

Observatory

Artist: Marina Perez Simão

Curator: Diana Campbell

Exhibition Duration: November 5, 2021 - February 27, 2022

Venue: Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing

Organized by Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing

Sifang Art Museum is honored to announce *Observatory*, the first major institutional solo exhibition in China of the Brazilian artist Marina Perez Simão. The exhibition is curated by Diana Campbell and will run from November 5, 2021 to February 27, 2022.

In addition to supporting the development of contemporary art in China, Sifang Art Museum is also committed to bringing cutting-edge art creations from around the world to Nanjing, to promote dialogue and understanding among cultures and people. In this particular era of isolation and division fostered by the pandemic, encounters with the distant become even more important. The museum hopes that Simão's mysterious, vibrant and poetic works will bring warmth and enlightenment from the most distant reaches of the imagination to this still unsettled autumn.

Simão's paintings take us into seductive thresholds of an alien world, spiraling through the outer limits of expression into forcefields where colors seem to become verbs and where lines vibrate with a musical resonance. She transfigures tonality by using hot and cold hues that create an unexpected contrast in color palette that evoke and hold light in unusual ways, almost like lanterns. What colors might emerge from the glowing fogbanks of color suffusing in yet-to-be-discovered atmospheres in far-off extraterrestrial landscapes? Her paintings open up possibilities for new states of matter beyond known solids, liquids, gases, and plasmas. This exhibition transforms Sifang Art Museum into an observatory to imagine the universe from a myriad of perspectives and vantage points through the interplay of Simão's paintings and Steven Holl's architecture, leading visitors on a journey to consider the interiors and exteriors framed by Holl

in new ways. Both Simão and Holl make us question our sense of perspective; Simão even posits that we could all be upside down, for all we know.

Simão is fascinated by the possibility of experiencing both day and night at the same time, such as when astronauts see lustrous levitating orbs emerging like islands from a pitch-black sky. Many of her paintings include multiple suns and moons on the same plane and expand with countless horizon lines that dissolve the twilight zone—that moving line that divides the warm daylight and the cold dark night of a planetary body. The word ‘planet’ means “wandering celestial body,” and Simão reminds us that our human bodies also swing among the sun, moon, and stars. She references astrology in her work and life, a practice that links our life journey from the precise time and place that we came into the world to the wider movement of the planets.

Simão’s work unleashes gravity’s reductive grip on our imagination, drawing us into the powerful potentiality of her charged, vulnerable spaces that we read as landscapes. Our minds are left free to wander in the myriad of paths that open up in her paintings and reach far beyond the limits of the canvas. While the artist studied painting in Brazil and France, the composition of her paintings holds much in common with traditional Chinese landscape painting in the sense that it refutes singular perspective in favor of axonometry, where the focus can be anywhere and nowhere and does not assume a fixed position of the viewer. Like Shanshui, Simão’s paintings do not depict landscapes that are seen in nature, but rather combine mountain and water elements to evoke a feeling of imagining a landscape with a multitude of meandering paths that are never straight lines.

Simão’s process is to build up the structure of her paintings in meticulously and mathematically ordered watercolor studies. Reflecting her obsession with how we perceive planets and how planets perceive us, Simão tends to paint from above, hovering over floor-bound canvases, allowing gravity to come in as a collaborator. She frees the canvas from any sense of fixed orientation, at times even inverting the original alignment of a work. However, it is the divergence from her plan and the way that a painting evades her control that is key to her letting it leave her studio, the painting must exceed what she previously held in her imagination.

In a world where we are supposed to know everything through the touch of a screen, the artist tries to conjure the exhilarating feelings of wonder, awe, and marvel that come with experiencing a sense of being that was previously unthinkable. Like any explorer, Simão’s practice seeks to probe the unknown; she is driven by a search for surprise, but without any desire to claim or conquer anything.

