

FEATURES

Véxoa Nós Sabemos: A powerful exhibition of Brazilian Indigenous art at Tufts University Art Galleries

The exhibition puts Indigenous communities and perspectives in dialogue with one another.



Ellora Onion-De / The Tufts Daily

An artwork featured in Véxoa Nós Sabemos at the Tufts University Art Galleries is pictured.

By [Ellora Onion-De](#)

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Upon entering the Tufts University Art Galleries' exhibition of Véxoa: Nós Sabemos, you are greeted by a vibrant variety of colors, mediums and sounds. Véxoa, originally showcased in the Pinacoteca de São Paulo in Brazil, found its new home at Tufts this September.

The exhibit, curated by Naine Terena, features the work of 22 contemporary Brazilian Indigenous artists from a wide range of regions and peoples. Terena herself is a member of the Terena people of Brazil, making Véxoa the first art exhibit in Brazil to be curated by an Indigenous person.

Claudia Avolese, a senior lecturer in the visual and material studies department at the SMFA, has led the project through its transition from São Paulo to Medford as TUAG's guest organizer of Vêxoa.

"I moved to the U.S. in 2019. When I was still in Brazil, as a professor at the University of Campinas in São Paulo, I was following the whole process of putting together the concept of the exhibition, the invitation to [Terena]," Avolese said. "So when I moved and was hired at Tufts, this was in my mind because Boston ... is the place with the largest Brazilian community outside of Brazil."

Avolese worked closely with Terena to bring Vêxoa to a new space while preserving its main principles and artworks.

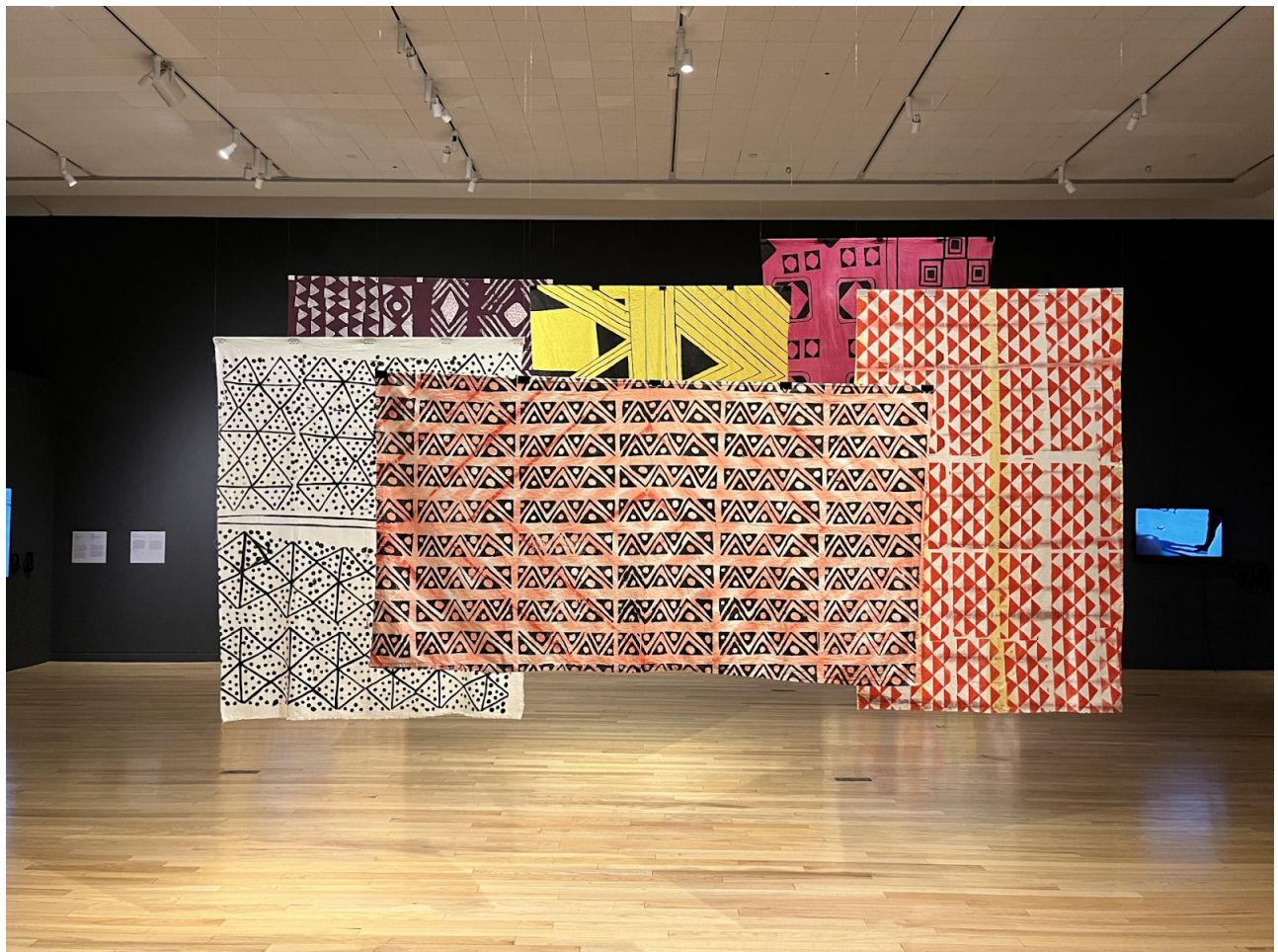
Vêxoa means "we know" in the Terena language. Avolese said that the title conveys that the Indigenous artists of this exhibit are speaking for themselves.

