

For the eighth edition of the ongoing exhibition programme dedicated to Nature, Abreu Advogados, in partnership with Carpe Diem Arte e Pesquisa, presents a series of works by the artist Pedro Vaz.

Pedro Vaz

Abreu Advogados, in partnership with Carpe Diem Arte e Pesquisa, is presenting a series of works by the artist Pedro Vaz. Now in its eighth exhibition, the programme dedicated to nature as a theme presents a set of works that were made specifically for the Abreu Advogados headquarters building.

Over the years, Pedro Vaz has developed a body of work that, despite presenting us with images directly linked to nature per se or with a more traditional approach in the sense of researching the colour of visual fields and format, reflects a contemporary reading of the world. His projects consider the times in which we live and are closely related to the interactions between man and the environment, containing, in addition to the poetic and visual, social, political and economic concerns.

Vaz's artistic praxis involves or integrates him with the subject or project in progress. An exotic or distant location (Tour du Mont Blanc, 2014), an abandoned palace (Capsule, 2016), or simply a political motivation. They all clearly take us back to the tradition of painting, but with one major difference: the positioning of the observer in another place. Not as a passive observer, referring to painting as 'a window to the world', a term often used in art history, but rather, as we intend to explain, in an immersive and disorientating way, like the effect generated by the Panorama.

This device - the Panorama - was patented in 1787 by Robert Baker, an Irishman living in Edinburgh, Scotland. In this patent, Baker described an elevated structure that allowed a 360° view and included a representation of various places in the world at a scale of 1:1. Baker called the structure 'La Nature à Coup d'Oeil' or 'Nature at a glance' or a glimpse of nature. In 1790, he changed the name to Panorama, taking inspiration from the Greek 'Pan' (everything) and 'Orama' (vision). Basically, this elevated roundabout required a set of conditions to be created. A large-scale painting, a roof, a skylight to illuminate the painting and darken the centre of the roundabout, and a distance between the centre and the painting to give the desired illusion.

The Panorama, as well as driving significant improvements in the practices of the 'sublime art of painting', presented representations of cities at the end of the 19th century, victorious military campaigns by the English over the French, emphasising the primacy of British imperialism, as well as distant and exotic landscapes. These enhancements helped to trick the observer into experiencing an exterior space inside the roundabout and feeling the 'here and now' and the 'there and another time' (battles or past deeds) in the same space. This whole dynamic, according to Denise Oleksijczuk¹, led to a transformation in the way we look at art in general, thus moulding notions of ethnicity, gender and social status in the 19th century, as well as the emergence of a new image-consuming public in the UK. According to his research, the Panorama of the Battle of Waterloo in 1816 had approximately 200,000 visitors a year, and by 1810, the main cities in Europe already had a Panorama to glorify their achievements. The emergence of this new audience also accentuated the discussion on the topics of what is 'high art' and 'low art', as well as the famous argument or quarrel between the entertainment industry and its critics, as the ticketing system was part of the Panorama's financial model.

The virtual reality generated by the specificity of this type of closed space is another issue that began to emerge at this time. In the context of reflection on the Panorama problem, there are two other authors mentioned by DO who also deserve our attention - Oetterman and his book 'Panorama, History of Mass Medium' from 1980, and Grau with his work 'Virtual Art, From Illusion to immersion' from 2000. The two authors agree that the Panorama is an immersive illusion experience that exerts a certain dominance over the spectators.

Therefore, we can say that the Panorama promotes realism through multiple perspectives, generating cognitive uncertainty and spatial disorientation, accentuating a phenomenological process through the perception of an immediate credible reality that is, in essence, the appearance of nature.

