João Maria Gusmão
***MARÉ-BAIXA*!**
FDAG Barra Funda
Nov 12, 2026 — Jan 30, 2027

The following press release was written by Portuguese artist João Maria Gusmão to mark the announcement of his new exhibition, *MARÉ-BAIXA*, opening on November 12 at FDAG Barra Funda.

People of Brazil, hear ye! FDAG presents (thunder, lightning & fanfare): *MARÉ-BAIXA*!, an exhibition of new and recent work by João Maria Gusmão, featuring an extensive body of photopaintings and a modest group of photographic sculptures!

Gusmão starts the day with a frugal breakfast. He heads to the studio and shuts himself away in the lab, among surgical gloves, black-and-white and color chemicals, and a water bath. A day at the beach is the equivalent of a month in the darkroom, where there's no vitamin D and plenty of toxic fumes. For the alchemist-artist, time stretches and contracts. The thermometer and stopwatch are the photographic painter's palette. The paper is plunged into the tray; agitation is constant, the tide ebbs and flows, and the image emerges from the waves like a contagious skin disease. As a precaution, Gusmão washes his hands frequently with soap and water. At night, he moisturizes his skin with cheap cream. The next day will be just like the one before.

For the past few years, the artist has specialized in an alternative process that dispenses with the photographic negative. The camera is set up in the studio. He frames the subject, adjusts the lighting, calculates the exposure, and so on. When everything is just right, he lights a cigarette, takes a deep breath, and clicks the shutter: light passes through the lens and projects the image onto light-sensitive chromogenic paper. But it's no sure thing. Seven chemical baths later, he has a positive print that he will probably have to make all over again. A one-of-a-kind image, to be sure, like a Polaroid, but, let's say, a hundred times larger and a hundred times more work. There's nothing instant about it.

Never mind. The work is meditative.

Maré-Baixa conjures sixteen images and a special edition made from *collages sur carton*, using an old Disney trick for making cartoons. When Mr. Walt made *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, he realized that by placing the foreground, subject, and background at different distances from the camera lens, cartoons acquired a second dimension: atmospheric depth!

This is what Gusmão does in his work, according to a logic all his own. The principle is diagrammatic, but the logic of the compositions is dioramic. The images are windows, and Gusmão makes no secret of it; on the contrary, he emphasizes it! The artist has an idea, develops a project, builds a maquette, and photographs it using the process described above, as if shooting in the dark or throwing clay at a wall. The resulting images are visual poems, a kind of riddle machine: images that are at once retinal and cerebral.
Taken together, the images coalesce into something pictorial and saturated: figures behind curtains, movements frozen in time, structuralist analyses of perception at the limits of vision–the sunset behind the curtain, the lighthouse at dawn, the moon-shaped lamp in a room the color of the starry sky, and so on and so forth. Paralogisms of percepts and paradoxes. And note that these images bring together several other aspects of the artist's intermedial digressions. On the one hand, they relate to the vocabulary of the magic lantern and Japanese

prints; on the other, they reveal a certain cinematic tension, both on and off the screen, that runs through the artist's other analog experiments with film.

Blur here, focus there, overexpose one surface or another while some other detail remains obscured. Silver salts give way to CMY dyes. Up to a point, greater density increases color saturation; beyond that, as luminosity falls, only gradations of black-cyan, black-magenta, and black-yellow remain. The artist's repertoire is remarkably extensive, even if his means seem pared down. It must be that certain *je-ne-sais-quoi* of stylization.

The sculptures on view are based on the very maquettes from which the images originate. Here, one can guess where Gusmão positions his twenty-by-twenty-four-inch camera, handmade in the Czech Republic. This time, the maquettes are enlarged and recreated in powder-coated sheet metal, built to withstand the elements: wind, sun, hail, and acid rain. They thus move from the protected space of the frame into the open space of the world, in a move that runs counter to photography's freezing of a moment. The sculptures are, in fact, the matrix of the image: frozen for all eternity—or until they end up as scrap.

In *MARÉ-BAIXA!*, the nautical theme pervades the horizon of the works. Ever since Euclid, we have known that parallel lines meet only at infinity. One may well ask: is it possible to travel without moving, through thought alone? Binoculars are provided for the viewer, who may use them, if they wish, to observe the landscape on the other side of the window.

FDAG Barra Funda
Opening: Nov 12, 2026
Exhibition: Nov 12, 2026 — Jan 30, 2027
Visiting hours: Tue – Fri: 10am to 7pm | Sat: 10am to 6pm
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