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Marina Rheingantz: up close and afar

By Tiago Mesquita

In her new exhibition, Marina Rheingantz doesn't make things easy. She creates dense compositions, heavy with paint. For the first time, it seems possible to associate her work with the abstract expressions of informal art. The paintings are expansive, made of the relations between organic blotches of paint in a heterogenous space. The *impasto* is stained and dirty, forming color fields that contaminate one another. Though they are not unequivocally so, these paintings approach abstraction. Space is punctuated by thick, discontinuous blotches. They indicate what is beneath and what is above; what is closer up and what is further behind. These markings, however, are not docile points ready to form an outline, a contour, designating a form. They seem more residual, like cracking, amorphous mineral shards, broken off from something that had once been a representation of a well-defined solid, bathed in light.

Curiously, some kind of horizon announces itself between one stain and another. When we look at the paintings up close, the canvasses seem dotted with these short, voluminous markings. It is as if a textile warp and weft were unweaving, unmaking the image or the pattern's regularity.

From afar, paintings like *Sensação* (2022), *Rastro* (2022) and *Suspiro* (2022) become more atmospheric, remitting to landscapes by Alberto da Veiga Guignard as much as to the white-out backgrounds of Cy Twombly. There is some ample and vaporous space projected inward through the canvas, but the image is frayed and vestigial. The view is diluted, almost lost, but something of it remains and settles. The stark stains of paint are what we see up close, the panorama is what we see far away. Side by side, they form the conflicting complementarity that is so compelling in the exhibition.

In *Primavera* (2022), Marina Rheingantz distributes dots of white, yellow, magenta, blue and green paint along the whole surface. In one corner they seem clearer and more sparse, in another they are denser, in both color and proximity to each other. Though the surface background is a dominant pink, some of the artist's paint scrapings allow us, in darkened places, to see the linen's weave.

Her interventions, mainly in the upper left corner, lend a spatial indeterminacy to the background, the color and texture of which seem further from us than the lower portion of the painting, specifically the lower right corner. The gestures made with such a mass of paint are not expansive or heroic marks, they are loose touches that bring out a fragmentary aspect. Reaching the base of the painting, the strokes act as brute matter that has forgotten its referential function. This is why the counterpoint with shining sparse touches of yellow and white is so revealing. Through them, we perceive what is on the ground and what is above it.

Pictorial space, as in earlier works by Rheingantz, is structured according to the genre conventions of landscape painting. She defines a point of view, separates ground from atmosphere, discriminates between different elements and distributes them in a distance as far as the eye can see. Even if the referential relations are not obvious, the loose, fragmented and disenchanting brushstrokes become moorings that allow us to identify a place. The blotches work as a residue allowing us to see ample spaces, vanishing horizons.

In *Sensação* (2022), a dark stain at the bottom right of the painting appears as a veil before an unreachable atmospheric landscape. From the corner, we see the dominant blue run horizontally and fuse with the other colors, in an expanding fog. Space is a blue, magenta, whitening haze; in it a pattern of dots and drippings suggests something like a mountain range. While we entertain the suggestion, the only concrete element is a heavy yellow coagulated smear of paint. Some black and white lines are made with thin, fragile brushstrokes, they seem too far away to be identified. We cannot quite

identify them, we know we look at a faraway place. So far away we are unsure where it ends. The darker area at the corner of the canvas seems closer and more palpable: everything else scatters.

This might be why it is so difficult to establish connections between one paint stain and the next. I believe the brutality and indeterminacy of the pictorial elements are intimately and contradictorily related to this amplification of the spatial representation field. Close up, the elements are so particular as to be irreducible. From afar, they scatter into a dissipating horizon.

Like in the paintings of Pieter Bruegel the Elder in the 16th century, Marina Rheingantz represents the point of view of someone looking from above, high up in a tower or flying along. For the sixteenth-century painter, the bird's eye view allowed for relating dispersed figures in immeasurable space. What was depicted large and up close occupied the same space as a character found far away, after the gaze has surmounted a vast landscape. Though both of their actions have no apparent relation, the artist managed to associate them.

In the master's images, we see the representation of a directionless, dispersed human experience, but even more so, we see the attempt to find links between apparently dissociated events. At the time, and in the following century, attempting to associate heterogenous elements of differing sizes in a homogenous space was a challenge for humanist rationality. This is the same European humanism that will be interested in lenses and later in the development of mathematical tools like calculus or the philosophical discourse of Blaise Pascal on the infinitely large and the infinitely small. These were ways of associating what was beyond the reach of the eye. This rationality and civilizational impulse are intimately tied to Atlantic expansion and Christian conversion efforts. As in Bruegel's painting, the world ordered by calculation betrays a sum of various insanities and perversions.

Marina doesn't use these limitless spaces in the same way. Unlike Bruegel, her work does not aim to create a hyperrational network of causal relations, connecting dispersed and dispersive happenings in an ample space. There is no one in Marina's paintings; her effort is not one of linking random events in space. The elements of her painting do not end up defining recognizable forms or figures. In works such as *Toca* (2022) – the artist comes close, but the relationships between brushstrokes and blotches are more undetermined. Even if they suggest figurative elements, the paint is stubbornly material. In the end, we have to face the blurs.

I would wager that these differences arise from the sense of seeing from above that Marina Rheingantz develops here. First, I believe this is a point of view deeply associated with the history of Brazilian painting, as the critic Rodrigo Moura has pointed out. She has learned from the vaporous vistas of Guignard, for example. I believe the paintings also spring from other contemporary, non-artistic experiences. If Bruegel established and developed new modes of describing and understanding things, Rheingantz deals critically with the instrumental reason of algorithms and the success formulae of self-help manuals, acting as an all-seeing eye.

The profound crises and changes we live through are frequently explained by technological, technocratic models of data analysis that, like all ideology, are supposedly neutral. The accumulation of information, data, models and diagnostics, confronted with people's lived experience, reveal the absurdity of one as much as the other.

It might be a bit of a stretch, but I like to think that Marina Rheingantz's painting deals with this misalignment. When the terms we used to name things become different from the objects named, we recognize neither the names nor the things. In these works, seeing from above does not mean being capable of seeing more complex relations but watching everything and everyone lose definition and become an amorphous, unnamable mass.