

## Vienna



Paulo Nimer Pjota, *Antiquário (Antique Shop)*, 2021, automotive paint, flight tickets, acrylic, and oil on canvas. Installation view.

# Paulo Nimer Pjota

## DEO PROJECTS

Paulo Nimer Pjota's show "Fragmented Images, Fragmented Stories" comprised ten paintings and a sculptural ensemble, most of which the Brazilian artist produced during a research residency on the island of Chios. The exhibition was mounted in a former slaughterhouse, where three large canvases were suspended like animal carcasses by chains anchored with chunks of local stone. With tactile surfaces inspired by the exterior walls of houses in the artist's home country, they were

floating palimpsests animated with disembodied details, layers of collaged snippets, and what looked like timeworn graffiti, along with store-bought children's stickers of butterflies, flowers, mushrooms, and stray cartoon characters.

*Antiquário* (Antique Shop) (all works 2021), a painting of an amphora and two kinds of kraters—ancient Greek containers used for mixing and drinking wine—had the artist's airline tickets taped to the verso, signaling that the work was a memento of a personal passage. Although the composition alluded to a still life, these anachronistic objects wouldn't stand still, almost teetering atop spectral tables painted the blue of a Mediterranean sky. A recurring motif for Pjota, the classical pots, rendered with painstaking realism, functioned as weighty symbols of the imperial construct defined as Western civilization. The quirky, diaristic constellation depicted in *Global position 2* began with a cake Pjota saw at a pastry shop on Chios; to this he added a globe, the burial mask of Mycenaean king Agamemnon, and a demented clown in whiteface with a toothy leer. The canvas hovered over a basin into which animal blood was once drained and that now contained discarded meat hooks, which finally took the patina of religious relics, or perhaps simply of bones cleansed of both flesh and cultural significance.

The installation *Ghosts* consisted of three groups of white sculptures assembled mainly out of household ceramics bought from a local potter. Arranged on ordinary tables to suggest pagan altars, the formally banal terra-cotta vessels had been sprayed with gesso—a sort of whitewashing

or purification. The totemic figures formed of stacked vases summoned *orixás*, the guardian spirits worshipped in candomblé and other syncretic religions of Brazil with African roots, for which initiates are dressed in white and painted with spots. Among these works were elegant columnar forms cast from plastic water bottles inspired by those placed in front of houses in Greece, and as far away as Japan, to deter cats from pissing on doorsteps. Effective as sentinels against carnal contamination or not, they conjured domestic divinities.

Conveying a sense of irreverence and dark humor, Pjota's compositions are uncanny reflections of the free associations that accrue at the liminal edges of our collective stream of consciousness. *Górgona sob a luz do Sol* (Gorgon Under the Sunlight) depicted the mythical monster as a drooling, murderous jack-o'-lantern that in turn mirrored the shape of the ancient Greek stamnos below it, portraying a violent scene of centaurs in battle. Yet the cheerful sun in the upper-left corner might have been drawn by a child. Walt Disney has infused Western culture with mythical figures such as Jiminy Cricket, here appearing in the form of a sticker on the painting, who teaches Pinocchio maxims of good behavior in the lyric "Always let your conscience be your guide." If only it were that easy.

What are we but the willing vessels of subjective acculturation? Pjota's intermingling of things extracted from high and low culture, and from periods across history, exposed the mechanisms that determine our beliefs and behavior. The contingency of being was teased out by these



unlikely contiguities, revealing reality as a state in constant flux, **T** transfigured with each successive encounter, and the present as a place where all of time collides. That means we also have the power to create our own identities, if we can block out all the noise. Just inside the entrance of the show, one of the *Ghosts*, a lone figure composed of two acrobatic amphorae, looked as if it were ready to dance right out the door.

— Cathryn Drake

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