

CHICO DA SILVA

06.06–06.09.26

and the
Soul
is for the
Birds

Nottingham
Contemporary

and the South is for the Birds

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Chico da Silva's legacy reflects a deep understanding shaped not by formal education, but by lived experience and a strong sense of belonging shaped by the sensorial. An artist of Indigenous origin and ancestry, with strong ties to a specific fishing community, he was able to translate this cultural inheritance intuitively into art.

His visual lexicon and pictorial grammar emerged from his direct engagement with two distinct worlds: his father's Amazonian environment and his mother's coastal one. His condition of poverty and lack of formal education did not prevent him from developing a prolific and coherent artistic trajectory. It is possible that the development of Chico's expansive artistic vocabulary was also shaped by mental health conditions the artist was diagnosed with at the time, with his personal experiences influencing the figures depicted across hundreds of works. These complexities carried over seamlessly into the collective practice in which he was both the main figure and articulator at the Pirambu School.

His striking palette, characteristic line and brushwork, and scenes composed of tension, combat, and co-existence asserted themselves as singular features of his work, undoing the conventions of landscape and horizon typical of the Western painting tradition. If, on the one hand, da Silva's fantastical bestiary may be seen as emerging from the richness of life that flourished in the vast Amazon rainforest; on the other, the solar and maritime force of the Ceará coast brings clarity, light, and aquatic abundance.

Today, it is important to note that the reintroduction of da Silva's works into the international circuit seeks to reframe our understanding of the artist, moving beyond the colonising and Eurocentric perception shaped by his encounter with the Swiss critic and artist Jean-Pierre Chaboz in 1943. Within what was, at the very least, a complex relationship between artist and critic/dealer, Chaboz's influence on the Ceará-born artist's trajectory is undeniable, including encouraging him to draw and paint on traditional media. Following their second encounter, in 1960, Chico da Silva would become an international phenomenon in Brazilian art, receiving an honourable mention at the 1966 Venice Biennale.

It was within a context of considerable vulnerability, in one of the most saline regions, marked by intense solar incidence (known as the "Land of Light") located at four degrees south latitude and under the Southern Cross constellation visible only from the Southern Hemisphere, that Chico da Silva endured as an artist. He developed a poetic practice that is neither primitivist nor exoticising, but rather defined by acute intuition and technical sensitivity, with highly distinctive themes that continue to resonate universally.

RELATED EVENTS

WALKTHROUGHS

Wed 17 Jun, 12pm

Welcome Walkthrough

Explore the exhibition with Sarogini Reddiar and our team followed by a creative workshop in Studio 1.

Thu 2 Jul, 1pm

With Dr. Michael Asbury, Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art with a focus on Brazil and Deputy Director of the Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation at Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London and Dr. Ileana L Seleján, Lecturer in Art History, Culture and Society at Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh.

Wed 8 Jul, 1pm

Curators' Walkthrough

Join Nottingham Contemporary's curators for a tour of our summer exhibitions.

Wed 15 Jul, 1pm

With Dr. Kate Durrant, Academic lecturer and researcher of animal behaviour, ecology and evolution.

Sat 22 Aug, 2pm

From the background to the figure:

Integration in the life and work of Chico da Silva
An exploration of Chico da Silva's life story through the examination of his artistic output. With Cecilia Vilela, London-based independent curator and writer from São Paulo, Brazil, who serves on the curatorial team of the International Circle – Latin America at the Centre Pompidou.

12.30 Talks

12.30pm every Tue, Thu, Sat, and Sun,
starting Tue 16 Jun

Join one of our friendly Gallery Assistants for a short exploration of one of our current exhibitions. For more details visit our website.

This exhibition was made possible thanks to the generous support of: The Chico da Silva Exhibition Circle: Galatea and those who wish to remain anonymous.

The Nottingham Contemporary Commissioning Circle: Nissreen Darawish, Gabriela Galcerán, Il Posto, Rafik & Najoua, Hamza Serafi and Mercedes Vilardell.

Exhibition texts by Diego Matos.

Exhibition texts translated from Portuguese by Raoni Azevedo.

Exhibition graphics by Waste Studio.

We would like to extend our deepest thanks to all the lenders who have supported us in bringing together this selection of Chico da Silva's works; ARS Belga, Alexandra Mollof Fine Art, Galatea, Gomide&Co, Mendes Wood DM and those lenders who wish to remain anonymous. We would also like to offer thanks to the contributors to the accompanying live programme, whose ideas and research will offer new viewpoints into da Silva's practice; Dr. Michael Asbury, Dr. Kate Durrant, Dr. Ileana Seleján, Cecilia Vilela, and Sarogini Reddiar. And finally, a very special thanks to the entire team at Nottingham Contemporary.

Nottingham Contemporary is a registered charity and dependent on the generosity of our visitors, partners and supporters.

If you would like to use any alternative forms of interpretation, we have a range of accessible versions on our Access Wall beside Reception or alongside the wall text in the exhibition.

Next up in Autumn 2026: Julia Isidrez and Sarah Cunningham

For more information about the exhibition, related events and learning programmes, visit nottinghamcontemporary.org or scan here:

