



nara roesler

thiago barbalho
once in never out
curated by raphael fonseca

nara roesler rio de janeiro
opening november 10
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once in never out
raphael fonseca

In addition to being a visual artist, Thiago Barbalho is a writer, who has already published books with his prose and poetry. It feels necessary to include this information along with his exhibited works, as his titles provide a clue to his passion for writing and the forms that words take when uttered aloud.

Beautiful to rain, Sprouts, Nightly and *The nest wasn't seen: was born* bring a semantic field denoting the artist's connection with landscape and natural phenomena—something that also echoes in *Xambá*, as a reference to an Afro-Brazilian religion centered around transcendence and spirituality.

Other titles seem to be bathed in the space between an absurdist surrealism and attention to the human body, but also to carnal pleasures; *Mãinha so voracious* and *Metabolizei a maravilha* are examples of this, but none of these surpass his work, *Gonads*, a reference to the organs that produce sex cells—either the ovaries or the testes.

Barbecue, Mamabanha and *Flabby* complete this list of titles and remind us that the flesh that today observes the world and enjoys life, will tomorrow be lying down, inert, dissected and transformed into food for other beings.

There is something in Thiago Barbalho's work that places him in a reflective space between vital power, the passage of time, melancholy and death; the hands and eyes that provide such visual delight are the same ones that show us that,

yes, everything is ephemeral and with dawn comes melancholy, absence and uncertainty.

Looking at his images, I have the impression that it is the works on paper that most notably embody this dialogue between excess and melancholy. Working with different scales, but always avoiding tiny sizes, these images are characterized by the *horror vacuum*—that is, there is a 'horror of the void'. Barbalho brings together situations, figures, spots and lines. Seen from afar, these images stand out for the vibrant presence of color, while up close, they can be seen as a web where pleasure, humor, violence and nonsense come together in their juxtaposition.

Words cannot express the experience of being in front of Barbalho's work, but nothing prevents us from committing the heresy of trying to describe it anyway: human eyes with red contours, the phrase 'I will not speak' is written in white. Over this, green eyes stand out from what appears to be the outline of a face with spiky hair. To the left, a hand that appears to have fish scales points with its thumb down; to the right, coming from the center of the face are repeated shapes resembling purple ribbons, decreasing in size and leading us towards the mistaken idea that the image has perspective and emulation of depth.

(The above few words are a poignant attempt at writing that doesn't even correspond to a tenth of the surface of Thiago Barbalho's Flabby; let's follow his own advice—'let's not talk.')

His compositions are presented as a kind of archive: suggestions of eyes, bodies, faces, quotes from a mass of images and, of course, organic shapes made with an infinity of colors, all inviting us to ponder them for hours and hours.

This desire to contain so much stimuli from the world into a single image induces a sense of anxiety that in my view, brings a certain melancholy to his practice. Life, incredible as it may be, is much bigger than these images. The artist may strive to present his seemingly disorganized Pandora's Box, but something will always be left out.

Meanwhile, when we look at his small-scale paintings, we see individual figures that present themselves as anatomical studies of fantastical beings. The fictitious limits between figuration and abstraction, representation and formal exploration blur and merge into one. When looking at these works in comparison to those on paper, we have the impression that the artist drew characters from his previous great narratives and decided to present them from a new perspective, front on.

When grouped together, these images resemble portrait galleries where psychological aspects are offered up for analysis. While one of these works has shapes that look like tears, another one has something that resembles claws, and a third has silhouettes of moons. The series of small paintings is based on this constant suggestion of movement, as static images that seem to be taken from an animated film.

Finally, the exhibition includes a three-dimensional piece where Barbalho embodies some of the central characteristics of his work on paper and canvas. What if these works indicated objects of flesh and blood—or, more appropriate in this case, resin, styrofoam, fabric and plastic?

How does the body of the audience relate to his practice, as it gains circularity in space and allows color to be experienced on the different materials used to build a three-dimensional object?

What will the next steps be regarding the way Barbalho deals with the notions of object, sculpture and further explores architecture more generally, and *site specifics*? What changes when Barbalho's use of the color orange goes beyond a few square centimeters and covers the walls of buildings instead?

Let us return, then, to our reflection on the titles of the works, given by Barbalho, and quote the title of this exhibition again: *Once in never out*.

