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TESTIMONY

**Maxwell Alexandre:
"Watching a child
develop is seeing the
perfection of God's
machine."**

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[Translated from Portugese to English]



In an interview with Gama , the visual artist reflects on the personal transformations and changes in her creative process brought about by the birth of her daughter, Goia.

Raised in an evangelical home in the Rocinha favela, Maxwell Alexandre became an internationally renowned visual artist, with works that confront structures of power, class, race, and privilege. Today, his works, marked by aesthetic rigor, are part of the permanent collections of institutions such as the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid, the Pérez Art Museum in Miami, MASP, and the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo.

A graduate in design from PUC-Rio, with experience in the Army and 12 years as a professional street skater, his work addresses issues ranging from the identity and experiences of marginalized Black bodies to investigations into whiteness in elite spaces. His particular way of observing the world, according to him, began to take shape in childhood, marked by the absence of his father and a constant feeling of not belonging.

At 35, Maxwell Alexandre is experiencing a new phase in his life and artistic processes with the arrival of his two-year-old daughter, Goia, from his relationship with early childhood educator Raissa. Fatherhood, which he had consciously avoided, now brings surprising elements. Immediately, the routine of a studio with more than 20 people gave way to smaller projects and, above all, to being present in his daughter's life. With her, he is building a relationship he didn't have with his own father.



Maxwell Alexandre, 2026. Courtesy of Almeida e Dale. Photo by Julia Thompson.

In his apartment in Flamengo, a stark contrast to his house on Travessa Mesopotâmia in Rocinha, Maxwell watches his daughter grow up with the same attention he dedicates to his work. According to him, it's like witnessing "the perfection of God's machine." In the following interview with Gama, the artist reflects on solitude, work, family, and what it means to create—a work of art and a daughter—based on his own contradictions.



Maxwell Alexandre, 2026. Courtesy of Almeida e Dale. Photo by Julia Thompson.

"My father is no longer with us. Our relationship was more about absence; he left home very early and went to live in São Paulo. I would see him once a year, when I went to São Paulo for Christmas or New Year's."

I experienced many family traumas; I was raised in a very dysfunctional family. There was a father's absence, but above all, there was something different about my personality that made me feel like I didn't quite belong in my family, because of how they behaved. In retrospect, I understand that this relates to what I now identify as the position of an anthropologist and, of course, an artist: someone who is observing the world from the outside. I have a degree in design. The foundation of my university studies was anthropology. I was already practicing this from a very young age, even without realizing it.

I was raised in an evangelical home and attended church . The gospel works a lot through fear and reverence for God. You are raised under dogmas that you cannot question. However, from a young age, I confronted the pastor, questioned biblical passages, and talked to my elder cousins. I can map out a lot of my upbringing—I'm 'therapizing' myself that way. The only thing I can't pinpoint the origin of is my attention span, because my family was disadvantaged in terms of formal education. But, since I was little, I've recognized this trait of a different kind of attention in myself.

I've always felt very lonely in every environment I've been in, at school, during my time in the Army. Of course, there's a vain aspect to differentiating oneself, a competitive and somewhat neoliberal drive to seek a unique selling point, and I embrace that, but there's also this self-sufficiency of not being afraid of ending up alone. I've learned to live very well and to love this solitary place. **Solitude is one of the most pleasurable things for me** . My own company is enough for me. This is fundamental to achieving the freedom to make decisions without needing to please others and without the fear of growing old alone. This social pressure to find someone so as not to end up alone has never terrified me.

Meanwhile, I developed an obsessive work ethic. I achieved financial independence in 2017; everything happened very quickly in my artistic career. **If I didn't have a family today, there would be no interruptions: it would be work 24 hours a day**. I'm very addicted. I can't stop working. Because I enjoy being alone and having endless work time, around 2020, when I was 30, I first thought that it was possible not to be a father. It was a watershed and liberating thought. I could comfortably imagine myself in a life without children.

My relationship with Raissa, my girlfriend, reflected this lifestyle. We've known each other for about ten years and have been together for seven. She was my first girlfriend. **When we started dating in 2019, our routine revolved around weekends.** She would come to my house on Friday night and leave on Monday morning. For me, it was essential to spend the entire week alone, working.

When Raissa got pregnant with Goia, it wasn't planned. We wanted to have a child, but my plan, in my mind, was to have one at 36—an age I'll be turning this October. When the pregnancy happened, Raissa said she wanted to have one. My advice was that, for me, I wouldn't have one at that moment, but our relationship was good and we were financially able. She decided to have one, I embraced the idea, and she moved into my house.