"They know what they need. They know what they want, and it is about opening a space for their voice," Avolese said.

Vêxoa showcases many different styles of art, ranging from Buriti fiber masks and hanging textiles to massive, vibrant paintings and documentary-style film. This is in part supported by the diversity of the artists, who hail from completely different peoples and regions of Brazil.

"To [Terena], this is a space to put different cultures from these different Indigenous perspectives in dialogue," Avolese said.

For Avolese, a hanging installation by Kya Agari particularly stands out.



“The textile, the way it hangs and when you start to walk through them, they kind of move and become alive,” she said. “So if you’re looking at it far away, it seems like abstract drawings, and when you start to relate to it, this idea of the corporeality of the work and the performativity of the work becomes more and more present to you.”

Agari made this textile piece specifically for the TUAG installment of Véxoa. The untitled work originally appeared painted on the walls of the São Paolo exhibition.

“When we asked [Agari] if we could reproduce the work, she said she actually wanted to change it and do a different work,” Avolese explained.

Some Tufts students may have viewed Véxoa independently on a self-led walk, but some have experienced a course-specific tour led by Elizabeth Canter, manager of academic programs for TUAG.

“Studio art classes might be really interested in the process and materials that are being used in the exhibition, whereas [an] anthropology of the environment class was maybe thinking more about how these Indigenous artists are simultaneously artists and activists really engaged in the fight for their Indigenous rights and their Indigenous land,” Canter said.

Canter added that students see and connect to the various pieces of art in different ways.

“I’m always sort of amazed at what students see in different pieces and in the work and the connections that they make and how that makes me see things differently,” Canter said, “And I hope that works for them too.”



Tufts students are not only viewers of Véxoa but are also involved behind the scenes.



Muri Mascarenhas, a junior double-majoring in education and child study and human development with a visual arts minor, is part of the TUAG Student Programming Committee.



“I lived all my life in Brazil before coming to college,” they said. “Coming here to Tufts was my first time abroad, and my goodness how I miss Brazil.”



In September, the Tufts Portuguese department hosted an event with Véxoa in which Mascarenhas introduced the panelists to students. The panel included Avolese as well as two of the artists whose work is featured in Véxoa: Denilson Baniwa and Daiara Tukano.

Mascarenhas also created a booklet that interacts with the exhibition and a musical listening guide.

“I curated a playlist of 40 songs from Brazilian Indigenous artists, and it’s there at the exhibition to listen [to] and available online. It’s good jams for all tastes from heavy metal, Indigenous [artists] from Brazil, ... to pop, reggaeton, to everything,” they said.

Mascarenhas emphasized how special the exhibition is to them and how much work their colleagues put into presenting Véxoa at TUAG.

However, they also expressed disappointment in its reception from the community so far.

“I can tell you it’s been a little frustrating. The outreach to the local Brazilian community has been very weak. This was such a special opportunity, and I don’t think the local population of Brazilians came to the exhibition, or the local schools with Brazilian kids,” Mascarenhas said.

