

This conversation between Allan Gandhi and Tiago Carneiro da Cunha, with Ricardo Sardenberg as moderator, took place in May 2026.

RS: So, if I've got this right, Tiago, you're doing a solo show at Carpintaria. And you decided to invite another artist to exhibit there at the same time. How did that come about? Why did you want to invite someone? And why did you choose Allan?

TCC: I've been following Allan's work for quite some time. I think we share similar tastes and interests, especially when it comes to painting. There's a space at Carpintaria called the *Aquário*. I suggested Allan for it, and the gallery was enthusiastic about the idea, which I thought was wonderful. But I'd like to hear his perspective.

AG: I thought it was fantastic. I was genuinely excited when I got the invitation, especially because I'd be showing alongside you. I also liked the fact that we talked about showing these ceramics, which, for me, are still somewhat experimental. So it feels challenging, different. If I were showing paintings, I'd be more at ease. Ceramics are still a medium that leaves me with a lot of doubts... Painting does too, of course, but ceramics even more so. That's precisely what interests me about it. It's a practice where I never quite know where I stand.

RS: Tiago, don't take this the wrong way, but I think you're an artist of my generation, whereas Allan belongs to a younger one. We're the old-timers here. So I think there's a generational encounter taking place. When I first started following your work, it was largely sculptural, made with those surfboard resins. In fact, it's a body of work I sometimes miss seeing more often. So you have a long history of working with materials, and Allan was just saying that ceramics is something he doesn't fully master, something he's discovering through the process of making.

That said, there's also a clear difference between the two of you. You [Tiago] had a formal education, whereas Allan came to art through a more self-taught path, through experimentation and learning by doing. I'd love to hear how each of you works. How did you [Tiago] arrive at the paintings you're showing now through that formal training? And how did Allan come to the paintings he's making today through this more self-taught process?

TCC: I'm surprised to hear you describe Allan as self-taught. I don't think I would have been able to tell. The generational aspect is also strange to think

about, especially because it feels to me as though time has passed in a strange way. I'm still trying to understand and work through a bunch of things in my practice. Moving from sculpture to painting, I've always felt there's a clear line running through my work: first, the polished artistic gesture, fixed and eternalized in those faceted sculptures; then a more expressive gesture, conveyed through imprints of fingers in the ceramics; and now a desire for increasing looseness in the paintings. There was a certain rigor to that early cubist phase of mine, a kind of satirical impulse, as though every sculptural gesture had been polished to perfection and made eternal within the logic of monetary value. Throughout all of this, I've always been fascinated by how one resolves a particular artistic problem. So, in a very organic way, the polished sculpture eventually began to reveal its limitations. I think that's why I turned to ceramics, as a way of exploring more expressive gestures, even while working with many of the same themes and clichés that had always interested me. And sculpture itself revealed its limits when I realized I wouldn't be able to create landscapes or more complex scenes through it. That's what brought me back to painting, which had been my original training and ultimately became the greatest challenge of all for me.

RS: And how did you, Allan, get into painting?

AG: Pretty quickly. It was really about the material. I'd always drawn, and when I started experimenting with oil paint, I realized that was where I wanted to be, where I felt most compelled to explore. You know that thing, not wanting to die, wanting to live? I want to live so I can keep doing this, and much more. When I discovered painting, I must have been around twenty-nine or thirty, and I became a little obsessed with it, reading everything I could get my hands on, books, videos, anything. And artists, too, like Tiago, for instance. When you see one of Tiago's paintings, it gives you a sense of permission to be a little crazier, to allow yourself to do things differently from what other people are doing, especially in São Paulo and Rio. So when I came across his work, along with that of several other artists, it opened doors in my mind.

TCC: Wow, that's wonderful to hear, Allan. Thank you!

AG: It's true, especially along this more self-taught path, there comes a moment when you start questioning where things are going. "What am I even creating here?" And then you meet a friend, someone you admire, someone you can talk to, and that changes everything.

RS: There's something I recognize in both of your practices, which is a kind of painting where images almost emerge from the surface itself, from the mixing of

paint. It's a mixing of paint where you don't quite know where it will lead, generating all sorts of problems of color and mass, and then at some point you have to resolve them in some way. There's a kind of kinship there, rather than arriving with a fully formed project for each image. There's a sense of openness there, in a good way. Of freedom.

TCC: In some of Allan's works I can recognize the pleasure of the specific gesture that produces the image, which is super cool to see. Like that painting of the poodle that was in his show at Sardenberg,<sup>1</sup> which is really one large gesture made up of many smaller circular gestures, to create the poodle's hair, and it's a delight. I think it's really enjoyable to experience this when you see the painting in person, where you end up reliving that pleasure, that repeated and improvised gesture. Another thing I think we share, and which I really admire in your work, is a certain sensuality as well. There's something about wanting to create seductive bodies, and about thinking through the curves of bodies.

