

After Eden

Curated by Gabriela Rangel

Artists

Vered Engelhard
Patrick Hamilton
Maria Laet
Randolpho Lamonier
Raphaella Melsohn
Diego Pérez
Nohemí Pérez Amador
Lisa Sanditz

Before abstraction appeared as a self-reflective and experimental language of art, landscape painting was, perhaps, the most abstract form of painting. Its merger with scientific research (botany, geology) and the debates of aesthetic theory embedded with science made this genre a significant laboratory of Western art. It is well known that it was Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802-1852) —the traveling painter inspired by Alexander von Humboldt— who, before Impressionism, invented painting "en plein air."

Despite this, landscape and its eschatological drifts seem complex terms to reconcile with the contemporary world. Von Humboldt's principle of the unity of nature, which consisted in bringing natural phenomena (according to its own laws) into a credible representation, is now facing the disintegration of the natural. However, paradoxically, it is precisely in landscape where the dystopia of Eden, the introspection of the subjectivities plagued by fanaticism and the unstoppable need for recovery from a world ravaged by environmental disasters, converge.

After Eden is a group exhibition framed in the idea of landscape that has remained "after paradise". The selection proposed here, addresses the turmoil of an American land threatened by the destructive forces of progress and the exploitation of minerals, thus revealing unusual places in the environment where the landscape no longer produces a feeling of spiritual fullness or aesthetic contemplation, but rather a space of uncertainty and chaos, or even, of disturbing beauty. The works included in this exhibition present an epistemic journey articulated from the visual arts through that moment when homo sapiens no longer intends to create a divine sphere of nature, separating it from culture. Here, the landscape is part of a chain of interconnected spheres.

In the painting *Cartografia de minha infância* (2014) by **Randolpho Lamonier**, we face the images of huge industrial buildings with flaming chimneys, which dominate a composition located in the enclave of a small town in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. In this work, the artist's autobiographical narrative —his saga as a young man harassed by his homosexual status— and the existential anxiety caused by gender intolerance, go hand in hand with the dangers of indiscriminate exploitation of nature and indifference towards the construction of a space of good living. The different narrative lines developed in Lamonier's piece, come together and disperse through an ample pictorial figurative space wherein a palette of grays and terrestrial pigments unfold the coexistence of lit factories, a water tower, houses with broken pipes, and a Christian church as the only place of worship. All of this is surrounded by streets and avenues with names related to the mythologies of nature (El Dorado, Amazonas). The painting includes a series of contaminated rivers, a tall palm tree, and several crumbling bushes that appear depicted as if they were the traumatic memory of a child. In addition, for

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After Eden Lamonier has made two new works: *Studies in English for the cartography of iron nerves* show the poignant image of a series of smoking chimney factories, accompanied by brief poetic texts that narrate biographical moments of the artist with his parents and grandmother.

The three paintings by **Nohemí Pérez Amador** —belonging to the series *Apuntes para el bosque en llamas* (No.1, 3, and 4)— present a catastrophic view of human action in the forest ecosystem, but in a sublime and abstract key. In them, the artist depicts scenes of landscapes devastated by a fire that consumes the life of the Earth's lungs. Pérez Amador —one of the most important painters of the hemisphere— has developed a poetic of the landscape that brings a trembling and fulminant vision formulated in opposition to the one represented by the traveling painters of the 19th century, one that is closer to the subjectivist impetus of William Turner. Its trembling brushes —brasses, smoke, and fumaroles— compose very contrasted chromatic rhythms that allude to the irreversible loss of nature devoured by the flames. Here, the blue, white, black, green, red, orange, and yellow translate into a dramatic movement: that which is captured at the very moment of their disappearance and death.

Amanecer en Ancón y madrugar en Cajaíba by **Vered Engelhard** is a sound landscape that allows us to take a journey moving around imaginatively through certain localities of contemporary Peru, where the sea is central to the cultural, economic, and social definition of places. In this mapping, two ancestral fishing bays in the south converge: Ancón, on the Pacific coast, and Cajaíba, on the Atlantic coast. The artist, writer, and performer works with documentation, performance and experimental field recording techniques to map the routes of tides, groundwater, rain, drainage, and clouds that cross the Pacific coast through the Andes, to the Atlantic Forest. In this piece Engelhard traces the movement from Ancón to Cajaíba in a sort of "solar revolution" accompanied by two collages on paper, which do not necessarily represent the usual images of the crossing undertaken between bays. Engelhard thus offers an experience through sound that —like those proposed by John Cage in contemporary music—, dismantle disciplinary categories.

