

For the fourth 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 Teresa Palma Rodrigues.

Teresa Palma Rodrigues

Teresa Palma Rodrigues (Lisbon, 1978) presents Zona V (vacant) at Abreu Advogados Cultural Program. This exhibition is the result of her PhD research in Painting at the Faculdade de Belas Artes de Lisboa. Teresa looks into a vacant plot of land that she can see from her home and studio. These works are fragments of the herbarium that was built during her visits to that inhospitable and uninhabited plot of land. In this interview, adapted from a conversation, Teresa Palma Rodrigues deliberates about Zona V and the Herbarium that she built from it.

Laura Falé (LF): What is Zona V?

Teresa Palma Rodrigues (TPR): Zona V is a plot of land in Marvila, in the Chelas neighborhood of Lisbon, which is vacant, without any sort of construction. Zona V is a fictitious name: letters are typically given to unnamed neighborhoods. I decided to name it 'V' because it is an urban void, as an open field for imagination, as an enhancer of desire and expectation. 'V' is from Vago in Portuguese, which means vacant, but it also means drifting. My work works with this double meaning. It is not completely vacant. But it is not occupied by anyone in particular. It is a difficult terrain to define. Chelas is difficult to define, everything has an unfinished look and what makes it look like this is the vacant land: the City Hall calls them 'waiting areas'.

LF: As if the ground is about to give birth but it never happens?

TPR: Yes. In 2003 I started to look at the land and it was said that within five years something would be built there. That terrain troubled me ...

LF: Why?

TPR: What bothered me most at that time was that I would no longer see the Tagus river from my window when something would be built on the land. In 2003, despite my concerns, due to the uncertainty about what was to be built and its apparent state of neglect, I preferred to ignore it. But then, in this long wait, the vacant land was imposing itself on the urban landscape and I began to pay more attention to it. Interested in everything that happened there. I realized that different people used the potentialities of the land in different ways - they built gardens or a small garden. This helped me accept this human presence. In the meantime, I got pregnant and with my daughter's birth the wilderness of vegetation that is born spontaneously was no longer an obstacle to me. I think I recognized myself also as part of nature because I had a baby. And I felt that as human beings we distanced ourselves from mother nature. My daughter was born as an animal, as we were all born, and I recognized that she was an animal too, but I no longer acknowledged this aspect.

LF: In these incursions into the land you collected common flowers and plants. Why did you choose to expand the plants that were part of your herbarium?

TPR: These plants I chose are invisible and unnoticed. They are banal and I wanted to give them importance, I wanted to value them. That's why I picked them and introduced them in the herbarium. But when I photographed them and noticed the details, I was marveled at the transparencies that resembled watercolor. So, I decided to zoom in for the viewers to see what I had seen. It seemed that the composition was already done and that each plant was in balance. In a way I was treating flowers like people because those who live here, live with difficulties, are poor. These are the people we prefer not to see. I increased the scale because we were able to notice the details, notice what is not seen in life size.

LF: Did you identify with the plants?

TPR: Yes, they worked like a mirror. We are so far from nature that we no longer identify ourselves as part of it. I wanted people to look at and identify with these balanced forms. When I look closely at the enlarged plants, I see these little hairs that I can't see with the naked eye - this sounds human to me, animal to me. Nature grows spontaneously and so do we. I'm just showing what we already are.

Laura Falé, March 2020