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LUCIA LAGUNA
1-13. *Paisagem nº 114* [Landscape no. 114] (details), 2018
IMAGE 72

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MASP

Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand

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lucialaguna neighborhood

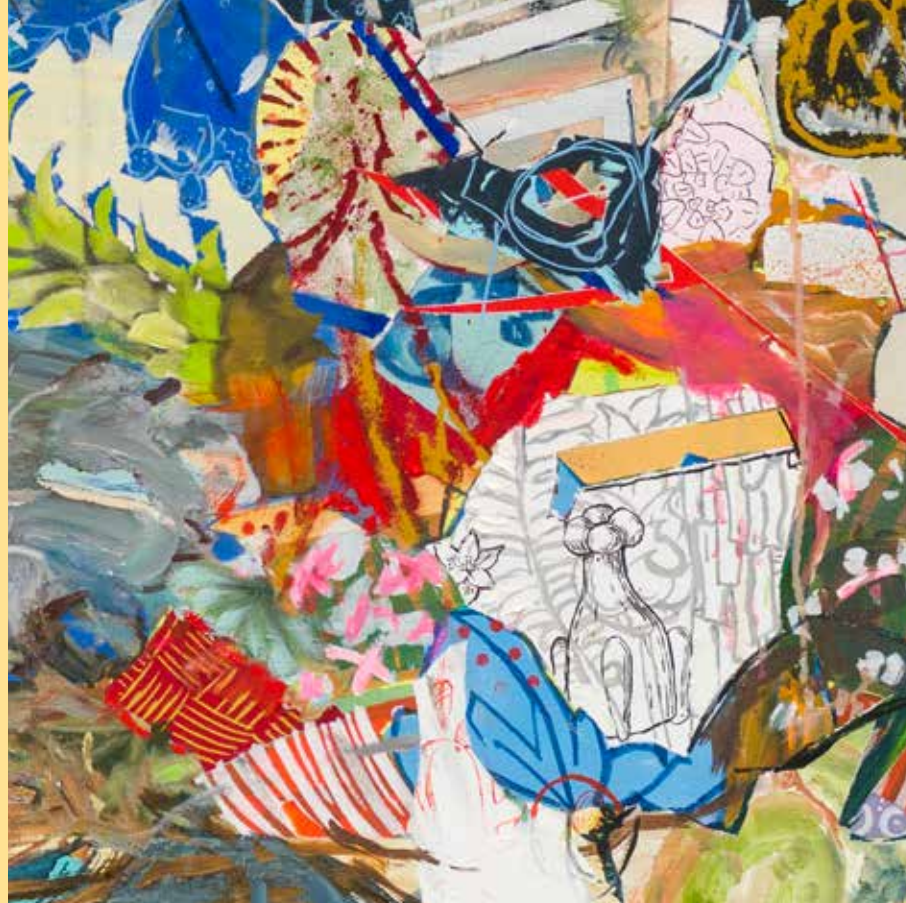


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14. View of Morro da Mangueira
[Mangueira Hill] through Lucia Laguna's
studio window, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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LUCIA LAGUNA
15. *Paisagem nº 103 (Vila Isabel)*
[Landscape no. 103] (detail), 2017
IMAGE 69

According to the *Encyclopedia of Brazilian Art and Culture* published by Itaú Cultural: “Lucia Laguna’s artworks depart from urban landscapes [...] they reveal a disordered beauty, translating the world that she sees from her studio.”

From the intricacies of the city—the overlaying of the old and the new and the myriad building styles—Laguna has conjured a way of creating that is intentionally not figurative—in a sense of not being restricted to the representation of a single, defined object. Her canvases are multiplicity. “This is what I want: that people don’t know exactly what it is but that it looks like *ten* different things,” the artist said in a recent interview.

Laguna’s work is marked by a creative process in which chance, surprise and residue play crucial roles. The artist does not paint on white canvases but begins to work on paintings already started by her studio team. She interferes and changes position (vertically or horizontally). She also uses layers of paint applied over adhesive tape, which is then removed, revealing previous layers of paint as well as unleashing unexpected color combinations.

As far as the urban theme is concerned, a number of initiatives led by Itaú Cultural are in dialog with the ideas evoked by Laguna’s work. For instance, the 2018 edition of the Institute’s program Occupation celebrates the work of architect and urban planner Paulo Mendes da Rocha. In an interview available at itaucultural.org.br/ocupacao, the architect said: “The city is simply an extraordinarily rich event covering all the aspects that one could imagine.” Both Laguna and Mendes da Rocha examine instants provided by the city, which are densely portrayed in Laguna’s paintings.

Another activity hosted by Itaú Cultural that focuses on urban space is the program of debates called Urban Gaps. With monthly events, the initiative is made of a series of dialogs about life in the city and includes the participation of artists, activists, and researchers, among others. The ways of seeing, experiencing and transforming the city, both politically and artistically, are the basis of the discussions brought to light. The recorded events are available here: youtube.com/itaucultural.

For more information about exhibitions, debates, concerts, and performances hosted by the Institute, please visit itaucultural.org.br. You can also access articles, essays, and chronicles about art and culture. Our *Encyclopedia* is also a great source of reference about key Brazilian artists: enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br.



LUCIA LAGUNA
16. *Jardim nº 29*
[Garden no. 29] (detail), 2015
IMAGE 57

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Our collaboration with the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand and support of Lucia Laguna's exhibition reasserts J.P. Morgan's commitment with culture and Brazil.



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lucia laguna at masp

LUCIA LAGUNA
17. *Paisagem nº 114*
[Landscape no. 114] (detail), 2018
IMAGE 72



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lucia laguna's neighborhood

[...] the space is one unity from the horizon right to the interior of my work room, and the boat that is going past exists in the same space as the familiar objects around me; and the wall with the window does not create two different worlds.¹ — henri matisse

Lucia Laguna's paintings are inseparable from their place of origin: the artist's studio-home in the neighborhood of São Francisco Xavier, in the northern part of the city of Rio de Janeiro, which can be seen through her window. A subject extensively researched in the history of art, the relationship between painting and the window is also a topic dear to Laguna. From Leon Battista Alberti's (1404-1472) fundamental's treatise *De pictura* (1435), in which the space to be painted is understood as an open window,² to Rosalind Krauss's view on the movement toward the flattening of the painting surface employed by some artists in the beginning of the twentieth century, the window grid, which previously sectioned the landscape, separating exterior from interior, became a metaphor for the autonomy of painting (art) in relation to life.³ However, the case of Laguna's window is different. The artist developed her form of painting from observing the outside world through her studio's window facing the Mangueira Hill [img. 14]. This portal opening her studio to the city, its surroundings and neighborhood, informs not only the theme and the context of her work but also the procedural and formal choices adopted in each painting.

Before her artistic career, Lucia Laguna taught literature, Portuguese, and Latin. Following her retirement, she attended free courses at Escola de Artes Visuais (EAV), Parque Lage, in Rio de Janeiro in the 1990s, where she met a number of key interlocutors, including artists, critics, curators, and art historians.⁴ Laguna's first paintings during her formative years—which were still exercises—reveal the beginning of a way of thinking that would lead to her most recent production.

The relationship with her surroundings—studio, house, and neighborhood—began to appear in her first compositional studies and



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experiments with oil paints, produced at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. All that remains from many of these works is a photographic record, as Laguna painted over the finished artworks, modifying the original image that we see today reproduced in the photos—an operation that would later become one of the key features of her work. The artist began to produce paintings on the third floor of her house, utilizing a space in which she and her husband operated a toy factory. As the space was much smaller than the studio she uses now, Laguna had to stack finished paintings on top of each other in order to be able to work on new paintings. The different-sized canvases meant that once a new blank canvas was placed atop older paintings, their sides and tops were visible against the new canvas. The artist reports that when looking at the pile of images underneath, she wanted to “bring forward” parts of the images that were “behind,” painting on the new canvas the “edges” of the older paintings that remained in her line of vision. This is the case in *Untitled* (1997) [img. 20], in which a line at the top of the painting separates one plane from the other, suggesting the accumulation of canvases in her studio. In her current work, this technique would be revisited, improved, and pushed to its limits, such as in *Paisagem nº 105 (Madureira)* [Landscape no. 105 (Madureira)] (2017) [img. 19]. In this work, the overlaying of asymmetric planes at the top left corner creates the illusion that the canvas is leaning against another canvas or even lying askew on the floor.

As early as her first painting exercises, Laguna began to survey the space of the canvas with lines placed in a grid, as if mapping the painting’s surface. In these works, the openly gestural painting from her earlier career clashes with the flat space of the grid, divided into small overlapping paintings, such as in *Untitled* (2000) [img. 21]. The action of compartmentalizing the canvas originates from an exercise proposed by Scottish professor and painter Charles Watson during his course at EAV, Parque Lage. The exercise consisted of dividing the canvas into different paintings so the artist could experiment, in each section, with a different way of painting.

LUCIA LAGUNA
19. *Paisagem nº 105 (Madureira)* [Landscape no. 105 (Madureira)], 2017
IMAGE 71

20. *Untitled*, 1997
Charcoal, graphite and oil on canvas, 123 x 153 cm
Courtesy of the artist, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Laguna, however, went beyond the operation suggested by Watson. After seeing the fragments of Édouard Manet's (1832–83) *The Execution of Emperor Maximilian* (1867–68) [img. 22] for the first time at the National Gallery in London, the artist finally understood what she was looking for with this exercise. After Manet's death, the painting was cut up and the fragments were sold separately by the family. Edgar Degas (1834–1917) allegedly bought some of the fragments and reassembled the pieces into a single painting.⁵ Laguna passionately describes her experience of seeing the artwork for the first time and how it influenced the inclusion of “strips” of images, planes, and lines in her paintings. Seeing these sets put together in one single canvas—the painting interrupted by planes of color and lines between images—meant that Laguna had found the synthesis of her own work, something that would culminate in the series *Entre a linha vermelha e a linha amarela* [Between the Red Line and the Yellow Line] (2001–06) [img. 23], a set of paintings that the artist considers her first actual artworks (no longer exercises), and in the use of masking tape—a technique she adopted as a way of “repressing the gesture.”⁶ In the series, the neighborhood surrounding her studio, in the suburbs of north Rio, appears as a subject, both in the title (the red and yellow lines are the highways that connect the city's north and south) and in her formal choices. According to Laguna:

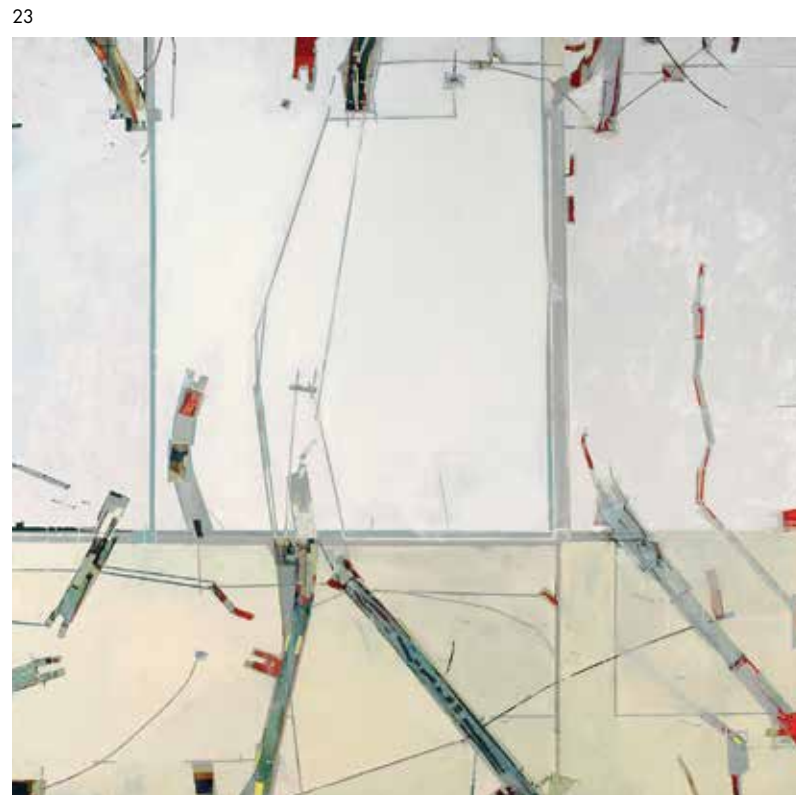
I was trying to find a path in which I would feel confident and say: I ought to take it further. I only found it when I looked out of the window and saw the sides of the buildings [...]. I was in front of the Mangueira Hill; I thought: let me look at this in a different way, from a new angle. So, I realized that outside my window there was not only a piece of hill but a piece of asphalt, that is, the buildings and their blind walls looking at me. I saw in them what I wanted to do: something clean, white, sometimes with small windows, as you can see in many images around here, the whole tiny favela, all dotted, all bent, like an architecture made of myriad pieces, makeshift extensions, resulting in huge contrasts between parts. They almost talked about those two realities, quite explicitly. So, I said: this is my subject. The place where I live is going to bring me a wealth of things about which I feel I am able to talk, as I live here. I am from the suburbs.⁷

LUCIA LAGUNA
21. Untitled, 2000
Charcoal, graphite and oil on canvas, 160 × 140 cm
Courtesy of the artist, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil





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The fragmented and calculated nature of her first exercises in “mapping” the surface of the canvas with lines converge with the “accidental” outcome of Manet’s painting and the artist’s own vocabulary, extracted from her surroundings, personal experiences, memories, and affections. Three spheres of reference make up Laguna’s repertoire: a meticulous and unwavering study of painting, the (Eurocentric) history of art, and a constant investigation of aesthetic possibilities in the context of where she lives. In an essay published in this catalogue, Fabiana Lopes questions:

Which possibilities open up when spaces that are considered outside the mainstream are mobilized not as ethnographic objects but instead as a source of vocabulary, as the trigger for an aesthetic language?⁸

I add to Lopes’s question: what happens when Laguna contrasts a formal vocabulary understood as peripheral against an institutionalized and hegemonic history of art, such as Western painting, whose narratives are dominated by white European men?⁹

Moving beyond official canons of Art History, the artist seeks, via her window, suburban ways of life, construction, and architecture in order to define her way of painting, producing images, and working collectively. The collective nature of her process is a major element for understanding her work, as since 2004 Laguna has produced in partnership and in dialog with her assistants.¹⁰ Her collaborators begin the paintings by sketching the initial images that are later covered, redesigned, transformed, and rotated by the artist [imgs. 37–42], sometimes reappearing upon the removal of masking tape. This collective process brought to Laguna not only a singular dynamics in the creation of her paintings but also formal challenges that had to be addressed using dialog as well as the incorporation of other vocabularies into her formal lexicon.