In 1993, Bernard Comment² pointed out that the Panorama, as a structure, has remained unchanged since its inception and proposed an analysis in which he distinguished between Panoramas of contemporary 19th century cities, made in the military as mentioned above, but also of distant places. Among these we can find representations of historic cities such as Rome, Florence, Naples, Palermo, Pompeii and Athens, imposing landscapes such as the Swiss Alps or Etna, and the great novelty would be exotic locations such as Calcutta, Rio de Janeiro and all the cities that were under the hegemony of the imperialist policies of the time. The author concludes that 'The invention of the

¹ Oleksijczuk, Denise Blake, "The First Panoramas, Visions of British Imperialism", University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London, 2011.

² Comment, Bernard, The Panorama, 2.ª Edição, Reaktion Books, France, 1999

panorama was a response to a particularly strong need of the 19th century: absolute domination. It gave individuals the feeling of apparent happiness and that the world was organised for them and around them, but this was a world from which they were also separated and protected, because they were viewing it from a distance. A double dream come true - that of totality and possession.

Analysing Vaz's artistic practice, in the sense that the work only comes into existence formally after the artist's direct relationship with a certain place or path, in distant and exotic places, reverberates some aspects that can be considered parallel or analogous to the 19th Century Panorama. It was his work *Cabana*, 2017, presented at the Portuguese Consulate in São Paulo, Brazil, that became the motto for this exhibition and text. In this project, Vaz travelled along the historic Gold Trail in 2016, from Paraty to Ouro Preto. As the first images that emerged in Europe about Brazil were presented in a circular form, Vaz conceived the work *Cabana*, inspired by the images presented in the Panorama, *Views of Brasil* by Julien Delteil (1792-1853), conceiving a structure that allows the observer to enter and be completely absorbed by a pictorial work and exalting 360° views of this famous path. On the other hand, in the *Superstition Wilderness* project, the artist presents a series of works made after the realisation of a trail in the area of the Peralta family mines. On this trail, the colour tone of the Superstition Mountains, located in the Arizona desert, USA, is used in the works. The landscape, harsh and desert-like, nevertheless takes on warm tones that draw the viewer in.

Recently, in 2021, both in the exhibition *A Vida Sensível* at Galeria 111, in Lisbon, and in the exhibition *Num Único Acorde* at the Centro Cultural de Burgos, in Spain, Vaz has, in our opinion, deepened aspects of the aforementioned projects, presenting new and immersive works in an installation environment. In Galeria 111, a set of pieces placed in an interspersed and suspended manner, tries to deceive the viewer in the sense that you can never observe a work in isolation. In our field of vision, there are always several pieces in the context of a penumbra also choreographed by the artist. This penumbra is only broken by the lighting of the Terrariums - a series of glass boxes containing a living ecosystem. At the Burgos Museum, in addition to the suspended works, both painting and video, Vaz extends his research and introduces sound reality, thus emphasising the interaction with the visitor.

Thus, as well as being an integral part of his creation, because he is present as a performer or craftsman, the artist creates work that alerts us to various issues and distances us from the 'window to the world' syndrome, as mentioned above. The vast scale of the works combined with the mystery of interpreting the grandeur of sublime and gentle 'nature', and lately, in some pieces suspended in the air or even the 'Terrariums', never fail to confuse us. Not in the trompe l'oeil sense, but in a broader and more disconcerting sense. When we interact with *Cabana*, as well as with recent installations at Galeria 111, or even at the Burgos Museum, similar sensations emerge to the effects generated by Panorama.

The sense of phenomenology present in the representation leads us to read and interact with the images, maps and other media, which refer to a reality that is immediately understood as not being where we are. The illusion of the immersive is real and the work's dominance over the viewer is created. Also lately, Vaz has carefully chosen shades of light, or rather demi tones, creating diffuse environments that emphasise this whole corporeal experience. However, despite these similarities or points of contact with art history and its instruments, Vaz's work is fiercely militant in the sense of activism and a warning to future generations. Our planet is not endless and the role of contemporary artists is fundamental in raising awareness of the meaning of art and how we treat the places that inspire us: with disdain and unbridled materialistic ambitions or with respect and dignity. These places, which Vaz interacts with and reveals to us, existed before us and will continue to exist.

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