

EXHIBITIONS

Paraíba art in Europe

Marlene Almeida will show her works tomorrow in London and Monday in Brussels, exploring the relationship between human beings and the Earth.

by Daniel Abath
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“I carry the Northeast with me.” Seemingly figurative, this phrase by visual artist Marlene Almeida from Paraíba holds literal meaning. She opens a solo exhibition tomorrow in London at the Carlos/Ishikawa gallery, exploring the nuances of the relationship between humanity, ecology, and Northeastern territorialities, using the dust of her native soil as her raw material. Titled “Acute Earth,” the exhibition presents a series of works including paintings, sculptures, and installations, all conceived from natural elements and pigments extracted from the Brazilian soil, the result of decades of work.

After the London season, the works will travel to Brussels, where Marlene will open another solo exhibition next Monday (26), at the Walter and Nicole Leblanc Foundation, entitled Terra Agônica. On this occasion, Marlene’s production will be exhibited in dialogue with previously unseen works by Leblanc from the 1950s. The curator is María Inés Rodríguez, with support from Mirco Bimbi and Joris Dockx.

“It’s a large number of works,” says the exhibitor, who has dedicated her life to the research and manufacture of pigment-based paints. After all, in London alone, two installations occupy the entire central space of the rooms. “All of

them are in the same spirit as the work I’ve been doing for the past two years, telling the story of Earth, but thinking about and focusing on this land that I’m now calling ‘acute land,’” she adds.

The concept comes from the current ecological panorama, inspired by the increasingly extreme (not so) natural phenomena that have plagued the planet, portraying humanity as completely out of sync with nature.

An ecologist, the visual artist has always actively participated in environmental movements. “Now I’m also following this moment, which I believe is a critical one, in the Earth’s development,” she affirms. “And at the same time, I connect to the soil of regions in the Northeast, which have always been special to me in my work, both because of their names—which are poetic—and because of the color of the material, as well as the quality and texture of these materials,” she emphasizes.

Among other materials, Marlene uses earth extracted from the Cariri and Seridó regions in her pieces, elements that evoke characteristic features of the rural environment while also highlighting the fine sheen of the mica found



MARLENE ALMEIDA



CARLOS/ISHIKAWA



in the soil of those regions. “These are lands of contrast, and they’re lands that we could also call a sharp region,” she says, emphasizing the quality of the composition due to the materials found.

Although born in Bananeiras, in a wetter region, Marlene Almeida has always felt connected to Soledade, which boasts soils almost devoid of vegetation—a feature of the artist’s unique chromatic diversity. Furthermore, her passion for the place runs deep: “When I was a

few months old, my mother lived in Soledade. I don’t know if that’s what connects me to the region, but it always captivates me,” she believes.

In fact, “Soledade” is the name of one of the paintings on display, which, given the title, causes some confusion among visitors. “People think I’m talking only about solitude. In fact, I’m talking about the solitude of the Earth, but I’m talking about Soledade, the municipality.”

The central installation at Carlos/Ishikawa

MARLENE ALMEIDA



features pointed shapes painted with earth tones in shades ranging from gray to black, occupying a large gallery space. Painted in darker, muted tones, the pieces evoke an atmosphere of intensity and reflection. “They are sharper forms, aligned with the theme of sharpness that permeates the entire work,” describes Marlene.

Completed in a few months, the exhibition involved a creative process that involved visiting, collecting, and preparing the soils used—these were transformed into natural pigments that resulted in the special paints used on the pieces. “The soils of the Northeast are special. They seem dry and

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unimportant, but for me they are incredibly rich in hues and meanings,” he observes.

The artist also highlighted the support she received from the London gallery. The gallery even produced a booklet detailing Marlene’s career, illustrated with a photograph of the artist from the 1970s, a time when she was already working with earth colors. “It’s very gratifying to see my work valued and documented in this way,” she says.

As her first solo exhibition in the city, the London exhibition marks a milestone in Marlene’s career, having previously participated in a group exhibition at the same venue many years ago. Bringing the exhibition to Paraíba is still uncertain. Marlene says that the works *Acute Earth* and *Terra Agônica* will likely remain

abroad for a while longer, where they will participate in fairs and other exhibitions.

“It’s a privilege to bring Northeastern art to the international stage and to be able to present such significant work in such a prominent space,” he declares. “I want to talk about this wonderful land. This work I’m presenting here is a deepening of a journey that began many decades ago,” he declares.

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