

36TH BIENAL DE SÃO PAULO: NOT ALL TRAVELLERS WALK ROADS – OF HUMANITY AS PRACTICE

Marlene Almeida is an artist whose work is built on the intersection between matter and territory. Born in Bananeiras, in the Brejo region of Paraíba, and with a degree in Philosophy from the Federal University of Paraíba, her artistic career spans over fifty years, driven by close observation of the landscapes of Paraíba and other regions. Her work combines art, science, and philosophy, challenging the conventional limits of artistic practice and proposing a reflection on the cycles of nature and the traces of time.

For the 36th Bienal de São Paulo, Marlene is presenting *Terra viva [Living Earth]* (2025), an installation that synthesizes decades of research and creation. Divided into two complementary strands, the work combines technical rigor and poetic power. The technical dimension manifests itself in a study space displaying samples of Brazilian soils, plant resins, minerals, laboratory equipment, and field note-books. The poetic dimension translates into an installation made up of expanded paintings in matt tempera applied to strips of unbleached cotton. These surfaces, which hang from the ceiling and extend to the walls, evoke the paths taken by the artist throughout her research, incorporating natural rocks that are in dialogue with the chromatic layers used.

The piece follows on from previous works, such as *Terra-Devir [Earth-Becoming]* (2024) and *Vermelho como terra [Red as Earth]* (2024), which reaffirm her research into the processes of sedimentation, erasure, and permanence. In the installation, Marlene works with a palette that ranges from the white of pure kaolin to the deep tones of hematite and pyrolusite, composing a color palette that reveals Brazil's geological

variations. The play of shadows cast by the strips of fabric and the lighting reinforces the passage of time, acting as a visual marker reminiscent of sundials.

Beyond its aesthetic and experimental character, *Terra viva* carries a political and ecological dimension. The work questions notions of ownership and extraction, problematizing the relationship between territory and exploitation. The artist not only collects and transforms natural materials but also proposes a dialogue in which the earth is not an inert object, but a living organism endowed with agency. Her use of natural pigments and low environmental impact techniques reaffirms her commitment to sustainability and to modes of creation that respect the cycles of nature.

Almeida challenges the boundaries between art and science, technique and intuition, tradition and experimentation. Her work not only represents the land, but also listens to it and translates it, transforming its materiality into a narrative. *Terra viva* stands as a testimony to what the land holds, reveals, and resists forgetting – a sensitive archive in which the passage of time becomes visible and where the landscape, in its infinite transmutation, continues to tell its stories.

— Ariana Nuala, 2025

Translated from Portuguese by Philip Somervell

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