

How to start at the beginning, if things happen before they happen?

Clarice Lispector in **The Hour of the Star**

When I visited Rebeca Watson Horn's studio — the space she occupied for a few months to paint the canvases she is now presenting in *A palavra errada* [The wrong word], her first solo exhibition in São Paulo — I immediately remembered the images concerning the origins of language and meaning that permeate the literary work of Clarice Lispector. An occasional painter, the writer understood, like few others, the nature of artistic creation, as she confessed: "And here's the thing: when a painting strikes me as strange, that's when it's truly a painting. And when a word strikes me as strange, that's when it reaches its meaning. And when life feels strange, that's when life begins".^[1]

In Rebecca's paintings, like an incision on the surface of the world, the line transforms into language by embodying imaginary signs within a field of magnetized color. Between abstract landscapes and graphic signs, her works suggest a dreamlike universe in which strong colors, sometimes in unusual combinations, are rendered in acrylic and oil paint on jute. The exhibition is divided into two sections: *Semaphore* (2025), in which the artist inscribes marks on open-weave, almost transparent surfaces that hang from the gallery ceiling like a firmament of timeless symbols; and the screens produced in 2026 on tightly woven jute, where the pictorial material acquires density against the rough resistance of the fabric. Both series evoke the magical practice of inscribing "sigils," in which words and letters are used to create a secret language capable of invoking desires and secrets. The permeable nature of the fabric, whose porosity demands a continuous painting process, fosters a process of sedimentation that transforms the marks into living forms.

As a result, her works seem to highlight strangeness as origin, since the figures emerge at the threshold between identity and non-identity, the material and the immaterial, energy and emptiness, the interior (the Self) and the exterior (the Other). Without starting from a predetermined meaning, the alphabet to be deciphered emerges as the very setting in which time and matter unfold: the indelible record of an unrepeatable experience.

Since the early 20th century, a rich strand of the abstract painting tradition has sought to capture the invisible within the visible or to give visibility to the non-sensible. By breaking away from the obligation to mimic immediate reality, many artists came to understand pure form—color and line—as the ideal medium for expressing the invisible, the

^[1] All quotes from Clarice Lispector were taken from the catalog of *Constelação Clarice*. Curated by Eucanaã Ferraz and Veronica Stigger. São Paulo: IMS, 2021.

numinous, and the dynamics of the mind, the unconscious, or the soul. As a response to a world in crisis, artists such as Hilma af Klint, W. Kandinsky, Paul Klee, M. Rothko, Agnes Martin, Mira Schendel, among others, sought to restore a spiritual, symbolic and transcendental meaning to the artistic practice. Through their contact with non-western traditions, these artists expanded the scope of art beyond the mere production of objects, turning it into a vehicle for new cosmologies.

In a certain way, Rebecca's production connects to this tradition; however, her journey takes a different starting point. Her canvases emerge through the accumulation of meanings that are refined through a meditative period, creating a constant tension between gesture and material. Faced with the excess of meaning that saturates the world we live in, she prefers to restore the power of synthesis and silence. As spectators, we are not transported to a sublime place, free from the limitations of the body. On the contrary, the symbolism created by the gesture results from a particular experience that can only be communicated through the friction of language itself as an organic matter. No wonder Rebecca prefers to work with jute: the hand, as any other organism, needs resistance to expand; it needs a boundary in order to take shape. And so, the surfaces also undergo processes of erasure, superimposition, and the removal of layers of colored pigments, until the organic forms and lines that enliven the off-center space of the compositions are stabilized.

In this sense, the vibrant materiality of her paintings results from an immanent tension rooted in the very origin of the gesture. The pictorial plane ceases to be a mere surface of representation and becomes a field of forces, where paint accumulates in textures and layers. Like Lispector's female characters, they are haunted by a constant sense of collapse stemming from the impossibility of communication; a moment when conventional language fails and falls silent. However, this silence is not an absence, but a saturation. At the same time, there is an urgent desire to recreate an expressive language from the ruins of matter—or rather, through them. It is in the very wearing away of the pigment, in the erasures, and in the cracks in the canvas that the painting finds its power, groping for the ethereal through what is most earthly. It does not hide its scars; it makes them its own alphabet.

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