The economy of Laguna’s painting is, therefore, an economy of leftovers¹¹ and their constant revisiting, which has been present from her first exercises—when the artist added images from the

EDOUARD MANET
Paris, France, 1832–1883
22 *The Execution of Emperor Maximilian*, 1867–68
Oil on canvas, 193 × 284 cm
Collection The National Gallery, London, United Kingdom

LUCIA LAGUNA
23. *Entre a linha vermelha e a linha amarela nº 46*
[Between the Red Line and the Yellow Line no. 46], 2005
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 180 × 190 cm
Collection of Luiz Chrysóstemo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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edges of the previous canvas to a new painting—through her current production, characterized by images that survive her collective process of construction (and destruction). This form of “constructing” painting is similar to the way suburban *carioca* [from Rio de Janeiro] houses are built. Sometimes these houses are the result of ongoing and collective processes of transformation: unfinished projects grow with the addition of makeshift extensions, and random chance often becomes a tool in the unplanned architecture.¹² This is also the process in Laguna’s painting. Although the artist organizes her production into three main themes—studio, landscape, and garden—these are only defined after she sees the painting as finished. She often paints over images, changes the canvas’s orientation—or even establishes two possible ways of displaying the same finalized artwork, as evidence of its permanent transformation and openness, such as in *Jardim n° 33* [Garden no. 33] (2016) [img. 60], which can be exhibited either horizontally or vertically.

The choice of theme defines and expands Laguna’s neighborhood. With her paintings, the artist rebuilds the space that surrounds her, where there is no distinction between inside and outside, between house and city. With a sort of centripetal movement, Laguna’s canvases pull everything inside, like a whirlwind. We often easily recognize objects from her place of work: ladders, stools, lamps, clamps, such as in *Estúdio n° 33* [Studio no. 33] (2010) [img. 24], *Estúdio n° 45* [Studio no. 45] (2013) [img. 54], and *Estúdio n° 46* [Studio no. 46] (2014) [img. 56]; items from her garden: pitchforks, hoses, water features, insects, and other animals; or urban elements such as barbed wire, railings, and lampposts. Almost against the wish of the gardener, anarchically growing plants invade everything and spread into all her artworks, whether or not they are defined as *Garden*, *Landscape*, or *Studio*. The presence of the garden is a typical feature of her surroundings, where every single house has a bit of garden behind the wall, even if only a vase with a snake plant by its entrance as protection against the evil eye [img. 62]. “The favela is something like this: lots of lines that cut trees,”¹³ says Laguna.

LUCIA LAGUNA
24. *Estúdio n° 33* [Studio no. 33], 2010
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 170 x 170 cm
Collection of Andrea and José Olympio Pereira, São Paulo, Brazil



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The exhibition *Lucia Laguna: Neighborhood* brings together a selection of twenty-one works from the artist's recent production (from 2012 to 2018) and within her three main themes of gardens, landscapes, and studios. A large proportion of the show is made up of landscapes depicting suburban neighborhoods of north and central Rio: Mangueira, Benfica, Manguinhos, Penha, Ramos, Caju, Vila Isabel, and Madureira. Based in the affective memory of someone who frequents these neighborhoods regularly, mentally noting their colors, Laguna proposes an alternative suburban imagery. These landscapes, placed against the mezzanine windows of the building designed by Italian-Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi (1914–1992), outweigh the curtains and the view of São Paulo's city center. Her paintings face the window as new landscape propositions: imaginary, fragmentary, and in transformation. In these paintings, we see a Mexican cactus [img. 68] inhabiting the same "neighborhood" as a samurai or a geisha [img. 71] taken from Japanese woodcuts in the books the artist keeps in her studio. Architectural references are also present in several artworks, such as grid lines that evoke a window or a sort of plan or map. In *Paisagem nº 95* [Landscape no. 95] (2016) [img. 61], two colored images (which Laguna calls "samurais") are covered by elements from her garden—bird wings, insects, and fabric prints—and hover over a geometric, grid-like, almost monochromatic background. It is in this series of works that sketched graphic lines become part of her paintings, as does the urban vocabulary of spray paint and stencil, such as in *Paisagem nº 103 (Vila Isabel)* [Landscape no. 103 (Vila Isabel)] (2017) [img. 69].

Also within her landscapes, Laguna expands her neighborhood to the space of art institutions—such as in the artworks produced for the 30th Bienal de São Paulo [imgs. 36, 52, 53] in 2012, for the Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR) in 2016–17 [img. 44],¹⁴ and for this exhibition [img. 72]. Using the same centripetal movement that characterizes her process, Laguna absorbs the space of her studio, her garden, MASP, and its collection into the canvas of *Paisagem nº 114* [Landscape no. 114] (2018), in which we see multiple



references to works in the museum's collection. In this painting, a small fragment of the fabric print in Édouard Vuillard's (1868–1940) *The Printed Dress* (1891) is combined with plants from the artist's garden; José Pancetti's (1902–58) *Autorretrato com marreta* [Self-Portrait with a Sledgehammer] (1914) meets Ferdinand Hodler's (1853–1918) *Lumberjack* (1910), both workers, in the arts or in the fields; the synthetic drawing of Lina Bo Bardi's building coexists with a Chinese guardian from 618–907 AD, one of the first sculptures visitors see when entering the museum's second floor; Rubens Gerchman's (1942–2008) *Ar—Cartilha de superlativa* [Air—Superlative Primer] (circa 1967–72) and the small crying figures of Maria Auxiliadora's (1935–74) *O velório da noiva* [The Bride's Wake] (1974) seemingly interact with other characters from different artworks and times. There are also two references to the kitsch collection that are not exhibited on the easels but that are part of the diverse museum collection: a china plate with relief decorations in the shape of fish and a platform shoe, blurring the distinction between so-called "high" and "low" cultures. References to the paintings *The Temptations of St. Anthony* (circa 1500), by Hieronymus Bosch (1450–1516); *The Captain Andries van Hoorn* (1638), by Frans Hals (1582–1666); *Female Nude* (1930–33), by Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947); *Fachada com bandeiras* [Façade with Flags] (1959), by Alfredo Volpi (1896–1988); and the sculpture *The Meditation* (post-1897), by Auguste Rodin (1840–1917), can also be identified in the painting. The whole painting is sectioned by lines that suggest the edges of Bo Bardi's glass easels, whose phantasmagorical presence is marked in photographic records [img. 25].

Lastly, the relationship between Laguna and the history of art also features in the artwork made for this exhibition. In the essay "O elogio ao descontinuo" ["A Eulogy to the Discontinuous"],¹⁵ professor Jailton Moreira addresses with the link between the artist and what she calls her "artistic family" via a reference to Akira Kurosawa's (1910–98) film *Yojimbo* (1961), in which a ronin (a wandering samurai) leaves a trail of destruction in his wake. Visitors to Laguna's studio can see a long list of artists attached to a corkboard in her studio [img. 48], featuring the



names of Paolo Uccello (1397–1475), Rogier van der Weyden (1400–64), Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806), William Turner (1775–1851), Édouard Manet, Paul Cézanne (1839–1906), Henri Matisse (1869–1954), Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964), Philip Guston (1913–80), Richard Diebenkorn (1922–93), John Baldessari, Paula Rego, Sean Scully, Cornelia Parker, Beatriz Milhazes, Cathy de Monchaux, Cristina Canale, Vânia Mignone, Jenny Saville, and Julie Mehretu, among others. Moreira reiterates that the artist is not subordinate to the Western painting tradition but puts her agents (not only references to artists but also structuring modes of pictorial composition) in an ongoing battle. However, the battle is not only against images in this familiar repertoire of art history. By defining them as her “family” and looking daily at these references in her house-studio, Laguna brings these “neighbors” into coexistence with Mangueira Hill, with the noise of the train that runs past her house, with the retaining walls supporting the favela hills; with the mugwort that grows in her garden and the climbing plant that invades her studio; with the birds that freely come and go through the studio window with no windowpane or bars, only an awning; with street graffiti; with the neighboring buildings’ back walls; with the shards of Portuguese crockery attached to the walls; with all the simultaneity of layers opened by gaps in the endless transformation that is the suburbs and the nature of Lucia Laguna’s painting.

Isabella Rjeille, Assistant Curator, MASP

Translated from Portuguese by Adriana Francisca.

1 The quote is how Matisse (1869–1954) replied to a radio interview about his works representing windows. The artist added in his writings: “I was able to incorporate the outdoor world, such as the sea, as well as the indoor world into my paintings because the atmosphere of a landscape and that of my room were one and the same. I didn’t bring one closer to the other—both were united in my mind. I can associate the armchair that is next to me in the studio to a cloud in the sky, to the shaking waterside palm tree, without any effort to differentiate the places, without dissociating the different elements of my motif that constitute a single unity in my spirit.” Dominique Fourcade, ed., *Matisse: escritos e reflexões sobre arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 100. Our translation.

2 “I inscribe a quadrangle of right angles, as large as I wish, which is considered to be an open window through which I see what I want to paint. Here I determine as it pleases me the size of the men in my picture.” Leon Battista Alberti, “Book One,” in *On Painting*. [First appeared 1435-36] Translated with Introduction and Notes by John R. Spencer. (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1970. Available at: <http://www.noteaccess.com/Texts/Alberti/>.

3 Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” *October* 9 (summer 1979): 50–64.

4 On Lucia Laguna’s life trajectory and career as an artist, see “Lucia Laguna: The Lagoon’s Egg,” on pages 50-67.

5 “The left-hand section of the canvas showing General Mejía was probably cut off by Manet himself. After the artist’s death the canvas was cut up into smaller fragments, some of which were sold separately.” Website description, “The Execution of Maximilian,” London, National Gallery of Art, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/edouard-manet-the-execution-of-maximilian>, accessed on September 14, 2018.

6 “I use tape to repress the gesture [...]. This has given me tranquility in relation to a full, messy space.” Paulo Herkenhoff, “A pintura: o que se pensa em Lucia Laguna,” in *Prêmio CNI SESI Marcantônio Vilaça: mostra itinerante: 2006-2008/SESI* (Brasília: Departamento Nacional, 2009), 31.

7 Lucia Laguna, in conversation with the author, August 28, 2018.

8 In this publication, on pages 34-49.

9 It is worth highlighting the work of feminist historians who seek to revert art history under the perspective of gender, race, social class, and geography, like the US-based feminist group Guerilla Girls; curators Linda Nochlin (1931–2017) and Ann Sutherland Harris, with their seminal 1976 exhibition, *Women Artists: 1550–1950*; and *Radical Women: Latin American Art 1960–1985*, curated by Andrea Giunta and Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, in 2017–18; among others.

10 Currently, Claudio Tobinaga, Davi Baltar, and Sumara Rouff.

11 Herkenhoff.

12 Paola Jacques Berenstein, “Estética das favelas,” *Arquitextos* 013.08 (June 2001), <http://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/arquitextos/02.013/883>, accessed on August 14, 2018.

13 Laguna, in conversation with the author, August 28, 2018.

14 Artwork produced for the exhibition *Enquanto bebo a água, a água me bebe* [*While I Drink the Water, the Water Drinks Me*], Cadu and Clarissa Diniz, curators, Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte do Rio, November 29, 2016, to February 26, 2017.

15 Jailton Moreira, “O elogio ao descontinuo,” in *Enquanto bebo a água, a água me bebe* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte do Rio, 2016), 15–17. Exhibition catalog.



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Lucia laguna: between keeping and letting go

The center of the world is everywhere.

— milton santos

When speaking with Lucia Laguna, you quickly realize that a quote from Brazilian geographer Milton Santos (1926–2001) fits seamlessly with her artistic practice: “The world is what you see from where you are,” states Santos, arguing that our position in the world frames our worldview. In the same documentary in which this quote appears, a previous statement qualifies and complements his idea: “The center of the world is everywhere.”¹ From where I stand, Afro-Atlantic (or black-Atlantic) histories are histories permeated by violence: violence transmuted throughout the past five hundred years; violence from the past rearticulated in the present; violence I would like to avoid, to ignore, and to not see. However, from where I stand it is impossible not to recognize it.² A direct reference to this past/present violence appears, for instance, in the ongoing series *Lynch Fragments* (1963–in process), by Melvin Edwards, an African-American artist whose exhibition is part of the *Histórias afro-atlânticas* [Afro-Atlantic Histories] program at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP).³ Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*⁴ becomes red in Rosana Paulino’s homonymous artwork and exhibition *Atlântico vermelho* [Red Atlantic] (2016),⁵ a reference to the volume of blood implied in Black-Atlantic histories—both the original and the still unfolding ones. A volume that, to artist Michelle Mattiuzzi, comes as flood—I am thinking here of her performance *Experimentando o vermelho em dilúvio* [Experiencing the Red in Flood] (2016) that took place in the Rio de Janeiro city center area surrounding the monument Zumbi dos Palmares (1655–1695)—the warrior, military strategist and last king of the runaway slave settlement Quilombo dos Palmares—thereby establishing a direct dialog with it.⁶

However, Black-Atlantic history is not limited to the violence that permeates it. From the perspective of African diaspora art history, it is also a history of visions and of worlds—alternative to some and central to others. According to art historian Krista Thompson:

LUCIA LAGUNA

27. *Paisagem nº 104 (Benfica)* [Landscape no. 104 (Benfica)] (detail), 2017
IMAGE 70



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African diaspora art history is concerned with ... the ever-changing and historical ways that subjects in the diaspora see, see themselves, and are seen, and the conditions of visibility and invisibility in and beyond the art world ... that inform the work, interpretation, circulation, and practice of art in the African diaspora more broadly.

