

# THE BODYSCAPE CREATED BY THE MATERIALITY OF NATURE AND PERFORMATIVE PRACTICE

Humans and nature are not only perpetual topics present in the works of artists; they are also subjects themselves and objectified objects at the same time. Humans, who express through their works, are understood as the subjects of their thinking. The natural world is often reified as their objects. When they are visualized as works of art, it is inevitable that they come through the mode of signs as they cannot be actual. Fernanda Galvão (b.1994) creates an artistic world in reference to the bodies that build relationships with the subjects who created the images of these signs and nature. It can be said that Galvão creates works as a complex of such meanings, that is, “bodyscape.”<sup>1</sup>

Based in São Paulo, Brazil, the artist expands the concept of interior and exterior landscapes, focusing on the body in her work. Such a landscape comes as a hybrid of the body’s inner biology that includes cells, tissues, and organs, as well as the natural ecosystem. It stages an atmosphere where the signs of images on the canvas materialize the horizons of time and space under certain rules. In that atmosphere, elements of the landscape seem to drift, breathe, and settle down in free spacetime in such an atmosphere. These are produced by Galvão’s precedent work based on her multidisciplinary studies of literature, science, and film, among others. The world on the canvas leads the viewer to encounter a situation in which the body and consciousness cannot exist in separation from each other.

Her work results from her denial of the ‘myth of the interior’ that all existence begins from the inside and her attention to the external things that the body can perceive by accepting that ‘there is no invisible interior.’ The artist pushes forward the phenomenon that the body, consciousness, and material world cannot exist in separation, focusing on the moment of encountering nature through the perception of ‘body-subject.’ Since the momentary situation always changes according to bodily movements and the flow of time, the materiality that the viewer encounters also appears in states under constant changes. As a result, it generates a situation where the viewer’s gaze is turned from the inside to the outside with an emphasis on the artwork and its surrounding relations.

Although Fernanda Galvão is presented mainly through her paintings, she has been consistently expanding the scope of her practice through media art and installation works. The shapes of ‘pictorial biomes’ that appear throughout her works, their backgrounds, and the formality of rhythms found in the masses of color do not appear as artificial. It is so since all these elements manifest from the experiential time the artist has embodied in her practice. Even if the artist has created a new organism by combining different materials, she invents an equation of ‘things/material-body-experience’ by creating an existential microcosm that is generated by nature and human beings.

In particular, Galvão’s primary materials, such as charcoal, oil stick, and pastel, serve as a kind of mechanism that can accurately present the bodyscape in terms of form and technique. Her works intuitively reveal the materiality of creative materials, and there is no trace of artificial processing in these works. For example, a surface colored with an oil stick creates a gap of rhythm through the slippage on the colored layers, thereby exposing the texture of the material as it is. Along with natural temperature, light and darkness, and sensory elements in wet or dry conditions, different forms of canvases are embedded with fluidity as if life was conceived. At the same time, they are populated with masses of color that hold different objects together. They lead the viewer to witness the artist’s practice of discipline that she left on the surface of the canvas.

The traces of materiality left by the materials representing nature, ‘the body of the object,’ are the traces of the artist’s movement. In other words, they are signs that function as an index, implying ‘the body of the subject.’ When the viewer moves in and out of the canvas with the focus on the ‘subject’s body,’ Galvão’s paintings become objects that express certain places. At the same time, they stand at an obscure boundary that refers to the very places. Ironically enough, the human ‘body’ that confronts this has the limitation of being the only physical being that is capable of perceiving the world. Yet, it also secures its existential justification since it is the only medium through which nature and the world can be experienced. Here, a painterly field is formed where the subject and object of representation coexist around the bodyscape to expand their relationship.

For instance, as seen in the titles of works such as Mirage (2022), Volcano (2022),

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Nicolas Mirzoeff, Bodyscape: Art, Modernity and the Ideal Figure, London: Routledge, 1995, p.3.

Mountain Cactus (2022), Mountain Flower (2022), and Ostra Túlipa (2022), Fernanda Galvão’s works are rooted in nature. All beings or states that occur on earth, in the sky, and around the universe. For Galvão, nature is the source of her inspiration, the object of her representation and subject, and also the principle of her creative production. Her works are characterized by their relatively distinctive boundaries between the depicted objects and landscapes on the canvas. In Anemona (2022), Tornadita (2022), Foggy (2022), and Water Stone (2022), however, it looks as if they became one entity by crossing each other without being divided. This gives rise to a landscape that moves between the figurative and abstract.

This results from the artist’s reference to science fiction as well as what she takes from nature. It creates a new substance through the metamorphosis that stems from the interaction between different forms of organisms and elements, which allows the viewer to explore the world of mythology beyond appreciating the artworks in visual terms. In this world that is depicted mainly with low saturation and brightness, not a single human being appears. The darkness subsides to a level where it emits a bleak aura. Although this seems to represent a so-called dystopian world,<sup>2</sup> it does not merely indicate a gloomy future since it includes a stage of nature where organisms live and proliferate.

Dystopia, an antonym of utopia as a ‘place that does not exist anywhere in reality,’ is another manifestation of utopia. It proves that utopia can never be completely achieved. In other words, dystopia is an outcome of a mirror effect on utopia.<sup>3</sup> While a utopia works as an ideal world that humans have longed for, Fernanda Galvão’s dystopia functions as an imaginary place where a space derived from the reaction and a particular material are combined to form a singular body. In other words, it can be said that Galvão’s work is the result of the hybridization between the principles of nature that the artist has learned and the fictional world.

Along with the pure mental resonance of the ecosystem, there are bodily experiences closely intertwined with the sense of touch and the multiple layers of spacetime in different layers on the canvas. They produce a complex of images that are abundant in visual terms. In Fernanda Galvão’s trajectory of symbols, her performative practice is transposed to artworks. Following it reveals that the unique bodyscape and places in her artistic world do not actually exist, but there are possibilities of materializing them in various forms instead. As such, one sees a paradox where her work is sustainable for the very reason and a reality where her methodological research and practice are valid at all times.

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In her solo exhibition Papila Sobremesa Tutti Frutti (2020), Galvão presented a narrative about a dystopian world through installations in the shape of bodies reminiscent of an ecosystem.  
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Krishan Kumar, “Utopia and Anti-Utopia in the Twentieth Century,” Utopia, The New York Public Library, 2000 (exh. cat.), p.259.