At that time, I had already left Rocinha and was living in a very large, luxurious apartment in Flamengo, about 300 square meters. I loved living alone in that apartment. Living in that silence was wonderful. Raissa's move there was a shock. I thought: 'Now I'm really married, we're going to live together and the baby is coming.' Fast forward to me living with her, now with a child in the house, and it's been wonderful. Life is great with Goia and Raissa.



Photo by Bruna Vernes

The arrival of Goia directly altered my work practices . It was the need to be present for her that forced me to rethink everything . In the studio, I managed an operation with more than 20 people, and it was stressful to sustain such a large structure. I realized I was exhausted both physically and mentally. I felt that, at some point, I was going to collapse. It's been ten years of my career, and I haven't taken a vacation yet. It was in this context that what I called "Cradle Paintings" emerged . **I decided I would continue painting, but I needed to do it from home, to be available for her at any time** . So, I made a selection of materials that don't get as dirty and don't have as much of an odor, like oil paints. This allowed me to reduce the scale and speed of my work, returning to that slightly more romantic image of the hermit artist in his studio, making his own stops alone.

Watching a child develop is like witnessing the perfection of God's machine. You notice things that are already in the person. From the moment she left the womb, she demonstrated a somewhat stubborn, somewhat snobbish personality. At one hour old, she already looked that way, and it continues. One thing I observed from afar is that everyone says, 'Oh, my child is too smart.' But with Goia, that's really true, because I see it in children of the same age or older than her. She started walking at nine months, which is very early, and soon began to talk. She's been swimming since she was six months old and is developing very quickly.

The human being, God's machine, is very perfect . Human advancements seem individual, but in the end, it's all one thing. For example, in the 80s and 90s, you had only one skater who could do the 900, which was Tony Hawk. Today it's not so difficult. It seems that, from the moment the human species achieves a feat, it spreads to everyone. It's in this sense that you can see the perfection of the machine: it seems that the next child born already has a little more ease in doing the 900.

They won't go through the same effort that Tony Hawk went through, because he has already achieved that for humanity.

This is something I feel very strongly when I see Goia. **The learning by osmosis is very fast, the development is very quick** . It's very interesting to observe. It's impressive how perfect the machine is.

Goia has light skin, but she has a Black phenotype. We'll understand her social exposure over time. The reality she grows up in is the opposite of my childhood: she attends an elite school and has access to a different standard of living. **In Rocinha, I lived on Mesopotamia Alley. It's an alley with drug trafficking, illegal gambling, police, prostitution, fights 24 hours a day** , you know? My last years in Rocinha were in that frenzy. I only realized how noisy it was after I left. In Flamengo, I have the silence, the security, and the view of Morro da Viúva, a really awesome mountain. The desire to go back to that past is truly nonexistent. You really understand another life that is very good.

I talked about the issue of being lonely, but I feel that, with Goia, a new relationship is being born. **Because she's someone who demands your trust, your care. You sleep every day and wake up every day with this person** . It creates a very visceral relationship. You hear her saying "daddy, daddy." Now she's in a phase where she's a little more attached to me. Before she was more snobbish, but now she wakes up, comes and gives me a kiss, says good morning, a hug, wants to be together, brings books to read, and when I leave for work, she cries.

I arrive at the studio at 10 am and leave at 11 pm. Since she goes to school at 10 am, I wake up and spend about 20 minutes with her. Interrupting this time to go to work has been painful; she says I work too much. When I'm not working on major projects, our routine changes: by 8:30 pm, the three of us are already in bed, ready to sleep. In this scenario, I also work more from home, taking her to and from school by bike.



Photos: Bruna Vernes

Fatherhood, for me, has also been a kind of experiment—which might even sound dangerous to say. I think **we learn how to be fathers as we go** . That's why I try to avoid more cliché fatherly attitudes. They are clichés, but they are also important because we are talking about a life, and certain clichés need to be fulfilled. Even so, I try to act in a more natural way, let things happen and respond to them.

Her upbringing within the studio is certainly something I consider important. Nowadays, she already understands what my work is, she already recognizes the Talipot palm trees . I think it's important to build that. **A child who has the privilege of growing up in the studio, who from an early age visits exhibitions, goes to museums, takes international trips to visit museums abroad, grows up with this book culture** .

Raissa is an educator; she works with early childhood education. That's also something special. She's someone who deeply understands children, who interacts with them and really likes them. This inspires me, including in an experiment I want to do soon: painting all her toys black. I'll collect the toys, bring them to the studio, paint them black, and give them back to her.

She will grow up within this universe. Not that I'm the most public person in the world, but there is a public nature to my work. And, since it's a work that deals with very present social and racial issues, there will certainly be some kind of impact on her in that sense."