“African diaspora art history,” Thompson adds, “also reflects on the specific sociopolitical environments, philosophical and aesthetic ideas, and visual regimes that figurations of diaspora take place within and against, the contexts that have (and often continue to) cast black subjects as noncitizens, as nonhumans, as not representable, or as unworthy or incapable of art.” The historian also highlights how this art history “offers an analysis of art and visibility as discerned from the changing historical perspective of people in the African diaspora.”⁷

the grammar of the suburbs

Position and visibility—the visible landscape (or world) seen from where one stands—are among the conceptual issues that seem to concern Laguna. “The window,” explains the artist, “is the path to reach the landscape. From my window, I decided to talk about landscape, a landscape void of green, with very little vegetation.”⁸ In Laguna’s work, the landscape is the middle and working class suburbs of north Rio, a region that includes São Francisco Xavier, the neighborhood where the artist has been living for over four decades, as well as the surrounding districts of Mangueira, Rocha, Riachuelo, Benfica, Manguinhos, Caju, and Vila Isabel. From her studio on the third floor of her house, Laguna contemplates—as well as her mango tree (*mangueira*, in Portuguese), which is one of the first elements that meets the eye—o Morro da Mangueira (Mangueira Hill), farther afield [img. 14, 28]. With its singular architecture—an architecture of irregularities, of improvisations, of the unfinished and precarious, or, to borrow from Paulo Herkenhoff, of “stacked-up makeshift extensions”—the hill is part of the aesthetic vocabulary used by the artist.⁹

In addition to the aesthetic vocabulary outlined by the hill, Laguna also appropriates the language provided by a landscape overflowing with houses and roofs and the contrast between the multitudes of architectural styles. With the vocabulary and language of these spaces the artist organizes her aesthetics. Which possibilities open up when spaces that are considered outside the mainstream are mobilized not as ethnographic objects but instead as a source of vocabulary, as trigger for an aesthetic language? What sort of meaning can be established from a context that—to the untrained eye—is presented only as precarious and chaotic, as if it were free from relations of meaning? How is it possible to articulate a peripheral grammar—urban or nonurban—a grammar made of “fractures, shards, seals, erasures, material precariousness, of makeshift extensions of form,” and of things outside their “proper” place? These are some questions I consider relevant.¹⁰ Laguna’s painting does not offer definitive answers but cues that can help us explore them.

Lucia Laguna became a young artist at the age of 54. She began her practice after concluding her career as a Portuguese and literature teacher. She anchored her transition to painting in a diligent practice—Laguna would dedicate five or six hours daily to painting—and to the study of works that she viewed as part of her “artistic family.” She developed under the supervision of Charles Watson, a painter and professor at Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage in Rio de Janeiro.¹¹ Sean Scully, Richard Diebenkorn (1922–93), John Baldessari, Henri Matisse (1869–1954), Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964) and Paolo Uccello (1397–1475) are some of the names on a list placed in a visible location in her studio [img. 48].¹² In the studio there are also publications on these artists, which Laguna consults regularly in a process that, according to her, generate some appropriations. Therefore, in a double movement, the artist is simultaneously connected to a Eurocentric art history—with which she also became familiar through regular trips to museums and art centers in Europe—and to the aesthetic references of her surroundings. The result is a sort of abstract figuration (or perhaps figurative abstraction)—an abstraction often conjured by the excess of elements or fragments of figurative elements—that

articulates, in a nonrealist way, the grammar of her surroundings and of her “classic” repertoire. Without responding to any impulse of representation, Laguna’s painting is paradoxically a mirror of (its) place of production, a condition reinforced by material features and procedures: the use of raw paint, a broad brush as opposed to a fine brush, and a process that incorporates residues and dripping paint, for instance. However, even though bent over itself, its time and its making, Laguna’s painting also suggests additional possibilities of contemplation. With a practice that introduces images that are sometimes recognizable and other times not, Laguna brings to the picture plane an economy of fragments, stacks, and accumulations. “The paintings have these things that evoke the place where I live,” comments the artist.¹³ This is the language present, for instance, in the series *Entre a Linha Vermelha e a Linha Amarela* [Between the Red Line and the Yellow Line], a title that refers to the space (the interim) between two highways that demarcate the *carioca* suburban districts, including Laguna’s own neighborhood [img. 23].

The precarious architecture that generates an aesthetic vocabulary of “adversity” is in itself a form of organization imposed upon some social subjects, but it is also resignified by them.¹⁴ This architectural and aesthetic configuration serves as “witness and record [of] the violent discontinuities of history introduced by the Middle Passage.”¹⁵ It is an aesthetic economy appropriated by artists based in urban peripheries such as Paulo Nazareth and Moisés Patrício. In Nazareth’s series *Cadernos de África* [African Notebooks], the artist produces or appropriates objects such as cardboard, packaging labels, stones, bottles, old advertising posters, plastic bags, items of clothing, and used jute bags. In *Sem título* (*Eu não vou te roubar*) [Untitled (I’m Not Going to Rob You)], from 2012, which is part of this series, Nazareth is photographed with a group of men, neighbors and friends, in front of his house in the residential complex of Palmital, in Santa Luzia, on the outskirts of Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais), moments before they started to work on a community self-building project.¹⁶ The artwork elicits multiple reflections, but the most relevant aspect for this discussion is how Nazareth places the precarious within a specific frame.

The interesting point here is how the artwork opens possibilities for a theory of the *puxadinho* [makeshift extension of a house] and how this extension devises a specific relationship with the space as well as it defines forms of sociability and enables a particular way of being in the world. With his singular aesthetics, Nazareth offers a worldview that claims one's space as central: "For me, the center is where I am, the center is my neighborhood, it is Palmital (Santa Luzia). Things that happen around here are central," he declares.¹⁷ In turn, Patrício's series of monotypes from the project Movimento Artístico de Ocupação Urbana (M.A.O.U.) [Urban Occupation Artistic Movement] are comprised of drawings that record the architecture of abandoned or condemned buildings in the city of Santo André, São Paulo. The series of twenty-five artworks reveal an aesthetic that articulates symbols of decay and destruction and of transition and permanence. These features are also found in his most recent series *Aceita?* [Do You Accept It?] (2013–in process). The common point between these two artists and Laguna is how they intertwine formal research with issues relevant to their social surroundings, how formal elements reveal an articulation that is not explicit nor thematic.¹⁸

landscape: the garden—life's archaeological site

For Laguna, landscape is not limited to the suburbs of north Rio. It also encompasses her garden, which she has put together by combining plants and objects accumulated over forty years: home decor items, such as statuettes and broken vases; discarded objects from her ceramics collection; keys, padlocks, and railings found in the scrapyard the artist regularly visits. "The garden is a deposit of things that pass through my hands," explains Laguna.¹⁹ As a space to gather things that are discarded but still important, the garden represents, according to the artist, a sort of archaeological site of her life, where objects and plants are interwoven.²⁰ In this sense, her private garden provides an aesthetic of excess, an economy of accumulation and precariousness. Within the context of the city of Rio, the expression *archaeological site* evokes the Cais do Valongo [Valongo Wharf], an important site for the memory of slavery. An estimated one million African captives disembarked at the wharf, which was a complex made of warehouses designed

MOISÉS PATRÍCIO

São Paulo, Brazil, 1984 — lives in São Paulo, Brazil

29. *Tempo* [Time], 2012

Monotype on paper, 100×70 cm

Courtesy of the artist, São Paulo, Brazil

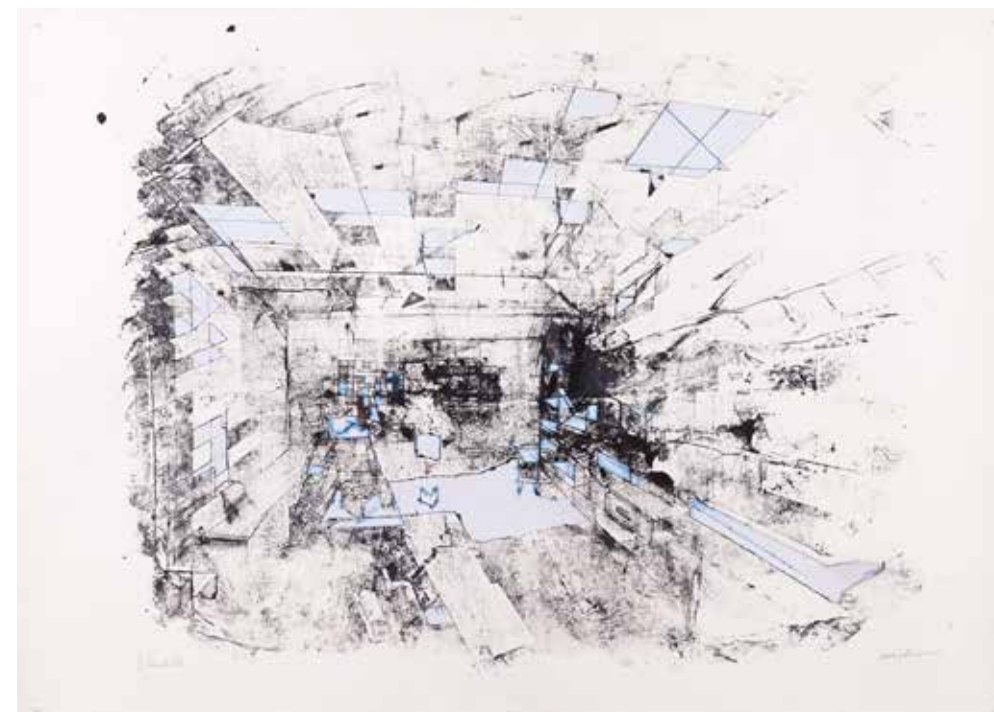
SONIA GOMES

Caetanópolis, Minas Gerais, Brazil, 1948 — lives in São Paulo, Brazil

30. *Tantas estórias* [So Many Stories], 2015

Threads, fabrics and ropes, 300×350 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, Brazil; Brussels, Belgium; and New York, United States



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for the display and sale of newly arrived slaves, as well as the Lazareto da Gamboa—a shelter for those who fell ill—and the Pretos Novos [New Blacks] Cemetery, where those who died on the voyage or upon arrival were buried.²¹ To think about Laguna's private garden (or her description of it) in relation to Valongo and Morro da Mangueira opens up a field of possible symbolic links that expand, enrich, and deepen the understanding of landscape, precariousness, accumulation, and excess as vocabulary and language. The works *Jardim nº 20* [Garden no. 20] (2014) [img. 43] and *Jardim nº 29* [Garden no. 29] (2015) [img. 57] help us think about these links and their possible meanings. For instance, we can consider how these images, despite not being representational, inevitably trigger memories and ideas of place, even if imaginary. A few artists have recently chosen the Valongo as a platform for articulating their discourses. It was in this region, more specifically in the area around the Instituto de Pesquisa e Memória Pretos Novos [Pretos Novos Institute of Research and Memory],²² that Janaina Barros and Wagner Viana performed *O cântico da paixão de Cláudia* [The Song of Cláudia's Passion] (2015). The reference to projects such as Barros and Viana's provides us with a broader understanding of the ecology conjured by contemporary artists and the links—direct or tangential, intentional or unintentional—that exist between their artistic projects.

For instance, in Sonia Gomes work, this aesthetics of accumulation, of stacking up, of entanglement was often described as "coisa de louco, coisa de preto" [mad people stuff, black man stuff]—this is how the artist says her objects were seen and referred to for a long period of her artistic career.²³ However, despite the gender disagreement—as Gomes work is actually "coisa de preta" [black woman stuff]—this definition, attached to the work as a negative predication, opens doors to a world of knowledge, to a "black hole."²⁴ In a different essay, I argue that in Gomes work the aesthetics of entanglement, that is,

[...] the process itself of stitching, suturing, embroidering, and binding reveals a century-long strategy to create and activate archives, to access and share memory: memory of previous lives

and uses imprinted on the fabrics, clothes and ropes, memory of African traditions inscribed in gestures, of collective knowledge preserved and faded, of unattended hopes and desires

such as in her *Tantas estórias* [So Many Stories] (2015) [img. 30].

