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L: Mestre Didi, *IGI NILÉ ATI EJO ORI MEJI* (Tree of Earth with Two-Headed Serpent), 1990s. Palm ribs, painted leather, cowrie shells, and beads, 43 3/4 x 20 x 6 1/4 in. Paulo Darzé Galeria, Salvador, Brazil. Courtesy of Inaicyra Falcão / Photo: Sergio Guerini. R: Candida Alvarez, *Soy (I Am) Boricua*, 1989. Acrylic and oil on wood panels, 68 x 46 inches. Courtesy of the artist/ Photo: Tom van Eynde.

EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO ANNOUNCES SPRING 2025 EXHIBITIONS

Mestre Didi: Spiritual Form
March 13—July 13, 2025

Candida Alvarez: Circle, Point, Hoop
April 24—August 3, 2025

NEW YORK, NY, November 18, 2024 — El Museo del Barrio is thrilled to announce its spring exhibitions: *Mestre Didi: Spiritual Form* and *Candida Alvarez: Circle, Point, Hoop*. Both shows explore diasporic artistic expressions through the careers of pioneering artists. *Mestre Didi: Spiritual Form* celebrates a central figure in Afro-Brazilian 20th century art, while *Candida Alvarez: Circle, Point, Hoop* examines the practice of a contemporary Brooklyn-born Puerto Rican artist whose decades-long dynamic practice continues today. “These shows look at the trajectory of both historical and contemporary artists, active in Latin America and the United States, to amplify their indelible contributions to today’s artistic debate,” says Rodrigo Moura, El Museo del Barrio’s chief curator.

Mestre Didi: Spiritual Form

Organized by El Museo del Barrio, *Mestre Didi: Spiritual Form* is a landmark monographic exhibition exploring the work of the late Afro-Brazilian sculptor, writer, cultural advocate and spiritual leader Mestre Didi (Salvador, Bahia, 1917-2013). As the first major U.S. museum exhibition of Didi's work in 25 years, the survey unites over 30 of his sculptures and offers a rare view of his far-reaching spiritual and artistic legacy.

Over the course of his career, from the 1960s until the 2010s, Mestre Didi was a visionary emissary for Candomblé, an Afro-diasporic religion which developed in Brazil as formerly enslaved Africans handed down their Yoruba spiritual practices. He was perhaps the first artist to reimagine Candomblé ritual objects as artworks in their own right.

El Museo's exhibition will foreground Mestre Didi's spiritually evocative and formally imaginative sculptures and present new interpretations of his symbolic repertoire. His distinctive artworks combine the traditional materials, shapes, and symbols of the orishas, the Candomblé deities, to create a modern sculptural language.

The exhibition also contextualizes Didi's practice by including key works by his artistic peers and by contemporary practitioners. In addition to Mestre Didi, the exhibition includes works by **Emanoel Araújo, Jorge dos Anjos, Agnaldo Manoel dos Santos, Aurelino dos Santos, Ayron Heráclito, Goya Lopes, Antonio Oloxedê, Abdias Nascimento, Arlete Soares, Nádia Taquary, and Rubem Valentim**. The influence of these artists' shared interest in African visual languages ranges from 20th century modernisms to the continued innovation of Black diasporic aesthetics today.

"El Museo del Barrio is deeply honored to present *Mestre Didi: Spiritual Form*, an exhibition that not only highlights the exceptional artistry of Mestre Didi but also celebrates the profound cultural and spiritual contributions of the Afro-Brazilian community," said Patrick Charpenel, Executive Director of El Museo del Barrio. "It embodies El Museo's mission to elevate artists and narratives from Latin America and the diaspora, enriching global conversations about art and celebrating the impact these artists continue to have in the art world."

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue featuring contributions from the curators and newly commissioned scholarly essays by art historians Roberto Conduru and Abigail Lapin Dardashti and biographer Joselia Aguiar. It will also include selected reprints of the artist's own writings, made available in English for the first time.

Mestre Didi: Spiritual Form is curated by Rodrigo Moura, chief curator and invited guest curator Ayron Heráclito with Chloë Courtney, curatorial fellow.

SPONSORS

Mestre Didi: Spiritual Form is made possible thanks to the generous support of Itaú and the [Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts](#).



A stylized, handwritten signature of Andy Warhol in black ink.

The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mestre Didi, born as Deoscóredes Maximiliano dos Santos, was closely involved in the Candomblé religious society Ilê Axé Opô Afonjá from a young age, where he spent decades making traditional ritual objects. Around 1962, he began to create sculptures and pursue exhibition opportunities, with early shows at Galeria Ralf (Salvador), Galeria Bonino (Rio de Janeiro), and the Museu de Arte Moderna, Salvador. After receiving a fellowship from UNESCO to conduct fieldwork in West Africa in 1967, Didi and the anthropologist Juana Elbein dos Santos, his wife, organized the exhibition *Afro-Brazilian Art*, which was presented in Lagos, Accra, Dakar, Paris, London, and Buenos Aires and included Didi's work. Since the 1980s Didi has been included in landmark exhibitions such as *A Mão Afro-Brasileira* [The Afro-Brazilian Hand] at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP); *Art in Latin America* at the Hayward Gallery, London; *Magiciens de la Terre* [Magicians of the Earth], Centre Pompidou, Paris; the 23rd International Biennial of São Paulo, with a solo presentation; and *Afro-Atlantic Histories*, MASP, 2018. His works are included in public and private collections internationally, including at El Museo del Barrio, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Dallas Museum of Art, Museu de Arte de São Paulo, Museu Afro Brasil, and Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro.

