



Selected Press and Texts

Patricia Leite

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*I don't make Brazilian music because I'm a nationalist,
but because I don't know how to make any other kind.*

Tom Jobim. Fatos & Fotos, January 1976

In a cold night in May 2018, I visited Patricia Leite's studio in Perdizes, a São Paulo neighborhood, right before she sent her works for a solo exhibition in New York. During that visit, we spent a little over one hour walking around an unheated warehouse, looking repeatedly at recently concluded paintings to which she had dedicated those last few months. The artist showed a certain apprehension when talking about them. A mix of excitement and insecurity made her descriptions of her work simultaneously enchanting and unnerving. For a painter almost 40 years into her career, Patricia (I will give myself permission to use the artist's first name in this essay) is far from having a close-minded perspective on her form of painting, a true relief in a scene that seems increasingly populated by artists full of certainties and devoid of patience to listen. Referring to one of the most impressive paintings in that small grouping, she asked me, disconcertingly: "Do you think I should cover the fruits with darker paint, so that they more closely resemble jabuticabas?"

Simple in its format, the question hides broader implications. First and foremost, it echoes one of the fundamental precepts of modern painting, according to which objects represented in a work of art shouldn't necessarily bear true resemblance to their real world counterparts. The following quote by French painter Maurice Denis (1870-1943) came to mind instantly: "Remember that a painting - before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or an anecdote of some sort - is essentially a flat surface covered with colors, put together in a certain order."

Secondly, the painting reveals aspects of the artist's method, using preexisting images to create her work. In the case of Jabuticabeira [Brazilian grape tree] (2018), the trees which originated the painting weren't fruit trees, but bare, dried out trees photographed in a European city, covered in Christmas lights. The yellow dots sprinkled throughout the trunks and branches suggested a similarity to what's considered the most Brazilian of fruits, to the point where it's used as a nickname for what only exists in Brazil. However, jabuticabas, or Brazilian grapes, are dark

purple, nearly black. Hence the dilemma over the color of the “fruits” (they ended up remaining in their original yellow).

The large painting, structured by an expansive drawing that occupies almost the entire surface, was part of a group of works to be presented a few months from then in an exhibition titled *Lusco fusco*, at the Mendes Wood gallery. The Portuguese expression, derived from the Latin (*luscus* means one-eyed; *fuscus* means dark), defines the moments between day and night when neither the sun's light nor the night's darkness have full dominion over the sky, leaving us in a kind of limbo, attempting to adjust our vision. That night at the studio, every painting was somehow connected to this specific sheen, illustrating hard to capture phenomena. The exhibition's eponymous work shows a sunset against a backdrop of indefinite color, between blue and red, with a dense mass of dark green in the foreground; a diptych showcases birds floating over a lake, their white bodies bathed in red highlights (Red Light District, 2018); yet another work presents a big reddish-yellow blotch against a black backdrop, where equally dark organic forms can be distinguished, creating an abstract image (Fogueira [Bonfire], 2018). As is the case with all her production from the last 15 years, landscape paintings happen in an exchange with abstraction: sun and moon are circles floating between the picture's limiting vertical and horizontal lines; the reflections on the body of water are paint stains; the luminous spots in Jabuticabeira are a pattern of polka dots drawn over a loose outline.

Patricia Leite emerged in the art world in the early 1980s, when young artists experimented with a return to painting in various parts of Brazil. The exhibition at the epicenter of this movement happened at Parque Lage, in Rio de Janeiro, in 1984, with the humorous title of *Como Vai Você, Geração 80?*. One of the most active artists at the time was Rio de Janeiro-based painter Jorge Guinle (1947-1987), known for his abstract paintings with heavy strokes. Other initiatives were appearing at the same time in other cities, such as the creation of Grupo Casa 7 in São Paulo, which participated in the 18th São Paulo Biennial (1985) as part of the collective presentation known as “big canvas”, where paintings by different artists aligned themselves in a big installation. In Belo Horizonte, where Patricia was born and studied Fine Arts at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (Brazil), the artist was close with a group of artists who would eventually take part in the Parque Lage exhibition, such as painter Ana Horta (1957-1987), who died at a young age in a car accident, and engraver and draftsman Mario Azevedo (1957), who later moved to Rio de Janeiro.

A certain expressionist impulse moved the generation's artists. On the one hand, this tendency had an international origin, since neo-expressionism was common to various European movements returning to painting, particularly among German artists. On the other, it was moved by direct influences from Brazilian art. Jorge Guinle's work, for example, is commonly associated with Iberê Camargo's (1914-1994). In a brief lineage, it's worth remembering that Camargo studied under Alberto da Veiga Guignard (1896-1962), cited as one of the main expressionist exponents in Brazil, having studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Munich during the 1910s and 1920s. When he moved to Belo Horizonte in 1944 to found Escola do Parque, Guignard (who is also a direct reference for Patricia's painting) counted among his first students neo-concrete sculptor Amílcar de Castro (1920-2002), who, in turn, taught Patricia at Núcleo Experimental de Arte, a workshop held at Museu de Arte da Pampulha.

In her first exhibition, a group show of drawings featuring artists Andréa Guimarães (1940-2000), Isaura Pena (1958) and Marcia David (1958) in the exhibition room of dance company Corpo, in 1981, Patricia presented small-format works, made with oil pastels on black cardboard. On neutral grey backdrops, the works used the winding movements of a single line to create areas filled with colors such as blues, greens and pinks.