I also highlight how Gomes uses this archive of memories to “warp ideas of abstraction and figuration, while blending concerns of structure and meaning, of matter and form.”²⁵

landscape: the studio and its objects

If at one point in her painting practice Laguna reached for the landscape through her window, at another, landscape was understood as a group of objects placed in her studio: finished and unfinished paintings, small studies, ladders and tape measures, cans of paint, tools, used masking tape stuck to the wall or piled up on the floor. However, Laguna continues to expand the concept of landscape, blurring the frontiers between exterior space and her interior, more intimate, universe. The outside and the inside, its objects and worlds, are merged. Priority is given to painting itself, to its place, time, and space. “Landscape is something in my head,” the artist asserts.²⁶ Therefore, landscape, regardless of the way the artist engages with it at a given point, is a motto for painting; it is part of her vocabulary and her language. In this process, Laguna employs a series of “maneuvers” that “transfigure things” that she likes: the elements of the painting, its development and outcomes. Whatever she doesn’t like is covered over. “The painting has layers,” explains Laguna, referring to her procedures of making and remaking, to her (continuously) ongoing processes. The layers—which are also the result of transfiguring things, of painting and covering—reveal different moments (or lives) in the picture. In a recent phase, Laguna began to paint in collaboration with assistants, a process that relies on conversations, generous exchanges, mistakes, and new beginnings. Her collaborators have the freedom to start the process from any point in the discourse (the landscape is the discourse), but it is Laguna who defines the final face of the painting, which can be revisited at a later stage. The

LUCIA LAGUNA
32. *Jardim nº 38 (Bonsucesso)* [Garden no. 38 (Bonsucesso)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 110 x 100 cm
Collection of Telma Andrade Nogueira, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

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marks of masking tape, so recurrent in the artist’s work—marks that are left by the same tape we see accumulated on the walls or piled up on the floor of her studio—allow us to see the painting’s past lives, at the same time suggesting the architectural element that permeates the work. Used to preserve sections of layers, the tape provides Laguna with “tranquility in relation to a full, messy space.”²⁷

In Laguna’s oeuvre, this economy of “full [and] messy space” seems to evoke the idea of time: a time from over there, from the surrounding landscape; a time from over here, the interior of her studio; and the intermediate time of her private garden, a time in the middle, a time in between. But it also evokes the slow time of the painting process combined with the artist’s urgency, as she haste to know, to make, to experiment, and to create. “Time is all I have,” Laguna declares in one of her interviews.²⁸ In *Jardim nº 38 (Bonsucesso)* [Garden no. 38 (Bonsucesso)] (2017) [img. 32], a darker palette with denser tones and a mass of unrecognizable objects incorporated into blurry areas seems to preserve what we cannot see (memory as remembering or forgetting?). Given its apparent self-focus, it may appear that Laguna’s painting is not concerned with “the existence of any memory from a place outside the painting itself.” However, from a different perspective, her accumulated, stacked up, and entangled objects implicitly hold memories of spaces, which carry other implied times: times that are revealed in memory.²⁹ The layers of the painting and in the painting, its vocabulary, language, and grammar, make memory: a memory materialized between keeping and letting go.

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Transalated from Portuguese by Adriana Francisca.

¹ Silvio Tendler, director, *Encontro com Milton Santos: o mundo global visto do lado de cá*, 90 minutes, 2016. ² While writing this piece, I am trying to digest the fact that a few weeks ago my fifteen-year-old nephew João Gabriel was confronted by armed police at home. It was a normal afternoon during school vacation. He was in the kitchen doing the dishes after lunch—one of his daily chores—when he was distracted by a noise in the living room. On the way to the living room, still in the hall between the two rooms, a police officer approached him, shouting, “Hands on your head!” What was the crime? Excited by the kites in the sky, he had climbed up onto the roof of his house to try and grab one of the falling kites (known as *mandado* in São Paulo). The experience immediately brought to mind the line *Runnin’ from the man/runnin’ from the badge...* in Pharrell Williams’s track *Runnin’* and the artworks *Raise Up* (2013), by Hank Willis Thomas, as well as *Mãe Preta: a fúria de Yansã* [Black Mother: The Fury of Yansã] (2014), by Sidney Amaral (1973–2017). ³ However, it is important (very important) not to limit—due to apprehension, excessive decency, or even the lack of courage to look in the mirror—our perception of this violence simply to the way it is presented in the United States. (I am considering here the way in which this topic is often referred to as “American talk.”) This same violence—which was inaugurated in the Black Atlantic, a cornerstone in the formation of the New World, and which permeates the Americas from north to south—it is also right here, among us, reproduced in (super-) abundance in the daily experience of black Brazilians. It is also reproduced by our silence, by our turning a blind eye to its existence and effects. ⁴ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). ⁵ *Atlântico vermelho* [Red Atlantic] is the title of an essay and two different artworks. It was also the title of two solo shows by Rosana Paulino, both in 2016: *Atlântico vermelho: padrão dos descobrimentos* [Red Atlantic: Patterns of Discoveries] (EGEAC, Lisbon) and *Atlântico vermelho* [Red Atlantic] (Galeria Superfície, São Paulo). ⁶ Michelle Mattiuzzi’s film *Experimentando o vermelho em dilúvio* [Experiencing the Red in Flood] was part of MASP’s *Afro-Atlantic Histories* program, which also featured the performances *Sobre o papel branco (black process)* [On White Paper (Black Process)], also by Mattiuzzi; *Axexê de A Negra ou o descanso das mulheres que mereciam serem amadas* [The Black Woman’s Axexê or the Resting of Women Who Deserved to be Loved], by Renata Felinto; and *Como erguer baronatos* [How to Erect Lordships], by Priscila Rezende. These performances help us think about how feminist strategies are expressed in and through art. ⁷ Krista Thompson, “A Sidelong Glance: The Practice of African Diaspora Art History in the United States,” *Art Journal* no. 70.3 (Fall 2011), 10. ⁸ Lucia Laguna, in conversation with the author, August 2, 2018. ⁹ Paulo Herkenhoff, “A pintura: o que se pensa em Lucia Laguna,” in *Prêmio SESI CNI Marcantonio Vilaça: mostra itinerante: 2006-2008* (Brasília: SESI. Departamento Nacional, 2009), 5. ¹⁰ Herkenhoff, 6. ¹¹ Instead of overlooking the fact that Laguna had a full career as a Portuguese and literature teacher, I would like to highlight this fact as the condition that allowed her to be the assiduous student of painting that she was in her early years. As an educator of young people, she developed skills that she would not have developed otherwise. She was fully aware of the level of dedication and hard work that her process would require. ¹² Herkenhoff, 1. ¹³ Laguna, in conversation with the author, August 2, 2018. ¹⁴ I borrow the expression “aesthetics of adversity,” from Herkenhoff in “A pintura.” ¹⁵ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 73. ¹⁶ Self-building projects often take place in communities at the edge of town and involve collective work in simple construction projects. This work

is sometimes called *bater laje* [literally, “beat slabs”], an expression used by Paulo Nazareth to describe his artwork. **17** This is part of a brief talk given by artist Paulo Nazareth at the opening of his exhibition *Che Cherera*, at Mendes Wood DM, in São Paulo, September 2014. **18** In a note for another essay, I briefly list some examples of artists that seem to use the same hybrid formal strategy. For instance, Peter de Brito intertwines reflections on the tradition of the self-portrait and gender investigations (*Autorretrato* [Self-Portrait], 2005); in a series of works, Moisés Patrício uses photography to address issues related to painting, using, at the same time, autobiographical traces to voice elements of his spiritual and social realm (*Aceita?* [Do You Accept It?], 2013–15); Juliana dos Santos uses her body to investigate issues related to painting while activating notions of racial identity (*Tempestade* [Storm], 2013). This type of complex investigation has rarely been approached in discussions and reflections on the contemporary production of black artists in Brazil. A closer look into this point can significantly broaden our understanding of history of art from the viewpoint of the production of artists from the African diaspora. It can also enlighten our understanding of how the latter informs, and is informed by, the Art History as we know it. See Fabiana Lopes, “Território silenciado, Território minado: contra-narrativas na produção de artistas afrodesscendentes,” in *Territórios: artistas afrodesscendentes no acervo da Pinacoteca* (São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado, 2016). **19** Laguna, in conversation with the author, August 2, 2018. **20** It is possible to establish a tangential dialog between aspects of Laguna’s garden—or the artist’s description of it—and the project titled *Mobília Tombada* [Listed Furniture] in which artist Rodrigo Bueno grew plants using a number of old furniture pieces that were appropriated and resignified by him. Bueno’s objects can be understood in dialog with Laguna’s private garden, particularly when seen in the context of Bueno’s studio-warehouse, which he calls Mata Adentro [The Woods Within], where chairs, sofas, and other pieces of furniture are combined with (and often mistaken for) different types of vegetation. **21** An excerpt from the dossier proposing its selection as a World Heritage Site is reproduced below: “The Valongo Wharf Archaeological Site, located in the port region of the city center of Rio de Janeiro, contains the archeological remains of an old stone wharf whose construction began in 1811 at the site that in 1774 became a place to receive the enslaved Africans that entered Brazil via Rio de Janeiro. The wharf was banked in 1843 during a building project dedicated to establishing a new place of disembarking, prepared to receive the Neapolitan Princess Tereza Cristina of Bourbon, the wife of Emperor Dom Pedro II. Between 1904 and 1910, a large embankment designed for the construction of a new city port covered the Empress Wharf, expanding the area by 344 meters. According to current official information, the site comprises the area of the square Praça Jornal do Comércio, and its borders are Avenida Barão de Tefé, Rua Sacadura Cabral, and Hospital dos Servidores do Estado (at the address, 78 da Rua Sacadura Cabral). In its original configuration, the area where the wharf was built was a small bay at the edge of the narrow valley between the hills of Valongo and Livramento, also known as Valonguinho, which was part of a larger bay, protected by the hills of Livramento and Saúde, known as Valongo Beach. In this geographically protected environment, between 1774 and 1831, a slave market was installed, including warehouses and depots, as well as the Pretos Novos Cemetery—which received the bodies of those who expired in the harsh conditions of the transatlantic journey—and Lazareto da Gamboa, a place used for quarantining recently arrived slaves who fell ill. This was the largest slave trade complex in the Americas.” **22** According to the artists’ description, *O cântico da paixão de Cláudia* was an “act carried out in honor of Cláudia Silva Ferreira, a black woman who was shot

by the police on March 16, 2014. She was rescued and placed in the trunk of a police car, but on the way to hospital she fell out of the trunk and was dragged for nearly 350 meters through the streets near the Congonha Hill in Madureira, Rio de Janeiro.” The act was a march in response to the “silence of the press and civil society.” (*O cântico da paixão de Cláudia*, text with the description of the act provided by the artists Janaina Barros and Wagner Viana.) **23** *O chamado*, interview with Sonia Gomes, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vV3Mj5x0pvo>, accessed on August 21, 2018. In a recent statement, the artist Lidia Lisboa makes a similar claim about her production. Her textile works that sow complex investigations into her formal processes (for example, the place of the black female subject) were also described for some time as “those kind of things.” Both statements from Gomes and Lisboa help us consider the current status of contemporary art criticism and historiography in Brazil and the existing gaps in terms of addressing productions whose features do not correspond to a model considered traditional. We can also think of how the lack of knowledge and familiarity with these artworks and practices among Brazilian art historians and critics creates a gap that curbs a fairer understanding and an expanded view of contemporary art production in Brazil. **24** There are many intellectuals committed to exploring and documenting “black things,” or the “black hole,” and the language and cultural manifestations generated in the Brazilian geopolitical and economic context. This commitment is crucial, as it produces specific discourses. And, according to scholar Hortense Spillers, discourses are important “intellectual technologies.” We should not be “blind to a material fact of discursive production,” given that “discourses do not spontaneously appear, but as writing, as intellectual technology, they will follow the path and the tide of generation.” For Spillers, the investigator must “partially ‘create’ the differentiations against the stubbornness of tradition.” Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003). **25** Fabiana Lopes, “Sonia Gomes,” in *New Shamans/Novos Xamãs: Brazilian Artists from the Rubell Family Collection*, exhibition catalogue (Miami: Rubell Family Collection, 2016), 20. **26** Laguna, in conversation with the author, August 2, 2018. **27** Herkenhoff, 4. **28** Raphaela Leite, director, *Lucia Laguna*, 2 minutes, 21 seconds, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wQFHDOAYmU&t=17s>, accessed on August 26, 2018. **29** Herkenhoff, 5.



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Lucia laguna (the lagoon's egg)

bernardo mosqueira

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Holding some booklets under her arm from a collection featuring the canon of great Western painting,¹ a young teacher arranges a line of preadolescent pupils in front of the school's small theater stage. One by one, she asks them to climb up the steps, to face the mirror placed at the back of the stage, and to contort their faces by mimicking animals and monsters or to make expressions of love, fear, and fright. Thirty minutes later, the students were to hand out brief texts about their experiences.

In 1971, a new law set the national education guidelines, restructuring the subject of Portuguese into a new discipline called "Communication and Expression." That inspired teacher, who was born in 1941 in Campos dos Goytacazes, Rio de Janeiro, welcomed the change as real progress. The school where she worked—in the northern region of Rio—was the perfect environment to put her experimental teaching ideas into practice. Using elements found in the classroom, the garden, and the school's surroundings, the educator introduced visual and tactile experiences to her students. She then asked them to write brief paragraphs or to create lists of adjectives based on what they saw and felt. According to the teacher, the nouns were already there (bowl, door, stone, bird, landscape, painting), but it was important that each student freely develop their own unique way of describing and representing them.

At the time, Lucia Laguna—the young teacher—could not have imagined that approximately twenty-five years later, after her retirement from almost three decades of teaching in underprivileged schools on the outskirts of Rio, she would become one of the most important painters active in Brazil. Her faith in the creative power of experimentation, her interest in language and in the development of original forms of expression and representation, her interaction with the neighborhoods in north Rio, and the pleasure she derived from working with challenging younger generations—all of which were fundamental to her work as a teacher—also played a crucial role later, in her production as an artist.

The level of freedom found at the Nossa Senhora Auxiliadora School was a defining experience, and after this, in the early

LUCIA LAGUNA

33. *Paisagem nº 99 (Ramos)* [Landscape no. 99 (Ramos)] (detail), 2017
IMAGE 65

1970s, Laguna decided to teach exclusively at municipal state-run schools in the northern and western regions of Rio. In the 1980s—disappointingly for Laguna—the less structured discipline of “Communication and Expression” was abolished and Portuguese as a required subject resumed. However, over time, the violence that pervaded these regions began to have a gradual impact on the artist’s willingness to work as a teacher.