Five words, no comma and two verbs: a Carnival block? A provocative tease on some hook-up app? A sentence whispered in your ear? A reference to political discussions in Brazil? Once our body enters Thiago Barbalho's universe, it is not easily forgotten. So, let's not leave and get lost in the labyrinth.



Flappy, 2021/2022
colored pencils, graphite, pastel,
ballpoint pen, permanent marker, acrylic,
oil and spray on paper
210,9 x 200 cm | 83 x 78.7 in
6 pieces of 70,3 x 100 cm
27.7 x 39.4 in





Metabolizei a maravilha, 2022
colored pencils, graphite, ballpoint
pen and permanent marker on canvas
40 x 30 cm | 15.7 x 11.8 in





The nest was not seen: was born, 2021
colored pencils, graphite, ballpoint pen,
oil and permanent marker on canvas
40 x 30 x 2 cm
15.7 x 11.8 x 0.8 in





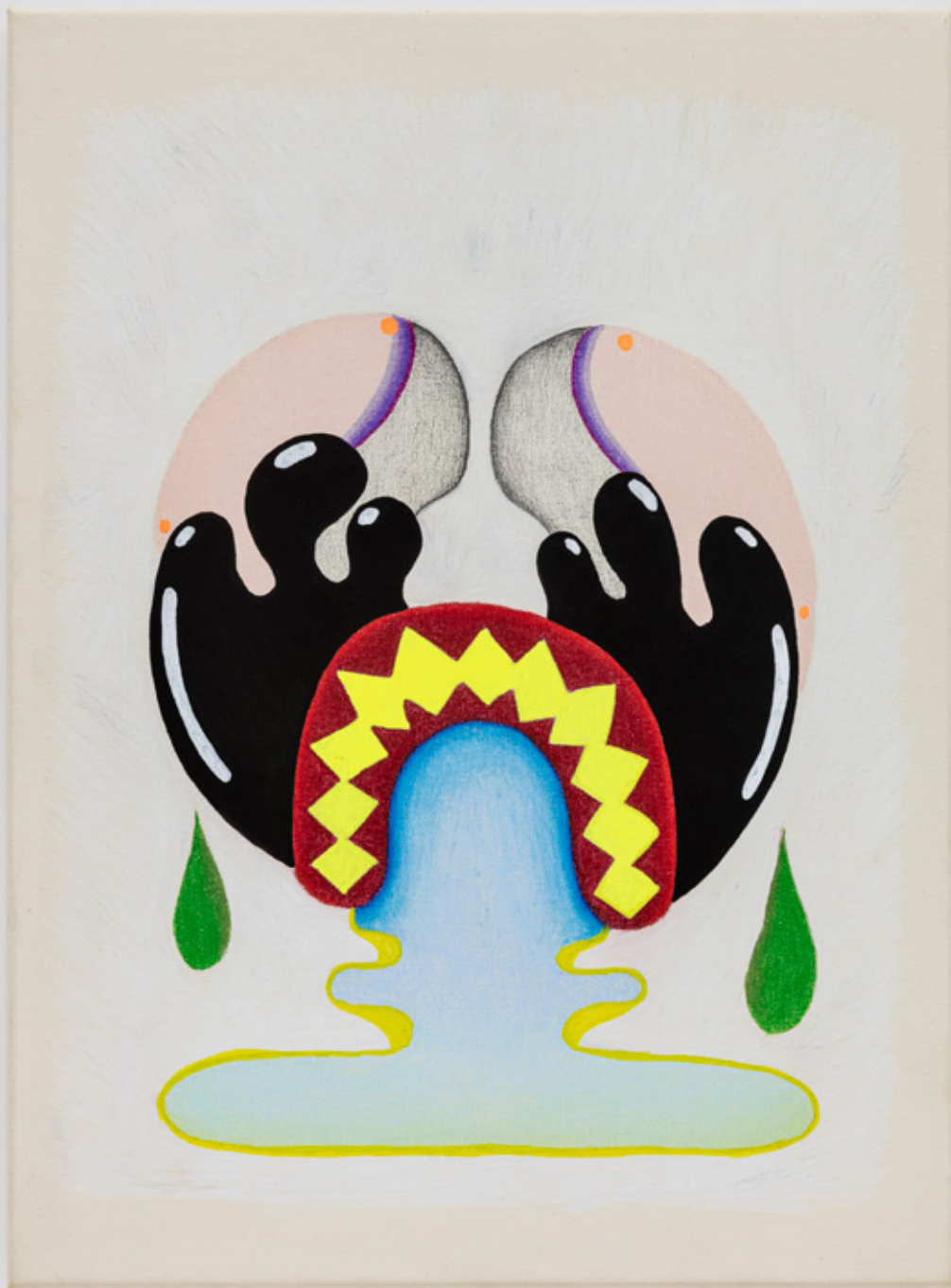
Máinha so voracious, 2022
colored pencils, graphite, ballpoint pen,
oil and permanent marker on canvas
40 x 30 x 2 cm
15.7 x 11.8 x 0.8 in





