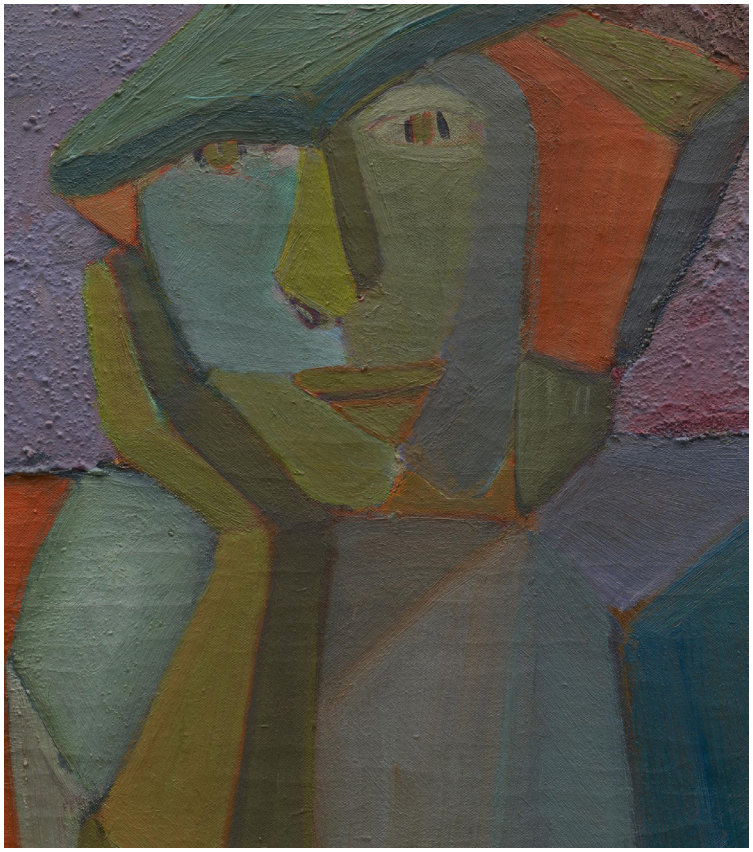
LISSON

MYTH MIGRATION

PRESS RELEASE

EXHIBITION DATES:
4 NOVEMBER 2026 – 23 JANUARY 2027
508 WEST 24TH STREET, NEW YORK

OPENING: 4 NOVEMBER, 6 – 8PM



Inspired by Carmen Herrera's peripatetic existence between Havana, New York and Paris and her subsequent shifts in style, this show centers on a wider, interconnected group of twentieth-century artists who moved to spend formative time within new communities of artists and writers in Mexico City, São Paulo, London and elsewhere. Following patterns of diaspora triggered by repression, conflict, curiosity and adventure, this exhibition includes works made by seven artists – Huguette Caland, Chen Kong Fang, Carmen Herrera, Wifredo Lam, Hélio Oiticica, Alice Rahon and Mira Schendel – during and after World War II, each charting a new geographic or formal horizon. The show weaves in and out of movements such as Surrealism, Neo-Concretism and Existentialism, in order to trace the artistic diversions and cross-cultural exchanges that each adopted country and each migration had on the evolution of their practices.

A never-before-seen painting by Carmen Herrera, *Early Figure Female* (1941, pictured below), serves as a point of departure. Leaving behind Cuba's brutal revolution on her journey towards geometric abstraction, she took in the influences of early Abstract Expressionism and Tachism for *Lignes Guides #30* (1951), while meeting and forming a relationship with another globetrotting compatriot, Wifredo Lam. His own mission led him from mid-century paintings featuring 'diabolical' animals to his characteristic fragmented humans that challenged the hegemony of Western Modernism by way of his Afro-Caribbean and Latin American heritage. Commenting on Lam's colonial legacy, Claude Cernuschi wrote: "as languages migrated, myths migrated along with them."

Similarly rooted in travel as a source of mythical narratives, Leonora Carrington's *Brothers* (1953) – painted a decade after she emigrated to Mexico – shows the bond between her young sons through hieroglyphic pairs of Egyptian jackals and bird-like creatures. She reached her mature fusions of man and beast in portrayals of former lover Max Ernst as a nightingale, as in *Señor Ruiz el Ruiseñor* (1967). In the aftermath of trips across the Pacific Northwest, Carrington's contemporary, the French Surrealist poet and artist Alice Rahon, also introduced local visual cultures and Indigenous mythologies to her work, infused as it was previously with homages to modern figures, notably Paul Klee. Migration as a catalyst for personal liberation can likewise be seen after Huguette Caland's relocation from Beirut to Paris, where she developed a newly sensual painterly language, heralding her *Bribes de corps* series from 1970.

