

Tableau – Preamble

Tableau, by Valeska Soares, includes five paintings from her new *Blindface* series, an installation and two sculptures.

In *Blindface* (2025), the gaze is obscured. This body of work extends the inquiries from *Doubleface*. Here, the focus shifts from mirrored identity to one that is deliberately concealed. In these compositions, timeworn, fragmented, and faceless female nudes appear. The bodies appear only in parts: the curve of a hip, the outline of a breast, the trace of a gesture. These are women without faces. Their individuality is gone, lost to time or removed by the artist. Yet this absence is not a silence but strategy. By withholding the face, *Blindface* resists identification, narrative closure, and voyeuristic intimacy. The viewer sees a suspended presence, hovering between subject and object.

Within the exhibition space, the installation *calling* (2025) sets an unsettling scene. A bronze bell, shaped like an apple, hovers over a large wooden table. A hidden mechanism gently sets the bell in motion at irregular intervals, releasing a subtle, crystalline chime that lingers briefly before submerging into silence. The work unfolds in both space and time. Its soft, unpredictable tolls seem to call out to something or someone long absent. Here, the fruit becomes a bell, an object used to summon, warn, or mark time. This transformation merges seduction and annunciation. The delicate and hesitant sound echoes an unanswered call or a distant memory—half warning, half enchantment.

Two sculptures are spread throughout the exhibition. They reconfigure everyday domestic objects by casting them in bronze. These works become silent but insistent presences that subtly disturb habitual domestic order. In *Sem Palavras* (2024), a floor mop stands improbably upright. It defies gravity as if frozen mid-motion. Nearby, a broom leans against a wall. A brush lies quietly on the floor. Lacking human touch, these tools seem animated by a ghostly autonomy. They appear frozen in the aftermath of some invisible gesture. The arrangement evokes a sense of abandon and a mute refusal to return to the hands that once held them. *Upside-down* (2024) intensifies this sense of domestic subversion. A bronze vase, turned on its head, balances precariously on its fronds, stems and leaves, transforming a tender, traditional emblem of domestic beauty into an object that quietly rebels against its own function.

The following conversation between Valeska Soares, Tiago Mesquita, and Pedro Köberle took place across several encounters between March and July 2025.

TM

I'd like to begin by understanding the spatial arrangement of the paintings. You chose to display them at irregular heights, with some hanging higher and others lower...

VS

These are bodily decisions, deeply connected to the spatial relationship with the viewer. They respond to the way one engages with the works, with

their empty forms and the cut-outs on the canvas. The voids relate to the same principle behind the sound emitted by the bell in *calling*. If I followed a regular rhythm, no one would notice the absences. That's why the bell tolls irregularly, and the paintings are hung at varying heights. The gaps between one work and the next create intervals that disrupt expectations. It's an absence that carries presence within it.

TM

So would you say the works suggest a sense of continuity?

VS

The exhibition is titled *Tableau*, and that's what a tableau is. It's made up of characters who create a narrative. I also think of a cabinet of curiosities, a pseudo-scientific collection that gathers body parts, bones, and artifacts to build a narrative. Things that, when brought together, invite—or even demand—a reading. Objects assembled to form a kind of sentimental archive. In that sense, the cabinet is also a tableau. When you look at three objects, you inevitably establish some kind of connection between them. In this exhibition, that's very specific. If I were to change the works or rearrange them in the space, the show wouldn't function in the same way; the meaning would shift. The variation in positioning helped me create a sense of movement and establish a kind of fluctuating horizon.

PK

This horizon idea is interesting. It suggests the formation of different levels, almost like varying waterlines.

VS

There's something of the siren in it, that kind of reference. If you look at the works, almost all of them relate to water: the partial image of the woman washing her feet, the upside-down vase. That's why it's titled *calling*, it's almost saying, "pay attention to me." The apple is a kind of call, more than anything else.

PK

It seems to me like the table creates this attraction point within the space. You see the paintings and hear a message. There's something of the siren's song in it, a calling, a demand that pulls you toward the apple, which could be seen as a figure of desire. There's a component of danger there.

VS

It's a call toward the table, an enchantment of sorts, quiet but persistent.

PK

I was reading something really interesting in an interview with you.¹ You and the interviewer are discussing the role played by gardens in your oeuvre. You mention *Vanishing Point*, a piece that replicates the layout of a Renaissance garden crafted in polished stainless steel modules filled to the brim with perfume. In the arrangement of the pieces, a corner of the design is missing. You said that this absence is a kind of calling.

VS

There are many types of invitations in architecture. Have you seen those old staircases that fan out at the bottom? They're called "invitation steps." They

¹ In *Seduções*, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2006

make people move through a call to action. A lot of what I do has the same character. There are no instructions.

TM

These absent elements, this lack of parts within a structure, recur frequently in your work.

VS

I like both invitation and secrecy. For instance, when I made *Epilogue* (2017), there were several tables with glasses, but the glasses were for drinking. There was never a sign saying, "You may drink." What I asked of the museum attendants or gallery staff was to occasionally take a sip. Those passing by would realize that drinking was permitted. There's always this uncertainty. Some people, even knowing they can drink, absolutely won't. And some go all in. It becomes a sort of secret: "Did you hear about that installation where you can drink?"—without any explicit instructions.

PK

But in *Epilogue*, the table was full. You could actually get drunk there. Here, the table is empty. Do you think that means something?

VS

I don't think in those terms. I'm drawn to elements like tables, headboards... I like furniture. I have this interest, though I don't know where it comes from. Sometimes, the glass and table need to be filled; other times, emptied. It depends on the drama or the image you want to convey.