Between 1981 and 1986, Laguna leisurely attended free courses (including ceramics, basketry, serigraphy, and jewelry) at the Centro de Artes Calouste Gulbenkian, in downtown Rio. After her husband, Severiano Sancho Laguna—a philosophy teacher—lost his consultancy job at FEBEM,² Laguna brought home the materials from her carpentry classes. Together, they learned how to work with wood. The first toys they made for their daughter Laura quickly attracted the interest of teachers in daycares, kindergartens, preschools, and special education settings for children with motor difficulties. Shortly after, on the top floor of their family home in the neighborhood of São Francisco Xavier, the couple set up Made in Casa³ [Made at Home], a small factory producing educational toys.

Feeling increasingly threatened by the violence she was witnessing first hand in schools—in one instance Laguna watched armed drug traffickers demand students’ school meals from the top of the school’s wall—she retired in 1995, after which she began taking painting lessons at the Escola de Artes Visuais (EAV), at Parque Lage. She took lessons that combined theory and practice with artist-teachers such as Luiz Ernesto, João Magalhães, and Katie van Scherpenberg. The artist was soon attracted to painting, the history of art, and the lives of the artists she was studying. Scottish lecturer Charles Watson was a major influence. Laguna attended his courses at EAV, frequented his studio, and took international trips organized by Watson through his project Dynamic Encounters, which consisted of taking groups of students and lecturers to visit biennials, museums, and studios, mainly in Europe. Laguna took tours with Agnaldo Farias, Anna Bella Geiger, Cadu, Carlos Zílio, Denise Gadelha, Fernando Cocchiarale, Frederico

Carvalho, Jailton Moreira, Luiz Alberto Oliveira, Milton Machado, Moacir dos Anjos, Reynaldo Roels Jr., and Ricardo Basbaum, among others. With them, she visited art institutions in Amsterdam, Barcelona, Madrid, and London; several editions of the Venice Biennale and the Documenta in Kassel, Germany; as well as artist studios, such as those of Bill Woodrow, Cornelia Parker, Mark Francis, Sean Scully, and Tony Cragg.

Before the courses at EAV with Watson, the only contact that Laguna had with the Art History was through the applied art courses she took at Centro de Artes Calouste Gulbenkian and the 1967 series of booklets on famous painters that she used in the classroom at the start of the 1970s. Laguna’s deep and intense relationship with contemporary art was only established at EAV between the late 1990s and the early 2000s that, for her, was both a terrifying and a fascinating process. Her desire to create her own language and poetics and to feel close to contemporary art and its international production as a discipline was deep-seated. In her courses and studio visits, the artist understood that her work should have consistency, coherence, criteria, strategy, and solidity—“nothing should be gratuitous,” she declared. Furthermore, while her colleagues—the artists of her “generation”—were twenty to thirty years old, Laguna was in her mid-fifties and therefore somewhat in a hurry. Her relationship with time and the abundance of images and information became two of the most important aspects of the work she developed in the following decades.

Even while at the start of her journey as a painter Laguna flirted with abstraction, the artist quickly realized the importance of using figuration to imprint her own worldview into her pictorial production. In 1995 and 1996, her initial years as a student painter, Laguna produced untitled works [imgs. 34, 35] in which we can see her first formal composition exercises—such as straight lines interspersed by masks and references to objects found in her studio—before she found her own process and language. The more she studied, the more she felt that almost everything had already been done and that she needed to find something



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that made sense to be painted. So Laguna turned to her surroundings. She began to look at the landscape from her studio window [imgs. 14, 49] and noticed the contrasts in the architecture, the back walls, the small houses on Morro da Mangueira [Mangueira Hill], the pier, people going up and down the favela, the trees in her garden, the landscape framed by the window, broken sidewalks, dumpsters, graffitied walls, and passing trains. So she opted to illustrate, to represent only what she could see around her, within the reach of hand and eye, from the inside of her house, which was also her workspace. Similar to her experiences with school children in the 1970s—when she asked them to write about elements inside the classroom, in the yard, and in their surroundings—she was now the one collating references from inside her studio, her garden, her neighborhood, her landscape. A type of painting truly *made at home*.

According to Laguna, one of her earliest experiences as Charles Watson's student was the major realization that she "didn't know how to draw, only to scribble." Instead of trying to improve her drawing technique, this led her to investigate, in a hands-on way, what painting could be without drawing: a pictorial notion that stems from constant scribbling. While the word *desenho* [drawing] originates etymologically from the Latin *designare*—which means providing a symbol to something absent or exterior—the word *rabisco* [scribble] refers to the creation of small *rabos* [tails]. Machado de Assis (1839–1908), in his essay "Um cão de lata ao rabo,"⁴ published in the magazine *O Cruzeiro* in Rio de Janeiro in 1878, writes: "What is a tail? An extension and an allurement. This appendix, which is flesh, is also a flash." This is Laguna's scribbling: the creation of image extensions to objects of intense allurement, forms that carry in them the power to expose flesh or flashes, light expressions with no distinguishable forms, epiphanies of color. Machado de Assis continued the short story by saying: "The dog was devouring. What was the dog devouring? Space. Space is food [...]. God invented a banquet for the soul. And called it space." The main procedure in Laguna's work is precisely this constant devouring of existence: a relationship in which the world that surrounds her is gathered and digested to generate a

LUCIA LAGUNA
34. Untitled, 1995
Acrylic, charcoal, oil and graphite on canvas, 121 x 121 cm
Courtesy of the artist, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

35. Untitled, 1996
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 188 cm
Courtesy of the artist, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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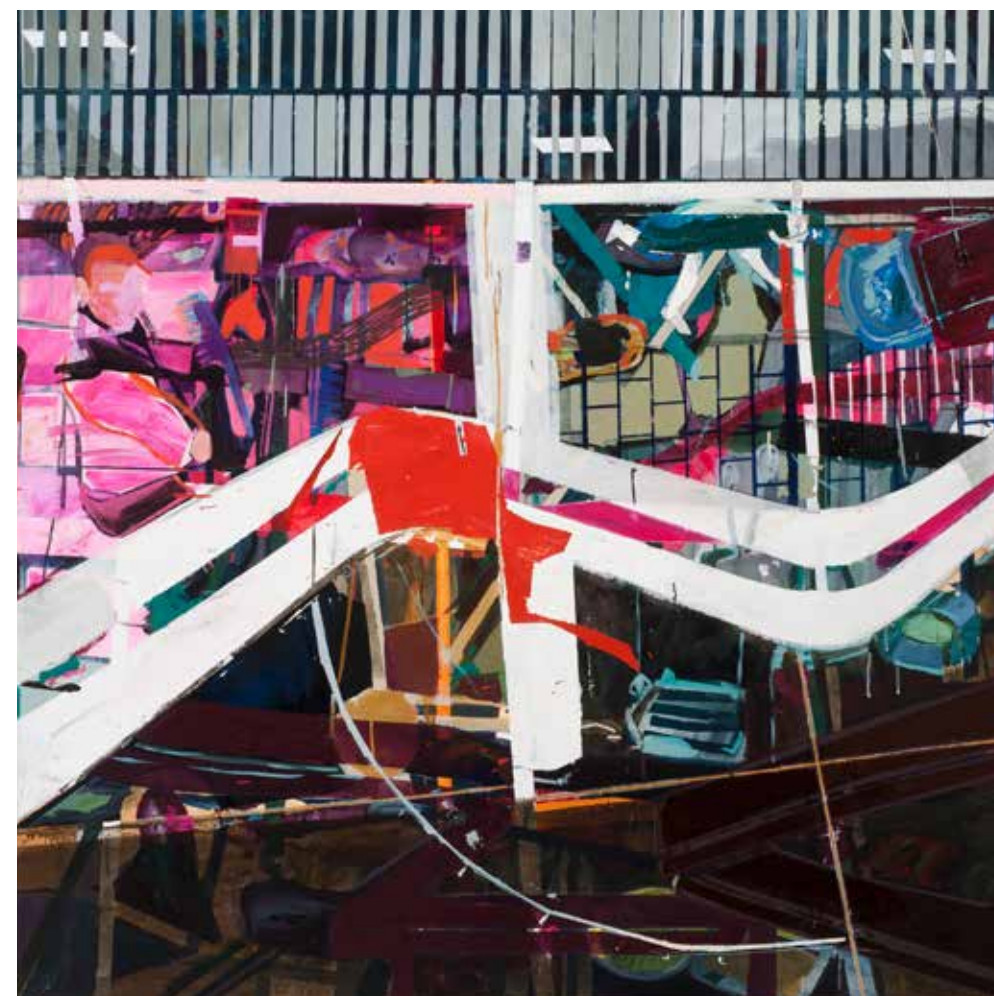
new universe in images. This became very evident when, in 2012 and 2013, and later, in 2016 and 2017, Laguna reflected in her paintings—as an exception—not only her place of work but also the places where the artworks were exhibited: the Bienal de São Paulo [img. 36] and the Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), respectively. In paintings specifically made for these occasions, we can see architectural elements of the Pavilhão Ciccillo Matarazzo, Praça Mauá, and the Rio-Niterói Bridge.

Laguna does not create her paintings by respecting the traces of drawing; her paintings are fueled by the risks of an open process. On the prepared canvas, she paints a background that often evokes a work from a consecrated artist. This choice, in her early career when she was finding herself as a painter, was an exercise to become more familiar with painting techniques, exploring the routes taken by painters whom she admired.

On the base, Laguna paints something that she sees around her (a bowl, a door, a stone, a bird, a landscape, a painting). From the relationship established by this encounter, she adds a second image, then a third one, carrying on until the previous images are—partially or fully—covered by new elements or monochromatic areas. For example, in *Paisagem nº 105 (Madureira)* [Landscape no. 105 (Madureira)] (2017), the process began with leaves on a white background [imgs. 37–42]. She soon added insects and later a detail of a lamppost, a strip of blue, a fish, a group of frogs, a red spot, a toad, a snake's head, a golden area, a striped caterpillar, some chicken feet, a slice of lime, a green geometrical area, a formless lilac area, a kimono taken from a book on Japanese art, a detail in the shape of a net, a white rectangle with dripping paint, and a blue rectangle made with precise brushstrokes, until the painting was finally ready [img. 71].

The artist always works on multiple paintings simultaneously and often turns them around during the process: the bottom becomes the side or the top, and at any given point they can return to their original position. This provides many of her works, such as *Paisagem nº 103 (Vila Isabel)* [Landscape no. 103 (Vila Isabel)] (2017) [img. 69],

LUCIA LAGUNA
36. *Paisagem nº 58* [Landscape no. 58], 2012
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 160 x 160 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil





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LUCIA LAGUNA
37–42. Record of the process of the work *Paisagem nº 105 (Madureira)*
[Landscape no. 105 (Madureira)], 2017
IMAGE 71

with the quality of vertigo. It was from this method that Laguna developed a distinctive way of painting, which is both complex and inspired, creating works whose origins are impossible to recreate and whose processes are impossible to retrace.

With a somewhat unique career and taking the notion of painting very seriously, Laguna managed to construct a stateless pictorial process: an unsettling way of painting that undoes fixed forms. By seeing this process as conducive to creation, the artist creatively flirts with chaos. Laguna's painting is a heuristic process, that is, it does not stem from an imagined or desired result, it is not based on rationality, and it does not wish to find the ultimate optimal "solution" for the work. It is a process that accepts chance and the challenges presented by painting. It is based on the faith that by being creatively adrift one can produce unpredictable and interesting discoveries. It is also a process of collage, of palimpsests, a long exercise of composition and decomposition. The artist says that she feels that painting itself is her guiding process, demanding to be transformed by the introduction of images and marks until it finds a state that, according to the artist, is both harmony and aporia: an insoluble and insurmountable balance, an energetic moment that echoes the whole constructive process of the work, taking it to a state of peace.

In contemporary art it is not uncommon for concepts to be both anterior and superior to the work itself. Painting forms are frequently submitted to the power of words. However, this is not the case with Lucia Laguna. It was only after some time in her career that she was able to conceptually elaborate her work, defining parameters, methods, and procedures. Her works are only organized and named—under the titles *Ateliê* [Studio], *Jardim* [Garden], or *Paisagem* [Landscape]—after the process of elaboration is fully complete.

In 2004, a time when the artist felt she needed to intensify her production, Laguna began to produce paintings through collaborations with assistant painters.⁵ They have been fundamental in accelerating her work and have become, at the same time, her

students and collaborators, contributing with their singularities as painters. By sharing the risks of the process, Laguna renounces part of the control in the making of her works, allowing her team to start the canvases, sketching their suggested backgrounds so she can introduce new images or rotate their position. These unsettling collaborations are understood by the artist as "ways of inserting accidents and challenges to be solved." Her studio has become a sort of school, and the collaboration of many hands also adds different traces, gestures, calligraphies, and styles to the paintings. The "obstacles" created by her assistants place the artist at new crossroads, prompting her to explore new routes, to improvise, to find ways of organizing relationships between the images, and to imagine formal outcomes that were previously unthinkable.

The images selected can be based on photographs taken inside the studio, in her garden, or through the window. Another important source are the hundreds of art catalogues and books found everywhere in the studio, on shelves, corners, and stools around the paintings. And let's not forget that Laguna began her prolific production at the same time she began to feel fascinated by the abundance of information and references from the history of art. We can see that her work is conjured as a sort of elaboration of new lessons learnt, amalgamating the world that surrounds her daily domestic life with art treasures from all over the world. If in her life prior to painting there was distance or a frontier between her daily existence and art, now Laguna has found a way of creating, multiplying, and shortening links. By relating to the appealing objects around her and in books, the artist creates paintings that are the result of a process of thinking through images, connecting the context of Rio's northern region to the history of art. Laguna's painting—which emerged as a way of allowing the flow of her desire to paint, materializing her investigation on the history of art, and marking her presence in this history—ultimately became the artist's way of living, her way of putting freedom and reflection into practice.

