



291 GRAND ST | SEP 3 – OCT 26, 2024

Mestre Didi

James Cohan is pleased to present *Mestre Didi*, an exhibition of twelve totemic multimedia sculptures by the late Brazilian artist, Mestre Didi (Salvador, Bahia, 1917-2013), on view at 291 Grand Street from September 3 through October 26, 2024. This is Didi's first exhibition with James Cohan.

Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, better known as Mestre Didi (Master Didi), was an influential Afro-Brazilian artist, spiritual leader, and writer. Didi's singular oeuvre is closely linked to the *Candomblé* universe, a West African diasporic religion that developed in Brazil as a result of the transatlantic slave trade and with which Didi maintained a profound and generative relationship throughout his life. Followers of *Candomblé* believe in a pantheon of gods, known as *Orixás*, ancestral figures imbued with the divine energy of nature that mediate between the human and the Supreme.

Didi's sculptures, made predominantly from organic materials such as palm fronds, painted leather, cowrie shells, and colored beads, are direct heirs to the traditional art and liturgical objects of the *Candomblé*, as well as symbolic representations of these ancestral entities. Elements from the Yoruba imaginary and other West African visual cultures, such as birds, snakes, spears, and flames, are reworked by the artist into evocative pieces that echo the deities and mythic narratives of these religions. Articulated like trees sprouting from ornate concave circular bases, Didi's works possess an elegant verticality and joyous gestural expression.

Mestre Didi, *Igi nlá ejo meji ati eye kan lori - Big tree with two serpents and a bird in the canopy*, 2010, Mixed media, palm tree trunk, painted leather, shells, and beads, 34 1/4 x 14 5/8 x 5 7/8 in., 87 x 37 x 15 cm.

Didi's creative output, while steeped in the spiritual and inextricably tied to his position as a high priest, was not intended for direct religious use. Didi's sculptures are creative interpretations and aesthetic celebrations of his cultural-spiritual practice. In Didi's work, the encounter between tradition and African heritage unified with the vernacular of contemporary art brings to life a semi-abstract conceptual and emotional vocabulary that fuses past and present to restore and renew life.

Mestre Didi has been featured in important solo and group exhibitions at institutions such as the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, the Afro Brazil Museum, the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art; the Oscar Niemeyer Museum, Curitiba; the Bahia Museum of Modern Art, Salvador; the National Historical Museum and the Rio de Janeiro Museum of Modern Art, in addition to being featured in the Bahia Biennial and the 23rd São Paulo Biennial. Abroad, he has exhibited in Valencia, Milan, Frankfurt, London, Paris, Accra, Dakar, Miami, New York and Washington. His works are featured in prominent institutional collections, including the Bahia Museum of Modern Art, the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art, and the São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand Museum of Art.

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