

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Tunga

4 April — 17 May 2025
67 Lisson Street, London

Opening: 3 April, 6 – 8pm

Lisson Gallery is pleased to announce its first exhibition of works by the multidisciplinary artist Tunga (1952-2016), whose estate has been represented by the gallery since September 2024. Internationally recognised as one of the most important Brazilian artists of his generation, the exhibition marks the first time Tunga's work will be shown in London since 2018 when Tate Modern staged one of his legendary performances, *Xifôpagas Capilares Entre Nós* (*Capillary Xiphopagus Among Us*). Acclaimed primarily for his precisely constructed sculptures informed by alchemy and mythology, Tunga drew attention to the psychological potential of three-dimensional objects which he first started to produce in the 1970s using materials such as iron chains, nylon mesh, lamps and rubber.

The exhibition highlights a pivotal period during which Tunga continued to experiment with increasingly diverse materials such as bottles, crystals, portals, teeth and tripods. While the artist's earlier compositions often consisted of one or two elements, such as a braid made from wire, or felt joined together with cotton cord and nails, these later works reveal Tunga's propensity for producing more corporeal forms that incorporate multiple components, and which balance density with ephemerality.

Four critical sculptural series are introduced by the exhibition, united by a pair of monumental drawings that link the downstairs spaces. The earliest work from *Fração de Luz* (*Fraction of Light*) (1981-2010) is upstairs — a sleek structure that draws on the physical mechanisms of a marionette and its relationship with the puppeteer that controls it. Hooked onto a black nail on the wall is a multipart metal cord from which long black hair has been suspended. Below this work is *Untitled* (2008) which acts as the exhibition's centrepiece. Consisting of a substantial cast aluminium weight hanging in mid-air beside a translucent fabric curtain which falls to the ground, this large-scale installation uses the dynamics of such hoisted positionings to reinforce the illusions at play when a puppet is in motion, its liveliness dependent on human intervention that is out of sight.

Three works from *Phanógrafo Policromático de Deposição* (Polychromatic Deposition Phanograph) (2004-2009) highlight the artist's impulse for exploring how materials might energetically relate or otherwise remain distinct from one another. Attached to the wall, these compact wooden boxes, once opened from each side, reveal a scene resembling an alchemical experiment. Internally lined with embossed white fabric, the centre of these mysterious containers holds a glass flask filled with coloured liquid held in place by an armature of metal and resin. Mirrors are another feature of these cabinet-like constructions, which continue to obscure the limits between what is real and what could be imagined.

The series *Estojo* (Case) (2008-2012) is represented by two iterations. These dark and diminutive iron containers were recognised by Tunga as portals that could convey their unique landscapes through a concoction of earthly materials such as crystal quartz and iron which the artist filled to the brim within each square unit. Magnets are another core element here — a later addition to the artist's visual language that allowed him to communicate further ideas relating to invisible forces and the transmission of energies.

With the most recent body of work in the exhibition (*Morfológicas*) (Morphologicals) (2014), Tunga turned his attention to abstract depictions of human anatomy using archetypal sculptural mediums such as bronze and clay. Revealing classical tendencies in their form and composition, these sensual objects allude to the body's physicality as well as its connection with the earthly realm.

About Tunga

Creating a unique vision inspired by psychoanalysis, philosophy and alchemy, Tunga (1952-2016) embraced a multi-faceted practice spanning the various mediums of contemporary art. Born in Palmares, Pernambuco, Antônio José de Barros Carvalho e Mello Mourão (known mononymously as Tunga) came from a family of writers, artists and social activists. As a creative, intellectual group, Tunga's family was forced into exile in Chile by the Brazilian military dictatorship in the 1960s. Tunga later returned to Brazil where he pursued a degree in architecture while he developed his artistic practice, creating drawings and small-scale sculptures while editing magazines and contemporary poetry publications in Rio de Janeiro with fellow artists. Driven by research across many fields, his early works were marked by a deep interest in the symbolic and the mythological. From this beginning his practice evolved into complex installation-making in the 1980s with the incorporation of a wide range of materials including magnets, lightbulbs, electrical wires, copper, felt and rubber. The period also saw the emergence of the shapes and signs that would become iconic throughout his career, such as clubs, scalps, combs, bells, cauldrons, funnels and braids. Tunga's sculptural investigations into the energetic relationships between materials intensified in the 1990s, marked by the introduction of magnets into his works, and the integration of elements of his installations with instauration – a word he coined to describe his works activated by performance. Further fusing diverse elements in order to imbue them with new values, Tunga continued to explore new materials until his passing in 2016: between 2000 and 2016, his work was characterised by the emergence of such diverse elements as bells, bottles, chalices, jewellery, teeth, wings, portals, lights, tripods, and thimbles.

Since 2017 the Instituto Tunga – founded and directed by the artist's son, Antônio Mourão, and Clara Gerchman – has worked to preserve, conserve, catalogue and disseminate his extensive work and memory. His work has been presented in major exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo and Tate Modern, London, as well as the acquiring of Tunga's work by institutions worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 70 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists and others of that generation, from Carmen Herrera and Olga de Amaral to Hélio Oiticica and Lee Ufan. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Liu Xiaodong, Otobong Nkanga, Pedro Reyes, Sean Scully, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Wael Shawky. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists including Dana Awartani, Cory Arcangel, Garrett Bradley, Ryan Gander, Josh Kline, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost and Cheyney Thompson.

For press enquiries, please contact

Mara Gans, Communications Manager, US
+ 1 201 575 4513
mara@lissongallery.com