Apparently abstract, the works were actually directly referencing the architecture of circuses and echoing influences such as Paul Klee (1879-1940) and Alfredo Volpi (1896-1988). In a poem presenting the exhibition, Amílcar de Castro congratulates his pupil's "confident and determined" spirit and her belief in "sensibility". Used in this context, the noun associates her work to the concept of "sensible geometry", predominant in most of 20th Century Latin American constructive production, as an alternative to the hard-edge and mechanistic version of abstraction of the more orthodox concrete movements.

A representative of this line best known for his sculptures made of bent weathering steel panes, De Castro developed at the same time a vast collection of drawings, made with precise paintbrush strokes of black India ink on white paper, with a very singular expressionist accent (similar, for example, to Franz Kline's [1910-1962] paintings, in an unsuspected association). During the time when De Castro taught in Belo Horizonte, this body of work was, in a way, more present than his sculptures, directly influencing the generations of artists learning under him, particularly those who dedicated themselves to drawing and painting, an influence which Patricia didn't escape. During that same time, she shared a studio with Isaura Pena, in an old house in the Belo Horizonte neighborhood of Funcionários, where they opened an arts school for children, Ateliê Risco Rabisco, alongside artist Monica Sartori (1957). Another floor of the same house served as the studio for painter and writer Maria Helena Andrés (1922), who owned the building and is also a former student of Guignard. The beginning of Andrés's career was close to geometric abstraction, but after a series of trips to India, her work became more lyrical and mystical, deepening the influence of Kandinsky (1866-1944), of whose work she is one of the main receivers in Brazil. Also in that same house, the experimental music group Uakti, that surface, closer to a gestural language common to paintings at the time and akin to Jorge Guinle's work from the 1980s. Although she doesn't resort to elements such as drippings and stains, typical of that period, there's a restless nature in Patricia's surfaces from that time, in the insurgent way in which colors blend together in the act of painting, a stranger to her entire previous practice.

In that moment, Patricia's painting reaches a point of exemplary inflection, illustrated by a short anecdote told by the artist when we first met: one day, she entered a gallery and saw one of her paintings from afar. Upon closer inspection, she realized the painting wasn't hers. The world turned upside down. End of story.

In December 2005, I organized a Patricia Leite exhibition at Museu de Arte da Pampulha, where I worked as a curator at the time. With around ten large paintings created in the previous three years, the show broke the artist's thirteen-year streak without a solo presentation of her work. The discomfort caused by the artist's unfamiliarity with her own language led to a season of reclusion during which she chose not to show her work, developing a type of landscape painting that resumed some elements from her earlier work yet led her further away from the more recent

abstract path. This moment involved spending more time in a lonely painting studio, located in a small terraced room in her house. There, far from her artist colleagues and close to her family, plants and pets, with a big window open to the mountain sunsets and the buildings under construction in southern Belo Horizonte, Patricia began approximating color areas in a new way. Painting horizontally on large unprepared wooden surfaces, she patiently overlaid layers and layers of thin oil paint, from lighter to darker hues, letting some gaps, covered by an iridescent residue, show between the areas. As I wrote back then, it was as if the paintings had gone through various hours of the day until they found their due tint. Or, as explained by the artist at the time, she “tuned” the painting until it was ready, in a process consisting of creating a general light for each painting, “harmonizing” (to keep using music metaphors, of which the artist is so fond) the various elements.

It was in that same studio where I met her in the early 20s, a little displaced, but more and more stimulated by the discoveries she was making. Titled *Outra Praia*, the exhibition we did soon afterwards in the mezzanine of the Museu de Arte da Pampulha represented a turning point in her work. If, on the one hand, it was possible to see a position of loyalty regarding her starting point as an artist, on another, she deepened her relationship to figuration and landscape painting which she would continue to do from this point onwards. The title of the exhibition referred to the seascapes contained therein, but also to the Brazilian informal use of “praia”, the Portuguese word for “beach” or “shore”, to mean an area of interest or expertise. Patricia presented herself in a new skin, in a different shore. One of the most characteristic works in this production, a huge untitled landscape framing the meeting between sky, sea and sand (or turquoise, blue and beige), was nicknamed Barnett Newman (1905-1970), referring to the abstract American painter known for his paintings of wide color fields. The work's expansive nature did justice to the comparison, as well as the affectionate treatment given to forms, which seemed to come to life with each winding stroke. Presented together, two works with the same dimensions and colors created a sequence with the first, adding vertical mountain elements in the background and a palm leaf in the foreground. The third picture was nicknamed Caymmi, alluding to the composer Dorival Caymmi (1914-2008) from Bahia who sang about his state's shores in songs with a certain nostalgic spirit shared by Patricia's paintings. Using the exact same color palette, a polyptych composed of ten small paintings depicts a wave arriving to shore, its white surf progressively bathing the beige sand, connecting time, matter and contemplation. Seeing the sequence, the coming and going of the wave, one can't help but think of Caymmi's lines: “o mar/ quando quebra na praia/ é bonito/ é bonito” [the sea/ as it crashes on the shore/ is beautiful/ is beautiful].