Candida Alvarez: Circle, Point, Hoop

El Museo del Barrio presents *Candida Alvarez: Circle, Point, Hoop*, the first large-scale museum survey of artist Candida Alvarez (b. 1955, Brooklyn, New York). This exhibition examines Alvarez's artistic practice, bringing together rarely seen works spanning five decades of her career.

Alvarez's engagement with painting, drawing, and collage has uniquely advanced a non-hierarchical relationship between abstraction and figuration, thoughtfully interweaving formal exploration, personal narrative, and conceptual strategies. Alvarez emerged in the New York art scene of the late 1970s, focusing on figurative artworks that directly referenced her experience as a female Diasporican artist in a predominantly white male art world. By the 1990s, Alvarez starts to incorporate conceptual strategies, which embraced the use of games, language, and other representational systems while also exploring materials and forms.

"Although Candida Alvarez's work has been deeply influential, it has yet to receive the full visibility and recognition it deserves," says Patrick Charpenel, Executive Director of El Museo del Barrio. "We are thrilled to spotlight her remarkable career in *Circle, Point, Hoop*, bringing her powerful contributions to a wider audience and honoring her place within our community and the art world at large."

The sections within the exhibition demonstrate how the artist's core formal and conceptual tropes emerged from specific bodies of works and particular moments of her career. The exhibition's title, which is drawn from a 1996 artwork, evokes the recurrent theme of circles in her work and the symbolic and literary interplay that shapes Alvarez's multidisciplinary practice.

Candida Alvarez: Circle, Point, Hoop will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue, featuring newly commissioned essays by Shiben Banerji, Terry R. Myers, Susanna V. Temkin, and Adriana Zavala, that shed light on Alvarez's artistic journey. The publication will be supplemented by archival materials, such as photographs, posters, and Alvarez's own illustrations, providing a comprehensive view of her life and career.

Candida Alvarez: Circle, Point, Hoop is curated by Rodrigo Moura, chief curator, and Zuna Maza, assistant curator, with Alexia Arrizurieta, curatorial assistant.

SPONSORS

Candida Alvarez: Circle, Point, Hoop is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts and Terra Foundation for American Art. Additional support is provided by Larry & Marilyn Fields, Martin Nesbitt & Anita Blanchard, and Mark & Allyson Rose.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Candida Alvarez (b. 1955, Brooklyn, NY) is an artist and educator whose artistic career spans five decades. Regarded as one of her generation's most innovative and experimental painters, Alvarez's formally rigorous abstract and figurative works weave in personal and cultural memory, art historical references, wordplay, and everyday life. Alvarez received a BFA from Fordham University, Lincoln Center (1977), and an MFA in Painting and Printmaking from Yale School of Art (1997). She has participated in residencies at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (1981), Studio Museum in Harlem (1985), Pilchuck Glass School (1998), and LUMA Foundation (2023), among others. Recent awards include the Trellis Art Fund Award (2024), the Latinx Artist Fellowship Award (2022), and American Academy of Arts and Letters Award (2022).

Selected solo shows include (Title forthcoming), Richard Gray Gallery, New York (April 2025); *Candida Alvarez. Stretching, Nesting, Reaching, Feeling*, Monira Foundation at Mana Contemporary, Chicago (2024); *Multihyphenate*, Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago (2023); *Palimpsest*, GAVLAK Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, Palm Beach, FL; and *Candida Alvarez: Here*, Chicago Cultural Center (2017). She has been included in group presentations including *Forecast Form: Art in the Caribbean Diaspora, 1990s—Today*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2022-2023); *no existe un mundo poshuracán: Puerto Rican Art in the Wake of Hurricane Maria*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2022-2023), and *ESTAMOS BIEN – La Trienal 20/21*, El Museo del Barrio (2021), among others. Her work is in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; El Museo del Barrio; Pérez Art Museum, Miami; Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, VA; and the Whitney Museum, among others. Alvarez taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for 25 years, where she now is Professor Emerit. Currently, she is the Alex Katz Chair in Painting at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York. She lives and works between Brooklyn, Chicago, and Baroda, MI. Alvarez is represented by Monique Meloche Gallery, Chicago.

ABOUT EL MUSEO DEL BARRIO

El Museo del Barrio is the nation's leading Latinx and Latin American cultural institution. The Museum welcomes visitors of all backgrounds to discover the artistic landscape of these communities through its extensive Permanent Collection, varied exhibitions and publications,

bilingual public programs, educational activities, festivals, and special events. The Museum is located at 1230 Fifth Avenue at 104th Street in New York City.

The Museum is open Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from 11:00am – 5:00pm. Pay what you wish. To connect with El Museo via social media, follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [X](#). For more information, please visit www.elmuseo.org.

PRESS CONTACTS

Alexxa Gotthardt, Sutton | T: 330.472.3775 | E: alexxa@suttoncomms.com

Pamela H. Hower, El Museo del Barrio | T: 212.660.7102 | E: press@elmuseo.org