

Chico da Silva: *And the soul is for the birds* at Nottingham Contemporary

Sat 6 Jun – Sun 6 Sep 2026

Private View: Fri 5 Jun



Chico da Silva (Francisco Domingos da Silva), Untitled, 1964, Gouache on paper. Photo: Ding Musa. Courtesy Private Collection São Paulo, Brazil

Nottingham Contemporary is thrilled to present the first European institutional solo exhibition of the late self-taught Brazilian artist Francisco da Silva (1922/3*–1985, Brazil), known as ‘Chico da Silva,’ or simply ‘Chico’.

Chico’s paintings were a glimpse into an immense non-hierarchical cosmology that was fuelled by the artist’s own imagination, mythology and folklore. Depicting sea creatures swimming on the currents of outer space, and fantastical creatures vividly painted in hallucinatory battles or stretching their jaws agape to consume smaller creatures, Chico’s works call attention to the interconnectedness of everything.

During his life, Chico’s practice was subject to significant local and international fascination, though in international contexts it was often exoticised as ‘primitive art’. Questions of authorship and authenticity following Chico’s establishment of a collective studio practice, the Pirambu School, also divided opinions. The exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary will present a selection of seminal paintings created throughout the artist’s lifetime and will celebrate Chico’s

contribution and legacy to contemporary Indigenous art practice in Brazil.

Chico was born surrounded by the Amazon rainforest in Alto Tejo, and while he moved across the region, he spent his life living in Brazil. Beginning his artistic journey through painting the whitewashed walls of the fishermen's houses in Praia Formosa, he gave shape and colour to his drawings with pieces of charcoal, bricks, leaves, and other elements found around him.

In his gouaches and paintings, Chico represented mainly forest creatures, such as birds and fish of the Amazon, as well as fantastical figures, such as dragons. His artworks give form to stories and mythologies from the oral tradition embedded in the culture of Northern Brazil. His compositions are marked by rich polychromy and the graphic details of his drawings, composed of colorful wefts and lines.

Given the originality of his style and compositions, he stood out in the context of the so-called Brazilian popular art movement and, in addition to achieving great commercial success during his lifetime, he attracted considerable interest from critics. Among the major exhibitions he has participated in are: Francisco da Silva, Galerie Pour L'Art, Lausanne, Switzerland (1950); Exhibition of Primitive and Modern Art, Musée d'Ethnographie, Neuchâtel, Switzerland (1956); 8 Brazilian Naïve Painters, Galerie Jacques Massol, Paris, France (1965); 9^a São Paulo Art Biennial, Brazil (1967); and Tradition and Rupture: Synthesis of Brazilian Art and Culture, Fundação Bial de São Paulo, Brazil (1984). In addition, in 1966 he received the Honorable Mention award for his participation in the 33rd Venice Biennale.

*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.

For more information about Chico da Silva and other exhibitions at Nottingham Contemporary, please 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

Chico da Silva: *And the soul is for the birds* is curated by Salma Tuqan and Niall Ó Faircheallaigh.

Notes to Editors:

Chico da Silva: *And the soul is for the birds* is showing alongside Augustas Serapinas: *Physical Culture*.

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About Nottingham Contemporary

Nottingham Contemporary is one of the leading centres of contemporary art in Europe. Since opening in 2009, we have welcomed over 2 million visitors – with free admission for all – to our highly ambitious programme that has featured hundreds of artists and cultural practitioners from across the globe.

Our programme champions international art and artists who invite us to imagine the world in new ways, and empower different perspectives into the most pressing cultural, social, and political questions of today. We support artists at different stages of their careers – from first-time solo shows in the UK to surveys of renowned or overlooked figures – and regularly present significant thematic exhibitions and major artist-curated projects. Nottingham Contemporary was shortlisted for Art Fund Museum of the Year 2019. Nottingham Contemporary is supported using public funding by Arts Council England.

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