With their seductive aspect and sensual colors, these paintings remind us of pleasant memories, and it's easy to find in them something of the postcards where we fantasize about spending idyllic times at the beach (equally obvious, the connection to José Pancetti's [1902-1958] marine paintings also accompanies this first impression). Indeed, Patricia frequently works based on pictures she takes or gets from friends, with direct angles leading her to a kind of zero degree of the painter's point of view and the stripping of technical resources in perspective and composition. There's no naturalist intention when transposing the images from photography to painting; often, the pictures used as sources are reprocessed by home printers with distorted colors, becoming mere pretexts from which there's nearly nothing left to imitate and are completely reimagined. The result gives off an initial feeling of repose, but small tensioned by the open gap, with imprecise brushstrokes,

in the center of the picture (the slashes made in steel rectangles by Amílcar de Castro come to mind).

The strategy of representing elements “against the sky,” title of an essay by critic Luisa Duarte on Patricia’s work, reaches a kind of apex with a series of paintings made from the last scene in Michelangelo Antonioni’s (1912-2007) countercultural icon *Zabriskie Point* (1969). In the seven minute sequence, Antonioni blows up a model of a house, repeating the action multiple times in the composition, from various angles, including a slow-motion shot where debris flies into the air after repeated explosions, to the sound of Pink Floyd’s psychedelic soundtrack. At first, Patricia painted four pictures on blue backgrounds, in different dimensions, with a fifth final piece recreating the “End” notice at the end of the movie’s scene, over a California desert sunset (in the film’s narrative, the end of an era). In these paintings, objects are transformed into unrecognizable elements, as if the tangible world of things had been reduced to abstract shards, to vestiges. Years after finishing the first cycle, Patricia executed two more paintings, even larger, where objects contrast a deeper blue in the background, revealing, in an even more ambitious and challenging way, the transformation of moving images into painting, of things into almost things. These pictures directly evoke Joan Miró’s (1893-1983) abstract paintings (specifically *Blue 1*, *2* and *3*, 1961), however, the dreamlike sky space of surrealist compositions is revisited here as the backdrop for a catastrophe. In her choice of iconography and technique, Patricia attains a semiotic explosion of painting.

Throughout the first decade of the 21st Century, Patricia Leite’s work raised, in a unique and complex way, a series of themes regarding painting. Her experience in her previous practice allowed for a productive dialogue with the Brazilian modernist legacy in which she was trained, giving new meaning to the Guignard-De Castro lineage. In this field, she attained a personal synthesis between abstraction and representation – she drew from aspects of the treatment of theme and matter, which brought her closer to aspects of Guignard’s landscape work, and broadened the relationship between painting and drawing by organizing large areas with few colors to give paintings an iconic quality, echoing drawings and sculptures by De Castro. With exemplary freedom, she gave landscape painting a new perspective, approximating the Earth’s curvature to points, lines and geometrical planes; she created synthetical light through her unique way of dealing with color, paint and its application on the support; she brought her gaze closer to ours by revisiting threadbare panoramas and seaside landscapes; she threw it all up in the air with the suspended signs in *Zabriskie*.

It seemed an admirable conquest, and it would certainly be improbable that she could now confuse her painting with that of another artist, as had happened in the distant 1990s. However, she had gotten used to restlessness, the paradox that feeds great artists. Patricia decided then to search for other sources that could interact with her painting. The interpretation of modern European art would have to happen through new lenses. I remember seeing more and more in her studio, starting around 2012, the paintings that her father, self-taught painter José de Oliveira Leite (1912-?), showed at the arts and crafts fair in Belo Horizonte’s Liberdade square. These landscapes, which inspired Patricia and her artistic calling during her entire trajectory, gained newfound importance in this moment, when she also began to dedicate more attention to the paintings of Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato (1900-1995). Oliveira Leite’s painting style was of impressionist

orientation, with attention to light and to the brushstrokes. Lorenzato created one of the most singular readings of modernism in his trees, slums and sky landscapes. These two works served as beacons for the artist's new moment. The paintings of Volpi, with his gradual transformation of façades of suburban houses to pure light and color, were also nearby. Popular sources, already manifested in paintings of circuses and fairground rides, would also come from music, which the artist had always considered a field of research and learning.

The series of paintings titled *Saudade do Brasil/Missing Brazil*, presented in an exhibition by the same name at the Mendes Wood gallery in São Paulo, in 2015, crowned this process. As starting iconography, they use images of the parade led by Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Estação Primeira de Mangueira (popularly known as the Mangueira Samba School) in 1992 as a tribute to Tom Jobim. The *Alegorias/Allegories*, as the biggest paintings in the exhibition were called, reprocess images of scenic elements used in the procession, freely recombining their fragments. There, the artist deepens an issue dear to her: that of unclear limits between high art and popular art, which had already been announced in some of her previous paintings, where the themes of vernacular architecture and painting were present. The fact that Tom Jobim was being honored by Mangueira (highbrow for samba, lowbrow for the concert hall) offers a case study for the painter. She references the composer directly in the title of the series, borrowed from a song in his album *Urubu* (1976), but also in the way in which she transposes into the painting the decorative elements of Mangueira's parade, turning into a source of high art what is often considered, through an elitist bias, inferior art. This is analogous to what Jobim did, approximating samba and choro melodies to the symphonic form. In these paintings, Patricia reenacts the theatricality of the samba parades, using a language of cheap jewelry, garish colors, excessive decoration and floral motifs (it's no accident that the easiest repertoire used to decode these paintings is Matisse, one of the painters dearest to the artist). As I wrote at the time, her paintings are "transfigured landscapes, framed by the architecture of the boulevard and the parade floats."

