

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

Patricia Leite
Paisagem de Lenda

Private view: Thursday 6 June, 6–8pm
Exhibition dates: 7 June–3 August 2024

Thomas Dane Gallery
3 Duke Street, St James's, London SW1Y

Like many Brazilian children, Patricia Leite (b.1955, Belo Horizonte, Brazil) was raised on the legends of the Tupi-Guarani indigenous people. These stories are embedded in the landscapes of Brazil, where the gods reside in the sun, the moon, the forest, the sea, the stars and the mountains, transforming these features of the landscape into lead characters to which a young Leite would look to shape her own world and imagination.

For *Paisagem de Lenda* (Landscape of Legend), her second exhibition at Thomas Dane Gallery in London, Leite presents a group of new paintings and a floor-based tapestry that invoke these indigenous stories, deeply linked to the landscape and ecology of Brazil. As these natural environments are being eroded by climate change, industry, extraction and the destructive policies of neglectful governments, Leite creates work that reflects on what will be lost, and in melancholic celebration of what still remains.

Leite's work is imbued with stories and memories from her life: her recollections of travel and of friendships. As one is taken through the studio, Leite often refers to each painting in progress, before she has titled them, by the source of the reference image for the work's starting point, each with an origin story of its own: "the sea, from my son" or "the trees, from my friend." Her method of using pre-existing images to create her work—sometimes processed, always modified, expanded and elaborated with memory and imagination—means that the image is reassembled on the wooden surface. The result is a strange, artificial quality, completely removed from the source. Curator and writer Rodrigo Moura describes this and the resulting "iconic quality" as one of the defining characteristics of Leite's work.

Central to the exhibition is the huge panoramic nightscape, *Jaxi* (2024), painted with oil on wood. Leite has an obsessive preoccupation with the moon, a subject she returns to over and over in an attempt to capture the strangeness and ephemerality of night, or the moment the day slips into night: the liminal feeling of the in-between. How to show the depth and immensity of the night sky? How to make a painting that feels like dusk? In *Jaxi*, we see the moon bright against an indigo night sky and we understand she is the painting's protagonist, illuminating the edges of deep green palm leaves in the foreground, and casting other shapes into shadowy black silhouettes.

The phenomena of light and water, catching their essential qualities, is a recurring preoccupation in Leite's work: rainfall, sea, reflections, starlight, dusk, moonlight, are all present here. In *Glisten* (2024) we see a group of trees reflected in a still body of water. In *Sideral (para Naiá)* (2024), Leite paints a sky full of shooting stars and celestial bodies; and in *Toró* (2024), cascading heavy rainfall covers the entire picture plane, almost to abstraction. *Vista aérea* (2024) shows us a boat sitting languidly amongst *mumuru*, seen from a birds-eye perspective. A rhythmic oscillation in scale—both in size and subject, zooming in and out from the micro to the macro—prevails throughout the exhibition, travelling from the immensity of the moonlit or starry night sky, to a close-up of a single leaf, painted on wood.

Working with São Paulo-based, Uruguayan tapestry maker Jorge Francisco Soto, Leite features the giant lily pads that are a symbol of the Amazon as an intricate floor tapestry, the centrepiece of the downstairs gallery. *Mumuru (por Burle Marx)* (2024) is shaped like a body of water, and teems with woven lily pads and flowers, inspired by *The origin of the Mumuru (Vitoria Regia, or Giant Lily Pad)*.

The Mumuru was created by a young girl Naiá's adoration for the moon, the goddess Jaci. Some nights in the rainforest Jaci appeared in all her splendour to light up the indigenous villages. When hiding behind the mountains, Jaci would turn her favourite women of the village into stars in the sky. Naiá was known for her love of the moon, and she would dream of the day that she would be turned into a star, and shine next to Jaci. Against her elders' warnings, Naiá continued to dream about Jaci, climbing the tallest trees and the highest mountains to beg the goddess to transform her into a star, her desire consuming her so much that she could no longer eat or drink. One clear night,

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an exhausted Naiá rested next to a lake, where suddenly she saw on the water's surface the image of Jaci, finally within her reach. Thinking that Jaci had come down to bathe, Naiá dove deep into the water to meet her. Swimming deeper and deeper, she swam out of her depth and drowned. Jaci, watching from above, was moved by such adoration and rewarded Naiá's sacrifice by transforming her into a star unlike any other that shines in the sky – one that would float on water. Naiá is memorialised to this day as the Mumuru, whose fragrant white flowers are said to only open at night for the goddess Jaci, and blush pink at sunrise like the adoring face of the young girl Naiá.

Leite has described being interested in the place where figuration, abstraction and landscape meet, and in “creating a confusion” there, finding freedom in the space between these languages. Though in dialogue with the Brazilian modernist tendencies in which she was trained, she has created a personal synthesis that hovers in the space between abstraction and representation. The works can have a graphic tendency, but they are not flat. Instead, there is a close study of the materiality of painting: layers of paint and colour create a luminosity and a texture which capture a fleeting moment of change or a particular atmosphere. Building up layers on layers of thin oil paint, over-painting colours on untreated wooden surfaces, tuning and harmonising the colours over time, she creates a kind of liminality through this handling of paint which seems to hum or vibrate with the feeling of a moment.

It is easy to feel a sense of solitude and reflection amongst these always-unpopulated landscapes. Through their luminosity, seductive fields of colour, their nostalgic register, Leite calls us to look more carefully at our natural world, to pay attention to fleeting moments of intangible beauty, to take notice of landscapes that, if we do not, may disappear through our own base neglect, and eventually, too, become the landscapes of legends.

Paisagem de Lenda will be accompanied by a Thomas Dane Gallery publication, including a new text by curator José Augusto Ribeiro in English and in Portuguese.

Patricia Leite lives and works in São Paulo. She has been included prominently in exhibitions such as *Calor Universal*, Pace Gallery, New York, NY (2022); *Unnatural Nature: Post-pop Landscapes*, Acquavella Galleries, New York, NY (2022); *Prelude: Melancholy of the future*, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Sint-Martens-Latem, Belgium (2020); *Mantiqueira*, Mendes Wood DM, New York, NY (2020); *Terra Trema*, Thomas Dane Gallery, Naples, Italy (2019); *Mínimo, múltiplo, comum*, Estação Pinacoteca, São Paulo, Brazil (2018); *Aprendendo Com Dorival Caymmi - Civilização Praieira*, Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, Brazil (2016); *The Circus as a Parallel Universe*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria (2013); and *Outra Praia*, Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte, Brazil (2005).

Her works are in numerous permanent collections, such as Pinault Collection, Paris, France; Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil; Fiorucci Art Trust, London, England; Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, Austria; Cranford Collection, London, England; Loewe Collection, Madrid, Spain; and Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

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Gallery hours: Tuesday to Friday 11am–6pm, Saturday 12pm–6pm or by appointment.

Admission: Free

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Nearest Tube: Green Park or Piccadilly Circus

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