

nara roesler

**thiago barbalho**





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## 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.

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### selected solo exhibitions

*Correspondência*, Galeria Marília Razuk, São Paulo, Brazil (2019)

*Thiago Barbalho*, Kupfer Project Space, Londres, United Kingdom (2018)

### selected group exhibitions

*AVAF*, Casa Triângulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2018)

*Rocambole*, Pivô, São Paulo, Brazil (2018)

*Rocambole*, Kunsthalle Lissabon, Lisbon, Portugal (2019)

*Voyage*, Galeira Bergamin & Gomide, São Paulo, Brazil (2017)

*Shadows & Monsters*, Gasworks, London, United Kingdom (2017)

### selected institutional collections

Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

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## drawing as writing

Thiago Barbalho's artistic practice is carried out on a double front: drawing and writing. In 2010, the artist left his homeland, moved to São Paulo and began to focus on writing. Between 2012 and 2017 he published a handful of books, such as *Thiago Barbalho vai para o fundo do poço* (2012), *Doritos* (2013) and more recently, *Um homem bom* (2017). Eventually, Barbalho faced an impasse with writing and its ability to represent reality and in its place, drawing emerged as an alternative to express his creativity.

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*Palavra de macaco*, 2017  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, oil, pastel, acrylic  
and spray on paper  
120 x 80 cm | 47.2 x 31.5 in

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→  
*Palavra de macaco* [detalhe], 2017  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, oil, pastel, acrylic  
and spray on paper  
120 x 80 cm | 47.2 x 31.5 in











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Barbalho's practice is marked by his readings and studies, which are as comprehensive and as dense as his drawings. The artist is as interested in Western philosophy as he is in poets, mystics and students of mathematics; Amerindian knowledge and traditional knowledge of the Northeast.

The variety of Barbalho's theoretical arsenal is the same as the materials he uses in his works, opening up endless possibilities for unique pairings with dissimilar mediums. His repertoire of materials includes graphite, colored pencils, ballpoint pen, permanent marker, acrylic and oil paint and pastel, recurrently combined on paper.

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*Untitled*, 2018  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, oil, pastel, acrylic  
and spray on paper  
101 x 72 cm | 39.8 x 28.3 in

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→  
*Untitled [detail]*, 2018  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, oil, pastel, acrylic  
and spray on paper  
101 x 72 cm | 39.8 x 28.3 in







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This diversity can be seen in his work *Plumas* (2021). The drawing begins with a simple repeated design. The artist creates small cocoons, shapes that can resemble drops or flower petals and as they accumulate, they look like fish scales or bird feathers. After covering the surface with these modular forms, the artist fills them with different materials and colors. Sometimes, he combines more than one material and color in the same cell, creating unique effects which result in a myriad of colors and a hypnotic visual rhythm.

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*Pele de plumas*, 2020  
graphite, colored pencils,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, acrylic and oil on paper  
72 x 101 cm | 28.3 x 39.8 in

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→  
*Pele de plumas* [detail], 2020  
graphite, colored pencils,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, acrylic and oil on paper  
72 x 101 cm | 28.3 x 39.8 in









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For Barbalho, drawing and writing have the same origin: action. They are undeniable marks left in the world that, in turn, always point to the existence of a subject who intentionally created them. They are statements by the individual. In this sense, the time taken to complete the work is a fundamental part of the process. The artist takes time to fill the entire surface of the paper with different shapes. However, unlike literature, these drawings do not build a linear narrative but instead, affirm the different temporalities that coexist in the world, creating an image that allows us to take different paths of narrative chaining as we follow Barbalho's drawings with our eyes.



