

# GLADSTONE

## Jaider Esbell's First US Presentation Opens at Gladstone Gallery

Exhibition features paintings and drawings from the later years of the Brazilian artist, curator, and activist's life

Gladstone Gallery presents the first exhibition in the United States dedicated to the work of activist, artist, and curator Jaider Esbell (b. 1979, Normandia—d. 2021, São Sebastião, Brazil). Spanning works from his final years between 2018 and 2021, the exhibition brings together paintings on canvas and drawings. Opening January 29 at Gladstone's 64<sup>th</sup> Street location in New York, the exhibition is on view through March 1.

Jaider Esbell was a key figure in a dramatic shift in the Brazilian landscape of contemporary art in recent years. This movement saw artistic creation by Indigenous peoples, Afro-Brazilian communities, and other traditional populations—equally central to the country's formation, yet historically sidelined—shift from being mere subjects of the establishment's representations to taking center stage in exhibitions and biennials across the country.

An activist and educator among the Macuxi People, who inhabit the Amazon region bordering Brazil, Guyana, and Venezuela, Esbell viewed visual arts as a tool to express the urgency of a narrative of resistance through exhibitions, institutional collaborations, and talks. He established in Boa Vista, Roraima, an artistic and intellectual laboratory that brought together Native Peoples, paving the way for an entire generation of Indigenous artists.

The works on display at Gladstone prominently feature Jaider Esbell's distinct visual signature. Using paints ranging from acrylic to Posca, and ballpoint pen on canvas and paper, the deep black backgrounds of his pieces are filled with intricate lines, dots, and vibrant patterns. At first glance, these may appear as cosmic imagery to those unfamiliar with Macuxi cosmology but gradually reveal recognizable animals or enigmatic creatures. These works are often inhabited by *kanaimé*, powerful spirits that can act as allies or adversaries in the battles of the Macuxi.

Other works visually translate complex myths about deities and the origins of the universe or tell stories of traditional knowledge. Esbell's artistic foundation is deeply rooted in Macuxi cosmology, which for him meant creating from an invisible dimension and from elements of "life" that do not exist in the material world. He championed a perspective that transcends Western art history's classifications and objects. A prime example is his advocacy for Mount Roraima as an Indigenous work of art, created by *Makunaimí*—demiurge and ancestor of all Macuxi—when he cut down the *Wazak'á* tree, scattering its fruits and vegetation to form the forest.

The relationship between humans, non-human animals, and other forest beings is central and urgent to Esbell's work and the political scope of his practice. As he shared his worldview with broader audiences, he fought for the recognition and defense of Indigenous peoples' rights and territories, threatened by the expansion of mining in the forest—practicing what he named "artivism."

The critical artistic and epistemological changes propelled by Jaider Esbell have proven to find echoes worldwide, and his legacy has been celebrated in exhibitions such as *The Milk of Dreams* at the 59th Venice Biennale (2022); *Mondo Reale* at Triennale di Milano, Italy, (2022); *Living Worlds* and *Le Serpent Cosmique*, organized by the Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain in Lille, France, (2022); as well as the 34th São Paulo Biennial (2021).

—Cristiano Raimondi

# G L A D S T O N E

## Exhibition Details:

January 29 – March 1, 2025

Opening Reception: January 29, 6–8pm

130 East 64<sup>th</sup> Street

New York, NY 10065

## About Gladstone Gallery:

Gladstone Gallery is recognized for its embrace of experimentation and visionary practices. The gallery has long been an active partner with artists pursuing catalytic ideas and engaging with pressing issues. Headquartered in New York, Gladstone's impact extends globally with galleries in Brussels and Seoul, enabling it to present new bodies of work and evolve its program to advance the practices and reach of its artists through time. Alongside its work with contemporary artists, the gallery is a steward of the legacies of pivotal historical artists and an advocate for the enduring power of their work. Gladstone is led by a team of partners who spearhead its long-term vision and program, building on the values of its founder Barbara Gladstone.

## Press contact:

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