



Paulo Nazareth, *L'Arbre D'Oublier*, 2013
Video still

Paulo Nazareth

*1977, Borun Nak, Brazil / Brasilien
Lives and works all over the world /
Lebt und arbeitet auf der ganzen Welt

Originally from the southeastern Brazilian state of Minas Gerais, Paulo Nazareth is a global nomad, making his home wherever he happens to be. His interdisciplinary practice is rooted in the tangled histories of colonialism, slavery, and immigration and their present-day legacies in Brazil and the Global South. Central to the artist's diverse works, which include performance-based actions, video, photography, drawing, and the assembling of archives, is his own complex transcultural identity, which encompasses African, European, and Amerindian ancestry. Reflecting on mixed cultural memory and hybrid identity, his epic walks have seen him travel on foot from Brazil to the United States, and across the African continent, retracing routes walked by slaves during the time of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Nazareth's black-and-white video *L'Arbre D'Oublier* (Tree of Forgetting), 2013, was filmed in Ouidah on the coast of the Republic of Benin, once home to one of Africa's largest slave trafficking ports. Enslaved Africans were brought to the city's slave market, Place Chacha (Auction Square), where they were sold to traders before being forced to board ships to the Americas. Nazareth traveled to the square to find the "Tree of Forgetting," a large tree around which slaves were made to walk clockwise—nine times for men, seven times for women—in a ceremony their new owners claimed would make them forget their origins. In the video, Nazareth walks

silently around the tree more than four hundred times, counterclockwise. His backwards walk is a poetic attempt to unwind time, symbolically replacing acts of forgetting with one of remembrance. The flags of different African nations draped over the tree's branches speak to the ongoing impact of four centuries of chattel slavery.

Brazil was responsible for importing more slaves than any other nation; between 1501 and 1866, approximately 4.9 million Africans were forcibly brought to the country, in addition to the millions of indigenous people captured during Portuguese slave-hunting expeditions in the seventeenth century. Conscious of this history, Nazareth repeated his backwards-walking performance around an ipê amarelo (golden trumpet tree) in Brazil, the bright yellow blossoms of which are the country's national flower. By connecting the two countries in this way, the artist seeks to make visible and reclaim the memories of their transatlantic pasts, which have shaped so many identities, including his own.