The work of three artists who found or left Brazil against their will – Chen Kong Fang, Mira Schendel, and Hélio Oiticica – sheds further light on the transformative power of displacement, presenting it as an impetus towards artistic synthesis and freer expression. Fang demonstrates a unique fusion of European still life with his training under a Japanese émigré teacher, while retaining a connection to the philosophies of his Chinese upbringing. Schendel's early figuration drew on Morandi and metaphysics, before she entered into a dialogue with Brazilian artists and thinkers who led her to experiment with cryptic letterforms and broken language on Japanese rice paper.

A peer of Schendel, Oiticica found Brazil's political climate restrictive, choosing self-imposed exile in London and New York to move beyond his early geometric abstractions, as seen in *Pintura H* (1956–57), towards more immersive, participatory forms of expression. This is exemplified in the 1972 *Parangolé*, a wearable cape activated through audience interaction, which he made once he reached America and began the deconstruction of the man, the myth and his own *Tropicália* movement.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Huguette Caland (1931–2019) was a Lebanese artist whose fluid forms and abstracted landscapes investigate intimacy, sensuality and the body. Having begun her practice in Beirut in the 1960s, Caland relocated to Paris in 1970, discovering greater personal and artistic freedom by distancing herself from social and familial expectations. This newfound independence informed her *Bribes de corps* series, in which the body becomes an enigmatic terrain of curves, contours and apertures.

Chinese painter **Chen Kong Fang** (1931–2012) bridged traditions of Asian ink painting and Western figuration. Upon his resettlement in Brazil after the Communist Revolution, he trained under the Japanese artist Yoshiya Takaoka, absorbing realist and naturalist influences into his landscapes, portraits and still lifes. In the 1960s, Fang returned to his formative Chinese influences, depicting domestic interiors, windswept trees and everyday objects that appear animated with supernatural presence.

Cuban-born artist **Carmen Herrera** (1915–2022) was renowned for her mastery of colour, line, rhythm and symmetry. Moving between Cuba, France and the United States, she exchanged her early architectural training for art, a passion that grew from heady encounters with the prevailing American and European avant-gardes. A sustained period in Paris (1948–1953) was instrumental in establishing the hard-edged, abstract compositions that came to define her later practice in New York, where she would further refine her palette and visual language.

Forced displacement and Afro-Cuban activism were two major driving forces in **Wifredo Lam**'s (1902–1982) Cubist and Surrealist practice. After exile in Marseille during the Nazi occupation, a return to Cuba in 1941 reintroduced the island's nature, colonial legacy and Santería into his work. Later journeys to Haiti and the wider Caribbean deepened Lam's engagement with Afro-Caribbean traditions, while time in Europe and the US connected him to international artistic circles.

The early geometric abstraction of **Hélio Oiticica** (1937–1980) developed under the banners of Grupo Frente and Rio de Janeiro's Neo-Concretist movement. Following Brazil's military coup of 1964, and facing an increasingly restrictive artistic environment, he sought greater freedom to pursue his interactive, sensuous practice. London proved a temporary refuge, with Whitechapel Gallery offering free grounds for the participatory environment of *Eden* (1969), as did New York, where he settled in 1970.

French poet and painter **Alice Rahon** (1904–1987) developed a distinctive visual language shaped by landscape, myth and memory. She turned away from Surrealist poetry in favour of increasingly experimental painting, culminating in her sand-encrusted canvases. Moving to Mexico, she entered the country's artistic milieu, alongside Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Frida Kahlo, eventually embedding local landscapes, pre-Columbian art and cultural traditions into her work.

Swiss-born **Mira Schendel** (1919–1988) explored the relationship between language, image and the material qualities of paper. Fleeing Italy during WWII, she moved through Sofia, Vienna and Sarajevo before emigrating to Brazil in 1949. There, she joined São Paolo's intellectual scene, experimenting with language, perception and the boundaries between two- and three-dimensional art forms. This led to her *Monotipias* on Japanese rice paper and the twisted paper sculptures known as *Droguinhas*, which she showed at Lisson in 1968, after meeting Lisson founder Nicholas Logsdail.

ABOUT LISSON

Lisson is a global gallery dedicated to shaping the art of today. Creating meaningful dialogues and robust markets between artists and audiences across six venues in the UK, US and China, Lisson exhibits the most engaging and challenging work, adding value and narrative through decades of experience and innovation.

Building significance and reputation with our artists, Lisson nurtures and amplifies their vision at every turn, supporting opportunities to show beyond the gallery's walls in museums, the public realm and through international partnerships. The gallery's heritage and its foundational role in contemporary art since 1967, allows for a deeper perspective and more thoughtful relationships when furthering the career and voice of an artist.

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