

Leisurely Floating Luminescence

Luiz Zerbini

A vibrant constellation of colors and forms emerges—an illuminated emanation rooted in the tropical landscape and pierced by abstraction. Luiz Zerbini's work reflects the natural world interwoven with the memory and history of the Global South. His paintings and installations open symbolic thresholds where nature and culture merge. Although anchored in a specific Brazilian context, Zerbini's work resonates more broadly, engaging with landscapes, rhythms, and sensibilities that connect us to the Atlantic, the forests, the *Cerrado*¹, and the hinterlands through intimate, affective relations.

There is a kind of light hovering in silence, not blinding but dancing in the dark. It is with this light that Zerbini traces the outline of his new exhibition, *Leisurely Floating Luminescence*. Inspired by two elements of nature—the tenuous endurance of fireflies and the resilient architecture of termite mounds—Zerbini proposes a visual journey between the infinitesimal and the immense.

In a sensorial and botanical inventory of the tropics, the artist once again turns to the landscape not as an idyllic backdrop, but as a living, inhabited body, charged with both visible and invisible histories. Forests, fields, riverbanks, urban remnants, and the traces of what we call civilization are translated into large-scale sculptures and canvases, built from geometric patterns and organic gestures.

Zerbini's longstanding interest in collecting everyday images of natural elements runs throughout his practice, functioning as a kind of living archive. In this process, an image of termite mounds with bioluminescent larvae in the *Cerrado* served as a visual catalyst. This rare scene inspired the association between termite mounds and fireflies that permeates the exhibition.

He summons fireflies in his paintings and installations as signals of another temporality, a leisurely time, outside the urgency of productivity, where light is discreet and vision must be relearned. Seeing requires silence. Many species of fireflies are declining, some already at risk of extinction due to atmospheric and, above all, water pollution. Fireflies, male and female alike, light up their bodies through chemical reactions in order to attract mates and reproduce.

In Zerbini's paintings, the subtle glow of fireflies appears alongside other presences: termite mounds, organic structures that persist after environmental disruption like living ruins. In areas of extensive cattle ranching and monoculture, the soil becomes compacted and loses biodiversity, yet termites manage to survive, adapting to the new landscape for years or

¹ The *Cerrado* is a vast tropical savanna region that covers much of central Brazil — roughly one-fifth of the country's territory, making it the second-largest biome in South America after the Amazon rainforest.

even decades. Made from a mixture of soil, saliva, and feces, and dependent on abundant sunlight, termite mounds become highly resistant to erosion and the passage of time

Here, they are monuments to the ephemeral, constructions of memory and survival. In dialogue with the notion of ruins and with the force of what resists domestication, the termite mounds rise as signs of persistence: matter that destroys but also reorganizes space, creating new flows and ways of inhabiting.

Zerbini intertwines these elements with recurring motifs in his work: the search for lost memories, the movement of water, architectural details, geometries, plants, patterns, and the interplay of textures and shadows. Light—a central element in painting and ever-present in Zerbini's practice—appears both as material and as an idea: not total illumination, but partial visibility, fragments that flash from the dark background of the canvas as if emerging from silence.

His works balance between figuration and abstraction, blurring the boundary between nature and artifice. They abandon the notion of the distant landscape to approach a re-enchanted collective memory. These are paintings that hold sculptures, and sculptures that bend toward painting, as in the stones Zerbini renders in three-dimensional form. Everything seems gathered from a familiar world: landscapes we carry within us—pastures, beaches, and forests—that form part of who we are, yet often pass unnoticed.

Leisurely Floating Luminescence is an ode to what pulses beneath the earth's surface, to what germinates, and to the moments that glimmer in the darkness and call for our attention. It invites us to reconnect with every being, every life form, every entity, every leaf, and every elder. As we return to the earth, we remember the fragility of our bodies and the strength of the ground beneath our feet. As Antonio Bispo dos Santos wrote in *A Terra Dá, a Terra Quer* ("the earth provides, the earth wants"): "We are a people of trajectories, not of theory. We are a people of circularity."² Zerbini brings back the memory of what has always been there.

In this entanglement of living forms and imminent erasures, the exhibition also proposes an urgent reflection on the silent disappearance of things—of species, of knowledge, of ways of life. Both fragile and resilient, fireflies and termite mounds become complementary metaphors: the former as a presence threatened by our modes of production, the latter as ruins that endure in the face of loss. Together, they call for a new logic of existence—the time of fertile darkness, of slow listening, of regeneration.

We turn our gaze once again to what pulses in the dark, rising quietly from the earth. The bioluminescence of the firefly and the architecture of the termite mound are manifestations of what insists on living—of circularity itself. And perhaps it is within this slow, modest, yet undeniable flash that our last chance to relearn how to see resides.

Catarina Duncan
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² SANTOS, Antonio Bispo dos. *A Terra Dá, A Terra Quer*. São Paulo: UBU; Belo Horizonte: Piseagrama, 2021.