

MAXWELL ALEXANDRE BLACK PAINTER, WHITE FIGURATION

9 October – 28 November 2026

Private view: Thursday 8 October, 6–8pm

CARLOS/ISHIKAWA

Unit 4, 88 Mile End Road
London E1 4UN

www.carlosishikawa.com

+44 (0) 20 7001 1744

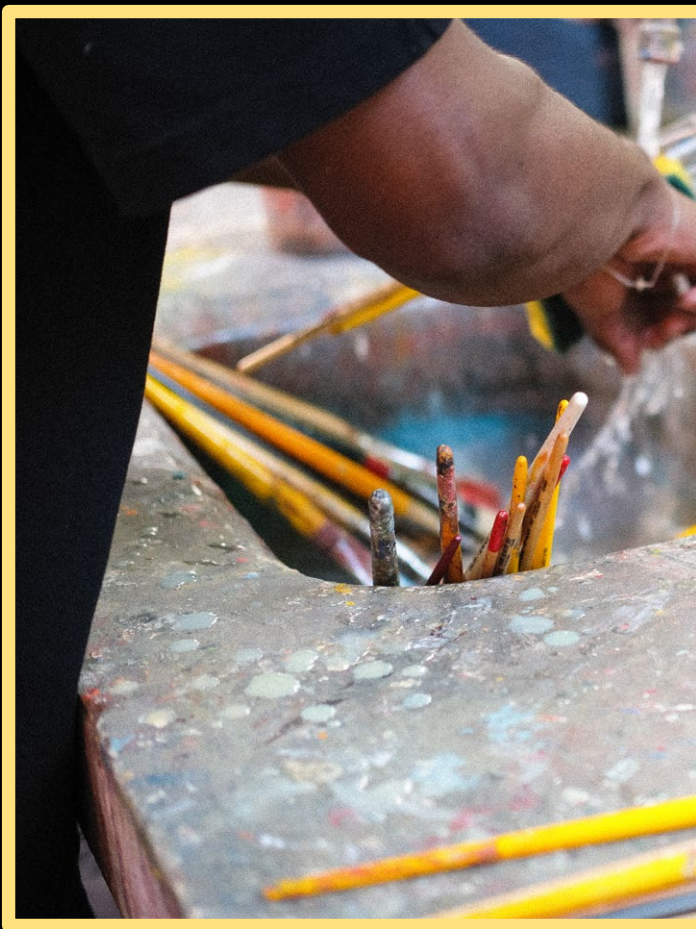














Maxwell Alexandre completely transforms the space at Carlos Ishikawa Gallery in *black painter, white figuration (pintor preto, figuração branca)*, his first solo show at the gallery.

The show results from conceptual and plastic developments of two iconic sets of artworks: *Clube (Club)*, first shown at the Rio de Janeiro Historical Museum (2024), and *Cubo Branco (White Cube)*, known for its *Galeria n.2 (Gallery n.2)*, a piece created for the 36th Bienal de São Paulo (2025).

The *Clube (Club)* series was initiated in 2020, when Maxwell started going to Clube de Regatas do Flamengo, a sports club located in Gávea, an affluent Rio de Janeiro neighbourhood adjoining Rocinha, the favela where the artist was born and raised. On the club grounds, Maxwell turned his attention to white bodies, a turning point in his career — hitherto marked by the exclusive portrayal of Black people —, culminating in the notion of “white figuration”, a trademark of this new exhibition.

The club’s tall red walls provide members and frequenters with an “oasis” — seemingly cut off from the contradictions and complexities of the surroundings, yet laying bare the power structures involved in peaceful scenes of people sunbathing and playing in the pool.

Although Maxwell calls his white characters “Gávea bathers”, the Flamengo club becomes a metaphor for every space “of wellbeing, leisure, bounty, safety, tranquillity, good architecture, good design, good art, good food,” the artist writes.

“No one calls the representation of the white male white figuration. Everyone knows the representation of the white male in painting simply as figuration. The most exhausted, canonised genre in art history is neutral; it is yet to be categorised. Seeing as the representation of the white male is regarded as the avatar of humanity, it could not have been categorised and racialised.”

— Maxwell Alexandre

The “white figuration” genre, therefore, emerges as a conceptual operation in Maxwell’s painting that makes visible the whiteness in the art field. “If there is Black figuration, then there must be white figuration,” the artist emphasises.

Maxwell Alexandre garnered international recognition for his *Pardo é Papel* (*Brown is Paper*) and *Novo Poder* (*New Power*) series, respectively portraying day-to-day scenes in the favela and Black people in spaces such as museums and art galleries. The *Clube* (*Club*) series marks a radical thematic shift in Maxwell’s paintings, which now dislocate white bodies from a place of neutrality, calling into question a centuries-old relationship in art history between the “Black painter” and the object of the painting, “white figuration”.

The *Clube* (*Club*) series denaturalises the representation of the white male in painting by naming the genre “white figuration”. And through the presumed neutrality of the white cube, Maxwell points out to us certain core values within the arts system. According to

the artist, the “white figuration” he creates is not neutral: it is intended to racialise the white body.

From the outset of the *Clube (Club)* series, the artist’s efforts to invent a new genre have been clear to see — as evidenced by the repeated use of the expression “white figuration as affirmation” in his discourse.

In the series’ lexicon, the idea of “affirmation” unfolds into two concepts: “intention” and “appearance”. “Appearance” is how one perceives, through visibility, the race of the painted figure. To this end, Maxwell Alexandre designated four preliminary determinations so that the “Black painter” can carry out “white figuration as affirmation”:

- 1 The Black painter must always paint “white figuration” in the whitest way possible. Whiteness is a fundamental piece of evidence towards the visibility of race in “white figuration”.
- 2 The Black painter must avoid painting the white male in shadows; should he do so, he must make sure to illuminate his body parts as much as possible so as to reveal his white skin, leaving no question that this is a white person.
- 3 The Black painter must not play with phenotypes. We know there are white people with wide noses and curly hair, but the Black painter must avoid these features when depicting the white male. The Black painter must opt to portray his white figures with thin, elongated noses and straight hair combed back.

- 4 Should the Black painter still have doubts regarding the raciality of the white male upon painting him, he must resort to the blue eye. A blue-eyed figure will very likely settle the distinction of the white race.

Regarding the concept of “intention”, Maxwell declares that “it is not possible to identify ‘white figuration as affirmation’ if such is not its purpose. In other words, the figuration must be termed ‘white figuration.’”

The foremost driving force of “intention” in the *Clube (Club)* series is, therefore, the classification of white figuration. The *Clube (Club)* series is where the representation of the white male, which has retained its neutrality throughout all of art history, starts being named.

In order for “white figuration as affirmation” to be produced, both “appearance” must be well resolved and “intention” must be evidenced. It is, thus, a deliberate systematisation of “white figuration” in the work of the Black painter, where “white figuration” is not topical, nor spontaneous, nor landscape. “It is totalitarian affirmation, the central theme,” the artist wraps up.