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*A redenção idiota*, 2019  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, oil, pastel, acrylic  
and spray on paper  
234 x 160 cm | 92.1 x 63 in

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→  
*A redenção idiota* [detail], 2019  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, oil, pastel, acrylic  
and spray on paper  
234 x 160 cm | 92.1 x 63 in











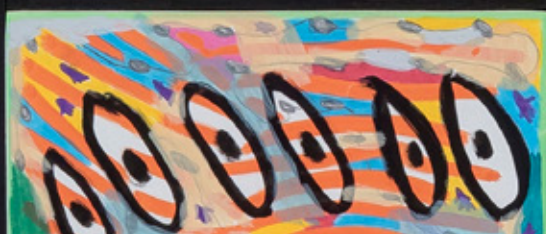
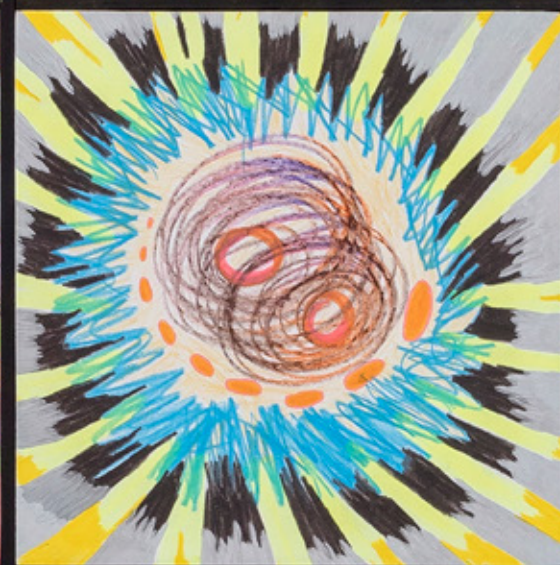
*Canto XI* (2019) begins with an experiment that brings a literary visual aspect to the drawing. First, the artist made a series of drawings on square-shaped papers and then experimented with different relationships between these independent parts, guided mainly by the form that the poem takes on the printed page. In *Canto XI*, Barbalho plays with the potential that each phrase—drawing—of this visual text, has of changing itself and the others through the close relationship that is established. The name of the work alludes to Canto as a poetic textual form of classical literature. Despite being a unique work, the numbering outlines the idea of continuity, as if this were just a chapter in a visual epic by Barbalho.

*Canto XI*, 2019  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, oil, pastel, acrylic  
and spray on paper and wood  
150cm x 128cm | 59 x 50.4 in

→  
*Canto XI* [detail], 2019  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, oil, pastel, acrylic  
and spray on paper and wood  
150cm x 128cm | 59 x 50.4 in











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## gesture, body, presence

The dimension of the design is important in Barbalho's practice because it adds another fundamental aspect of his practice: the body, as drawing is the result of the action of a body and the concentration of its energies over a period of time. A drawing attests to the presence of that body, it is the direct result of an action in the world.

The body also appears as a theme, in whole or fragmented anthropomorphic figures, and also through analogies established by the titles of the works, such as *Peito de pombo* (2021) and *Pelanca* (2021/2022), or *De pernas pro ar (sendo engolido)* (2020). We are led to consider Barbalho's drawings as bodies in themselves, due also to the scale of his works.

When working on large sheets of paper, the artist does not completely adapt his creation to the larger dimensions. Instead, he continues to cover it with small drawings and rich textures, as if the different motions of a hand on paper also affirm this.

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*Peito de pombo*, 2020  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, acrylic, oil and  
spray on paper  
101 x 116 cm | 39.8 x 45.7 in  
Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo



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*Pelanca*, 2021/2022  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, acrylic, oil and  
spray on paper  
210,9 x 200 cm | 83 x 78.7 in

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→  
*Pelanca* [detail], 2021/2022  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, acrylic, oil and  
spray on paper  
210,9 x 200 cm | 83 x 78.7 in












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*De pernas pro ar (sendo engolido)*, 2020  
graphite, colored pencils,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, acrylic and oil on paper  
72 x 101 cm | 28.3 x 39.8 in

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→  
*De pernas pro ar (sendo engolido)* [detail], 2020  
graphite, colored pencils,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, acrylic and oil on paper  
72 x 101 cm | 28.3 x 39.8 in







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Thiago Barbalho's drawings also take place in the intimacy of his notebooks. This practice, common to many artists, allows for the hand to move freely and also for more casual experimentation. Sometimes, a drawing can be formed in a more incisive way that is more attuned in form and material qualities. *Paranoia* (2019) is exemplary in this regard. Barbalho selected the drawing that he thought was worthy of being shared with the public and framed it without detaching its stand. In this way, the artist respects the process and the work's original stand, leaving the other drawings dormant under the one on view.