An important element of Laguna's work is the use of masking. Placing adhesive tape between layers of paint, which is then removed,

she has developed a technique that gives the painting a geometric feel, in contrast to its explicitly gestural content—a process that does not require a brush, that folds time, and that opens gaps to prior moments in the painting, revealing a painting that has a memory of itself. The presence of these gaps, the recurring glaze, the dripping paint, and the emergence of visibly fragmented images are some of the elements that signal to the viewer the depth of the painting, through the overlapping of multiple layers, as we can see in *Jardim nº 20* [Garden no. 20] (2014) [img. 43] and *Paisagem nº 86* [Landscape no. 86] (2016) [img. 44]. In Laguna's works, the figures mostly appear interwoven, forming a membrane through which we see other fragments of the image, or are covered by monochromatic areas. This membrane corresponds to a window, which—to the artist—is the insurmountable illusion of painting, the element that is both limitation and opening. And this membrane is also a shell.

The relationship between the artist and surrounding neighborhoods is atypical among the most visible Brazilian artists. Which Brazilian artists have gained national and international recognition painting from the suburbs? How many of them have selected their own region as main object of study? It is certainly not Laguna's intention to act as the Grande Méier region's diplomatic representative among the art elite. Painting her subjects is something that comes naturally to her: she simply wants to show paintings that take us to Rocha, Lins, Serra dos Negros Forros, paintings from the point of view of an artist from the São Francisco Xavier neighborhood. Even though Laguna is, above all, interested in painting—and her relationship with the elements is linked to a plastic, formal allure—the choice of representing Rio's outskirts is necessarily political. More than being present as content or motif, the intuitive and improvised construction process in Laguna's work echoes the urban development of the city's outskirts and favelas. Heterogeneous growth, abrupt changes, and radical dynamism are all features of both the urbanization of the edges of town and of her painting process. These are processes that accumulate marks and traces from other stages of construction that generate dense, eccentric, and babel-like structures.

LUCIA LAGUNA
43. *Jardim nº 20* [Garden no. 20], 2014
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 160 x 160 cm
Private collection, Antônio Prado, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil





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Laguna's paintings, even when they have a softer color palette, do not offer tranquility but rather agitate our gaze, stimulating curiosity and imagination. They do not allow us to assume we have seen (let alone understood) everything that is there. Laguna creates paintings that are image systems, outcomes of games of crisis, games of criticism, tense processes of disturbance, mutation, hybridization, figuration, disfiguration, reconfiguration, replacement of something visible by something else; paintings that are the product of a free process, without obsessions, without known destinations; paintings that boast the fact that they know more than us, delicious live eel soup in bowls full of memory.

One of the main procedures in Laguna's painting is the sacrifice of images. One object is destined to its careful and detailed representation, and then the painting demands that we are deprived of seeing it by covering it with new layers of paint. The appearance of an element that we can no longer see generates a wave of transformation on the canvas. In a fashion similar to religious sacrifices, this intentional death does not delete the previous image but generates a new wave of transformation in the entire painting area. Being invisible does not mean that these elements are better or worse in quality—it is simply something necessary to the process. Laguna's works are formed by sequences of births and sacrifices until at some point—like the angel allegedly said to Abraham when he was about to sacrifice his son Isaac—a voice whispers: "Lucia, don't touch the painting!."

In Judeo-Christian mythology, there is no alliance with God without sacrifice. Noah and his ark represent another instance when God sealed a pact with a human being through immolation. According to the story, Noah, following God's instruction, was able to rebuild the world from a desert island, which was in fact Mount Ararat in Turkey, surrounded entirely by floodwater. In the 1950s, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) wrote "Causes and Reasons of Desert Islands" which would not be published until 1989. The essay can help us establish a link between Laguna's work and a desert island.

LUCIA LAGUNA
44. *Paisagem nº 86* [Landscape no. 86], 2016
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 170 cm
Collection of Museu de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

First, the desert island is a place whose contents, to us, are unknown. There is distance and discontinuity between continent and island (similar to many layers of paint) that obstruct access. Secondly, the desert island, as in the example of Noah, is a place that holds the possibility of recreating the world. Deleuze suggests that there are beings on the desert island:

Human beings live there already, but uncommon humans, they are absolutely separate, absolute creators, in short, an idea of humanity, a prototype, a man who would almost be a god, a woman who would almost be a goddess, a great Amnesiac, a pure Artist, a consciousness of Earth and Ocean, an enormous hurricane, a beautiful witch, a statue from Easter Island. There you have a human being who precedes itself.⁶

The process through which Laguna continuously collects elements that surround us so they can be incorporated in her work is the behavior of someone who gathers things that are necessary to reestablish the world. An island where the history of art already existed and to where she takes her surroundings and the inside of her studio, Laguna’s work is the consciousness of the studio and of the suburbs. Impregnated, it is “the radiating egg that must be sufficient to reproduce everything.”⁷

Each egg-work is the result of a process of overlapping. Some openings and gaps—through the use of tape—are like cracks on the surface, allowing us to glimpse what is yet unknown. Previously, Laguna used to finalize many of her paintings using a spatula, calcifying the membrane between the inside of the painting and the viewer, with the prevalence of geometric lines and monochromatic areas, but today she tends to leave the surface more open by exposing in detail the hatched content, impregnated with mysteries that will never be fully revealed. The images that were sacrificed to invisibility are not nonexistent: they are still there, in their materiality, in the painting’s own memory. The paintings know what we don’t know. When we look at them, they stare back, admiring the renovation of our tissues and repudiating our prosaic rationality. Standing before these islands—seeds of promise of a

world dreamt in the light of the lagoon—we are taught that one must break some eggs to open the eyes.

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Transalated from Portuguese by Adriana Francisca.

¹ A popular series of booklets published by Editora Abril in 1967, called *Gênios da Pintura* [*Geniuses of Painting*]. The collection featured reproductions of Western painting. ² A former young-offenders prison in São Paulo, known today as Fundação Casa. [Editor’s note.] ³ The name of the business is a play on words around the idea of things manufactured abroad and imported to Brazil under the “Made in” label and the toys made at home. [Translator’s note.] ⁴ “Um cão de lata ao rabo” is a short story in three chapters written by Machado de Assis, published in the magazine *O Cruzeiro* on April 2, 1878. ⁵ Arthur Chaves, Claudio Oliveira, Claudio Tobinaga, Davi Baltar, Pollyanna Freire, Rafael Alonso, Sumara Rouff, Tatiana Chaloub, and Thiago Pereira were Laguna’s collaborators between 2004 and 2018. Currently the artist has a symbiotic creative relationship with two of her assistants: Davi Baltar and Claudio Tobinaga. After a period when Laguna was recovering from bone and cataract surgery, she had to move slightly away from the actual making of her works, becoming a sort of critical and creative consultant of the processes developed by the two collaborators. At this point, she developed this creative relationship with both which has led, for instance, to more detailed images and finer drawings. ⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974* (Los Angeles, New York: Semiotext[e], 2004), 11. ⁷ Deleuze, 13.



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lucia laguna: artemisia-geledé

At the end of a studio visit, standing by the gate, Lucia Laguna and I were talking about the diversity of plants that hedged the house. My failed attempt to name one of them was at once corrected by the artist:

— No, that's Artemisia.

Artemisia vulgaris is a plant species found in Europe, Asia, and Africa. In popular literature, the herb is reputed to have magical powers and is linked to witches and female strength. In Brazil, it is also known as *erva-de-são-joão* [St. John's plant] and is connected to the orisha Shango. In Greek mythology, Artemis (whose Roman equivalent is Diana) is also the warrior goddess of hunting.

From a different perspective, Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1656), a painter from the Baroque period of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, was one of the few female artists who was not completely excluded from the hegemonic narratives of art history. Gentileschi was the first woman to enter the Academy of Fine Arts of Florence and was a contemporary of artists such as Caravaggio (1571–1610). It is believed that after suffering sexual violence, she denounced her aggressor and subsequently suffered the consequences of speaking out. Today, Artemisia Gentileschi's presence and her so-called "empowerment" feature in gender studies texts, such as those of Griselda Pollock.¹

Lucia Laguna, a black artist from the poor suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, was welcomed into the art world at a mature age. Her production, nurtured by free art courses in Rio, provides, in certain ways, different modes of empowerment. By beginning her art career at the age of fifty-four, Laguna brings the power of a *Geledé*: the name given to elderly African women who gain mystic powers with age. (*Agbá* is the term used to name the most elderly.) According to Nago tradition, age brings to women the power to control the evil eye and the possibility of synthesizing female power that connects them to fertility. Geledé masks are some of the most remarkable artifacts found in ethnographic collections in major museums worldwide.

Maturity and empowerment are two elements that distinguish Lucia Laguna in recent Brazilian art. The transcendence of prejudices against age and ethnicity give the artist a prominent position. Evidently—as highlighted by feminist scholar Joice Berth—we need to be aware of “the great danger of the inversion and distortion of values” so the art world’s use of features that were previously linked to marginality does not become yet another “instrument of domination.”²

Laguna inhabits a street like the one Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) described as a “one-way street,”³ not because vehicles can move in only one direction—which is certainly not true of the artist’s discourse—but because viewers are faced with social facts that gain complexity through the observations presented in her paintings. Benjamin’s one-way street congregates multiple elements, such as antiques, costumes, jewelry, fire alarms, and travel memories. Laguna, analogously, uses every detail of her surroundings, or her street. However, she gives sense to things and situations that are much closer, from the branches of trees that surround her studio to the insects that visit it. Laguna’s street is like any other street in north Rio: packed with houses in eclectic styles and lampposts entangled by electric wires. Another major element is its proximity to a hill, adding a certain bucolic feel that is quickly offset by the concrete reality of the busy road.

The garden in Laguna’s studio offers us another layer of understanding and closeness to her paintings. Full of bits of stones, pipes, plants, tiles, this archeology of elements often becomes apparent in her paintings, such as in *Jardim nº 14* [Garden no. 14] (2013) [img. 46] and *Jardim nº 29* [Garden no. 29] (2015) [img. 57]. In *Paisagem nº 104 (Benfica)* [Landscape no. 104 (Benfica)] (2017) [img. 70] and *Paisagem nº 99 (Ramos)* [Landscape no. 99 (Ramos)] (2017) [img. 65], we see how gestures create a certain symbiosis between natural and built elements. So the drawings of flowers, stalks, and tree branches are closer to—or even mistaken for—modernist columns, windows, and doorframes. On top of these relations, more detailed elements can be intuitively perceived, such as blue and white ceramic shards. In the artist’s



recent work we can note a closer approach to detail, to the drawing, a task that Laguna does not carry out herself, delegating instead to her assistants.

Captured directly or via photographs, the game of collecting and deleting surrounding scenes is part of a continuous search for pictorial motifs, for impregnating images. Here, impregnation gains a new sense with Laguna's exploration of empty spaces, the side of a pipe, the tip of a branch, like we see in *Jardim nº 33* [Garden no. 33] (2016) [img. 60]. In this composition, Laguna avoids the theatrical and aura-like centrality of the most obvious scenes, of landscapes, still lifes, or seascapes, a classic choice in painting. Instead, she is interested in them as quotations, incorporating images from magazines, newspaper clippings, or references to works by other artists.

Laguna gives sense to a certain disorder, which is translated into her interest in the studio that is exemplified, for instance, in *Estúdio nº 45* [Studio no. 45] (2013) [img. 54]. There is a clear link to the notion of collage, an idea also present in the aesthetics of street markets—one of the most important social occasions in north Rio. Markets are also one of Geledé favorite places: a site of exchange and passage, where the apparent order is conjured from the edges, a place where witches bring and send their birds to perform their tasks. In Brazil, the market also generates meetings between immigrant, African, and indigenous cultures. In Laguna's paintings, the use of geometry is similar to the way in which the irregular stalls made of wood and colorful tarpaulin are put together for temporary markets.

According to Georges Didi-Huberman, disorder has a potent link to the practices introduced, for instance, by Bertolt Brecht's (1898–1956) theater and Sergei Eisenstein's (1898–1948) cinema. For the French philosopher, here we have "poetry of dispersion," that is, poetry that seeks to give sense to excess by including by excluding, selecting by rejecting. To annul and to discard are distinct gestures. It is interesting that in Laguna's paintings we also see dispersion. There are so many references that we are left looking for





a narrative, a melodic thread that only arrives a posteriori, when such different “documented gestures”⁴ are twinned with fields of color or are kept separate by geometric or figurative apparitions.

Scrutinizing the studio is a task to which Laguna is attuned. In her paintings we can often see a 360-degree view of her house’s top floor—such as in *Estúdio nº 28* [Studio no. 28] (2009) [img. 47]—where every day the artist creates her paintings, discusses them, and defines the edges of the pictorial process. There are several landscapes that, added to one another, can offer us a 360-degree view of her studio. Her place of work is located in a neighborhood in the outskirts of Rio, at the conjunction of the neighborhoods of São Francisco Xavier, Maracanã, Vila Isabel, and Mangueira, at the end of the busy Marechal Rondon Avenue, one of the main routes for workers commuting from satellite suburbs to Rio’s financial center.

Laguna’s painting is a critical exercise: it happens only through the analysis of the many stages of a process shared with her assistants. Geometries, colors, and figurative references are configured as in a process of montage: painting, then painting again, masking appearances, insisting, deleting, challenging, accumulating. Every verb is performed by the artist, expanding the painting in the same way Richard Serra expanded sculpture by producing a list of verbs.⁵ In *Jardim nº 31* [Garden no. 31] (2015) [img. 58], for instance, deleted items are felt more directly: the remains of a bird’s wings, mixed flowers and leaves, spheres that in proximity to the plants look like fruits.