AG: I don't normally think of it that way, but of course I'm aware of it. I've never really looked for sensuality, it just happened. Maybe it's the other side of the same coin. It can be strange, a bit monstrous, and sensual at the same time.

RS: Would you say there's a biographical dimension to your work, rooted in your own experience? In the way you construct images? I'm thinking, for example, about sensuality in the work, not necessarily as something explicit, but something that comes from the subconscious.

AG: In painting, what I want to do and what I end up seeing tend to emerge together. In the process of putting paint down, taking it away, putting it back again, this kind of mud that gradually forms, images appear that I wasn't necessarily looking for from the outset. When you let the subconscious do that much of the work, it can't help but be autobiographical. Something is bound to surface, something is already there, even if I don't know what it is yet. It can be more or less mysterious, but there's always a bit of mystery to it.

TCC: Yes, I think it's autobiographical in that sense, because what's there are our emotions, and those emotions are personal. It's interesting to hear that you don't really plan things either. I find that funny to think about. I also love starting without knowing... Well, not entirely without knowing, because I do have desires. But there's only so much planning I can do, because in the end it all comes down to the last brushstroke, you know? I always feel like the painting is

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<sup>1</sup> *Allan Gandhi*, held from May to July 2025 at Sardenberg, São Paulo.

coming to the surface, and that I'm constantly having to deal with that, with whatever has just surfaced.

RS: I wanted to ask about this issue of desire in your painting, because I think painting is a very particular site of desire. In that respect, sculpture is more planned. But working within this unstable field, at what point do you think the image begins to exist? If it isn't there at the beginning, when does it appear and settle into place? Is there a moment of stabilization that signals the end of the work? I'm trying to understand that moment, which is always so difficult to describe. We find ourselves in the studio asking, "Is it finished or isn't it?" I think that's the big question everyone asks themselves in the studio.

AG: There's an even harder question: "Have I gone too far?"

RS: It's a corollary to the same question!

AG: Was it finished two hours ago? Sometimes that's even harder to figure out. When I photograph a work with my phone, certain possibilities become clearer and the painting starts to reveal itself. Since you can't make a copy of the work itself, or leave it untouched for very long, the solutions can end up being more—or less—interesting.

TCC: If it doesn't quite come together, do you rework it, or do you leave it as it is?

AG: If it isn't working, I paint over the whole thing and start again. I have no problem with that. I try to take a more drastic approach. If I'm too easy on myself, I end up leaving a lot of canvases behind. So if it didn't work, it didn't work. Maybe I learned something from it, but I'm more interested in what might happen after I transform it.

TCC: Of course. I think that's a fundamental part of being in the studio, because you have to be able to fail. Fear of failure can really constrain a painting; it constrains the line.

AG: Yes, it's scary, but I just have to push through it.

RS: I've been living with Allan's work much more lately, not just through studio visits, but by having it in front of me at the gallery for days, sometimes months. And as a viewer, something strange happens. Sometimes I'll look at a painting and think, "This isn't all that good." Then it goes up on the wall. A few days go by, a week goes by, two weeks go by, and suddenly I think, "Man, this painting

is so fucking good.” Nothing has changed. The work has been sitting in the same place the whole time. You begin to notice things, to discover relationships, something genuinely seductive. It’s not really a matter of image; it’s almost relational, and I think that’s a great experience.

That’s always been my experience of Tiago’s work as well. At first, there’s a certain strangeness to it. But then you live with it, you keep looking at the image, and before long you find yourself seduced by it. It begins to shift your entire aesthetic orientation.

TCC: An acquired taste.

RS: Acquired taste is a bit of a cliché. I don’t think it’s an acquired taste. I think it’s a form of learning, but it also has to do with seduction. The work seduces you through something you don’t perceive at first. It can’t be rushed, you know? It doesn’t resolve itself that quickly.

At the same time, there seems to be a kinship between your work. It’s not as though you’re neighbors constantly showing each other what you’re making. It’s a distant aesthetic kinship, a conversation taking place from afar. You don’t need to be in constant contact; the communication happens through the work itself. And because of that, the paintings feel very different from most of the images I encounter in everyday life. The gestures are deeply personal. It’s very easy to look at something and say, “That’s clearly Tiago’s hand,” or, “That’s obviously an Allan brushstroke.” You can see it in the paint itself, in the way the paint is handled, sometimes even in the color choices. It’s not necessarily an iconographic matter. I find that fascinating.

