



Os alquimistas estão chegando
Paulo Nimer Pjota
Sep 6 Oct 8, 2025

You have to be at least three to make a society – and so at least three for a splitting off to take place. Three, too, to make a family – and from that simple truth, many aspects of our relation to the world begin to unfold. Space is experienced in three dimensions, while a chord requires three notes to resonate, and life itself is divided into three ages. The triad is powerful, and religions are evidence to that: the Three Jewels of Buddhism – Buddha, Dharma, Sangha; Hinduism’s Trimūrti of creator, preserver, and destroyer; the divine triads of Ancient Egypt (Osiris, Isis, and Horus, among others); Christianity’s Holy Trinity; even Greco-Roman mythology, with its Fates, Graces, and Furies, which all come in threes. It’s a matter of balance, yes – but also of dynamism, completeness, mediation.

It is in this spirit that Paulo Nimer Pjota conceived *Os alquimistas estão chegando* – its title borrowed from a song by Jorge Ben Jor, a central figure of Brazilian popular music – as the third and final chapter in a cycle that began with *A Lua e Eu* (Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam, 2025) and *Na Boca do Sol* (Mendes Wood DM, New York, 2024). A matter of balance, it has been claimed, but not of symmetry or fairness.

The triad challenges every binary logic: more and less, yes and no, good and evil. It resists the rationalist impulse to divide the world into opposites – true versus false, permanent versus ephemeral, visible versus invisible. It also stands against the reversals on which such dualisms so often thrive – like the one that saw colonisers recast the gods of Brazil’s Indigenous peoples as the devils of Christianity.

Paulo Nimer Pjota approaches painting as a meditative, inward-looking practice, a way of letting go of what is known, of unlearning, in order to begin anew, each time more freely. As such, it is a practice prone to producing monsters and beasts, born from the far reaches of an imagination unbound by canon or expectation. In the Western tradition alone, Gilbert Lascault demonstrated the vastness and diversity of the monstrous realm, identifying no less than 27 monster types.¹ And that doesn’t even include the many monsters conjured by Afro-descendant cultures, which appear in mystical tales or religious celebrations.

Does that mean that Paulo Nimer Pjota’s paintings tend to stand outside reality, that they refuse it? Certainly not. On the contrary, they feed on the richness of reality – a richness so often overlooked when it takes forms dismissed by the strictures of positivism. They unearth what official narratives try to bury, for official narratives recoil from what contradicts them. Some have invoked Goya to cast the monster as a beast to be slain: his *Caprichos* engraving No. 43, inscribed “*The sleep of reason produces monsters*,” lends itself all too easily to such a reading.

[1] Gilbert Lascault, “*Tableau du catalogue abrégé des monstres*” in Id., *Le Monstre*. “*Un problème esthétique*,” Paris, Klincksieck, coll. *Esthétique*, (1973), p. 174–175.



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Taken literally, it suggests that monsters are simply the opposite of reason. Yet in Goya's language, *sueño* means both sleep and dream. This ambiguity has been read in a far more fruitful way than mere opposition: Georges Canguilhem wondered "whether the sleep of reason might not be a liberator rather than a generator of monsters,"² while Deleuze and Guattari insisted, "It is not the slumber of reason that engenders monsters, but vigilant and insomniac rationality."³

It is precisely in this space of ambiguity that Paulo Nimer Pjota works, drawing on the unlikely juxtapositions that shape our relationship to culture today. He also works in the absolute ambiguity of dreams and what they generate. Dreams are capable of conjuring both the worst horrors and the most complete bliss, but, more often than not, they amalgamate the two. Here again, the neat categories on which dualist thinking depends no longer hold. Far from retreating from the world, Pjota scrapes away its surface to reveal the forgotten memories and unforeseen promises still lodged within it.

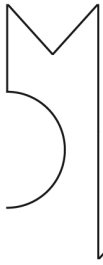
Pjota often draws on Brazil's history as well as its popular culture – itself steeped in outside references – and creates his paintings like lost paradises, peopled with nature and the spirits that inhabit it. A double return to origins, then: to the origins of a vast country whose plurality and disparities stem from a history as rich as it is dark and to the origins of his own practice, revisiting his adolescent days, reconnecting with them now by other means and under different formal ambitions.

Alchemy, that occult science devoted to transmuting base metals into gold, fascinates him, as it once did Jorge Ben Jor. He pays tribute to the musician by referencing his album named after one of alchemy's founding texts, the *Emerald Tablet* of Hermes Trismegistus. Perhaps this is one way of approaching Paulo Nimer Pjota's painting: it transmutes, it transcends.

— Guillaume Blanc-Marianne

[2] Georges Canguilhem, "Monstrosity and the Monstrous," in *Knowledge of Life*, trans. Stefanos Geroulanos and Daniela Ginsburg, ed. Paola Marrati and Todd Meyers (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

[3] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: Penguin, 2009).



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Paulo Nimer Pjota (b. 1988, São José do Rio Preto, Brazil) lives and works in São Paulo.

The artist's solo exhibitions include *Os alquimistas estão chegando*, **Mendes Wood DM**, Paris (2025); *A Lua e Eu*, **Kunstinstituut Melly**, Rotterdam (2025); *Na Boca do Sol*, **Mendes Wood DM**, New York (2024); *Do cômico e do trágico*, **Mendes Wood DM**, São Paulo (2023); *Every Empire Breaks Like a Vase*, **The Power Station**, Dallas (2021); *Cenas de Casa, Caixa de Pandora*, **Ivani and Jorge Yunes Collection**, São Paulo (2019); *Medley*, **Mendes Wood DM**, São Paulo (2018); *The history in repeat mode – image*, **Mendes Wood DM**, Brussels (2017); *The history in repeat mode – symbol*, **Maureen Paley and Morena di Luna**, Hove (2017).

Additionally, his work has been included in institutional group exhibitions such as *Works from the Colección Jumex*, **Jumex**, Mexico City (2025); *38th Panorama de Arte Brasileira: Mil Graus [A Thousand Degrees]*, **Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP)** at **Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo (MAC USP)**, São Paulo (2024); *La mirada encendida*, **Fundacion Osde**, Buenos Aires (2024); *X Pink 101*, **X Museum**, Beijing (2024); *Private Passion – New Acquisitions in the Astrup Fearnley Collection*, **Astrup Fearnley Museet**, Oslo (2019); *Trouble in Paradise*, **Kunsthall Rotterdam**, Rotterdam (2019); *Sea of Desire*, **Fondation Carmignac**, Porquerolles (2018); *The Marvellous Cacophony*, **57th October Salon**, Belgrade (2018); *O Triângulo Atlântico*, **11th Mercosul Biennial**, Porto Alegre (2018); *Painting /or/ Not*, **KaviarFactory**, Lofoten (2017); *Soft Power*, **Kunsthall KAdE**, Amersfoort (2016); the **19th Sesc_Videobrasil**, São Paulo (2015); *Here There*, **Qatar Museums – Al Riwaq**, Doha (2015); *Imagine Brazil*, **Astrup Fearnley Museet**, Oslo (2013); **DHC/ART Foundation for Contemporary Art**, Montreal (2015); **12th Lyon Biennale**, Lyon (2013).

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