

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Dalton Paula

11 September – 18 October 2025
508 West 24th Street

Lisson Gallery is pleased to present its debut solo exhibition with acclaimed Brazilian artist Dalton Paula, featuring a powerful new body of work that reclaims and re-centers Black childhoods as vital spaces of joy, memory, resilience, and cultural continuity. Marking a significant expansion of his practice, Paula moves beyond his celebrated portraiture to create vivid, narrative-filled compositions that depict moments of play, ritual, celebration, and communal life—each rendered against his signature blue-green backgrounds, a visual nod to Brazil's tradition of studio portraiture.

At the heart of the exhibition is a monumental, four-meter-wide painting portraying a choir of 17 children. Dressed in ceremonial attire that fuses historical and contemporary dress, as well as the sacred and the playful, they sing in unison—a sonic and visual gesture resonant with Brazil's cultural syncretism. More than a depiction of music, this work becomes a living archive: a testament to collective memory, ancestral knowledge, and the creative agency of Afro-Brazilian youth. Across the exhibition, childhood is reframed not merely as a site of innocence, but as a domain of resistance, inheritance, and imaginative power.

Paula's approach is grounded in rigorous archival research and a method he calls *critical fabulation* (from the framework set out in Saidiya Hartman's 2008 book, *Venus in Two Acts*)—a speculative, creative process that fills in the silences of undocumented histories. His paintings often incorporate symbolic motifs, often modelled or modified from art historical precedents, which layer the work with spiritual and contextual depth. Elements such as the wooden chair, symbolizing dignity and authority, or the glass of water, evoking spiritual purification and remembrance, serve as quiet tools of storytelling, asserting Afro-Brazilian presence and power within a reimagined visual canon.

While the scenes of birthdays, games, offerings, and everyday intimacy may appear novel within Paula's visual language, they continue a longstanding thread in his practice. Earlier series, such as *Rota do Tabaco* [Tobacco Routes], 2016 (paint on ceramic vessels,) and *Rota do Algodão*, [Cotton Routes] 2022 (cotton textile-covered objects), also featured portraits of children, toys and dolls, while continuing his sustained commitment to recovering Afro-Brazilian histories through image-memories—narratives that resist colonial erasure and center Black resilience.

This new series also meditates on the transformative power of voice—understood as song, as testimony, and as collective affirmation. Drawing from the history of choral traditions in Brazilian schools and churches, Paula frames voice as both a spiritual and political force. When children are denied full recognition and protection, these works offer a counterimage: one where Black children are not ornamental or invisible, but central—makers of culture, carriers of tradition, and embodiments of the future.

About the artist

Dalton Paula is an artist, researcher and educator known for his powerful engagement with Afro-Brazilian traditions. Paula foregrounds the lives of undocumented figures whose contributions to society have been overlooked by working to impart a lasting cultural legacy through the continuation of communities and bodies of wisdom that have been forgotten or hidden over time. Just as the personages he depicts were excised from official narratives or documentation due to their actions in opposition to slavery or other forms of injustice, Paula uses collage, paint, film and photography, as well as the symbols and traditions of studio portraiture, in order to stitch the memory of their existence back into the fabric of history. He also works to elevate and commemorate these portrayals through the use of regal attire, highlights of gold leaf and the aura of reverence usually reserved for subjects of high or noble rank.

In addition to his individual and groupings of portrait busts and full-length portraits – created through meticulous archival research and, where necessary, equal parts critical fabulation – Paula has produced vast installations and series in ceramics and textile on the residues and tolls left behind by the human labour used in the tobacco and cotton industries in Brazil and further across the Global South.

As further evidence of his uniquely transformative and postcolonial practice, Paula has established his own center for knowledge transference in the central state of Goiás, not far from his birthplace in the capital of Brasília. Known as Sertão Negro, this art school, residency, studio, garden and kitchen complex hosts classes, workshops and study groups to explore creativity and the possibilities of the surrounding ecosystem, so mirroring the collective activities of former quilombos, sites of refuge originally formed by African slaves in Diaspora.

Dalton Paula (born in Brasília, Brazil, 1982) lives and works in Goiânia, Brazil, where he graduated from the Visual Arts programme at the Federal University of Goiás (UFG). He was awarded the Chanel Next Prize in 2024 and the Marcantonio Vilaça Award in 2019. His recent solo exhibitions include: Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) and Pinacoteca de São Paulo, Brazil (2022-23); Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Centro Cultural Oscar Niemeyer, Goiânia (2014); Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Sala Samuel Costa, Goiânia, Brazil (2010). Major group exhibitions include: ‘Foreigners Everywhere’, Venice Biennale, Italy (2024); ‘Afro-Atlantic Histories’, touring from Museu de Arte de São Paulo and the Instituto Tomie Ohtake in Brazil (2018) to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the Dallas Museum of Art, USA (2021-24); ‘Compositions for Insurgent Times’, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2021-22); ‘Critical Fabulations’, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA (2021-23); ‘Songs for Sabotage’, New Museum Triennial, New York, USA (2018); ‘O Triângulo do Atlântico’, 11th Bienal do Mercosul, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2018); ‘The Atlantic Triangle’, Goethe-Institut, Lagos, Nigeria (2018) and ‘Incerteza Viva’, 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil (2016).

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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