They also added that it seems as though many local Brazilians have not heard of Vêxoa or the fact that it is free and open to the public.

Much of the Boston Brazilian population has historically voted for right-wing Brazilian candidates, including former President Jair Bolsonaro—though he was predicted to be less popular in the 2022 election than in 2018.

These politics, Mascarenhas contends, tend to go hand in hand with apathy toward expanded Indigenous rights. Mascarenhas expressed that they wished more local Brazilians had come to the exhibition to challenge their perceptions and open their perspectives of Indigenous life.

Avolese spoke wearily of the misconception that if Indigenous peoples are not isolated, then they lose their identity.

“[These cultures are] not trapped in the past. They’re dynamic and they’re being transformed, and that doesn’t make them less Indigenous. ... Most Indigenous populations in Brazil, they’re living at what you could call sort of the border between two cultures. ... The majority of Indigenous people are living in urban centers,” Avolese said.

Vêxoa’s run at TUAG continues until Dec. 10, 2023, when a final event will mark the exhibition’s closing. The event will involve a tour led by Avolese and a talk in both English and Portuguese.

TRENDING

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[Students protest Tufts’ Israeli investments during TCU meeting with University President Kumar](#)

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[Students stage walkout and sit-in for Palestine in the Campus Center](#)

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LOCAL

How Somerville's 'rat czar' is fighting the city's rodent problem

Samantha Eng
Staff writer

Originally published Nov. 9.

Somerville has a rat problem. "I mostly see them in parks and around my house, especially at night," Elizabeth Lohr, who lives near Davis Square, said. "You can hear them scurrying around and sometimes darting into the path."

"Cats help keep the rats at bay," she said. "But I do always kick the trash can before opening it."

Rats are a normal part of life in any urban setting. But according to Somerville's own "rat czar," the number of sightings in the city has risen significantly over the past decade. Officially known as an Environmental Health Coordinator, Colin Zeigler helps run the city's Rodent Control Program. He's responsible for tackling the rat problem from every angle, from extermination to education.

It's a big job. Zeigler told the Daily that the recent uptick in rat sightings is partially an after-effect of the pandemic. When restaurants and businesses shut down and people were mostly staying home, waste was diverted from reinforced, commercial dumpsters to private, flimsier garbage cans. The rats learned to seek out residential areas, where they had easier access to food scraps.

"In a city that's as dense as Somerville," Zeigler said, "that was just a perfect recipe for the rats."

To combat this shift, the rodent control program offers free inspections to community members. Tenants and property owners with three units or fewer can also call 311 to sign up for three weeks of free abatement services from the city.

"Last year, about 800 individual residents used that abatement service," Zeigler said. This year, he's aiming for 1,000.

What does "abatement" mean, exactly? Somerville has

gotten creative, using carbon dioxide poisoning, dry ice and SMART Boxes. The boxes — which trap and electrocute rats — were most effective in dumpster-dense areas where rats tend to congregate for food, water and shelter. The city also issues tickets for rodent control violations like improper trash disposal and overgrown landscaping.

"On the day-to-day basis there are issues associated with property management, and a lot are non-owner-occupied properties," Zeigler said. "Tenants also are having trouble motivating or justifying the replacement of trash barrels or rodent control measures of any sort. Larger property management companies have trouble keeping a close eye on their properties as well as doing the types of work required to reduce rodent activity throughout the area."

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UNIVERSITY

Students stage walkout, sit-in for Palestine

Julia Carpi, Caroline Vandis and Henry Chandonnet
Associate Editors and Managing Editor

Originally published Nov. 14.

At least 250 students staged a walkout and 10-hour sit-in at the Mayer Campus Center in support of Palestine on Nov. 9. The protest was organized by the newly formed Coalition for Palestinian Liberation.

"Hundreds of students walked out of their classes, many skipped their classes, their clubs [and] their obligations for the whole day to show Tufts that they stand against the ongoing genocide in Palestine and to demand that Tufts divest from Israeli apartheid," a representative for Tufts Students for Justice in Palestine said. "It shows that there are more and more students joining the cause, we have momentum and we aren't going to slow down anytime soon."

