

*Holidays Forever* sounds like the title of an afternoon TV movie. For a body of work that prizes ambiguity, the title suggests metaphor and a taste for the absurd—from a euphemism for death to stereotypes about artistic practice. In tragicomic tension, we find paintings with staged landscapes, places meant to be enjoyed until or through death.

There was, however, a provisional title in the months leading up to the exhibition that accompanied much of the process: “The Rodrigueans.”

“Who is Rodrigues?” I asked without hesitation, immediately giving away the fact that I had missed the reference. Familiarity with the adjective borrowed from Nelson Rodrigues' universe and less embarrassing questions followed shortly thereafter. Was it the landscapes bathed in dramatic light, the nature of the figures that inhabit them, or something invisible suspended between Tiago Carneiro da Cunha and his paintings that made them Rodriguean?

Better versed in T.C.C. than in N.R., I find myself returning to a concept I associate with his work: that of “visual reward.” By this, I mean the particular satisfaction of encountering a painting that delivers in person. The pleasure afforded by close looking, through drawing closer to the surface, is essential to the unfolding of a critical relationship with the picture plane and the subtleties of its language.

In following his work at close range, I have invariably been struck by the precision with which he determines whether a brushstroke succeeds or fails, a reflection of the rigor with which Tiago scrutinizes the completion of his paintings. There is always the risk of taking delight in a gesture that has not yet reached its peak “deliciousness,” its fullest eloquence. The decisive moment comes when the painter places the final mark. In Tiago's case, that punctuation often takes the form of a slightly narrower brushstroke that cuts into and softens a previous layer of paint, dense enough to expose the intensity of the color beneath and set the new gesture in motion.

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that such categorical analysis places absolute power in the hands of the viewer, possessor of the eye, the judgment, and, at times, the brush. Quite the contrary: inside the studio, the risk hanging over the final layer may lead to opposite destinies—trash or glory. Here lies one of the most valuable and elusive qualities of Tiago Carneiro da Cunha's work. The internal logic of his painting, unwilling to settle for half-measures and capable of producing fearless surfaces, grants as much authority to the challenges of execution as it does to the pursuit of pleasure.

Across successive sessions devoted to chance occurrences, Tiago's paintings accumulate layers of unpredictability and refinement. An area of light becomes a cloud, which becomes a stone, which becomes the shadow of a body: metamorphoses yearning for arresting creatures. Yet as paint thickens with the sediment of failed attempts, the final sentence is never far off. Within this drama, the surviving Rodrigueans emerge radiant.

The provocation of naming this body of paintings as one might an Impressionist series lays bare the artist's satirical streak. Embedded in this invocation of Nelson Rodrigues is an acknowledgment of formative, endemic qualities. For this satirical painter, the Rodriguean inheritance evokes a sense of identity and citizenship, not in terms of rights and duties, but under a shared banner of drama and morality. His tragicomic compositions adapt the

experience of living within those coordinates, drawing freely on the iconography of tropical abandon and Brazil's disheveled reality. Yet the rawness with which Nelson brings these tensions into the light differs from the virtuosity with which Tiago illuminates and stages them.

Nor did I require much illumination to feel my way toward another of the playwright's provocations: "Between the viewers and the work of art, it is always the work of art that is right." A distinctly Rodriguean assertion, one that finds a counterpart in T.C.C.'s creative insatiability. The autonomy Nelson Rodrigues grants to the artwork echoes, in a less-than-obvious way, the reverence for the well-made painting displayed by the Rio-born, São Paulo-trained artist.

Both seem to believe in this truth and accept the risk of building windows that ask to be looked at as much as through. On the other side lies a distinctly Rio de Janeiro world, domestic or wild, drawn from dream or memory, that forms part of the narrative and acts alongside it. Although N.R.'s terrain is not landscape but rather body and confinement, Tiago Carneiro da Cunha's Rodriguean landscapes only appear contemplative. Beneath that appearance, they reveal themselves to be contrary, anthropomorphic, and endowed with agency.

For all the importance of the setting, human animality remains fully present, whether in instinctive boldness or erotic provocation. To be a creature, to belong to the larger whole, yet without retreating into an idyllic register; instead, embracing a realist rawness. And while, in Rodrigues's work, people repeatedly collide—indeed, collide—with conflicts and their resolutions, the figures inhabiting this series seem to flirt with solitude, as though they took pleasure in the company of the elements themselves. Yet the artist is not content with a romantic notion of contemplation. Tiago directs his protagonist-victims as they move from the ridiculous to the sublime in a strange, silent opera. To watch him balance—confidently and audaciously—upon such a duality, at a moment marked by both artistic and commercial timidity and proselytizing certainty, is invigorating.

From our seats in the dimly lit audience, we watch and judge these human-arboreal figures onstage beneath the intense spotlight of sweaty colors. Time becomes elastic, even suspended. Everyday life is nowhere to be found. What lingers is an atavistic—or perhaps futuristic—fantasy, difficult to pin down. The body, by contrast, undertakes no such dimensional journey; it rests. Between a stretch and a muscular spasm, a thousand years may pass, perhaps more, as biomes transform in a kind of time-lapse spanning eras of erosion and regeneration. For all we know, subtle shifts in the scenery may already have worked their effects.

Before long, human drama returns to the stage. There are enough nuances for the slow contortions—of bristles and legs alike—to reveal other possible circumstances. I think of a final breath, a recent orgasm; in short, a holiday. Ambivalence oxidized into thick light, dense air, and ruffled water. An exuberance that escapes self-indulgence and instead becomes a laboratory for discovery. Within the theatricality of these pictorial stages, Tiago Carneiro da Cunha pays homage to tradition while openly embracing his attraction to cartoonish and psychedelic contours and linework. He builds as he guides the paint, working against the notion of a reference image and thinking instead in terms of composition, light, and contrast. A synergy between figure and ground emerges, anchoring the body of work as shifts in the

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direction of sunbeams and muscular axes—trunks and torsos, roots, arms, and branches—  
guide our gaze in the hunt for visual rewards.

Gabriel Secchin, Rio de Janeiro, 2026