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*Caderninho VI*, 2021  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent marker,  
crayons and spray on paper  
15 x 20 cm | 5.9 x 7.9 in







*Caderninho V (Paranoia)*, 2020  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent marker,  
crayons and spray on paper  
15 x 20 cm | 5.9 x 7.9 in





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*Instantes* (2017) is one of the artist's first series, and starts with a basic component in drawing: the trace, as the artist mechanically lays out short strokes on paper at almost equal intervals. Barbalho brings together craftsmanship and machinery, both the repetitive rhythm of form and also small deviations from it.

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Instante II, 2018  
graphite pencil  
on colored paper  
47,5 x 65 cm | 18.7 x 25.6 in





Instante XII, 2018  
graphite pencil  
on colored paper  
47,5 x 65 cm | 18.7 x 25.6 in

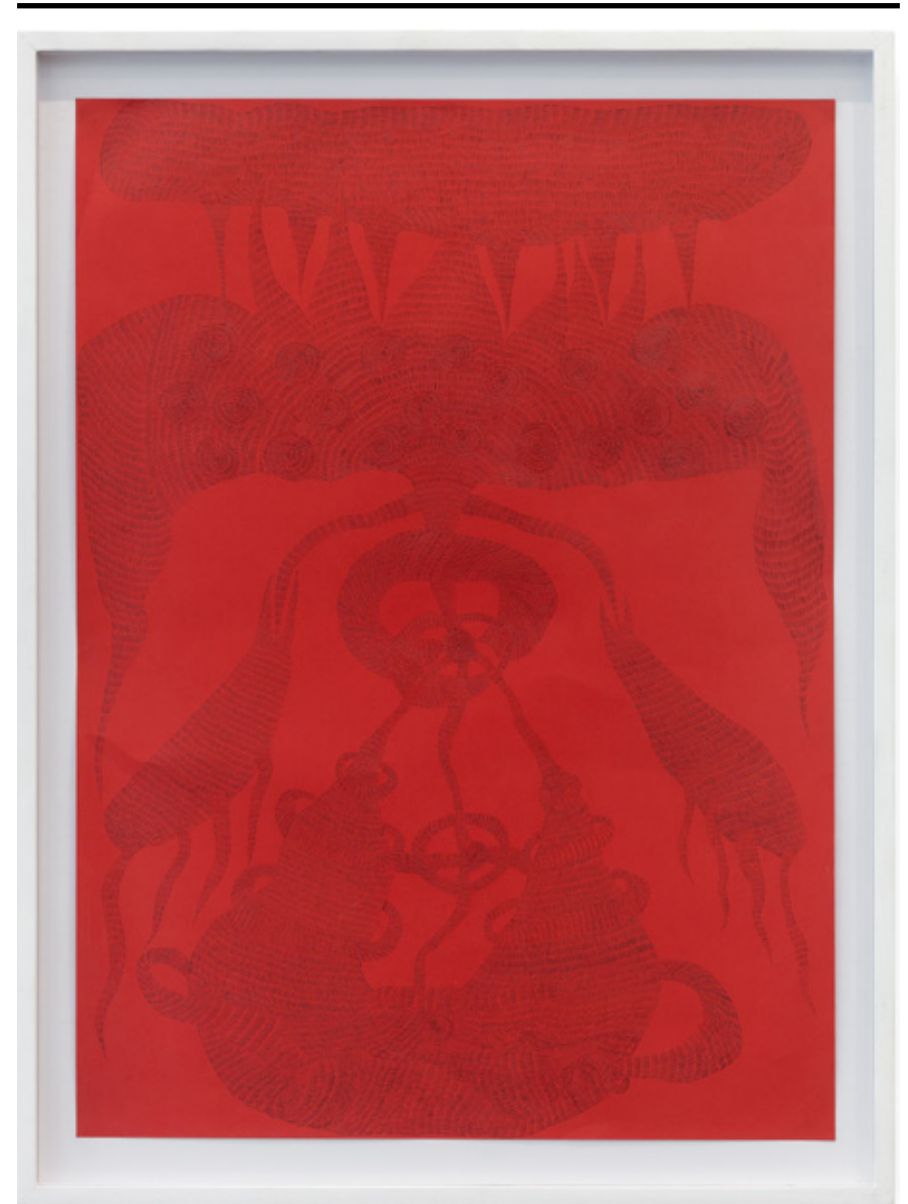


Instante I, 2018  
graphite pencil  
on colored paper  
47,5 x 65 cm | 18.7 x 25.6 in



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Gradually, these sets of strokes, whose intervals, thickness and size create different visual rhythms, are able to provide a richness of textures that break with the supposed monotony of the process. The organic, rounded shapes are also a counterpoint to the rationality of the process, as they were not planned by the artist but rather, happened organically during the creative process based on the small decisions Barbalho made with each new step.



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Instante IV, 2018  
graphite pencil  
on colored paper  
47,5 x 65 cm | 18.7 x 25.6 in



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## images in abundance

2013 marks the moment when the artist began to become more aware of the possibilities of drawing and use it more deliberately. During this period, the artist began to make digital drawings using the software paint brush. The possibility of getting closer and further away from the image, with the zoom in and zoom out tools, allowed the artist to focus more on the details, getting deeper and deeper into the drawing.

These incredibly detailed works bring many of the elements present in the artist's practice onto paper: profusion. In fact, this is one of the fundamental characteristics of Barbalho's work, where we find not only a variety of images, but also materials, colors and textures. The time it took to create each drawing—Barbalho did at most two a year—contrasts with the speed we attribute to the digital universe.