It is worth highlighting that Laguna’s palette is sometimes more striking, with citric colors, and at other times denser, harboring duller, almost earthy tones. However, we almost always see aerial relations. Analyzing the work of Philip Guston (1913–1980)—one of Laguna’s influences—Paulo Pasta has noted that “Guston doesn’t want to go up, he prefers to go down.”⁶ Pasta identifies in the artist’s production an “extraordinary commonplace” that looks to what is horrible, to “junk,” moving him away from a certain pop asepsis. In Laguna, there is neither asepsis nor depth:



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her search is also for the extraordinary commonplace but by looking at windows, gardens, and lit interiors. The split between low and high culture—a duality so extensively studied in post-1960s history of art—no longer makes sense. Today, they coexist in aesthetic equivalence: modernist architecture and exposed pipes, a lamppost entangled by wires, and art nouveau china. Natural and man-made landscapes no longer belong to distant worlds. Thus, Laguna's suburbs present us with traces from Brasília or Chinese porcelain. But in everything the air prevails.

This is the confirmation that Laguna's production is somehow transversal, trespassed by multivocal references. A type of corkboard in her studio shows the names of artists that she decided to study [img. 48]. Newspaper clippings, invitations, and catalogs from Brazilian and international museums are all part of her biographical references: the artist attended several study groups and also took part in a series of international art trips. Therefore, to talk about Laguna's painting is in fact to deal with accumulations, not only of layers of paint on the canvas but also of lived experiences to which her paintings often refer.

For her exhibition at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), Laguna used the names of north Rio neighborhoods in her paintings, such as Manguinhos, Ramos, Manguera, Penha, Caju, Vila Isabel, Benfica, and Madureira [imgs. 63, 65–71]. Any attempt to find direct, formal, or chromatic associations between the paintings and the named places is bound to lead to a trap. Laguna explains that when choosing the names she wished these places were inserted into a different Rio de Janeiro, perhaps the Rio described by Chico Buarque: where Jesus exists but with his back turned, in reference to the statue of Christ the Redeemer with open hands over Guanabara Bay, facing south Rio; in the carioca suburbs—the "the mountain's reversal"—where we hear the "chords of song-chants" and think about the other side, which is "so marvelous it offends"; a Rio made of backstreets, of intersections with devoted offerings to Eshu; of hip-hop, of no *chiaroscuro*, where the "plate is hot";⁷ hello, hello, Realengo!

49. Retaining wall in the Morro da Manguera [Manguera Hill] seen through the window of Lucia Laguna's studio, 2011

LUCIA LAGUNA
50. *Paisagem nº 43* [Landscape no. 43], 2011
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 160 x 170 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil

In this sense, Laguna’s painting is organized in order to name, to bring, to insert, and to summon. According to the artist, this concern has always been there. In some works, such as *Paisagem nº 43* [Landscape no. 43] (2011) [img. 50], Laguna displaces scaffoldings and retaining walls that she used to see from her studio’s window; at the time the Morro da Mangueira [Mangueira Hill] was still visible [img. 49]. She also produced a series portraying the motorways built to optimize long-distance traffic in Rio: the Yellow and Red Lines.⁸ Therefore, the relationship between Laguna’s production and her surroundings, the city, the urban, is something that has existed for some time.

In any case, the strategies carried out at the margins of the artist’s work are not represented figuratively. In a roundabout way, the deleted presence of references is perhaps the main gesture in her paintings. In Laguna’s work—similar to a process of collage and reordering—statements are made by annulation. The image’s evanescence does not suppress it from the painting. Original figures—from animals to furniture—are defeated in a sort of battle in which Laguna’s assistants begin the task and she enriches them through a game of doubt, refusal, and respect, eventually turning the start of the project into something fully invisible [imgs. 37–42]. An improvisation, a remark is thrown together. Each one has a different semantic basis but improvises in its own way. In fact, one of the enigmas in Laguna’s oeuvre is precisely how she reaches the end, the last sentence, given that the richness lies in the experience of remaking. Laguna attests that she never discards a painting.

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Translated from Portuguese by Adriana Francisca.

¹ Griselda Pollock, “Feminist Dilemmas with the Art/Life Problem,” in *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*, ed. Mieke Bal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 169–206. ² Joice Berth, *O que é empoderamento?* (Belo Horizonte: Letramento, 2018), 85. ³ Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin (Obras escolhidas II: Rua de mão única)* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1987). ⁴ Georges Didi-Huberman, “A dis-posição das coisas (desmontar a ordem),” in *Quando as imagens tomam posição* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2016), 89. ⁵ The author refers to the artwork *Verb List*, 1967–68, which belongs to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York.—[Editor’s Note]. ⁶ Paulo Pasta, “O comum extraordinário (sobre Philip Guston)” in *A educação pela pintura* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2012), 46. ⁷ Chico Buarque, “Subúrbio,” track 1 on *Carioca*, EMI Music Portugal, 2006. ⁸ The series *Entre a linha vermelha e a linha amarela* [Between the Red Line and Yellow Line] was produced between 2001 and 2004.—[Editor’s Note].



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52. *Jardim nº 7* [Garden no. 7], 2012
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 120 x 180 cm
Collection of Andrea and José Olympio Pereira, São Paulo, Brazil



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54. *Estúdio nº 45* [Studio no. 45], 2013
 Acrylic and oil on canvas, 160 x 160 cm
 Collection of Luciana Cezar Coelho, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



55

55. *Jardim nº 13* [Garden no. 13], 2013
 Acrylic and oil on canvas, 140 x 140 cm
 Collection of Tereza and Luiz Antonio de Sampaio Campos, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



56

56. *Estúdio nº 46* [Studio no. 46], 2014
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm
Collection of the artist, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



57

57. *Jardim nº 29* [Garden no. 29], 2015
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 140 x 180 cm
Collection of Kayath, São Paulo, Brazil

58. *Jardim nº 31* [Garden no. 31], 2015
 Acrylic and oil on canvas, 160 x 120 cm
 Collection of Andrea and José Olympio Pereira, São Paulo, Brazil

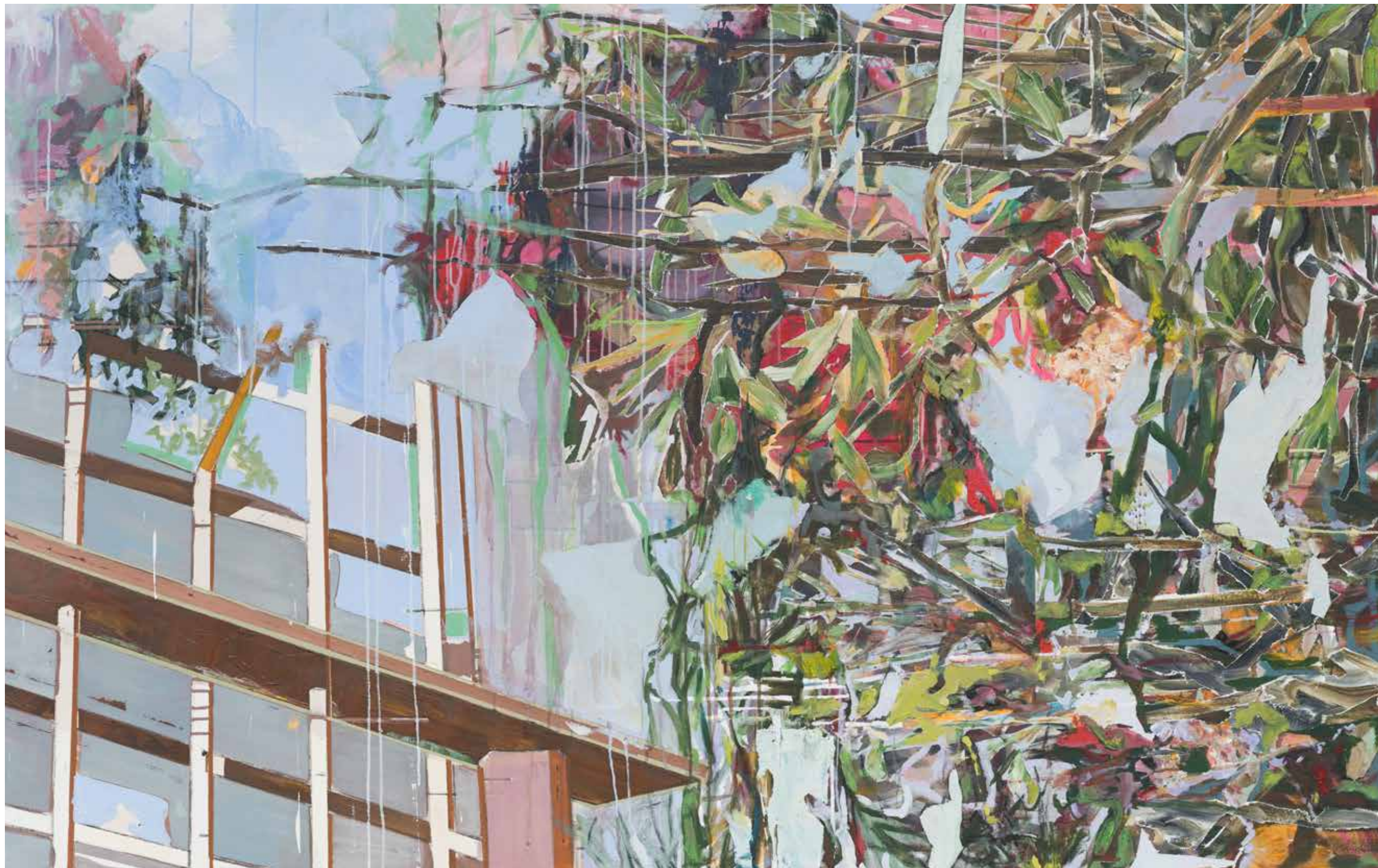




59

59. *Jardim nº 32* [Garden no. 32], 2015
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 140 x 180 cm
Collection of Antonio Marcos Barros, São Paulo, Brazil

60. *Jardim nº 33* [Garden no. 33], 2016
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 120 x 190 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil





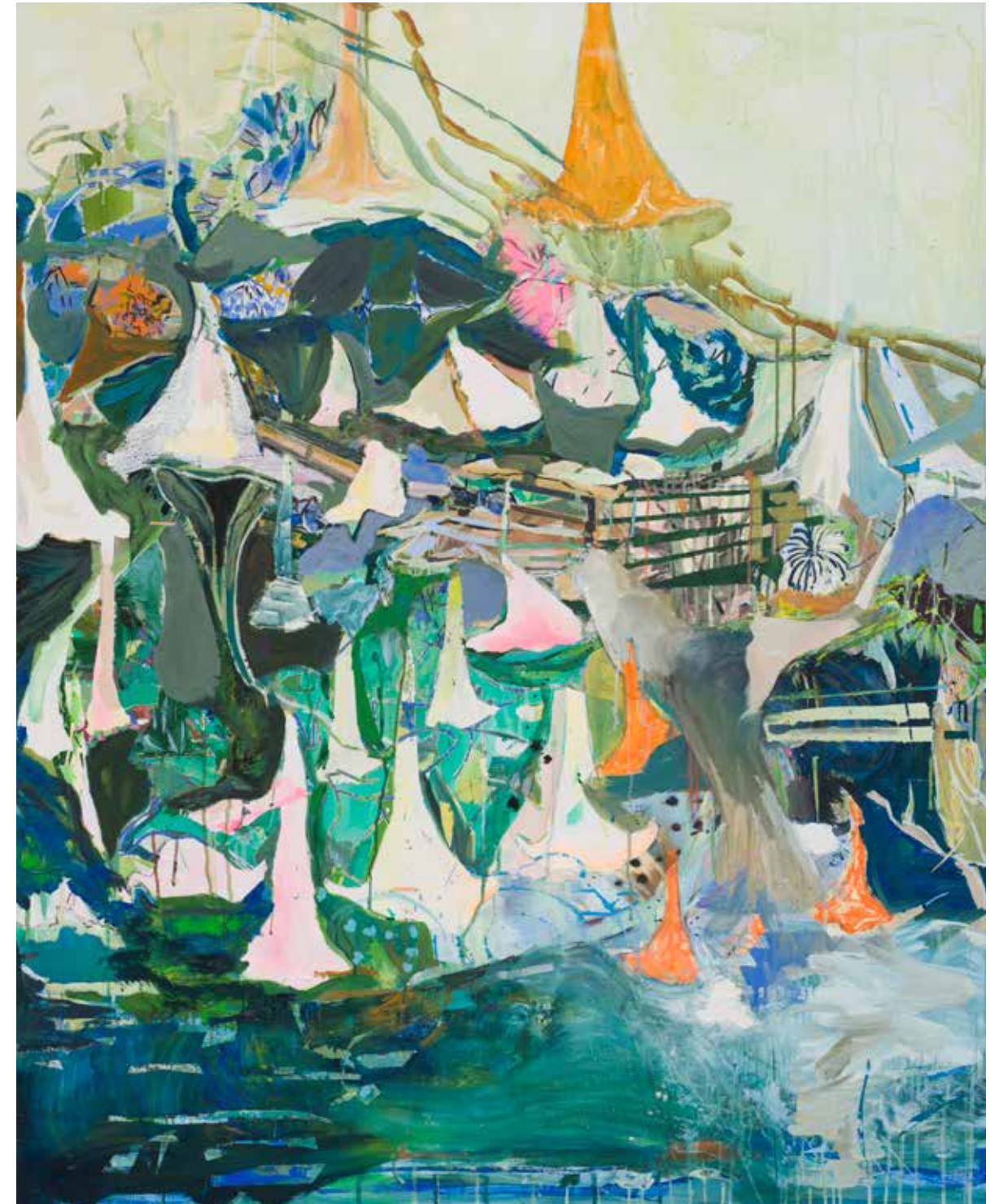
61

61. *Paisagem nº 95* [Landscape no. 95], 2016
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 170 x 210 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil



