

Press release

Paolo Salvador

14.05.-25.07.2026

Opening: Wednesday, 13 May, 2026, 6 - 9 pm

carlier | gebauer, Madrid, is pleased to announce Paolo Salvador's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

On the occasion of the exhibition, writer and International Editor at *Artforum*, Pablo Larios, interviewed Paolo Salvador during the preparation of the show. Their conversation offers an introduction to the artist's practice and the exhibition.

A conversation with Paolo Salvador
by Pablo Larios

Pablo Larios: *I'm interested in the material dimension of your work: the fact that you mix your own paints, and are even involved in the construction of the fabric you work on. What is this tactile dimension about for you?*

Paolo Salvador: Partly, it's about thinking through how humans understand the world. We understand through the senses—smell, touch, sight, and so on—and process them with the mind. This unites all our experiences. So that question has been very present for me: the investigation of materials as a way of finding the “why” of experience.

PL: *Does that question begin with materials?*

PS: I was always interested in the unique qualities of specific materials. In Peru, where I am from, there are only a few brands of oil paint, and they are prohibitively expensive. So there was a need to make paint myself, as a way of making it accessible. Later, when I studied in London, I deepened this interest in materials. A tutor introduced me to *Kremer Pigmente*, a family-run business that has been producing and distributing raw materials for over 40 years. I began to research and work with these materials directly. Not all minerals are compatible with oil; they can separate. To achieve a buttery consistency, you must introduce fillers, which can change the color's intensity, purity, grain, texture, and finish.

PL: *Has making your own paint shaped the way you think conceive of the medium?*

PS: Yes. When you work with a material, you enter more deeply into its history. One color comes from a mountain in Switzerland, another from a region in Italy; each pigment becomes localized. Historical materials like lapis lazuli have a history that it would be careless not to touch on. So it's about intensifying the material, but also about making it more stable. In my studio, I have a machine to make my own oils and another to make acrylics. There is a green that recurs through my recent work: a synthetic malachite green, made from three or four components. Color becomes a kind of time capsule, because it recalls earlier paintings made with that same color.

PL: *That would seem to point to the historical dimension of painting, too.*

PS: At a certain point, I struggled with the social meaning of painting. I remember asking a professor at the Slade: “What is the point of making a two-meter painting of a jaguar when, in Peru, there are so many other things to do—things that might be more effective?” She told me that art could still change something, because discourse is built collectively. That stayed with me. Sometimes relevance is found in things that seem simple, or even purposeless. My focus on materials was also a way of grounding myself in something concrete, almost scientific. But painting always remained suspended between that rational investigation and something more intuitive, physical, and empirical.

PL: *How did you come to paint on artisanal fabrics instead of traditional canvas?*

PS: I come from a textiles background. Over time, my fascination with fiber kept increasing, especially with its variety. In Peru, there are so many fibers—not only alpaca, but also guanaco, sheep's wool, cotton—and each has a particular quality. At *Ruraq Maki*, an artisans' fair in Lima, I met Samuel Quispe Paredez, who comes from a family of weavers working mainly with sheep's wool. Through collaborating with them, I began to understand the construction of

the textile itself—the threads, the structure—as well as what can be changed.

So we began to test different fibers. There is the artisanal dimension—how a fiber is made and produced—but also how to work with natural fiber within painting. Once the tests began to work, the question became: how could I paint with this? Now there is a method by which the paint can be rubbed into the textile, and that's incorporated into the process.

PL: What changes for you when the support is no longer conventional canvas?

PS: It goes back to the history of painting. Before, painting was often done on wood; fabric emerged partly through trade and transportation. Almost everyone paints on canvas now, but for me it was interesting to find a reason for that change. I have a textile made 100 percent from alpaca. At its highest quality, alpaca does not differ so much from linen. So what does it mean to change the support? It changes your relationship to the work a great deal.

PL: There's something that interests me about your new works: in your earlier paintings there is a lot of research into the human being and the animal. But in the new series, there are almost no human beings; I see more animals.

PS: In my earlier works, there was more of a relationship between human and animal, but there was also a lot of transition. The human has never been represented entirely as human; nor have the animals, actually. If you look closely, the animal is never fully articulated. It might be based on a jaguar, for example, but a jaguar has more rounded ears and a different jaw structure. The animals I paint often look more like dogs or cats. I play with an idea of the animal, and that takes me to a more magical level, to something that can only happen in painting. The animal might have three legs, or be in a physically impossible position—things that only painting allows.

PL: So the animal is not simply an animal, but a kind of unstable figure—between species, between human and nonhuman?

PS: Yes, though it also has a strong connection to the human. For example, the navel is never present. There is always this question of the creation of man: does the first man have a navel, or not? In Dürer's Adam and Eve, they have navels. So they were born from someone, no? In the early paintings, the genital area was also not very described, because the focus was on an entity rather than a particular gender. It was more anthropomorphic; it allowed you to enter that field of definition and non-definition. At that time, I painted those characters with a particular pigment, almost like a kind of clay. This related to the creation of humanity in the Biblical tales, or the Greek myth of Prometheus, who creates man from mud or earth—a body still in the process of becoming defined.

PL: So there's a mythical dimension to these works.

PS: Yes, it relies on ancient myths, or fragments of myths, but always with the idea of understanding those fragments or proposing other stories. It also has a lot to do with the place where you grew up. There is a lot here from Andean myth, but also something more Western. I was interested in how humans observe qualities in animals in order to imagine something superhuman, something that transcends them.

PL: And does that also relate to the solitude of the figures? They often appear as isolated presences rather than characters in a narrative.

PS: Yes. There is always this animal character, and it takes a very solitary path. That has to do with the practice of the painter, which is basically a matter of being alone in the studio. And then, of course, when the work opens up—when another character or new elements enter—the constellation can keep expanding. New points appear, and those lead you to different forms of investigation.

Paolo Salvador (b. 1990, Lima) lives and works in Berlin. In 2019, he was awarded the William Coldstream Prize, the Barto Dos Santos Memorial Award, and the Tom Espley Prize. Recent solo exhibitions include Peres Projects, Milan (2022); Ilwoo Space, Seoul (2021); and Peres Projects, Berlin (2021). His work has also been exhibited at Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo; Rudolph Tegnens Museum; and Perrotin, Paris. Salvador studied at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and received an MFA from Slade School of Fine Art in 2019.