

Gisele Camargo

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Given that Gisele Camargo's career began in the context of 1990s Rio de Janeiro, her urban typology—for example, deadpan painterly fragments of window views or rear facades—is both characteristic of the renewed attention devoted to the city by artists of her generation, such as Ronald Duarte, Alexandre Vogler, and Romano, and strikingly at odds with the widespread presumption that the medium of painting cannot address the urgent contradictions of life in Rio. But while the practice of urban intervention eventually crystallized into yet another artistic orthodoxy, the distance that Camargo's paintings maintain from a direct engagement with the hustle-bustle of the streets has actually helped hone her work's persistent critical edge.

Camargo has cultivated a form of artistic autonomy, but not in the modernist sense of the word. The geometry of her architectural structures is blatantly indifferent to metaphysical reaffirmations of either the grid or the picture plane. Instead, the bulky polyhedrons and incongruent vanishing points in her paintings can be likened to the unsettling geometric landscapes that Robert Smithson so much admired in Lorenz Stoer's Mannerist woodcuts, in that they frustrate the viewer's search for a unifying perspective or privileged vantage point. In her recent exhibition "*Falsa Espera*" (False Wait), Camargo hung her paintings in a single, uninterrupted line at eye level, like a horizon line dysfunctionally operating as a film strip. Instead of grounding one's spatial orientation, the line—which was 125 feet long and about sixteen inches wide, except for a few parts where it widened—created a temporal sequence, contracting the various geometric objects into a hasty succession of shapes and textures. As the line finally reached the back wall and turned to face us from a distance, the paintings themselves seemed to broaden and offer a calmer view before disappearing behind the protruding right wall.

Traversing this lineup, the eye could not rest for long on any single panel. In part this was because the painted forms bear no structural relation to the shape or limits of the panels; their framing seems somewhat arbitrary. It's not that the panels are awkwardly composed, but that they actively aim to dispel any sense of spatial self-sufficiency so as to invite us to notice similar surfaces and textures across the sequence. Everything seems slightly out of place, but this perception sparks a

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There is a fundamental link between Camargo's cinematic articulation of fragmentary scenes and her commitment to landscape painting. The latter is a charged subject in Rio, whose emblematic vistas have been ideologically mobilized ever since the 1920s in representations of the city *as a whole*. In this sense, the artist's fleeting painterly stills of anonymous terraces, rooftops, chimneys, and rain gutters—images not of famous sights but of the rather melancholic views one gets from the back windows of high-rise apartment blocks—position her work critically against the backdrop of the city's aggressive process of self-branding over the last decade or so, as it has pushed to compete for tourism and mega-events. There may be no ideal viewpoint for Camargo's geometries, but this ambiguity is what tells us that there is still something unexpected to be seen, even in painting.

—Sérgio Martins