

Title	Luiz Zerbini	Author	Adriano Pedrosa
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Luiz Zerbini

Luiz Zerbini was included in the landmark 1984 exhibition “Como vai você geração 80?” (How Are You Doing 80s Generation?) in Rio de Janeiro. Many of the Brazilian artists in the show mostly painters, have since laid down their brushes, which perhaps they should never have picked up in the first place. The handful who have survived lend retrospective weight to the rather dubious motto of the 1980s generation of artists and critics: the return to painting and (or with) pleasure. The truth is that the painters who have achieved a measure of success with their paintings worked long and very hard to do so, and most have distance themselves from that rather lightweight 1980s Zeitgeist. This is certainly the case with Leda Catunda, Beatriz Milhazes, Daniel Senise and the late José Leonilson. The Rio de Janeiro-based but São Paulo-born Zerbini has recently returned home to join the group with what is perhaps not his prettiest but probably his cleverest exhibition to date.

Included in the show were at least three quite distinct types of painting. The first of these relates to Zerbini's early work large-scale colourful and richly figurative paintings depicting odd, quasi-theatrical scenes or panoramas. The apotheosis-like *Eu e Mini no universo sob efeitos narcoticos do amor* (Me and Mini in the universe under the narcotic effects of love, all works 2002) recalls a younger Zerbini at his best but having developed another level of complexity: at the bottom of the canvas two figures (apparently the artist himself and his wife, Mini) are depicted lying in the sun in a setting that's half patio, half beach, with bamboos (which provide background of vertical lines), plants, translucent curtains and coconuts casting shadows. In the foreground, surrounding the lovers as they lie with their sun-glasses and headphones, are an array of objects: a tape recorder, a record player, a walkman, a loudspeaker, a telephone, a sandal, a seashell and a lava lamp ejaculating its Day-Glo green goo into mid-air all connected together by a network of cables, adaptors, plugs and extension leads. Above a marquee-like structure is covered with a tiled, multicoloured grid. In the background is a seascape with sand sea (the salty waters rendered in psychedelic, undulating lines) and mountains – it could be Barra da Tijuca, in Rio. There are some subtle delightfully uncanny details: two heads appear half-hidden by plants and an extension (or possibly replica) of the patio, one of them probably that of Zerbini himself, whose left eye in the figure lying down below peeks out from behind the sun-glasses to reveal unequivocally the symptoms of intoxication – amorous or possibly induced by something else.

Another group of figurative works in the show depict well-known motifs from classical paintings: window frames, curtains, veils and screens, which allow barely a glimpse of the vista outside. These items are invariably covered with another, classically abstract, motif: horizontal stripes. These paintings have cunning titles such as *O Sol* (The Sun), *Ar* (Air) and *Sombra* (Shade). One work that could be identified as transitional here (incidentally, the artist's curatorial hand in the show is clear and impressive) is the delicious *Untitled (Marzinho)* (Little Sea), a small seascape that is one third sky and ocean and two-thirds grid. And then there are the clever paintings of assorted pieces of wood (and in one case a book) on which Zerbini paints various abstract designs, including grids and monochromes. Bits of wood are propped against the wall or arranged in a precarious compositional equilibrium. Again the artist provides some cunning titles. *Documentos Políticos* (Political Documents) is a brown painted piece of plywood resting against a wall; on top of it rests an old book (also propped against the wall) with a beautiful abstract cover whose stained organic pattern Zerbini has used in other paintings. The work's charged title can be read in gold on the book's faded leather spine. *Arte e Tecnologia* (Art and Technology) is a small wall painting that's half grid and half wood-grain, the veins of

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which glow richly under a white patina. It's that old pas de deux of nature and culture, performed in a fresh and concise manner.

My favourite work in the show, however, was a six-piece polyptych titled *História em Quadrinhos* – literally “History in small Squares or Picture’s”, a play on the somewhat clumsy Portuguese expression for “comics”. Its sections are painted in grids, stripes, monochromes and the organic booksih pattern previously mentioned. Constructed from paint, sculpture and assemblage, the work alludes to myriad sources – Pop, Conceptual art, Geometric Abstraction and figuration – and is a deadpan, humorous conclusion to the show.