The protest began at 2 p.m. when students rallied at the

Campus Center's lower patio, chanting "Free free Palestine" and "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." After a collection of student speeches, protesters marched around Professors Row before entering the building.

"[The Campus Center] is a central hub for student life," another representative for SJP said. "Since one of our goals was to specifically address the student body, we chose that space."

During the sit-in, students filled the main level lobby, The Sink café and both stairwells, leaving pathways for movement throughout the building. Organizers said the protesters stayed from 2 p.m. until midnight, when the building closed, maintaining a crowd throughout the 10 hours.

"The university was monitoring the situation throughout to make sure that any exigent violations were addressed immediately," Patrick Collins, executive

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UNIVERSITY

Gen Z Congressman Maxwell Frost talks civic engagement

Anne Li
Contributing Writer

Originally published Nov. 8.

The first Gen Z member of Congress, Florida Rep. Maxwell Frost, visited the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life during a Solomont Speaker Series conversation on Oct. 30. The conversation, moderated by Tufts ACTION President Alison Cedarbaum, covered topics including gun legislation, the future of Congress and voter registration.

A survivor of gun violence himself, Frost found his call to action for gun control while attending a vigil for the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting. Since the age of 15, he has led programs and campaigns at organizations including the American Civil Liberties Union and March For Our Lives, before running for Congress in 2022.

Frost gave advice on how he believes student organizers and activists can make their voices heard and issues clear.

"The top thing we can do right now is work with each other to build political power," Frost said. "When an issue comes up and you have hundreds, if not thousands, of people writing into your office or calling or protesting ... [create] that sort of pressure."

However, he noted that preparing infrastructure for action is also key to successful organizing.

"As young people, we need to focus on finding a political home and then working in that political home year-round," Frost said. "The true testament of our strength as organizers isn't when there's been a mass shooting and everybody cares and the news is talking about it, it's when no one cares. It's when it's not in the news."

He added that each part of a political movement — be it voting or protesting — is equally important, and that advocacy looks different for everyone.

"We need all of it. All of it. We can't afford to throw any part of our movement out," Frost said. "Be open to different forms of advocacy and let people really do what makes them unique."

Frost emphasized the importance of long-term planning, using his protesting after the murder of George Floyd in 2020 as an example.

"We went out and we started protesting, and then a few weeks into our protesting, we started to ask, 'what's next?'" Frost said. "What are we going to do after this? Those conversations and what came after that are powerful."

Frost also pointed out the need to strategize in order to make the most of a political movement.

"Figuring out how to utilize this movement and show our political power at the ballot box, but also at offices and lobbying meetings, and also planning more events and getting more people to be involved in what we're doing," Frost said. "Using every part of that is really important. ... We've got to use all of it."

Audience members then turned the conversation to Frost commenting on the body's makeup and decision-making abilities.

"Over the next probably 10 years, we'll see the most open seats that we've seen in a while in these elections," Frost said. "Because most of Congress is very old, there comes a short period of time where many of those people will not be in their seats anymore. ... Because of that, there will be a lot more open seats, and there will be more opportunity for young people."

Despite being the youngest member of the U.S. Congress, Frost elaborated on the importance of accurate generational representation.

"I don't think that all of Congress should be all Gen Z," Frost said. "It's a representative body that needs to represent the country. ... My mom just retired from 37 years as a public school educator. ... I would love someone like my mom to represent me. It's not just about old versus young, but it's about new people that could be helpful."

Later, Frost shared his insights on voter registration processes.

"This effort to institutionalize the process, that is what I'm focused on," he said.

He acknowledged that while efforts like tabling booths at lunchtime and concerts are important, there also exists plenty of "low-hanging fruit, where we can work with our institutions to ensure it's part of the process to register to vote, and it's not an extracurricular."

As an example of this institutionalization, Frost is currently working to make voter registration required to enroll in the Orange County school district. According to Frost, most colleges do not incorporate voter registration into their registration.

"That's really the big key here. We need to make sure [registration] is part of the process," he said. "Automatic voter registration should just be part of life."

To boost political engagement, Frost believes the voting age should be lowered to 16.

"I believe that young people deserve a voice in legislation," he said. "I think it's going to fundamentally change turnout for young people. ... Let's get this [voting] habit into people when they're young."

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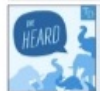
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