Another comparison that can be drawn between Jobim and Patricia is in the interest in nature themes that nurtures the works of both artists. In my last visits to Patricia, I saw some of the paintings she has been working on based on different species of birds painted on the hollow of small wooden bowls. As I write this, I am staring at a Brazilian tanager painted on a 7 centimeter shallow bowl and remembering how Jobim liked to quote bird calls in his melodies, such as the stylized rufous-bellied thrush song used as the coda for "*Saudade do Brasil*". This title, the same Patricia used for her Carnival paintings, resonates perversely in these first months of 2019, when a romantic idea of Brazil is melting in the hands of an authoritatively-biased government with a voracious appetite for destroying nature. The ecological bent of Patricia's paintings makes itself necessary, more than ever now.

After so many associations and genealogies with history of art, this essay will give itself permission to end on an idiosyncratic note and remind its readers that, at the exact minute when I write these last lines, the same Mangueira Samba School that honored Jobim in 1992 and inspired Patricia's paintings has just been declared the victor of Carnival in 2019, with a samba-enredo (the theme song composed by a samba school for the Carnival parade) that denounces how the Brazilian government has been trampling the rights of native, black and poor people, who are named in the flag used during the parade, in lieu of the positivist couplet "order and

progress” (“ordem e progresso”, the text featured in the Brazilian national flag). The relationship between the painter and Mangueira immediately came to mind, as well as an idea for another motto for our flag, borrowed from a Luiz Gonzaga (1912-1989) song for her paintings and chosen as the title for this book. This brief plea talks about the affective nature of Patricia Leite’s painting while also draws attention to what is all around us and without which we simply cannot exist: “Look at the sky, my love.”



lorsqu'une société disparaît, ce qui lui survit c'est la forme d'art qu'elle s'est choisie...
(Hollis Frampton quoted by Jean-Luc Godard in *Le livre d'image*)

In the new series of paintings presented in this exhibition, Patricia Leite expands her research on the luminosity and vibration of light. Since her last two solo exhibitions *Olha pro céu, meu amor* [Look at the Sky My Love] and *Lusco Fusco* [Dusk] in 2018, she has been developing a body of work in which light is contrasted against the sky at nightfall. On an almost always-dark background, light emerges in the form of fireworks, stained glass, the moon and stars, Christmas fairy lights, a bonfire or through a gap or a corner. The search to represent something that 'lights up' now merges with other landscapes, mostly from an urban perspective. The scenes appear melancholic and fragmented. They frame details of an amusement park, sections of a light sign, church stained glass in a contre-plongé angle. In each motif in the edited images from her personal archive, there is a sort of singular world with unusual points of view that stems from a particular way of seeing, which is inspired by cinema and photography.

The artist recognizes the image of something that is in front of or within us and immediately produces a new image, totally autonomous in its functioning even though born out of life in this world.

In *Natureza Morta com Barnett Newman* [Still Life with Barnett Newman] (2019), a beach appears in the background, while the foreground is occupied by a surface covered by a checked cloth, on which we see a bowl with pineapples. This is still life intersected with the landscape, but in Leite's case, painting genres are simply departure points for the exercise of moving between figuration and abstraction, which becomes increasingly more complex. The reference to Newman is witty and relevant. In his paintings, vertical lines (his zips) cross the canvas from top to bottom, defining the special structure of the plane. In the series of seascapes produced by Leite in the beginning of the 2000s, horizontal lines of colour that set out the horizon and the meeting point between sea and sand stretch from one side to the other, defining the painting's structure. Here she revisits an artwork from 2003 (Barnett Newman), adding a new layer of composition guided by colour.

The idea of bringing together the works of Patricia Leite and Cristiano Rennó draws on the artists' affective memories and the profound sense of freedom that surrounds both of their approaches. Colour is a cornerstone in their work and both artists resist categorization. Even though painting is their main activity, their practices are not defined by the conventions of any genre or form.

Rennó's paintings move around two axes. The first axis is the two-dimensional plane, where he experiments with different types of material, from canvas to wood and polystyrene. In his series *De Bandeja* [On a Tray] (2016), polystyrene packaging is used to create a large range of abstract paintings, mainly monochromes, in which figurative forms are gradually revealed in the materiality of the painted surface. He uses paint but also other materials such as tobacco, wax or soil. In these works, Rennó's painting takes the opposite direction to Leite's, which tends towards geometric simplification, culminating in a sort of minimalist landscape through the reduction of figuration.

With regards to the second axis, Rennó often works with installations, using different materials in which overlapped chromatic planes become paintings expanded in space. In *Cortina* [Curtain] (2012) — which was exhibited at CCBB RJ, in Rio de Janeiro — huge red and yellow plastic strips were suspended at a height of 25 metres creating a long bicoloured panel in the central opening of the building, and as the public touched and mixed them, the artwork acquired a new composition every day. The installation *Fitas* [Ribbons], created for the present exhibition, follows a similar premise, now also using in the gallery space the colour of its surroundings: the green from the garden. A large group of black fabric strips of different widths is placed in the transparent room and in the front garden, like a long Mobius strip, without interior or exterior, endless, available to the visitors' use. *Fitas* is a living painting, it is a material abstraction to be touched. An invitation to 'the body diving into tactile things' (Hélio Oiticica).

The artist's thinking is materialized in the painting. However, he leaves room for the painting's own thinking to come into being.

