

Chico da Silva

Amazônico

March 13 – April 26, 2025

Los Angeles

Press Release

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to announce *Amazônico*, the first solo exhibition of Chico da Silva's work in Los Angeles, on view at 5130 W. Edgewood Pl. from March 13 through April 26, 2025. An opening reception will be held on Thursday, March 13 from 6 to 8 PM.

"I feel the animals, the jungles, the fantastic worlds, entering the phase of other worlds."
—Chico da Silva, 1972

Over a prolific career spanning four decades, Chico da Silva devoted himself to depicting the celestial, otherworldly realms within his imagination. His work, which spans a rich and varied body of paintings, drawings, and performance, encapsulates a profound engagement with the intersection of personal mythology, cultural history, and collective creativity. *Amazônico* brings together exemplary paintings from the 1980s—an often-overlooked phase of Chico's career—alongside works from the 1960s, offering a comprehensive look at his practice and insight into the evolution of his distinctive artistic vision.

Born in Alto Tejo, Brazil, Chico's early years in the Amazon deeply influenced the development of his cosmology of fantastical creatures and environments. As a teenager, he moved to Pirambu with his mother. It was only a few years later that Swiss art critic Jean-Pierre Chablot saw him drawing on some neighborhood buildings and quickly became a key supporter, launching Chico's international career. By the early-to-mid 1960s, Chico had honed his unique style, working primarily on paper and depicting creatures—both real and imagined—in suspended states of conflict. The 1964 and 1966 works featured in this exhibition both feature stippled lines and dots that define his *bichos* (creatures). In the 1966 example, fish surrounding a tree share the same intricate patterns, dissolving the boundary between flora and fauna in Chico's invented world.

Chico continued to garner significant attention, culminating with an invitation to participate in the 1966 Venice Biennale, where he received an honorable mention. A work from this pivotal year is included in *Amazônico*. The only painting in the original artist frame, this work offers critical insight into Chico's process: the painting's frame bears marks from the artist, who constantly wiped his brush onto the frame's border to ensure precision in every stroke. His refined technique later became the foundation for the Pirambu School. Originally conceived as an arts workshop for children and local artisans to learn directly from Chico, the school quickly evolved into a collective. Members of the Pirambu School began to create their own works, expanding Chico's visual language and contributing to a shared, imaginative universe.

Throughout his time teaching at Pirambu, Chico continuously reinterpreted and evolved his compositions. Two works from disparate parts of his practice, 1966 and 1981, exemplify this sustained reinterpretation. Both of these works feature a large, central fish surrounded by smaller ones swimming around its open mouth. In

the earlier of the two paintings, an eel swims into the fish's mouth, while in the later version, Chico replaces it with a slim fin extending from the fish's head, subtly shifting the composition and drawing in the smaller fish. Moreover, Chico's use of color and pattern shifts from a moody, dark tone in the 1966 work to a vibrant, eclectic style in the 1981 piece. Fifteen years apart, these works highlight Chico's endless ability to reinvent his fantastical world and the characters that inhabit it.

Chico's Venice Biennale recognition brought both fame and scrutiny to the Pirambu School. European audiences struggled to make sense of the school's collective approach. Meanwhile, Chico's worsening alcoholism led to extended inpatient treatment. While hospitalized, Chico continued to paint and by the late 1970s, he had returned to the studio. An untitled painting from 1980, created in the last few years of Chico's life, presents a notable departure from his earlier style by omitting the patterned gradient backgrounds that had defined much of his previous work. Here, a vibrant grid serves as the backdrop for two dueling dragons. Each square is composed of creatures and scenes amassed throughout his decades-long body of work. The snakes, trees, birds, and fish familiar from his 1960s pieces are reimagined in smaller forms, subtly obscured by the dramatic presence of the two dragons. Through this grid, Chico synthesizes the rich cosmology he had developed over many years.

Chico's deployment of Amazonian flora, fauna, and mythical iconography has had a lasting impact on international audiences. By presenting regional narratives on an international stage, Chico continues to play a key role in shaping the conversation around Latin American art, challenging conventional views and highlighting the relevance of art practices from outside traditional art centers in global movements.

Chico da Silva (b. circa 1910, d. 1985) has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including the major, traveling retrospective *Chico da Silva e o ateliê do Pirambu*, presented at the Pinacoteca de São Paulo (2023) and the Pinacoteca do Ceará (2023). Other solo exhibitions include *Chico da Silva: Sacred Connection, Global Vision*, Museu de Arte Sacra, São Paulo (2022); *Chico da Silva – O Renascer 100 Anos*, Espaço Cultural Correios, Fortaleza, Brazil (2010); *Retrospectiva Chico da Silva: do delírio ao dilúvio*, Espaço Cultural do Palácio da Abolição, Fortaleza, Brazil (1989). Group exhibitions include *Uma história da arte brasileira*, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro (2024–2025); *Patrimônios, Memórias, Artes e Ofícios*, Museu da Cultura Cearense, Fortaleza, Brazil (2024); *The Sacred in the Amazon*, Centro Cultural Inclusartiz, Rio de Janeiro (2023); *Fantaisies brésiliennes*, Musée International d'Art naïf Anatole Jakovsky, Nice, France (2016); *Brasileiro, Brasileiros*, Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo (2005); and 33rd Venice Biennale, Italy (1966). His work is in the permanent collections of Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate, London; Pinacoteca de São Paulo; El Museo del Barrio, New York; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; Museu de Arte do Rio de Janeiro; and Fundação Edson Queiroz, Fortaleza, Brazil.