt male body parts in different positions. The fired clay sculptures were assembled in pairs and groups, and fitted with the forgotten speedos, sometimes suggesting closeness, other times suggesting explicit sexual encounters. While locker rooms are common places for anonymous male sexual encounters and collecting soiled underwear or sportswear is a frequent fetishistic activity, this work initiates an explicit, and sometimes tender, dialogue around issues of body image, masculinity, love and intimacy in the queer male community.

## The Club, 2010

Digital print on paper  
 Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
 308 gsm<sup>2</sup>; 4 prints, 105 × 80 cm  
 each

*The club also offered another, very intense life; underground, albeit very evident. It wasn't necessary to talk much; this was one of the advantages, words were kept to a minimum; things happened instinctively, all it took was a simple glance.*

*I dreamt that the club was surrounded by the sea; that the tide had come in several kilometres and the whole patio was inundated; it was a wonderful feeling to be floating in the water; I swam and swam; looking at the surface of that briny, secretive, flooded space; smelling the water which flowed in a powerful current.*

*The sea swallows a man every day. And, yes, there was something forbidden about the club. However, once the sense of danger had been overcome, soaked in salt and courage, they enjoyed every moment as if it was their last, toasting freedom. I then had an irresistible urge to reach the sea.*

*Our people and our tradition could never tolerate greatness or dissidence. The club always made me think that what saved our sanity was the possibility of reaching the sea, entering the water and swimming. A type of secret conspiracy, preserved through abandonment. Together. And it has always been that way.*

The Alagoas Yacht Club opened in 1964 in Maceió, Jonathas de Andrade's hometown, and ceased its activities in the 1990s. The club was located between two of the city's beaches and it advanced over the sea. In its heyday the club hosted the Alagoan high society of the time, while underneath it local fisherman searched for fish and men used it as a meeting point for casual sex encounters. The title of each of the four images is a reworked excerpt of Reinaldo Arena's acclaimed autobiography *Before Night Falls*, further exploring the Yacht Club's clandestine and underground activities.

## **The Fish, 2016**

16mm film transferred to HD video; 38 min

Collection Pinault

A fictional village of fishermen, located in the northeast coast of Brazil, where the men hold and embrace the fish until they die in their arms constitutes the main narrative of the film. The affectionate hug that accompanies the death of the animal is riddled with an ambiguous sequence of gestures of tenderness, violence, and domination. Underneath this surface, however, hiding in plain sight, another narrative gradually becomes impossible to dismiss. The way the camera looks at those men, their wet bodies, their muscles, their eyes, is not dissimilar from the way ethnographic research devours its subjects. The ambiguity slowly gives way to the explicitness of desire. An erection is briefly glimpsed, a buttock presents itself discretely and a flexed bicep reflects the golden sunlight in its wet, tanned skin.

## **Posters for the Museum of the Man of the Northeast, 2013**

Digital prints mounted on K-Line, displays, notes on transparent acetates, overhead projector, framed newspaper ads; total dimensions variable

Coleção Maria e Armando Cabral

Departing from the Museu do Homem do Nordeste, an ethnographic museum created in Recife in the late 1970s by sociologist and writer Gilberto Freyre, the installation includes a series of hypothetical posters for the museum, as well as additional documentation that sheds light into the strategies deployed by the artist. By approaching working class men on the streets of Recife or by placing ads on the local newspapers requesting men to be photographed for the posters, Jonathas de Andrade has established an extremely ambiguous relation with those men, their bodies and the identity they were asked to portray, through the anthropophagous and homoerotic gaze of the camera lens.

## **The Uprising, 2012–2013**

Single-channel video, colour, sound; 8 min

Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Privatstiftung

The video documents the first Horse-Drawn Cart Race in the centre of Recife, in north-eastern Brazil. Since rural animals are forbidden in the centre of the city, men who use these animals as a means of locomotion are rendered invisible in the eyes of the law, and excluded from the centre of the city. The race thus attempted to render them momentarily visible, while the video portrays them as physical beings, engaging in an intense physical activity, exerting control over their animals and carts, competing and wanting to win the race.

## **Eye – Spark, 2023**

Men's underwear, acrylic glass, plastic, painted wood, metal; total dimensions variable

Collecting and archiving has been one of Jonathas de Andrade's recurring artistic strategies, and is made explicit throughout the exhibition. Such an archival drive serves as a means to deploy a collection's potential to conjure narratives about the world, oneself, and how these two intertwine. The status of these narratives, whether fictional, true accounts, or both, remains intentionally ambiguous and always left to the viewer to make sense of. *Eye – Spark* displays one of such collections, a series of 68 pairs of used men's underwear, belonging to the artist's lovers over the years. Probably the most personal collection de Andrade has ever used, this piece places the artist in a previously unseen place of self-exposure and fragility, signalling his need for connection, closeness and intimacy, while simultaneously allowing him to claim ownership over his own identity as a gay man and his belonging to the queer community.



## **2 in 1, 2010**

Photographs, wooden shelves, and technical drawings printed on tracing paper; total dimensions variable

Courtesy of Galeria Nara Roesler

Playing on the tropes of DIY furniture guides or instruction manuals, *2 in 1* depicts two carpenters in the process of customising two single beds into a double one. In a very didactic way, following every step of the process which features extensive visual documentation of the men working and the access to the blueprints of the transformation, the visitor is confronted with the uncertainty of such an endeavour, which subtly hints at the possibility of a relationship between the two men and their construction of a space for desire and intimacy.



## **Working Up a Sweat, 2014**

Shirts, wood; total dimensions variable

Collegium / Adrastus Collection

For this piece Jonathas de Andrade collected 120 sweaty uniform or work-related shirts. Each shirt was either donated, exchanged or bought from workers the artist met randomly on the street or as they were about to start or leave work. Each shirt, and the collection as a whole, is permanently imprinted with the body fluids, the smells and the remnants of the bodies of those men after a day of work. Displayed as a large group of anthropomorphic shapes, the uniform shirts resemble a community, an assembly or even a demonstration. But also, in all their sweaty and manly odours, they can't avoid suggesting the tension inherent to a specific sense of masculinity and manhood.

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