Leite and Rennó are close friends and both come from Minas Gerais. They have followed each other's work since the beginning of their painting careers when they attended the classes of Amílcar de Castro (1920-2002) at Núcleo Experimental de Arte in Belo Horizonte and shared a studio in the beginning of the 1980s. There is an immense degree of complicity between the two of them. They share a lot amongst each other and there are also many things I share with them, including a long list of favorite artists and the joys of being close to the clean and deep blue sky of Belo Horizonte. One of the results of their common ground is Leite's *Teia* [Web] (2003). Leite named her painting after an installation produced by Rennó for Museu da Pampulha in 2003. In Rennó's *Teia*, an enormous entanglement of colorful threads, strips, and ribbons occupied the museum's central space and was transformed every day by the intervention of the public who were invited to arrange and rearrange the piece. In turn, Leite's drawing defines a moment in the work, showing a succession of colored lines that occupy the whole space. The point of view comes from inside the work. It is a response to experiencing Rennó's piece, where everything is possible.

I am writing this text on 15th May 2019. Today, one of the largest public demonstrations since 2013 took place in Brazil. Thousands of people occupied public spaces and protested against the education cuts recently announced by the current Brazilian government. This climate, heavy with social tension, has existed for months, impacting on all spheres of life: sociability, affections, relationships, and our bodies. Reality is extremely oppressing; injustice and intolerance are on the rise.

Patricia Leite
Press and Selected Texts

Parks and other pretexts, 2019
Text by Camila Bechelany on the occasion of Leite's 4th
exhibition at the gallery

As an honest expression of personal and social experience intrinsic to its political context, art is a pure sense of reality. Art is what is left, is one share of the 'accursed share' (Georges Bataille). To keep working, thinking, creating and taking action is a way of resisting. We must persist and rearrange.



Patricia Leite's exhibition *lusco-fusco* [last light of the day] presents a new body of painting inspired by momentary meetings of darkness and light. Inviting us to grasp the sensation of an object alight, Leite portrays light alive with vibration, at once optically tangible and sentimentally fleeting.

Leite's paintings are derived from 'sketchbook' of photographs, akin to a visual diary collected from various sources. These referential images present a point of departure for the tone and form of each painting. As Leite elaborates on the sentiment that inspired her to approach each scene, she freely abstracts and experiments to come to a playful somberness, where soft masses of color are seemingly suspended in nimble outlines of pointed light.

In works such as *Veneza* [Venice] (2018), Leite captures the essence of a familiar landscape, rendering an iconic, instantly recognizable scene as well as an intimately manifested memory. As timid whispers of light become preciously transient under an immense sky and sea, Leite activates both a personal and an archetypal poetry.



The painting which lends its name to the exhibition, *lusco-fusco* [last light of the day] (2018), presents a point in time that has always transfixed the artist; when the moon rises over the embers of sunset, and the day is neither in darkness nor light. This melancholic panorama, allows the warmth and sunlight of the day to dissolve into the night sky in a smoke of lyrical brushstrokes that echo the dense foliage below. The encounter of these two color fields is mediated by a small glowing moon which sits on the boundary between them.

Inspired in part by the artist's recent travels through Europe and residency in Brussels, these works follow Leite's formal progression as she encounters new landscapes, as well as a renewed affection for her native landscape of Minas Gerais in Brazil, after so many months abroad. These juxtaposed geographies leave traces of humor as they are presented side by side. Works such as "*Jabuticabeira*" (2018), which takes its name from a Brazilian

tree covered in ball shaped fruits, actually depicts trees in the Netherlands covered in round Christmas lights. In works like these Leite's subtle sensibility and technical handling of hue becomes so striking.

Beginning her paintings on a white ground, Leite cast layers of shadow around points of light to build form. "Jabuticabeira" (2018), therefore, begins with hundreds of small yellow bulbs, with dark trees later added around them. Leite dims her canvases following a natural light progression, only arriving at a grey overcast sky after composing a blue expanse beneath it.

As Leite painstakingly carves darkness from light to create depth, the highlights of the painting pierce directly through the many layers of synthesized hues. Leite further charges this point of contact between light and dark by carefully curating small slippages of color that blur the borders of a white moon or sun kissed horizon, mimicking the optical effect of light mixing color. In Moonlight Mood (2018), these eloquently blurred outlines meet a velvet darkness as the viewer's eye darts fluidly from the saturated surface of the painting to the white ground of highlights. Creating a vibrating, luminous sensation, this pictorial technique becomes the formal, conceptual and narrative gesture of Leite's painting.

Here, light is animated, alive, seemingly pulsing or moving in front of us. In her fusion of visual effect and emotional affect, Leite allows us to perceive that fluctuating moment, when a preciously ephemeral light encounters – and dances with – form.



Les idées sont aux choses ce que les constellations sont aux planètes.
Walter Benjamin

To throw worlds at the world
Caetano Veloso

To write a text entails a search for words and expressions that are able to elaborate an idea that only exists as an image in one's mind. From where I write, I see the vast sky, as well as the line where it meets the sea and a plethora of plants and birds moving at their own pace under the same firmament. Perhaps this is indeed the perfect place to write about my emotions and impressions of Patrícia Leite's works and to really grasp the possibility of appropriating the sky through the gaze. The landscape and life I see are woven into thought in the same way that thought is woven into the landscape and the mind, in an ongoing process.