TCC: That’s true. I was drawn to Allan’s work the first time I saw it, years ago now. Beyond our shared interest in drawing, line, and so on, I saw a great deal of sensuality in it. In the swollen cheeks, those masculine backs, the poodles’ hair. What a pleasure it was to see the sensuality of the subject matter merge with the sensuality of the paint itself, of the facture. That’s something I admire in the work, and find attractive, quite literally.

AG: I’m happy to hear that. For me, it’s a path, though every now and then you have these moments of illumination. The more you make, the more you begin to see other things. Ricardo says it, other people say it, but to me every painting feels as though it were made by a different person. I don’t particularly like returning to the same thing, either. I’ll start somewhere, and halfway through I’ll feel the urge to move in another direction. And when I come back to that initial impulse, something different comes out, even if the subject is similar. The paintings I was making recently were extremely material, very dense; in my

latest exhibition some of them are incredibly thin. Ceramics are similar in that way. I go into them without really knowing, and then there's the firing process on top of everything else. Maybe what interests me most about ceramics is that it takes even more decision-making away from me. God only knows what happens to the glazes inside the kiln.

TCC: Yes, it's almost like painting blind. That's something I loved about ceramics too, the fact that you're working almost blindly, with only limited control. I think those kinds of tricks are always wonderful. You create an arbitrary constraint that, in the end, makes certain decisions easier precisely because you no longer have to make them.

AG: Yeah. The pieces I'm showing are very much like that: let's see where this leads, within the rules I've set for myself. Take the ceramic heads, for instance. Especially with the glazes I'm using, which erupt a bit and create a texture that's something more than simply glazed ceramic. It's not just a matter of transferring painting onto a ceramic surface. Something else happens. I'm looking at them now, and this one here [*Acne*, 2026], for example, has clearly become something I never planned.

TCC: It transformed.

AG: It turned into this acne-like skin, I don't know.

TCC: It's very good, it's beautiful.

AG: I think that has something to do with your paintings as well, where it's really the layers and the movement that make the work.

TCC: Exactly. They're going to be full of texture. I'm loving that at the moment, exploring texture upon texture.

AG: As though one layer dries at a different pace than another?

TCC: One layer of paint tearing through the one beneath it.

AG: Those accidents, right? And then, good luck getting that orange to meet that blue in exactly the same way again.

TCC: Right. Accidents. I tend to think less in terms of arriving somewhere, though I'd like to believe in evolution. It's always good to have some kind of motivation, isn't it? Maybe I'm fooling myself, but I like to believe there's such a thing as evolution.

Since you're in Paris, there are some sculptures by Daumier at the Musée d'Orsay. Have you seen them? Ceramic caricatures of the politicians of the time.

AG: I have. They're incredible.

TCC: They really are. Just astonishing. And incredibly sensual too, aren't they? Little objects that make you want to hold them, manipulate them.

AG: Stick your finger in them.

TCC: Exactly. Stick your finger in them. There you go, that's the definition of sensuality: wanting to put your finger in something.

AG: You know, I actually do that at exhibitions whenever I can. Hopefully nobody does it at our exhibition, but I go ahead and do it, and then if someone complains, well, I've already done it. It's strange. A minor transgression.

TCC: I think that's entirely understandable.

RS: You've both spoken at length about this distrust of perfection, and of a final resolution to the work. Now I'd like to ask about the rhythm of studio life. How do you work within the studio? How do you relate to that space? Allan is living a particular situation at the moment, constantly moving from one place to another, so he almost has a nomadic studio. Tiago, on the other hand, is more rooted. I imagine there's a fairly fixed routine in place. What does the studio mean to each of you?

AG: Well, in my defense, despite my nomadic life, I try to maintain roughly the same routine wherever I am. In downtown São Paulo, I sleep right next to the studio, so I can work at night, which is my favorite time of day. I go through the day, and then when night falls, things begin to happen. Or at least that's when I start to understand what I did earlier. It's as though the work begins to make sense at night, seen through a different set of eyes.

I have this problem: I wake up in an extremely bad mood. It's getting better, but it still happens. That mood gradually fades throughout the day, and by around seven in the evening I'm at my ideal point. So even with all these scattered studios, I end up following a similar rhythm. I start working around three or four in the afternoon and, if all goes well, I keep going until eleven-thirty at night, with breaks along the way.

TCC: I'm very disciplined about relaxation, basically. I like feeling as though I'm on holiday. I think that's one of the reasons my exhibition ended up being called *Holidays Forever*.

RS: We didn't know that. I don't think any of us knew that. *Holidays Forever*. What a great title.

AG: Great title.

TCC: Well, for many reasons, but yes, there's definitely an allusion there to the state of mind of studio "work," in very large quotation marks. If I go into the studio tense, determined to solve problems, or with an overly productive mindset, things usually go wrong. But if I'm calm, if it's a Sunday, let's say, everyone is resting and I'm there working as though everything were floating on a cloud, then it's wonderful. That's when things go well.