TM

They're domestic objects. You engage with this universe of interiors, of representing the inside.

VS

I think that's a valid reading. We don't know who knocked over the vase. Was it someone cleaning? Women rebelling against the situation? There's a drama unfolding, and we don't know who left behind the mop, the broom, and the brush. I do feel, on some level, that a revolution is taking place—possibly one led by different female characters.

PK

The objects, for instance, appear as gestures...

TM

The table lends a more ceremonial tone. The paintings and the *Upside-down* pieces seem to evoke a memory of home. Times and social relations are scrambled.

VS

The vase is a trace of an action, the brooms too—acts in progress that were interrupted. The mop, in fact, isn't resting against anything—it's as if someone were still holding it. I made these old, discarded objects without molds, using lost items cast in bronze. They're replicas of things that were once used. I decided to load them with memory, so to speak. They're monuments to an action.

TM

The sound of the installation takes on a different meaning surrounded by

these works. It becomes something else, it takes on the dimension of domestic labor, of a call...

PK

An unanswered call. The tools are leaning against the wall, they evoke idleness.

VS

Someone chose not to work.

TM

The ceremony is undone. Everything is suggested, hinted at. The elements of order are still there, but new ones start to emerge.

VS

An event is being insinuated. That's why the exhibition is called *Tableau*. But these are actions historically attributed to women.

TM

And it's depersonalized, since in this case the paintings have no "faces." The surfaces now reveal traces of bodies, even landscapes.

VS

I don't think the figures are entirely depersonalized just because they lack faces. There's another kind of revelation through body parts. That can imply exposure while still preserving intimacy, or the inverse: something hidden that reveals itself. A kind of modesty. There's an ambiguity there.

PK

There's something that's almost the inverse of censorship. I think of those black bars placed over nude images...

TM

Here, repression is like a Möbius strip—it becomes erotic. What covers the back of the painting has an erotic dimension. The paint layer helps reveal something through this subjective, fragmented rendering of bodies. What's hidden is also seductive through the interplay of color and absence. It could be the scent of a body we don't see, or bodies in decay. I'd like to understand better this eroticism tied to concealment, to ellision.

VS

The energy has to go somewhere (laughs). In the act of sealing off, a censoring appears in what I'm revealing. And color acts as though I'm transferring that covering to another place, opening what was once veiled. It's abstract painting. In the *Doubleface* and *Blindface* series, it's a more rigid, geometric abstraction, hard-edged, with fields of color. In the *Equivalents*, the erasure led me to a more organic abstraction. Each genre of painting gives rise to a different kind of abstraction.

PK

Because the blank alone isn't enough. There's also the image that takes the place of what's absent.

VS

It's a kind of erasure—like a palimpsest. But there's also revelation. Censorship is, in a way, a kind of palimpsest too.

TM

Yes, there are remnants that are very present in this exhibition. The elements you reveal in turn reveal what lies behind your actions. Some works relate to landscape, others to the objecthood of painting itself, beyond the image. Not by chance, the heights of the works in the exhibition matter: they too reveal something.

VS

What I'm doing is bringing forth a new subjectivity. These paintings were made with an original subjectivity in mind by the painter who created them. Then they were lost to the world. They no longer relate to the original desire to depict those figures. They were left behind. I take these images because I'm incapable of painting like that myself, and I edit them as if they were text. People will relate to these fragments and erasures in different ways. There's also a question of preservation. Many of these paintings were deteriorating, and in a way, I'm saving them. Sometimes literally—they underwent restoration. I bring them back to circulate again.

TM

But they're not the same. When you put them back in the world, they've become something else.

VS

It's a new life.

PK

It's not just that bodies are depicted on the back of these paintings—you treat the canvas itself as a kind of skin, something corporeal, that receives a cut, that has inner tension, and then comes undone, wounded. A cut that folds outward, expanding into space...

VS

There is a certain violence in these works. There's also a certain danger, because I never know if the process will work until the very last moment. If I make a wrong cut, I lose everything. The violence of cutting the canvas is serious. These risks make me think of the act of cutting as surgery, and each canvas is like a patient under my care. In that moment, I'm fully focused on the act of cutting.

TM

You find meanings within the paintings and try to amplify them by painting on the reverse, letting the inner side of the body fall toward the viewer, making the painting into a kind of relief.

VS

I always have that urge—to discover things, to make them exist. It's a painful process. I'm always afraid it won't work. Because it doesn't depend solely on me. I'm not the one painting; I'm not the one stretching the canvas.

TM

Are there aspects in these paintings that depart from your previous processes?

VS

There's an issue with the facture of the paintings, especially the ones I

bought from Ukraine—they're much thicker. The original paint surface became a problem. On the white painting, for example, the facture simply refused to disappear. And some are so saturated with oil that I had no idea what would happen when I made the cut.

TM

That brings another kind of sensuality—the sensuality of the paint itself.

VS

That connects to the idea of skin, which Pedro mentioned. I don't know what materials were used—how good the oil is, how much gesso lies underneath...

PK

Maybe in the way fragments of landscape appear in the *Blindface* series, there's an opening to an external space. Do you see that as a doorway to something wilder?

VS

I'm not sure. I haven't arrived there yet. It's like asking a writer what the next chapter will be—it hasn't been written. In this exhibition, I'm working within this more domestic universe of references. But my work touches other dimensions, other spheres. What interests me is the intermediate space between an individual reality and social space, and that materializes in different ways.