Leite's practice invites us to consider the relationship between light and all objects. Observing an innate life in all elements, the painter animates them or expresses their poetry. *Olha pro céu, meu amor* [Look at the sky, my love] follows Leite's continued investigation of landscape, presenting a series of works themed on the sky. Here, the sky is multiplicity: it appears as the background and the figure, the landscape and the environment, the source and the event of light, the continent and the content...

The painting that lends its name to the exhibition, *Look at the sky, my love*, reveals a nocturnal landscape, in which an immense starlit sky takes up almost the entire painted surface, occupying and expanding the surrounding space. Underneath, at the bottom of the canvas, we see a fine iridescent line, timidly shining, separating the range of green hills from the blue-ish dark mass behind. This subtle line confronts the density of the dark tones and interplays with the stars shining above: splattered points of light permeate the surface like small gaps to find a passage to the other side.

Leite's painting often challenges the contrast between abstraction and figuration. Her works emerge from the overlay of colours. Mountains, stars, rays, cracks and drops are formed from the lines and dots between the several coats of paint. *Explosion I*, *Explosion II* and *Rain* were based on photographs of exploding fireworks. The delirious drops and rays of light are optically confusing; if you rest your eyes on them for some time, abstraction prevails. As large-scale paintings (all 1,60 m high and up to 4 m long), they expand on the experience of looking at the sky to transform it into an experience of looking around you, of being surrounded by the sky.

When facing a new image, we should not only consider the history it documents but also the memory it activates and the elements of affection and absence that it triggers. During her three-month residency in Brussels (from December 2016 to February 2017), Leite's studio overlooked the Notre Dame du Sablon Cathedral – an impressive 15th century gothic jewel. This was the first time the artist spent an extended period of time away from Brazil. This change of context, during the European winter, inspired a longing to return to her affectionate memories, familiar themes and places. As a consequence, Leite worked with images of 18th century churches from her birthplace of Minas Gerais, churches that are prevalent in her (and the Brazilian) vernacular. Nossa Senhora dos Prazeres and Ó are the result of this creative drift.

According to the artist, her production is almost entirely derived from her "sketchbook": a collection of photographs she took of places she visited and situations she experienced. They work as an illustrated diary providing a study of forms and colours. Ó – a stained-glass project for the gallery's three large windows – was created from a photograph of the church Nossa Senhora do Ó in Sabará, Minas Gerais. The small 18th century church – which displays a rich and complex array of panel paintings – is an important reference for the artist, one which she knows intimately. The façade, nonetheless, is simple, and not very different from many other churches in rural Minas Gerais. In Leite's stained glass, we see a church surrounded by green mountains below a sky of intense light blue, a typical representation of the local landscape. As light filters through the stained-glass, this Brazilian context is cast over Brussels' own landscape, the view of the Sablon cathedral just a few metres from the window. The glass not only works as a membrane between the outside and the inside but also as a connection between two distinct worlds with two different histories.

Look at the sky, my love refers to the initial verse of a song written by Luiz Gonzaga, a beloved late musician from the state of Pernambuco, whose popular music from the Northeast became a fundamental cultural reference in Brazil. Olha pro céu [Look at the sky] is a song about love during the Saint John festivities, a nationwide celebration that takes place in June. Using this title, Leite reveals once again her connection to Brazilian popular music and culture, which define the themes of her work. The choice of materials, such as stained-glass, tapestry or wooden bowls (gamelas) made by indigenous peoples, evidence of the value she places on artisanal traditions, using her practice to expand possibilities of experience, exchange and relationship.

The exhibition title is an invitation; an invitation to pause, to catch a glimpse of infinity, to recognize yourself in the world, in reality. To look at the sky, the multiplicity that surrounds us, which is the very rhythm of life. Perhaps it is only by looking up that we might begin to understand the imminent catastrophic consequences of the "falling sky," which Davi Kopenawa Yanomami, a Brazilian indigenous shaman, famously forewarned us about.

Look at the sky, my love: it is essential.

The inaugural exhibition at the Brussels branch of Brazilian gallery Mendes Wood DM is a group effort. A partnership with curator Carolyn Drake, who also runs the non-profit space A Tale of a Tub in Rotterdam, the new venture already has the air of an enterprise that values collaboration and experimentation. Its first show, 'Neither.', is curated by Fernanda Brenner, director of the independent art centre Pivô in São Paulo.

Brenner has installed works by 47 artists throughout the four rooms of the gallery, which occupies a house built by Belgian art deco architect Adrien Blomme in the Sablon area of Brussels. Hung by a bay window is a small painting by Brazilian artist Patricia Leite depicting a colonial-style church, its modesty striking in contrast to the grandeur of the 15th-century gothic church visible through the window across the street. In the same room, slabs of sandstone appear to hover on the floor in a deconstructed grid. On one of them rests a felt bowl, its interior coated with sand, apparently on the verge of rolling over and spilling its contents. This is Katinka Bock's *Winterlandschaft mit Hut* (Winter Landscape with Hat, 2011), a work that evokes the ordered disorder of a Japanese garden. The stone is reclaimed from historic buildings: a memento mori to structures like the church outside. In an alcove, Nina Canell's *Brief Syllable* (2017), from a series of works made with segments of high-voltage electricity and communications cables, is an upward curve perched on thin metal stilts. It resembles a torii, a type of gate found at the entrance to a Shinto shrine. On either side of the fireplace, Dan Coopey's *Untitled (Xia) / Untitled (Sinai)* (2017), twin hand-woven rattan baskets enclosing organic materials, evokes a museological display of ethnographic treasures.

