

Chico da Silva

And the soul is for the birds

06.06 – 06.09.26

Francisco Domingos da Silva, or simply Chico da Silva, (Cruzeiro do Sul - Alto Tejo, Acre, 1922/3* - Fortaleza, Ceará, 1985) was a formidable artist and important figure within the history of Latin American art. Da Silva remains a figure who is impossible to overlook. His work is shaped by a distinctive pictorial imagination that complicates questions of authorship, value and the hierarchies of art production – both for the distinctiveness of his practice and for the ways it has been historically framed, circulated and contested within and beyond Brazil.

Da Silva's legacy resonates in contemporary debates through efforts to deconstruct the colonial violence and erasure of insurgencies that did not, or do not, conform to the Western modern tradition. For this reason, more than ever, it is essential to direct our

attention to his vast artistic production, which began in the early 1940s and continued until close to his death in 1985. From a continental country such as Brazil, the artist portrayed in his lifetime a mirror of the cultural and environmental diversity of this territory.

The son of a mother from Ceará, who migrated to the state of Acre in search of work during the rubber extraction economic boom, and of an Indigenous father from the far western Amazon of Peruvian origin, Chico da Silva was born and lived in an Indigenous community in Alto Tejo (Acre), later migrating with his family to the state of Ceará in 1934. In the early 1940s, in a context of total adversity, this unique figure in Brazilian history began to poetically intervene, drawing on the walls of the city of Fortaleza, onto sheets of paper, and onto canvases of fabric and wood.

In broad terms, it can be said that his practice condenses and synthesises two powerful imaginaries of Brazil's environmental and cultural reality: the vast

symbolic world of the Amazon and Indigenous culture; and the equally powerful environment of the country's coastal life, from fishing culture to the urban culture of the Northeast coast. This may be one of the central keys to understanding his repertoire, of lived experiences and dreams translated onto two-dimensional surfaces. Between co-existence and tension, within the field of his canvases, Da Silva's fantastical animals come to life.

It is from the communion of these worlds that the exhibition unfolds. From the outset, the presence of a singular spectrum of colours is evident in the body of works now on display, along with the richness of the reinterpretations of local fauna and flora. At the same time, his work is not merely an idyllic and fantastical version of what emerges from this continental landscape, it is also a reflection of forms of popular knowledge, often erased, and of a poetics of dream and delirium that responds to the harshness of everyday life.

***The artist's date of birth is not precisely known and is widely circulated as 1910. Given the precarious nature of record-keeping in early twentieth-century Brazil, together with the adverse conditions of his life, it is unfortunately not possible to determine the exact date with certainty. In recent years, however, based on cross-referenced data and interviews given by the artist, it has been established that the widely circulated 1910 date does not align with the findings of researchers.**

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 Selejan, 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.

Environmental: Nottingham Contemporary is committed to advancing sustainability within the organisation and aims to explore and embed sustainable working practices and habits within our workplace and across the sector. This includes standardising environmental considerations at all stages of decision making.

In *And the soul is for the birds* we have reused some materials from previous exhibitions to build the framework for the walls. Where possible other materials have been borrowed, re-used or re-purposed. The exhibition graphics have been produced by local suppliers Hayman Creative. Since spring 2026 we have switched our wall texts from cut vinyl to Xanitaprint, a recyclable material. Our exhibitions are always built and installed by local fine art technicians. Our exhibition notes are printed on FSC Mix paper (Forest Stewardship Council ® certified products manufactured with a variety of sources including FSC-certified virgin fibre, controlled wood and/ or recycled materials).

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 Selejan, 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.

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



Curated by: Salma Tuqan and Niall Ó Faircheallaigh
3D Design and Exhibition Build Lead: David Thomas

Exhibition Build and Installation: Helen Bartholomew,
Jon Chambers, Craig David Parr, Billy Hughes, Jack
Narewski, Emily Stollery, and Hannah Templeman

Condition Checking: Lachlan Hui, Jenna Jones, Lara
Mattinson, Millie Quick and Simon Withers

Development: Emma Graves and Antonia Seroff

Marketing: Catherine Masters and Holly Nowak

Learning programme: Sandra Austerfield, Amelia Daiz, Chan Hyacinth Fagan, Pasha Kincaid, Susannah Lambert, Milee Lee, Holly Nowak, Ursula Rae, Peter Rumney, Rachel Scanlon, Amanda Spruyt, Andrew Martyn Sugars, Holly Tea, Charlotte Tupper and Sian Watson Taylor

Exhibition Invigilators: Winter Beaumont, Tom Chamberlain, Nadim Chaudry, Lynn Chippendale, Olwen Davies, Quinn Greytryx, Lachlan Hui, Jenna Jones, Milee Lee, Karen Lunt, Holly Matthews, Lara Mattinson, Craig David Parr, Millie Quick, Nikki Stevenson, Olu Taiwo and Simon Withers

Visitor Experience: Emma Beischer, Paul Buddle, Nadim Chaudry, Olwen Davies, Craig David Parr, Sam Harrison, Jenna Jones, Lucy Martin, Holly Matthews and Jordan Sterry

Large Print Wall Text – Chico da Silva: *And the soul is for the birds*

People and Culture: Lauren Riley

**Finance and Operations: Andy Batson, Jon Chambers,
Mandy Newbold and David Thomas**