The profusion of images not only breaks the hierarchy between foreground and background, but also creates intertwinement between shapes, creating a unique surface which weaves together various threads. The containment of these threads is only contingent on the margins of the paper, as if they could otherwise continue exponentially, giving the image a character of containment.

On the other hand, it is the very limits of the paper that make the arrangement of the shapes more coherent. Coming from such different sources—cartoons, book illustrations, artifacts from popular Northeastern culture, brand logos, product packaging, etc when combined with traces, scribbles and stains, they affirm their differences and at the same time they see themselves bound by the relationships they establish in that space. The result is an explosion of visual hierarchies and notions of high and popular culture.

*Untitled*, 2017  
paint brush  
variable dimensions



It is common for the artist to use more than one sheet to carry out his works. In *Tríptico I* (2017) and *Tríptico II* (2017), made during his residency at Pivô, in 2017, Barbalho started by placing the sheet on the wall, and drawing on it and then continued to add extra sheets, in order to let the drawing naturally flow and expand.

*A redenção idiota* (2019) and *Dois louva-a-deus* (2019) occupy four large sheets each. It is interesting to note, in these works, how the meeting point of the sheets creates a precise orthogonal axis, constantly tensioned by the multitude of directions of Barbalho's lines.

The axis anchors the observer as they wander through the labyrinths of Barbalho's figures, and gives them attributes, such as symmetry, which governs the eloquence of his images and brings to the drawings a vertiginous character that seems to communicate with the excess of images of contemporary life, presented by the multiple canvases that surround us, while pointing to other relationships between the images and the things they represent.



*Triptico I*, 2018  
acrylic paint, crayons,  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, oil pastel and spray  
paint on paper  
240 x 120 cm | 94,5 x 47,2 in





*Triptico II*, 2018  
acrylic paint, crayons,  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, oil pastel and spray  
paint on paper  
225 x 120 cm | 88.6 x 47.2 in



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Despite the undeniable materiality of his drawings, there is a spiritual dimension in Barbalho's work, which is not transcendence, but rather the reality of things, trying to identify the natural structures that control our perception. The path chosen by the artist passes through the Amerindian cultures.