So it's a kind of productivity in reverse, because you have to be in a state that's almost like laziness. Not exactly laziness, but certainly not what we normally mean by productivity. That's what allows the work to flow in a pleasurable way and convey what I, as a viewer, also enjoy receiving: the sense that the person making it took pleasure in doing so. I think that's one of the hardest things for anyone. It's difficult for any work of art to truly communicate that sense of delight. It's a contradiction: all that effort in order to convey the feeling of being on holiday.

RS: Do you know the story about Tom Jobim? He's at home, in Gávea I think, where he lived, up on a hill surrounded by the forest, sitting at the piano, picking out melodies. The housekeeper asks him, "So, Mr. Tom, working?" And he says, "No, resting." A couple of hours later he's lying in a hammock, listening to the birds, and she asks again, "Resting?" And he replies, "No, working."

AG: That's perfect.

RS: That's more or less what we're talking about, isn't it? An inversion of productivity. He would say, "No, lying here in the hammock listening to the birds, that's when I'm working."

AG: Is it a form of self-deception? You sit down at the studio table... At least I work at a table. You work on a table too, don't you, Tiago?

TCC: I do, I do.

RS: That's true, you both work on a table.

AG: Yes. You sit there, and then suddenly something happens that leads you somewhere else. Someone was telling me the other day, "I'm not good at..." and I thought, "Nobody is. Things have to be made and tested." There's something interesting that happens when I go to the studio hungover. I think, "Well, today's going to be a disaster. I'm not going to get anything done." Your guard is down. The game is already lost. You can't work like that all the time, but that's often how it works. Not necessarily hungover, but whenever that slightly distracted state appears.

TCC: Yes, distracted is good. I think there really is that contradiction: rigor on one side, relaxation on the other. Or distraction, perhaps. That's it, rigor and distraction together.

RS: Distracted, we shall overcome.

AG: Although you can't be too distracted either, otherwise something happens and it's gone. It passed, disappeared, got painted over, got ruined. It's a very attentive kind of distraction.

RS: Earlier, Tiago, you spoke about being the viewer of your own work. You said something like, "me as the viewer of my own work." But what about the other viewer—the viewer as someone else? Do you think about that at all? In the end, the work is meant to be shown. So where does the viewer enter the picture? Fine, you're both beautifully settled in your studios, distracted or relaxed. But where does the other person fit into all this?

TCC: I think about the viewer all the time. I imagine they bring the same rigor that I do. Most of the time I think what I'm making isn't very good, and I'm trying to make it better. So when I was talking earlier about desire, I think that's part of it. I desire a certain effect, both in myself and in the viewer. It's the effect I experience when I look at great paintings I've loved for years. I'm fascinated by them, and I'm always trying to create a comparable experience. In my own way, obviously, with my own means. What about you, Allan?

AG: I'm the worst viewer of my work. At the same time, I'm always wrong when I try to anticipate the viewer. Whenever I think people are going to like something, they don't. And whenever I think nobody will like it, they do. So I'm still trying to understand who this viewer is. First and foremost, what I'm looking for in the studio is my own satisfaction. If I can satisfy myself, if I can make the work feel right to me, then it deserves to exist. And if other people like it too, great. If they don't, that's a shame. Of course, life is more complicated than that, but if I had to answer the question in ideal terms...

TCC: I understand that completely. For me, it's almost a kind of quality control. Basically, it has to be something that won't make me feel embarrassed. That's my scale. If I see something and feel exposed in the wrong way, then I have to issue a recall.

AG: Take it back.

TCC: Take it back, take it back. I changed my mind.

RS: I love that thing James Lee Byars used to do. He'd have an exhibition up for a month, a month and a half, and he'd keep adding works, removing others. There was never a moment when it was simply finished. It remained unfinished, in a perpetual state of being able to change.

There's a wonderful thing in the catalogue for the exhibition at Bicocca: they reproduce a work and note, "This is how it was presented in such-and-such year, in such-and-such place." The work had existed four or five different times, and each time it was completely different. He would move elements around, remake things, add things. The work kept existing; it never reached a definitive endpoint. I find that fascinating. We never really know where a work ends, and there is a kind of openness there that we're losing more and more. Increasingly, everything has to be finished. Finished, completed, and gone. That unstable space where things aren't quite finished interests me enormously. Why shouldn't it be possible? Imagine coming across one of your works ten years from now and thinking, "I wish I'd done that." And yet, theoretically, you can't simply walk up to it and add something. It's no longer yours. It's no longer in your space. In the end there are rules that prevent us from doing that. We're always forced to finish things.