

Mariano Rinaldi Goñi, *Quilombo*

11 July through 7 September, 2019

Quilombo, from the African Kimbundu language's *kilombo*, originally referred to the settlements of escaped African slaves in the plantations of Brazil. In Lunfardo, the street slang of Buenos Aires, it was first used as a term for brothels before it assumed its present meaning of "chaos, disorder, bedlam, brouhaha, racket." It is in this latter sense that Mariano Rinaldi Goñi uses the term almost daily, but his works resonate with all the earlier meanings and associations. Positive and negative connotations of the expression freely blend in the paintings: the commotion is lively, the chaos creative, the whores ecstatic, the slaves free and full of unfettered zest for life, and the ruckus is made up of laughter, shouts, screams, howling, moaning, singing, drumming, and music. The painting giving the exhibition its title assembles in the manner of a collage all of these various nuances of meaning, while at the same time creating new ones. All the while a bridge is forged between Goñi's Argentinean origin and his adoptive home, Berlin. The sensual female nudes conjure up the flophouses of Buenos Aires, in contradistinction to the aristocratically dressed woman in the upper left corner. In the upper right corner of the central panel there appear, like an apparition and an optical allusion to the Nordic Norns so often painted by Goñi, the silhouettes of three African women that Goñi had encountered one day on the side of a Berlin street. Right next to these we discover a group of African drummers—like the man playing the trumpet in the upper left they embody the boisterous and exuberantly noisy, dancing element of *Quilombo*. The portrait bust of an African man below is an homage to the slaves of South America, but it is just as much inspired by the lively groups of African drug dealers active in Berlin's city parks. The entire painting is vibrating with strong hues of luminous reds, oranges and yellows, expressive of its energy, joie de vivre, and the sensually creative confusion of races, cultures, and social classes.

We encounter these and related themes in the other works of the exhibition, as well. Transformation is a recurring topic expressed not only graphically in Goñi's vigorous brush strokes and scattered dabs of paint. Background vistas of harbors spring from the painter's long fascination with trade, with import and export, as icons of ceaseless coming and going, to and fro, the constant changes and the transience of all that is, particularly evident perhaps in today's Berlin, with its interminable waxing and waning of the human tide, as once upon a time in the immigrant's city Buenos Aires. Life abroad, a second home far from his original home, is something that is always present for the native Argentinean Goñi, as well as for many of his international coterie of friends. For them, life as a journey to ever new shores is a conscious choice, the ship a carrier of travelers and explorers, adventurers and soldiers of fortune, emigrants and refugees. Depictions of conflagrations and blazes are, on the one hand, metaphors for emotional states, also constantly changing, but on the other hand also romantic tributes to the uncontrollable and awe-inspiring power of nature, most imposingly manifested in natural catastrophes such as volcanic eruptions, forest fires, earthquakes and hurricanes. The countless mythological elements of earlier paintings are still visually present if less explicit, as cyphers rather than direct statements. Goñi's characteristic style of painting retains its mixture of deliberate composition and intuitive spontaneity: the gestural lines bestow dynamic graphic structure to the works, the free and painterly application of color charges them with emotional expressivity. Combining group portraits, nudes and overarching subject matter, Goñi thus creates works of strong optical presence and detailed narrative character taking us, the viewers, on a journey as well.