

Paulo Nimer Pjota

Every Empire Breaks Like a Vase

October 26 - November 30, 2022



François Ghebaly is proud to announce *Every Empire Breaks Like a Vase*, Brazilian artist Paulo Nimer Pjota's first exhibition in Los Angeles and with the gallery.

Every Empire Breaks Like a Vase features layered, mixed media paintings with bronze and resin sculptural elements and ashtrays crafted in resin, bronze and porcelain. Distinctly architectural, the paintings on view in Pjota's latest exhibition mimic the complex, textural surfaces of building facades in Ipiranga, the São Paulo neighborhood where he works. Pjota achieves this effect by employing a hand mixed tempera paint composed of the same pigments and binder that coat the buildings of the city. Heightening this architectural quality even further, Pjota often works on a large scale and divides his paintings in vertical panels through color or bronze objects in ways that suggest doors, barriers, or the distinctions between two adjoined buildings. On top of Pjota's hazy, matte, tempera ground, crisply rendered ancient monsters, plants, classical vases, logos, cartoonish characters, and other iconographic images appear in the paintings with equal weight. Pjota implements acrylic and oil to paint on these figures from art history, pop culture, and daily life, engaging in a kind of sampling reminiscent of remix culture. Having grown up in São José do Rio Preto, a predominantly conservative town in the Brazilian countryside where hip hop music was an integral part of the counterculture, sampling and remixing are essential tools for the artist. Hip hop greatly influenced Pjota's artistic development and continues to inform his art making approach.

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A close look at any one of Pjota's paintings reveals the vastness and variety of his sources. In *Ballet Triadico amarela*, Pjota pulls elements from the avant-garde Bauhaus ballet Triadisches Ballett developed by Oskar Schlemmer. Based on the trinity, the ballet features three acts, three participants, twelve dances and eighteen costumes. Each act features a distinct palette and mood. Pjota borrows the cheery yellow from the first act as well as elements of costuming and props from the performance including the silver mask and bright red ball. In *pesadelo*, Pjota depicts three demon figures from across different cultures: there is Pazuzu, an Assyrian and Babylonian demonic god, a blue Oaxacan monster mask, and an Ancient Greek vase featuring a gorgon character. Fascinated by Joseph Cambells's concept of the monomyth, Pjota often depicts monsters to point at how versions of similar figures appear again and again across cultures and time periods. In *EX VOTO*, Pjota focuses his attention on Brazilian culture by representing ex-votos, small sculptures presented to saints by those in need of healing. Logos of the LA Dodgers, Monster Energy, and others are painted on like stickers, adorning the painting's bottom edge. On the floor, four resin gourds sit in front of the painting like ghosts. An interest in death and death rituals also appears in Pjota's *Cinzeiro* series. These short, round primarily resin sculptures borrow their form from funerary urns. Returning again to the monster character, the vases are embellished with playfully exaggerated demonic faces. Blurring the line between the sacred and quotidian, these sculptures are topped with bronze ashtrays.

With humor and lucidity, Pjota remixes art history, pop culture, and universal symbolism. Deeply invested in cross-cultural myths, Brazilian architecture, and the essence of hip hop music, Pjota bends the boundaries between far-flung cultures and histories, dipping without erasure in the stream of our collective consciousness.

Paulo Nimer Pjota (b. 1988, São José do Rio Preto) lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil. His most recent solo exhibitions include *The Power Station*, Dallas (2021); *Ivani e Jorge Yunes Collection*, São Paulo (2019); *Mendes Wood DM*, São Paulo (2018); *Mendes Wood DM*, Brussels (2017); *Maureen Paley / Morena di Luna*, Hove (2017). Additionally, his work has been included in institutional group exhibitions such as *Astrup Fearnley*, Oslo (2019); *Kunsthal Rotterdam*, Rotterdam (2019); *Fondation Carmignac*, Porquerolles (2018); *KRC Collection*, Voorschoten (2018); *Biennial of Contemporary Art Belgrade*, Serbia (2018) among others.