Without romanticizing the horrors of colonization, Simão often cites an observation attributed to Montezuma’s scouts as an inspiration for how she articulates the inexplicable in her work. They allegedly perceived the Spanish ships arriving at their shores as floating mountains moving on the sea and the armor-clad conquistadors as visitors from another world. She is also inspired by phenomena known as black swan events which are characterized by their infrequent appearance, critical impact, and the widespread insistence that they were obvious in hindsight. The Dutch explorer Willem de Vlamingh became the first European to see a black swan when he crossed the equator and landed in Australia in 1697. Up until that point, Western belief systems posited that only white swans existed, and this discovery lifted the curtain on the folly of arrogant human

assumptions about the world. Chinese exploration predates and exceeds the scope of the Western exploration that impacted Simao's history as a Brazilian, and interesting parallels can be drawn between the artist's references of the Age of Exploration (from the vantage point of Brazil) and Nanjing via Zheng He's 1405-1433 explorations of Africa, South and Southeast Asia. A giraffe masquerading as a qilin arrived in China from Africa via what is now Bangladesh in 1414, an emissary to the unknown, a symbolic "black swan" that transformed what people knew of worlds beyond their reach.

The exhibition is organized by Sifang Art Museum. We would like to thank the artist, the curator, Mendes Wood DM, Nanjing Pukou Culture & Tourism Development Group, Sifang Cultural Group, and all partners who have helped and supported the exhibition in this uncertain "post-pandemic era".

About Artist

Marina Perez Simão (1981, Vitória) lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil.

Marina Perez Simão's working process is based fundamentally on the accumulation and juxtaposition of memories and images. By combining personal experiences and multiple references stemming from fields such as philosophy, literature and journalism, the artist collects certain narratives in order to edit them through pictorial means that do not belong to any predefined language; rather, they develop within an organic practice, which combines thematic density and a delicate treatment.

Simão uses a variety of techniques, such as collage, drawing and oil painting, as starting points in order to marry interior and exterior landscapes, she composes visual journeys that sometimes traverse the unknown, the abstract and the nebulous, but also include visions and memories. Simao's work leads us into territories in which we are confronted with that which is ungraspable, with that elusive and unspeakable instant that poets strive so hard to capture with their words.

Her recent selected exhibitions include Sonia Gomes & Marina Perez Simão, Pace, East Hampton (2020); Éveils Maritimes, Mendes Wood DM, Brussels (2020); Landscapes of the South, Mendes Wood DM, New York (2020); Veredas, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo (2019); Our dog-eyes, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo (2018); Miniature, Embassy of Brazil, Rome (2016).

About Curator

Diana Campbell is a Princeton educated American curator who has been working in South and Southeast Asia since 2010, primarily in India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. Since 2013, she has served as the Founding Artistic Director of Dhaka-based Samdani Art Foundation, Bangladesh and Chief Curator of the Dhaka Art Summit, leading the critically acclaimed 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020 editions. Campbell has developed the Dhaka Art Summit into a leading

research and exhibitions platform for art from South Asia, bringing together artists, architects, curators, and writers from across South Asia through a largely commission based model where new work and exhibitions are born in Bangladesh, also adding a scholarly element to the platform with a think tank connecting modern art histories in and across Africa, South and Southeast Asia in collaboration with the Getty Foundation, Cornell University Center for Comparative Modernities, the Asia Art Archive, and the Samdani Art Foundation. In addition to her exhibitions making practice, Campbell is responsible for developing the Samdani Art Foundation collection and drives its international collaborations ahead of opening the foundation's permanent home, Srihatta, the Samdani Art Centre and Sculpture Park in Sylhet. Concurrent to her work in Bangladesh from 2016-2018, Campbell was also the Founding Artistic Director of Bellas Artes Projects in the Philippines, a non-profit international residency and exhibition programme with sites in Manila and Bataan, and curated Frieze Projects in London for the 2018 and 2019 editions of the fair. She chairs the board of the Mumbai Art Room and is an advisor to AFIELD, an international network of socially engaged artistic practitioners. Her writing has been published by Mousse, Frieze, Art in America, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) among others.