ARTE NAÏF – Nenhum museu a menos [Naive Art – No museum left out] is an exhibition-manifesto, made with the collection of the Museu Internacional de Arte Naïf do Brasil in dialogue with artworks by more than thirty artists from outside the collection. With this show the Parque Lage School of Visual Arts [Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage – EAV] takes position in favour of Brazilian cultural institutions and their freedom of expression. In 2018 Brazil suffered the greatest museological catastrophe in its history, one of irreparable loss to humankind: the fire at the Museu Nacional. According to the Brazilian Institute of Museums there are 261 museums in Brazil today that have been closed due to lack of funding and maintenance. This figure represents 7% of all 3789 institutions in the country. EAV Parque Lage stands up in support of cultural institutions and exhibition spaces as learning zones, territories for confrontation and doubt, education and the exchange of knowledge.

The very notion of ‘naive art’ – from the French naïf – eludes attempts at definition. It suggests something ‘natural’, ‘primitive’, ‘instinctive’, or ‘original’. In the past it was seen as an art of spontaneity, of authentic creativity, of artistic practice without training or guidance. As a free school, it is interesting to us to think about the practice of artists who haven’t attended schools or academies. In a more contemporary manner, it’s also important to consider this reality from a class perspective: which artists made a choice not to graduate in schools, and which artists could not afford such an experience? With a curatorial approach that prefers to dismantle the idea of naivety by looking for the political grounding, the selected paintings from the Museu Internacional de Arte Naïf’s collection often narrate the quotidian and the extraordinary that is intrinsic to it. The works depict rituals and popular festivities, work and pleasure, social life and leisure, sports and natural landscapes, religious manifestations and spiritual beliefs, from the mundane to the extraterrestrial.

The dimension of labour is an important tool for the consideration of these artists’ trajectories. Odoteres Ricardo de Ozias used to draw and paint at his workplace, during his breaks at the Railway, using his fingertips, smashed toothpicks and toothbrushes. Amadeu Lorenzato was a wall painter, just like Alfredo Volpi. Rafael Alonso also presents his painting directly on the exhibition walls, thus dialoguing with popular urban references and with the chromatic power of the so-called naive art works.

Self-taught artists usually work with the matrix of Brazilian popular culture in multiple ways. It makes sense to update this notion in 2019, in alliance with feminist and anti-racist demands, and with decolonial narratives that review the histories about the formation of the country and denounce the structural racism that is the main cause of the social inequality that ravages the country. What is left is a commitment to these artists’ boldness to self-educate with a free practice. This approach make this a unique exhibition, inspired by EAV Parque Lage, which was created in 1975 as a vanguard school that was attentive to Brazilian and anthropological issues and sensitive towards the demands of its community and its time.