Brenner says she was guided in her selection of works by Roland Barthes's writings on the neutral – a notion he understood as describing that which evades categorization or, as he put it, 'baffles paradigm'. It's a seductive way to think about intriguing works of art, but because we often expect contemporary art to defy conventions, the concept's critical capacity is somewhat diminished here, especially in the unambiguous context of a commercial gallery. The question, it seems to me, is one of taste. I didn't view anything in the exhibition that exceeded or even baffled my understanding of

the paradigm of contemporary art, but I did see many works that held my attention and pleased my senses.

Brenner told me that she wanted the show to evoke 'the time between bringing boxes into an empty house and it becoming a home.' The multiple aesthetic, conceptual and anecdotal components of this exhibition indicate that the unpacking is already well underway.

Main image: 'Neither', 2017, installation view, Mendes Wood DM, Brussels.

Courtesy: Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brussels, New York



Saudade do Brasil (1920) is the title of a suite of twelve dances for piano composed by Darius Milhaud after his stay in Brazil from 1917 to 1918. The dances are named for places in Brazil, referring to the landscapes of Rio which enchanted him while he served on a diplomatic mission in the city. Milhaud was profoundly affected by Brazilian popular music, as evidenced by such ballets as *Le Boeuf sur le Toit* and *L'Homme et son Désir*. Through Milhaud, Brazilian music made its mark on the landscape of 20th century music, especially the French avant-garde of the 1910s. The percussion and polyrhythm, absorbed by music of African origins and that of Villa-Lobos (*Uirapuru*, 1917), are recognized as attributes of Milhaud's work.

Saudade do Brasil (in the singular, *ai, que saudade do Brasil!* Literally, *How I miss Brazil!*) appears in the first verse of the samba song *Adeus, América*, by Geraldo Jacques and Haroldo Barbosa. The lyrics go, *O samba mandou me chamar* [The samba sent for me] and they are repeated: *O samba mandou me chamar*. Saudade do Brasil is the title of a song recorded by Tom Jobim for his stupendous album *Urubu* (1976). There, Jobim gave instrumental form to a glorifying spirit, indirectly referring to his transcontinental musical dialectic between the U.S. and Brazil. In the schematic narrative of bossa nova, Tom delivers the genre to the American people, which they transform into something abominable. *Águas de Março*, in the early 1970s represents the master's redemption. In *Urubu*, the border between the national and the universal, the classical and the popular is redefined with each bar. Saudade do Brasil is a kind of collage-manifesto of all this, with echos of Villa-Lobos, Pixinguinha and Ary Barroso, Ravel, Debussy and Gershwin.

Saudade do Brasil (2015) is the title of a new series of paintings by Patrícia Leite. With a base in iconography, they utilize images of the parade held in Jobim's honor by the GRES Estação Primeira de Mangueira samba school in 1992.

The main paintings in the series are *Alegorias* [Allegories] made from low-definition computer screen prints of images of the parade, whose fragments are reconfigured in the paintings and totally reinvented. In these works, there is a continuity in the use of preexisting images and an investigation of movement, something that appears, for

instance, in the series *Zabriskie Point* (2012). Yet, here she delves into an issue dear to the artist: the purposely blurred lines between classical art and folk art, something hinted at in many of her previous paintings, which feature themes of architecture and vernacular painting. Leite's precursors can be seen in the work of Zizi Sapateiro, Lorenzato or Nello Nuno, regional (anti)-heroes whose paintings stubbornly do not travel well, but Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés* aren't far off. *Jobim at Mangueira* (too classical for samba, too popular for concert halls) seems like the perfect example. Boss nova itself, the joyous antidote to the doldrums of the 1950s, looms as a paradigm ("que coisa linda, que coisa louca", *Chega de Saudade!*) [How beautiful, how crazy, *Chega de Saudade*]. These compositions are nocturnal, sensual, exciting, dance-inspiring. Transfigured landscapes, framed by the architecture of the avenue and the allegorical floats. Joy is the litmus test.



A painting like *Alegoria II* [Allegory II] (all the works are from 2015) has something extraordinarily organic, loose and spontaneous. Passionate, but not in a romantic way; dynamic but not schematic. The composition is facilitated by the more recognizable figurative element, a garland of lights which divides the space, at the same time softening it, splitting it horizontally and curving it. The other elements at once draw near to and distance themselves from this line, generating rhythms and movements that are given potential in the employment of repetition, explored through vertical vectors, as if the allegorical float were passing right before our eyes. Some of these elements appear as if they were deformed by this movement, and the sum of these occurrences creates a collective body – not necessarily a human one – made of Matissean phytomorphic arabesques, two toucan heads, fragments of allegories and carnivalesque costumes, and so on. We are confronted with an interpretation of the Carnival experience.

In other paintings about *Alegorias* [Allegories], the pictorial questions are multiplied: simultaneousness, velocity, organicity, composition, texture. Not to mention color, deliberately vibrant, explosive, wild. In *Alegoria I* [Allegory I], the expressive use of texture and the mastery of the interplay between figure and background are the keynotes, but a wealth of decoration does not allow us to forget that we are on a walkway (or perhaps in a garden? Or a jungle?). Areas of vivid brushstrokes and monochromatic

backgrounds overlap one another and create alternative logics; but there is no sign of a clear, dominant perspective. Abstract art and so-called folk painting (a label that is quite indicative of classist and authoritarian limitations) are in a constant process of exchange. One of the small, preparatory paintings made for the exhibition makes us feel like we're at a typical Brazilian festa junina. Another, the portrait of Tom Jobim as the centerpiece of the allegory, has an affectionate title, Tonzinho, the nickname that poet Vinicius de Moraes used to call the musician. A closer analysis of these images echoes Debussy's celebrated remark to Stravinsky: The air must again be filled with beauty.

