

## Lucia Laguna

### Se hace camino al andar

For centuries the association between painting and landscape has been one of the most recurrent subjects in the realm of art. In the work of Lucia Laguna, the observation of the world surrounding her studio, located in São Francisco Xavier, a suburb of Rio de Janeiro, is key to understanding her painting.

For the past two decades the artist's output was driven by three main series: "Landscapes", "Gardens" and "Studio" – which highlight the inseparability of her artistic practice and studio experience. *Se hace camino al andar*, Laguna's first exhibition in Rio since her solo at Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR) in 2016 presents a group of new paintings of the "Garden" series.

The choice to observe the flora of her studio-home as a creative path for working on these new paintings was both a symptom and a diagnosis of recent times. Early on in the pandemic, Laguna shut down all activity in her studio, and so was without her assistants for four months. In the meantime, restricted to the perimeter of her house, the artist chose the garden as a possible source of inspiration, a familiar landscape, responsible for a renewal of her pictorial process halfway through last year.

Produced from that point on all ten paintings that comprise the exhibition make up a powerful set of compositions characterized for the density of elements and the profusion of figures. According to the artist, her "Gardens" are conceived as landscapes seen through a kind of eye-zoom, magnifying lens through which the artist allows plants, flowers, animals and the like to bloom. Such zooming-in effect is a result of the technical previously improvement undergone by the artist.

In these recent paintings Laguna often employs "masking" -- blank areas of the painting resulting from delimited tape protection -- over which drawings and other figurative interventions are made. Once the tape is peeled off, something similar to a trompe-l'oeil happens, an optical trick in which these figures acquire the effect of a collage on canvas, featured in the foreground and delicately outlined by white gaps. Windows open to even more detailed and precise possibilities of observation.

However, the power of these works as a whole does not diminish their individual substance, revealed in their (virtually) multiple layers. Each painting by Laguna is invested with its particular lexicon concerning its craft, process and use of different materials. The yard of her house, under careful observation, may even stay consistently unchanged. But her conversion to the pictorial arena always takes place through a new path, made of specific colors, rhythms and temperatures.

If a peculiar hybrid of figuration and abstraction has always been at stake in Laguna's work, this connection is even more intricately and complexly displayed in this new series. Although oil paint is often responsible for full-bodied brushstrokes, which reveal glimpses of vegetation patches, it's the acrylic paint that accounts for the many figurative remnants – such as the dog in Jardim n. 53 and the racoon in Garden n. 52. In addition to the "Gardens", three small scale paintings are included in the exhibition, a size that refers to some of the artist's earliest pictorial experiments, back in the 1990s.

*Se hace camino al andar*, a verse from a 1939 poem by Antonio Machado, lends its title to the exhibition as it poetically evokes Laguna's process. Employing a collaborative form of painting, the artist allows her assistants to initiate the work on the then blank canvas, onto which they outline compositions and insert graphic signs and sketches. The artist then takes control of a rambling that happens through the constant addition and subtraction of whatever is on the canvas. From this journey throughout the surface, result her ingenious compositions, actual palimpsests of days gone by. Garden and painting merge, transforming into analogous organisms, both alive.