Between 2014 and 2017, the artist put aside his dedication to Eurocentric philosophy and began to dedicate himself to the study of native South American thought, until he came into contact with those who use consciousness-altering plants as a path for spiritual investigation. These experiences allowed the artist to access another repertoire of shapes that would later be integrated into his work. The artist's contrasting and sometimes fluorescent colors make for a psychedelic atmosphere that can be seen as a tribute to these experiences.



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*Dois louva-a-deus*,  
2019-2020  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, oil, pastel, acrylic  
and spray on paper  
234 x 160 cm | 92.1 x 63 in

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→  
*Dois louva-a-deus*  
[detail], 2019-2020  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen, permanent  
marker, oil, pastel, acrylic  
and spray on paper  
234 x 160 cm | 92.1 x 63 in







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## amerindian experiences

In December 2019, Thiago Barbalho landed in Peru, in Pucallpa, capital of the province of Ucayali, seeking to get closer to the practices and experiences of the Shipibo-Konibo. Years before, in 2014, Barbalho had lived with members of this community in the interior of São Paulo, an event that coincided with his readings of Amerindian ethnography.

This contact drew his attention to the possibilities of drawing as a kind of visual writing that is not guided by principles of linearity, but which is still capable of carrying knowledge and communicating a tradition, as happens in many Amerindian cultures. Barbalho's encounters with Native American cultures with more peripheral aesthetics, that the artist had already previously incorporated, produced a collection of imagery in Barbalho's work about cultures and languages normally excluded from traditional history. Furthermore, themes of violence and conflicts between mass culture and tradition reverberate in the work.



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*Prenúncio em Ucayali*, 2020  
embroidered in fabric with  
natural pigment and cotton  
22 x 19 cm | 8.7 x 7.5 in





*Atrás do que vi (Yarinacocha,  
Amazônia peruana)*, 2019  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen and permanent  
marker on paper  
21 x 14 cm | 8.3 x 5.5 in



*Atrás do que vi (Yarinacocha,  
Amazônia peruana)*, 2019  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen and permanent  
marker on paper  
21 x 14 cm | 8.3 x 5.5 in



*Atrás do que vi (Yarinacocha,  
Amazônia peruana)*, 2019  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen and permanent  
marker on paper  
21 x 14 cm | 8.3 x 5.5 in





Atrás do que vi (Yarinacocha,  
 Amazônia peruana), 2019  
 colored pencils, graphite,  
 ballpoint pen and permanent  
 marker on paper  
 16 parts of 21 x 14 cm | 8.3 x 5.5 in





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Among the various experiences of Barbalho during that period that were ultimately translated into drawings, the artist highlights the fifteen days he lived in the house of a master of Shipibo plants. Barbalho immersed himself in the daily life of the house and spent his mornings with the women as they embroidered.

Barbalho followed their work, letting his own traits and inner images merge with those shared by them. These images, seen in ceremonies which include the ingestion of plants, are images present in nature that are only accessed through these experiences.

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*Atrás do que vi (Yarinacocha, Amazônia peruana)*, 2019  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen and permanent  
marker on paper  
21 x 14 cm | 8.3 x 5.5 in



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Despite the direct reference that the series *Atrás do que vi* (Yarinacocha, Amazônia Peruana) (2021), makes to Shipibo visual culture, it seeks to create its own cosmogony, without explicit standards, made from the encounter between design and Amerindian tradition, dealing with questions of appropriation, post-colonialism and alliances. The series was first presented in *Electric Dreams* (2021), a group show curated by Raphael Fonseca at Nara Roesler Rio de Janeiro.

When viewing the drawings up close, the viewer can see that the small shapes look like inscriptions, or a particular kind of vocabulary, revealing to us the proximity between writing and drawing, a relationship which often finds itself at the foundation of Barbalho's practice.



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exhibition view  
*Electric Dreams*, 2021  
Nara Roesler Rio de Janeiro  
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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→  
exhibition view  
*Electric Dreams*, 2021  
Nara Roesler Rio de Janeiro  
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil









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## drawing and other languages

In *Rocambole*, an exhibition at Pivô (2018), in São Paulo and at Kunsthalle Lissabon (2018) in Lisbon, Thiago Barbalho presented works alongside the artists Yuli Yamagata and Flora Rebollo. In addition to drawings, Barbalho also presented a sculpture. *Leite desordenado* (2018) was a tubular structure made of wood, metal mesh, coconut fiber and plaster over two meters long.

Barbalho has drawn several drawings both within the interior of the sculpture and on its exterior surfaces, experimenting with the possibilities of construction on a space that provides continuity between inside and outside and whose topography is opposite to that of the flatness of the sheet of paper. Barbalho also collaborated with Rebollo in the creation of *Mapa* (2018), a large-scale drawing that combines the imagination of both artists.

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*Untitled*, 2019  
colored pencils, graphite  
pencils, ballpoint pen, oil,  
acrylic, permanent marker  
and spray paint on paper  
154 x 118 cm | 60.6 x 46.5 in

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→  
exhibition view  
*Rocambole*, 2018  
Pivô, São Paulo, Brazil











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Recently, Barbalho has developed a series of works on canvas. However, he continues to use the same materials used for works on paper. In particular, graphite stands out, capable of creating both large dark and bright areas through the reflection of light. Another characteristic is the size of the works, which are less monumental than the previous ones and therefore maintain the notion of intimacy despite being on canvas.

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←  
exhibition view  
*Rocambole*, 2018  
Pivô, São Paulo, Brazil

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







This set also presents another more concentrated and centralized compositional relationship. In these images, the symmetry is highlighted, an element that the artist had already been exploring in other works. We also see the proliferation of both concave and convex shapes.

The artist investigates a certain squaring of the world, with shapes that represent the sky, the cosmos and the spiritual sphere, as well as the universe of matter, with the earth, eggs—metaphors for birth—and plant forms—metonymy of nature. These works aim to visually represent the macrostructures of nature or propose cosmogonies, explanations for the emergence and development of the visible and invisible world.

*Depois que entra ninguém sai*, 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

→  
*Depois que entra  
ninguém sai* [detail], 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







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The titles of the works, in turn, seem to indicate various possibilities of meanings for the drawings. *Metabolizei a maravilha* (2022); *O ninho não foi visto: nasceu* (2021); *Mãinha muito voraz* (2022); *Depois que entra ninguém sai* (2021); *Meu guia* (2022) all radiate with a kind of wonder and mythology. The shapes on the canvas, which seem to fold in on themselves, as if they are observing themselves, seem to emulate our act of observing them, pointing to the fact that, when seeing them, they are added to us, and enter our imagination, which subsequently projects them on themselves again, in the painting.

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







*O menino não foi visto: nasceu, 2021*  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen and permanent  
marker on canvas  
40 x 30 x 2 cm  
15.7 x 11.8 x 0.8 in



*Mãinha muito voraz, 2022*  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen and permanent  
marker on canvas  
40 x 30 x 2 cm  
15.7 x 11.8 x 0.8 in



*Meu guia, 2022*  
colored pencils, graphite,  
ballpoint pen and permanent  
marker on canvas  
40 x 30 cm  
15.7 x 11.8 x 0.8 in



nara roesler

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**são paulo**

avenida europa 655,  
jardim europa, 01449-001  
são paulo, sp, brasil  
t 55 (11) 2039 5454

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**rio de janeiro**

rua redentor 241,  
ippanema, 22421-030  
rio de janeiro, rj, brasil  
t 55 (21) 3591 0052

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**new york**

511 west 21<sup>st</sup> street  
new york, 10011 ny  
usa  
t 1 (212) 794 5038

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info@nararoesler.art

www.nararoesler.art