It strikes me that, for Patrícia Leite, painting is primarily, more than medium; it is a craft. The fact that she chooses to paint things that are important to her, like the music and figure of Jobim, brokered by the tribute from Mangueira, this innovation through samba (o samba mandou me chamar) [the samba sent for me] might seem overly simple, but they harbor an intense relationship with something that has been forgotten of late. I'm referring here to art and the dialogue which artists establish through it. It is not a citation, but the possibility of truly effecting an interruption in the temporal pressures of the present through art, a dialogue between the dead and the living, the central and the marginalized, the popular and the classical, crossing centuries and different parts of the world. Her paintings don't address issues that come from the outside (from the newspapers, the water shortage, political partisanship, the internet, trendy restaurants), but they have a fundamental power that is more important and more necessary right now.

Of the vast archives of Jobim anecdotes, his penchant for aphorisms stands out, especially those regarding Brazil. This one is perhaps most opportune: Living abroad is good, but it's shitty. Living in Brazil is shitty, but it's good. In the recollections of friends, his work space is often described as a combination of a music room and library, where dictionaries are more prominent than sheet music. The image of a painter surrounded by albums is not so different.

LE QUOTIDIEN THE ART DAILY NEWS DE L'ART

— Patricia Leite est née à Belo Horizonte en 1955 et a étudié sous la direction d'Amilcar de Castro, ce qui inscrit ses premières œuvres dans le cadre des expérimentations néoconcrètes. Ses recherches sur la couleur et la géométrie ont plus tard évolué vers ses récents travaux figuratifs représentant des scènes familières où la couleur prend une qualité haptique et apaisante. Le cadrage serré de ses peintures se concentre sur les détails, comme des structures lumineuses (*Lâmpadas I, II et III*, 2009), des chaises (*Beira Serra*, 2012), ou des architectures publiques (*Paris III*, 2012), parmi d'autres sujets, permettant à la figuration de s'approcher de l'abstraction, par la qualité minimaliste des aplats de couleur. L'observation méditative d'objets vernaculaires transforme alors leur présence ordinaire en recherche existentielle, rêveuse et ambiguë. Ce questionnement acquiert davantage de connotations mystiques dans ses paysages, où le feuillage des arbres, les sédimentations de la terre et les ciux étoilés sont représentés par des combinaisons de nuances sombres et intenses imprégnées d'une ambiance tropicale de contemplation nostalgique. ●

— Patricia Leite was born in Belo Horizonte in 1955 and studied with Amilcar de Castro, inscribing her early work in Neo-Concrete experimentations. Her research into color and geometry later evolved into her recent production of figurative works depicting familiar scenes where color takes on a haptic, soothing quality. The tight framing of the paintings concentrating on details such as lightning structures (*Lâmpadas I, II and III*, 2009), chairs (*Beira Serra*, 2012), or public architecture (*Paris III*, 2012), among other motives, allows for the figurative to extend into abstraction, by the minimalist quality of the color planes. The meditative observation of vernacular objects thus transforms their ordinary presence into a dreamy and ambiguous, existential enquiry. That questioning acquires further mystical connotations in her landscapes, where leaves of trees, earth sedimentations and starry skies are depicted in combinations of sombre and intense hues imbued with a tropical sense of nostalgic contemplation. ●

Patricia Leite

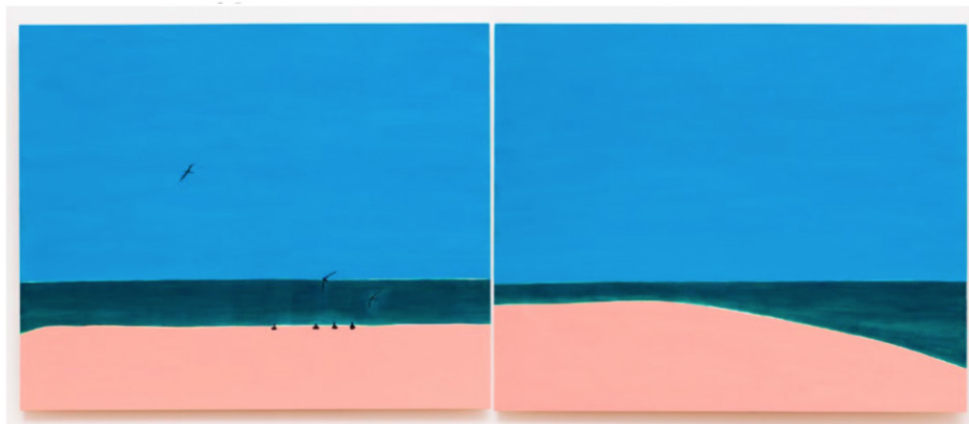
1955: Born in Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

2005: Solo exhibition at Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

2009: Solo exhibition at Galeria Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil.

2012: Winner, Itamaraty Prize of Contemporary Art, Brazil.

2012: Group exhibition at Kunsthalle Wien, Austria.



Patricia Leite, *Atol I / Atol II*, 2014, oil on wood, 90 x 110 cm (each). Courtesy Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo.