

FERNANDA GALVÃO: WHEN WE LOOK AT WHAT WE CAN'T SEE

The ability to create paths between micro and macro universes—that is one of the most striking aspects of Fernanda Galvão's artwork. The beginning of her pictorial investigation can literally be traced back to her experience looking at microscopic views of a cell, whereas her most recent pieces express a science fiction desire to create new worlds.

At 15, Fernanda Galvão had her first cancer—Synovial Sarcoma—an aggressive soft tissue cancer that later metastasized into her lungs. When looking at imaging exams of her tumor, she was impressed by the oval-shaped forms in shades of pink, some of which were so bright that they didn't look like realistic pictures of a human body part.¹ Those colors practically guided Fernanda Galvão's investigations from 2015 until 2020, as can be seen in the paintings from the series *Anatomy* (2016–2017) and in the installation *Lara* (2016), which are representative of the artist's first associations between an investigation in painting as a medium and the conceptual elaboration of her interest in biology and histology.

ALL BEGINS DEEP INSIDE THE BODY

Anatomy is based on interventions made on pages of *The Human Body*, a book from the collection *Visual Atlases*, used by her older sister in her biology classes in school. Besides illustrations, it had images of human body parts that came from actual medical imaging like MRIs, CT scans and ultrasounds.

In the series, Galvão used mostly oil paint and lithographic pencils in reds, pinks, grays and black to cover - and uncover - the book's content with gestures and shapes that rarely would be relatable to actual figures. The work would turn out as a hybrid between pictorial experimentation and formal reference to human anatomy. The reference to anatomy was emphasized in the paintings' titles and in the choice to exhibit them in the same way the pages of the book would have been read. Conversely, the pictorial experimentation is seen at first glance with the masses of paint and gestural aspect of each painting.

At around the same moment, Fernanda Galvão also presented the installation *Lara* in the art occupation project called *In(LAR)*, independently organized by Beatriz Chachamovits, Cal Kielmanowicz and Rafael Menôva, all colleagues of hers from Undergrad school. Together with other 28 artists, they presented art-works in an ancient Larynx Institute in São Paulo, Brazil, about to be demolished. Fernanda Galvão made a site-specific intervention on the walls of a room formerly used for X-ray exams, using charcoal, Vaseline and acrylic and oil paint. At eye level, the artist painted mountain shapes in shades of pink, from which paint would drip until it hit the small wooden blocks floors.² The artist would ultimately call those shapes as body-landscapes, since they could be understood both as the representation of elevations of the earth surface or of the silhouette of a human body laying down.

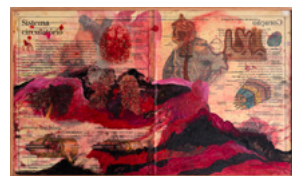
ALL RIVERS LEAD TO THE SEA

When she completed her Undergraduate Degree in Visual Arts at Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado (FAAP), which offered one of the first Undergraduate courses in Arts in Brazil, she would deep dive into research about the differences between the concepts of nature and landscape. In the course conclusion work *Éden*, the artist studied the symbolic roots of the Garden of Eden myth and the perception of landscapes in the occidental world. Still very well suited for interpreting her current art production, her thesis started with a quote by English historian Simon Schama in *Landscape and Memory*:

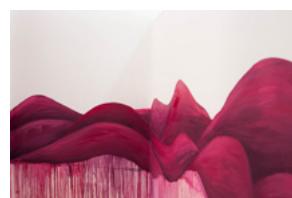
Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock...once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of

LUANA FORTES

—1
Those colors were due to a histopathological analysis with staining by hematoxylin-eosin (H&E), which is a type of stain that has been used for more than a century and is important for cancer diagnosis. The H&E stains are responsible for images in which one sees blue/purple cell nuclei and pink cytoplasm and extracellular matrix. More information about this can be found in: Fischer, Andrew H et al. "Hematoxylin and eosin staining of tissue and cell sections" CSH protocols vol. 2008, pdb. prot4986, 1 May, 2008.



Circulatory System from the series *Anatomy*, 2016–2017, Oil and lithographic pencil on the page of the *Visual Atlas of the Human Body*, 31 × 51 × 3 cm



Lara, 2016, Charcoal, acrylic, oil and Vaseline on the wall, blocks, holes and window of a room in a deactivated larynx institute in São Paulo, Brazil, 3.35 × 3.18 m²

—2
In Portuguese it is called *tacos de madeira*, a type of floor long-established in Brazil, that became popular in apartments built in the 1950s and 1960s in São Paulo.