62

62. *Jardim nº 37* [Garden no. 37], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 110 × 100 cm
Private collection, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



63

63. *Jardim nº 39 (Manguinhos)* [Garden no. 39 (Manguinhos)], 2017
 Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm
 Courtesy of Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



64

64. *Paisagem nº 98* [Landscape no. 98], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 140 x 160 cm
Collection of Adriano Castello Branco, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



65

65. *Paisagem nº 99 (Ramos)* [Landscape no. 99 (Ramos)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 170 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil



66

66. *Paisagem nº 100 (Mangueira)* [Landscape no. 100 (Mangueira)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 170 x 210 cm
Collection of Mirian Khouri, São Paulo, Brazil



67

67. *Paisagem nº 101 (Penha)* [Landscape no. 101 (Penha)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 170 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil



68

68. *Paisagem nº 102 (Caju)* [Landscape no. 102 (Caju)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 170 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil



69

69. *Paisagem nº 103 (Vila Isabel)* [Landscape no. 103 (Vila Isabel)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 170 x 210 cm
Courtesy of Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil



70

70. *Paisagem nº 104 (Benfica)* [Landscape no. 104 (Benfica)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil



71

71. *Paisagem nº 105 (Madureira)* [Landscape no. 105 (Madureira)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 180 x 280 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil



72. *Paisagem nº 114* [Landscape no. 114], 2018
 Acrylic and oil on canvas, 110×230 cm
 Collection MASP
 Gift of the artist, 2018
 MASP.10802



73

LUCIA LAGUNA
73. *Paisagem nº 105 (Madureira)* (detail), 2017
IMAGE 71



74

LUCIA LAGUNA
74. Paisagem nº 102 (Caju) [Landscape no. 102 (Caju)] (detail), 2017
IMAGE 68

exhibition checklist

Jardim nº 7 [Garden no. 7], 2012
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 120×180 cm
Collection of Andrea and José Olympio
Pereira, São Paulo, Brazil
IMAGE 52

Paisagem nº 59 [Landscape no. 59], 2012
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 170×300 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil
IMAGE 53

Estúdio nº 45 [Studio no. 45], 2013
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 160×160 cm
Collection of Luciana Cezar Coelho,
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
IMAGE 54

Jardim nº 13 [Garden no. 13], 2013
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 140×140 cm
Collection of Tereza and Luiz Antonio de
Sampaio Campos, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
IMAGE 55

Estúdio nº 46 [Studio no. 46], 2014
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 120×120 cm
Collection of the artist, Rio de Janeiro,
Brazil
IMAGE 56

Jardim nº 29, [Garden no. 29], 2015
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 140×180 cm
Collection of Kayath, São Paulo, Brazil
IMAGE 57

Jardim nº 31 [Garden no. 31], 2015
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 160×120 cm
Collection of Andrea and José Olympio
Pereira, São Paulo, Brazil
IMAGE 58

Jardim nº 32 [Garden no. 32], 2015
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 140×180 cm
Collection of Antonio Marcos Barros, São
Paulo, Brazil
IMAGE 59

Jardim nº 33 [Garden no. 33], 2016
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 120×190 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil
IMAGE 60

Paisagem nº95 [Landscape no. 95], 2016
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 170×210 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil
IMAGE 61

Jardim nº 37 [Garden no. 37], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 110×100 cm
Private collection, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
IMAGE 62

Jardim nº 39 (Manguinhos)
[Garden no. 39 (Manguinhos)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150×120 cm
Courtesy of Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São
Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
IMAGE 63

Paisagem nº 98 [Landscape no. 98], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 140×160 cm
Collection of Adriano Castello Branco, Rio
de Janeiro, Brazil
IMAGE 64

Paisagem nº 99 (Ramos)
[Landscape no. 99 (Ramos)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150×170 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil
IMAGE 65

Paisagem nº 100 (Mangueira) [Landscape
no. 100 (Mangueira)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 170×210 cm
Collection of Mirian Khouri, São Paulo,
Brazil
IMAGE 66

Paisagem nº 101 (Penha)
[Landscape no. 101 (Penha)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150×170 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil
IMAGE 67

Paisagem nº 102 (Caju)
[Landscape no. 102 (Caju)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150×170 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil
IMAGE 68

Paisagem nº 103 (Vila Isabel) [Landscape
no. 103 (Vila Isabel)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 170×210 cm
Courtesy of Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São
Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
IMAGE 69

Paisagem nº 104 (Benfica)
[Landscape no. 104 (Benfica)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150×120 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil
IMAGE 70

Paisagem nº 105 (Madureira) [Landscape
no. 105 (Madureira)], 2017
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 180×280 cm
Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil
IMAGE 71

Paisagem nº 114
[Landscape no. 114], 2018
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 110×230 cm
Collection MASP
Gift of the artist, 2018
MASP.10802
IMAGE 72

75. *Portrait of the artist*, 2009,
Rio de Janeiro



75

Lucia laguna

Campos dos Goytacazes, Rio de Janeiro,
Brazil, 1941 – lives in Rio de Janeiro

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1998**
Lucia Laguna: pintura, Pequena Galeria Centro Cultural Cândido Mendes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 1999**
Lucia Laguna: pintura, Centro de Eventos Empresariais da Bolsa de Valores, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2001**
Entre a linha vermelha e linha a amarela, Arte Sumária, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2004**
Entre a linha vermelha e a linha amarela, Loja/Edifício Galaxi, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2006**
Galeria Laura Marsiaj Arte Contemporânea, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2007**
Lucia Laguna: pintura, Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Galeria Cândido Mendes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2009**
Janela, Galeria Virgílio, São Paulo, Brazil
- Galeria Laura Marsiaj Arte Contemporânea, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2011**
O mundo é o que se vê, Galeria Moura Marsiaj, São Paulo, Brazil
- 2013**
Jardim, Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo, Brazil
- 2014**
Outras paisagens, Cristina Guerra Contemporary Art, Lisbon, Portugal
- Projeto technô*, Oi Futuro Flamengo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2016**
Enquanto bebo a água, a água me bebe, Museu de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2017**
Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, Galpão, São Paulo, Brazil

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1997**
Versões da pintura, Galeria Primeiro Piso, Escola de Artes Visuais Parque Lage, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 1998**
Arte e cia., Casa de Cultura Estácio de Sá, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 1999**
Galeria Maria Martins, Universidade Estácio de Sá, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2001**
Efeitos especiais de baixa tecnologia, Espaço Cultural dos Correios, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Rio trajetórias*, 1ª Bienal Livre do Rio de Janeiro/Foco 153, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2002**
Eduardo Costa e Lucia Laguna, Foco 153, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2004**
Projéteis de arte contemporânea, Fundação Nacional de Artes — Funarte, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Posição 2004*, Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2006**
Paradoxos Brasil — Rumos Artes Visuais, Instituto Itaú Cultural, São Paulo; Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro; Palácio das Artes, Belo Horizonte; Centro Dragão do Mar de Arte e Cultura, Fortaleza; Museu de Arte de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil
- Zona oculta; entre o público e o privado*, Centro Cultural CEDIM, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2007**
Os Trópicos: visões a partir do centro do globo, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro; Martin Gropius-Bau Museum, Berlin, Germany; Galeria do Convento, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Prêmio Marcantônio Vilaça — exposição itinerante, Museu Nacional, Brasília; and SESI, Taguatinga, Distrito Federal, Brazil

2008
Prêmio Marcantônio Vilaça — exposição itinerante, Museu da República/Unisa Chaminé, Manaus; Museu Oscar Niemeyer, Curitiba; Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro; Solar da União, Salvador; Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo – Fiesp, São Paulo, Brazil

Galeria Murilo Castro, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

Arte pela Amazônia, Fundação Bienal, São Paulo, Brazil

Retrospectiva, Galeria Cândido Mendes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Arquivo Geral 2008, Centro Cultural da Justiça Eleitoral, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

2009
Galeria Millan, São Paulo, Brazil

Pequenos formatos, Atelier Subterrânea, Porto Alegre, Brazil

Galeria Marcelo Guarnieri, Ribeirão Preto, São Paulo, Brazil

2010
Arquivo geral, Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

2011
Pintura brasileira séc. XX, Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, Brazil

*Pintura reprojeta*da, Centro Cultural Marcantonio Vilaça, Brasília, Brazil

Gigante por su propia naturaleza, Instituto Valencià d’Art Modern, Valencia, Spain

An Other Place, Galerie Lelong, New York, United States

A rua — Projeto Europália Brasil, Museum Van Kunst, Antwerp, Belgium

32ª Panorama da Arte Brasileira, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, Brazil

Os primeiros dez anos, Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, Brazil

2012
30ª Bienal de São Paulo, Fundação Bienal, São Paulo, Brazil

2013
30ª Bienal de São Paulo — Seleção de obras, Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado, Ribeirão Preto and São José dos Campos, São Paulo, Brazil

30x *Bienal*, Fundação Bienal, São Paulo, Brazil

Obras selecionadas, Centro Cultural Cândido Mendes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

O abrigo e o terreno, Museu de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

2014
Coletiva de verão, Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo, Brazil

2016
Tertúlia, Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo, Brazil

A cor do Brasil, Museu de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Os muitos e o um, Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, Brazil

Em pulverosa — *Um panorama da coleção do MAM Rio*, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

2017
Modos de ver o Brasil: Itaú Cultural 30 anos, Oca, São Paulo, Brazil

Prova de artista, Fortes D’Aloia & Gabriel, Galpão, São Paulo, Brazil

2018
Dialética, Estúdio OM.Art, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Mulheres na coleção MAR, Museu de Arte do Rio, Brazil

Nem pássaro ou inseto, folha, bolha e galho... Nada escapa à armadilha do olhar, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, France

Oito décadas de abstração informal, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, Brazil

books and catalogs

ALVES, Cauê; TEJO, Cristiana. *Itinerários, itinerâncias/ itineraries, itinerancies: 32ª Panorama da arte brasileira*. São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna, 2011.

COSTA, Marcus de Lontra. *Pintura reprojeta*da. Brasília: TCU; Espaço Cultural Marcantonio Vilaça, 2011.

DIEGUES, Isabel; COELHO, Frederico (orgs.). *Pintura Brasileira século XXI*. Rio de Janeiro: Cobogó, 2011.

Enquanto bebo a água, a água me bebe. Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte do Rio, 2016. Exhibition folder.

FARIAS, Agnaldo; COCCHIARALE, Fernando; HERKENHOFF, Paulo. *Lucia Laguna*. Rio de Janeiro: Paço Imperial, 2007.

FILHO, Paulo Venâncio. 30x *Bienal*—*Transformações na arte brasileira da 1ª à 30ª edição*. São Paulo: Fundação Bienal, 2013.

Gigante por la propia naturaleza. Valência: Instituto Valencià d’Art Modern, 2011.

HUG, Alfons. *Os Trópicos*—*visões a partir do centro do globo*. Rio de Janeiro: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 2007.

Made by Brazilians. Paris: Galerie Enrico Navarra, 2014.

Os primeiros 10 anos. São Paulo: Instituto Tomie Ohtake, 2012.

PEREZ-ORAMAS, Luis (org.). 30ª *Bienal de São Paulo: A iminência das poéticas*. São Paulo: Fundação Bienal, 2012.

PIPA—*A Janela para a arte contemporânea brasileira, 2015*. Rio de Janeiro: PIPA | Museu de Arte Moderna, 2015.

Prêmio SESI CNI Marcantonio Vilaça: mostra itinerante: 2006-2008. Brasília: SESI/ Rio de Janeiro: Departamento Nacional, 2009.

ROELSTRAETE, Dieter (org.). *A Rua: Rio de Janeiro & The Spirit of the Street*. Brussels: Ludion, 2011.

SHAW, Edward. *Pintura contemporânea latinoamericana*. Santiago: Celfiln Capital, 2011.

STORR, Robert. *Os muitos e o um*. São Paulo: Instituto Tomie Ohtake, 2017.

WATSON, Charles. *Entre-vistas: acervo Dynamic Encounters Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Dynamic Encounters, 2016.

articles and reviews

QUEMIN, Alain. “Lucia Laguna/ Galerie Karsten Greve”. *La Gazette Drouot*, Paris, France, 26.10.2018.

DUARTE, Luisa. “O exercício da liberdade”. *O Globo*, Rio de Janeiro, 30.1.2017.

LOPES, Jonas. “Pinturas coletivas”. *Veja SP*, 17.7.2013.

RADAELLI, Bruna. “Lucia Laguna apresenta todas as cores do seu cotidiano em exposição na galeria Fortes Vilaça”. *Bamboó*, São Paulo, 27.6.2013.

HIRSZMAN, Maria. “Bienal, trégua na crise”. *O Estado de S. Paulo*, junho 2012.

FONSECA, Marcio de Oliveira. “Conversando sobre arte entrevistada Lucia Laguna”, *Arteseanp*, 21.8.2012.

LOPES, Jonas. “Talento tardio”. *Veja SP*, 1.6.2011.

VELASCO, Suzana. “Obra em progresso”. *O Globo*, Rio de Janeiro, 28.2.2011.

GIOIA, Mario. “Artista que começou aos 60 conquista mercado”. *Folha de S. Paulo*, Ilustrada, 25.10.2009.

VELASCO, Suzana. “Com a janela escancarada”. *O Globo*, Rio de Janeiro, 10.2.2009.

—“A mesma janela que se fez nova”. *O Globo*, Rio de Janeiro, 10.9.2006.

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76. Photo documentation made with cellphone camera by Lucia Laguna during her visit to MASP in April, 2018

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