



Chico da Silva (Brazil 1910 - 1985)

Serpente da serra luminosa

Circa: Circa 1966

A consummate example of a singular visual cosmology, *Serpente da serra luminosa* exemplifies the aesthetic vision and unparalleled individuality that made Francisco “Chico” Domingos da Silva (1910-1985) “one of the first Brazilian artists of Indigenous descent to achieve international fame” (Hilarie M. Sheets, “A Visionary Brazilian Artist Is Rediscovered,” *The New York Times*, October 19, 2023).

In *Serpente da serra luminosa*, shimmering Amazonian insects, birds, serpents, caimans and mystical hybrid creatures tangle with lushly adorned flora. Intricate patterning and a complex color scheme give dimensionality to this phantasmagoric dreamscape, where figures emerge and recede in an infinite swirl. The visual and emotional impact of this impeccable detail and rich polychromy is immersive; defying the one-point perspective of European art, it challenges the eye and immerses the spirit in the richness of its imaginary rainforest.

Born in the Northwestern state of Acre, da Silva, known simply as “Chico,” grew up surrounded by the diverse wildlife indigenous to the Amazon rainforest. The diverse flora and fauna he encountered while traveling with his father, a boatman, along the river as a child are abundant in his mature painting.

Elongated claws, hypnotizing eyes and hybridized animal forms imbue the work with an otherworldliness rooted in the mythologies and oral traditions of Northern Brazil’s indigenous populations. However, like many other artists working at the midcentury (in particular, Surrealists in Mexico and the United States), Da Silva’s work incorporates a diverse network of additional influences - from astrology to modern science.

These worlds that I paint are not memories from the time I was a boy. This is called imagination, occult sciences, astronomy...

At a time when the current of popular Brazilian art was propelled towards geometric abstraction and Concrete art, da Silva established a distinct aesthetic vocabulary that spoke more directly to the country's substantial indigenous heritage. Da Silva was selected to represent the country at the 1966 Venice Biennale, where *Serpente da serra luminosa* was one of seventeen of his works exhibited. He received honorable mention at the Biennale that year and his work was exhibited again at the São Paulo Biennial the next year. Presently, his works are part of numerous public collections, among them: El Museo del Barrio, New York; Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro; Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo; and Musée International d'Art Naïf Anatole Jakovsky, Nice.

Exhibitions

Venice, XXXIII Biennale Internazionale d'Arte Venezia, 1966, no. 2