ALL IS COSMOS

muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becom-ing, in fact, part of the scenery.³

Fernanda Galvão then explored different understandings of culture, scenery and artificiality, which culminated in the solo exhibition *Papila Sobremesa Tutti Frutti* in March of 2020. The show was a result of the participation and award received in the 44th edition of the *Salão de Arte de Ribeirão Preto Nacional – Contemporâneo*, a traditional art salon that happens annually in the city of Ribeirão Preto since 1975. She presented a collection of artworks that could be defined as objects, installations and/or sculptures, still in shades of pink, that would remote to the idea of a scene from a dystopian world, in which natural elements have been affected by the ingestion of radioactive substances.

The opening of the show happened exactly two days after the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a global pandemic and four days before the first death caused by the virus in Brazil.⁴ The exhibition would close in the same week it opened. With the increasingly alarming numbers of cases and deaths, it became clear the need for quarantines, which led Fernanda Galvão to move to the small city Vargem, 100 km away from the State capital.

With this need of reclusion came a real immersion in painting. The artist would spend her days gazing at a dam, living the parallel universe which was enduring the Covid-19 quarantines, and definitely focusing on her practice in painting. Her canvases got bigger and bigger. Her color-palette made way to different shades. And her pictorial experimentation thrived.

Vagem (2020)⁵ is a symbolic representation of that time of rupture, when Fernanda Galvão decided she didn't need to use the color pink anymore or overthink her desires when it came to choosing what medium to use, given that she was interested in painting since a young girl. With a more experimental process using charcoal, dry pastel, oil bar and oil paint on canvas, the artist began to build a real and increasingly growing gesture alphabet.

In each of her paintings, one can find specific shapes and movements that are repeated throughout her works and usually appear in titles. One example of an item from that alphabet would be the *Ova*, which consists of a group of little graphically outlined circles resembling eggs, that can be seen in works such as *Ostra Tulipa* (2022) and the homonymous *Ova* (2022).

Through the creation of that gesture alphabet, Fernanda Galvão started to create her own future universe. And the word future is key to understanding her work, especially since it doesn't include human beings. She isn't representing specific places in time. And she isn't representing "the future" as mere space, as something that exists in front of us and that we own. Fernanda Galvão is depicting the future that we can't see, except for little glimpses over the shoulder. The future as part of the spacetime continuum from which—in the body and in ordinary states of consciousness—we are excluded. As put by North-American author Ursula K. Le Guin:

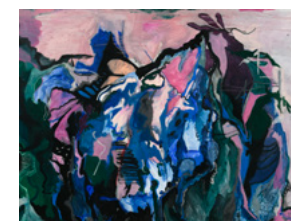
When we look at what we can't see, what we do see is the stuff inside our heads. Our thoughts and dreams, the good ones and the bad ones. And it seems to me that when science fiction is really doing its job that's exactly what it's dealing with.⁶

Luana Fortes (São Paulo, Brazil / Los Angeles, USA) is an independent contemporary art curator and cultural journalist. She is a Getty Graduate Grant recipient (2022-2023) working in the Digital Media & Content Strategy department at the Getty Research Institute. Previously, she worked as a chief-reporter at *seLect* magazine, and as a researcher and curator at Instituto Tomie Ohtake. Fortes holds bachelor's degrees in Visual Arts from FAAP and in Social Communication: Journalism from Faculdade Cásper Libero, and is completing her Master's in Brazilian Culture and Identity in the Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros of Universidade de São Paulo.

—3
Schama, Simon, *Landscape and Memory*, Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1995, p.61.



Installation View, *Papila Sobremesa Tutti Frutti*, 2020 (Solo exhibition of the 44th SARP Art Prize)



Vagem, 2020, Charcoal, dry pastel, oil stick and oil on linen, 120 × 150 cm

—4
Brazil would become one of the countries with most Covid-19 fatalities in the world, due to an irresponsible and denier national government under the command of ex-president Jair Bolsonaro, who is expected to be investigated for spreading fake information about the pandemic. Data on Brazil's context during the Pandemic can be found in the following articles: "Police call for Bolsonaro to be charged for spreading Covid misinformation," *The Guardian*, August 18th, 2022, <https://pp.nexojournal.com.br/linha-do-tempo/2021/O-primeiro-ano-de-pandemia-no-Brasil-em-43-eventos>; "O primeiro ano de pandemia no Brasil em 43 eventos," *Nexo Jornal*, April 20, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/18/jair-bolsonaro-covid-misinformation-charge-brazil-police>.

—5
The similarity between the painting's title and the name of the city in which she finished painting is not a coincidence. Fernanda Galvão intended to reference both the city Vargem and the plant Green Peas, called *vagem* in Portuguese.

—6
Ursula K. Le Guin, "Science fiction and the future," *From Dancing at the Edge of the World*, New York City: Grove Press, 1997, pp.142–143.