Once in never out, 2021
colored pencils, graphite, ballpoint pen
and permanent marker on canvas
35 x 27 x 1,5 cm
13.8 x 10.6 x 0.6 in





Xambá, 2021
colored pencils, graphite, ballpoint pen
and permanent marker on canvas
40 x 30 cm | 15.7 x 11.8 in





Once in never out II, 2021
colored pencils, graphite, ballpoint pen
and permanent marker on canvas and
fabric dyed with natural pigment
21 x 15 cm | 8.3 x 5.9 in





My guide, 2022
colored pencils, graphite, ballpoint pen
and permanent marker on canvas
40 x 30 cm | 15.7 x 11.8 in





Mamabanha, 2021/2022
colored pencils, graphite, pastel,
ballpoint pen, permanent marker,
acrylic, oil and spray on paper
70,1 x 200 cm | 27.6 x 78.7 in





Beautiful to rain, 2021/2022
colored pencils, graphite, pastel,
ballpoint pen, permanent marker,
acrylic, oil and spray on paper
40 x 30 cm | 15.7 x 11.8 in





Sprouts, 2021/2022
colored pencils, graphite, pastel,
ballpoint pen, permanent marker,
acrylic, oil and spray on paper
40 x 30 cm | 15.7 x 11.8 in



thiago barbalho

b. 1984, natal, brazil

lives and works in são roque, brazil

The writer and visual artist Thiago Barbalho discovered in drawing an expression form that overcame a crisis he had with words. Working in different dimensions and with different materials (colored pencils, graphite, spray, oil, oil pastel, and marker on paper), his compositions bring intricate universes to the public's eye, in which shapes and colors intertwine and shuffle in narratives that seem to radicalize and endow the Hieronymus Bosch fantastic universe with a contemporary and lysergic air.

According to the critic and curator Kiki Mazzucchelli, 'when working essentially in drawing, Barbalho produces extremely intricate, but unplanned compositions, in which a multiplicity of images, symbols and color fields merge to create uninterrupted vibrant surfaces.' The apparent chaos of his images arises from the gestures he traces, refusing to submit to a formal logic dictated by rationality. In fact, we encounter in his work a variety of fragments, a profusion of references from different spheres, from pop culture to art history tradition, disarranging categories, and the relationship between figure and background.

With a background in Philosophy, Barbalho relies on philosophical concepts to guide his practice. In this sense, he understands drawing as an ancestral technology, which spans ages and cultures as a specific human species' invention. The artist's visual research leads him to see in the drawing the trace of a presence and the relationship between the mind—the imagination—and the body—the gesture—, between consciousness and reality.

selected solo exhibitions

- *Correspondência*, Galeria Marília Razuk, São Paulo, Brazil (2019)
- *Thiago Barbalho*, Kupfer Project Space, London, United Kingdom (2018)

selected group exhibitions

- *Mapa da estrada: Novas obras no acervo da Pinacoteca de São Paulo*, Pinacoteca de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brasil (2022)
- *Electric Dreams*, Nara Roesler, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2021)
- *AVAF*, Casa Triângulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2018)
- *Rocambole*, Pivô, São Paulo, Brazil (2018)
- *Rocambole*, Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon, Portugal (2019)
- *Voyage*, Galeria Bergamin & Gomide, São Paulo, Brazil (2017)
- *Shadows & Monsters*, Gasworks, London, United Kingdom (2017)

selected collections

- Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

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