An unfathomable "labyrinth of tires" invades the space, as if it were the evil inhabitant of a desert landscape in northern Mexico. The extraordinary digital color photography by **Diego Pérez** offers a powerful, surprising, and sinister picture of the assault on nature by industrial waste, which replace the natural landscape with an artificial and indestructible one, announcing an ecological catastrophe. These tires, which occupy a space once inhabited by plants or rocks, remind us that one of man's most lethal (and useful) inventions has been plastic. The classic stamp that Pérez composes on this rubber maze surrounded by mountains of sand refuses all temptation of sensationalism, to offer instead a perplexed look. Another photograph —belonging to the same series of northern landscapes— unfolds the idea of the unfinished as the involuntary ruin of the so-called underdevelopment. Here, the artist frontally photographs a typically recreational space —conceived for passing travelers— that has not been completed, and through which he handles to produce the public's amazement at what appears surprisingly displaced or alienated from its context. In these photographs, Pérez's eye joins the eyes of Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Enrique Metinides, and Graciela Iturbide in the poetic ability to hole reality with an element that destabilizes it.

On the other hand, *Atacama* —**Patrick Hamilton's** ongoing photo collages— highlights the Chilean desert through a series of photos of its dusty plains and rocky hills, deprived of foliage but abundant in minerals. In more than one sense, *Atacama* refers to the photographic register that the couple of modern artists formed by Joseph and Annie Albers made in archaeological sites in North and South America. Departing from this reference and using copper plates over

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the photographs, Hamilton juxtaposes the images with a semiotic blockage that reminds of conceptualist John Baldessari. Hamilton elaborates this extraordinary series on the desert and its metaphors — copper, mother nature, the observable cosmos, American geometric abstraction, ruins, and vestiges— as a context and general framework to place Chile at a historical moment in the world where the "political ecology" of which philosopher Bruno Latour spoke, is required for planetary survival. In its multiplicity of meanings, *Atacama* deploys the mapping of a complex and vast ecosystem that exceeds the territorial uses of the state, the extractivist role of corporations, the predation of tourism, and the instrumentalization of science, and places the region as a reservoir of ancestral knowledge, abstractions, unresolved political histories and natural wonders in danger, as well as a coveted place because of its great economic potential.

The multidisciplinary practice of Carioca artist **Maria Laet** acquires an essential presence in this exhibition through the use of three expressive media: the two-channel video *Soft Limit* (2023), the clay sculpture *Head* (2024) and the photographic polyptic *Sustentação II* (2010/2020). These works examine the relationship between nature and the elements, as well as the equation between matter, context, and temporalities of objects. While Laet shares with the generation of Brazilian Neo-concrete artists the aesthetic fascination for abstract forms and the interest in their potential social function, her approach to these principles or qualities is decanted in a self-reflective exercise on the materiality of things and the epistemic ruptures proper to poetry. In this sense, in *Soft Limit* —where a set of stones of different colors is manipulated by people who group and separate them with an elastic band— Laet dialogues with the performative work that Lygia Clark did with objects (non-objects). *Sustentação II*, on the other hand, shows in a photographic sequence the process of dissolving milk in the water of a river. Thus, the image Laet builds, as Suzana Vaz points out, "is the result of the recording of specific moments of the durational creative flow or an action".

Raphaela Melsohn's hand-worked sculptural and installation ceramics often take on suggestive organic shapes that adapt to the characteristics of the space where the work is displayed. In her presentations in Brazil, the artist created forms that, more than sculptures, look like three-dimensional growths. Melsohn, who reflects on the body in relation to space, has prepared for *After Eden* an in-situ work: a series of interconnected nonlinear wall structures —made of ceramics worked at the Suro Ceramics factory in Guadalajara— that are scattered in the center of the gallery like a living organism. The pieces Melsohn designed for this occasion bring together biomorphic forms and vessels that evoke both ancestral forms and industrial functionalities with tubes and connections, creating environments contained in themselves, where the ducts inhabit. In a second work, *Plano de piso*, the artist creates mosaic diagrams that indicate how to transit in this section of space in a plane that we inhabit with our bodies on a scale of 1:1.

Lisa Sanditz's *Mountains* is composed of dense, viscous brush strokes of vibrant colors on different format canvases, that present a schematic —but not idealized take— on landscape. On the other hand, in *Home for the Holidays*, a meandering road crowded with cars and surrounded by forests and mountains manages to merge two often separate problems: the understanding of nature and the regulation of social life. Rooted in the Hudson River area of New York, where an important school of painting inspired by von Humboldt's ideas developed, Sanditz elaborates a powerful poetic of landscape deprived of romanticism, in which the cultural elements transform it into an image of tensions between human life and nature. The narrative of *Home for the Holidays* could very well refer to the weekend exodus undertaken by residents of a large city —as in Julio Cortázar's short story *Southern Highway*— where a leisure ritual like going out of a big city can quickly turn into a metropolitan nightmare. On the other

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hand, *Coastal Line* offers an unusual aerial perspective corresponding to the strip that divides land and sea and is only possible to see from a cabotage navigation aircraft. However, Sanditz's composition rejects the temptation of realistic accumulation, to place us instead in the spatiality of pictorial textures and chromatic atmospheres.