Mateus Nunes. “Leda Catunda Uses Flora to Analyze Image Culture,” *Frieze*, 12 September 2024.

FRIEZE

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Leda Catunda Uses Flora to Analyze Image Culture

In her new exhibition at Carpintaria, Rio de Janeiro, the São Paulo artist contrasts the city’s lush landscape to her hometown’s concrete geometry



In ‘Paisagem Selvagem’ (Wild Landscape) at Carpintaria, Rio de Janeiro, Leda Catunda draws on her work in painting and fabric collage to create new sculptures inspired by her tenuous relationship with the city. The Paulistan artist’s new works address the perceived tensions between her hometown, stereotypically seen as commercial and formal, and Rio de Janeiro, generally regarded as romantic and dynamic, by combining metonymic symbols of each place. An icon of Geração 80 (Generation 80) – the group of Brazilian artists who rose to prominence during the 1980s with their experimental and challenging works – Catunda here demonstrates both artistic maturity and innovation.

The title alludes to the overgrown flora of Rio – a stark contrast to the geometric skyline of São Paulo, shaped by glass and concrete skyscrapers. Catunda gives us a show filled with flamboyant patterns, colours and materials, as a way, it seems, of responding to sensory overload – whether through contemporary media consumption, urban stimuli or a lush landscape. Her irreverent works render what’s overwhelming as plush and pleasant: ‘affective consumption’ is how the artist described her output in a 2019 interview with curator Fernanda Brenner.



Leda Catunda, *Cinema*, 2024, acrylic and enamel on canvas and fabric, 125 × 125 × 50 cm. Courtesy: Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro; photograph: Eduardo Ortega

Catunda's practice often incorporates ovoid and curvy shapes. Earlier works, such as *Barriga* (Belly, 1993) and *Couros II* (Leathers II, 1993), employed these 'soft forms' – a term frequently used by the artist – in opposition to the rational rigidity of 1970s Brazilian conceptualism. In 'Paisagem Selvagem', we see her expanding on what she described in her 2003 doctoral thesis as 'the poetics of softness'. For *Ovo* (Egg, 2024), Catunda wove together golden ovals against a large blue gradient teardrop background. In the bean-shaped *Azteca* (Aztec, 2021), geometric patterns and pre-Columbian figurative iconography are juxtaposed and contained within a gold-fabric frame.

In *Cinema* (2024), the artist arranges cut-outs of monochromatic movie posters, in a bright presentation resembling a cross between a eukaryotic cell drawing and a pillow. The work's approachable, naturalistic design is shared by sculptures like *Sete saias* (Seven Skirts, 2024). Here, she has superimposed pleated garments, painting them silver and adorning them with *balangandãs*, golden chains and sinuous voile hemlines that resemble the waves off the coast of Rio.



Leda Catunda, *Paisagem Selvagem II*, 2024, acrylic and enamel on canvas, fabric and plastic, 2.8 × 2.1 m. Courtesy: Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro; photograph: Eduardo Ortega

While Catunda's textile pieces suggest a critique of popular tastes and industrial production with their use of fast-fashion materials, they're also presented as almost growing out of the local landscape. In the large-scale *Caprichosa* (Capricious, 2024), a robot-like torso – with a chromatic finish, screws and pistons – wears an openwork skirt made to look like a field of flowers. *Carnaval* (Carnival, 2023) draws on the city's festive costumes and their colourful fringes designed to emphasize dance movements.

Carnaval shares similarities with *Paisagem Selvagem III* (2024), in that both appear like chromatic bushes erupting from the wall, with fabric leaves resembling tongues, belts and peninsulas. Like many of the pieces in the show, this one plays with traditional landscape painting, both by giving it dimension and by including a horizon line. Above the protuberance, a radiant sun rises behind a silhouetted mountain range. The top half of another work in the series, *Paisagem Selvagem IV* (2024), features several golden moons populating the sky.



Leda Catunda, *Caprichosa*, 2024, acrylic and enamel on canvas, fabric, plastic and velvet, 2.6 × 3.4 m. Courtesy: Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro; photograph: Eduardo Ortega

Throughout the exhibition, Catunda incorporates images and fabrics appropriated from diverse origins and orders, bringing together geometric abstractionism, pre-Columbian cultures, popular Catholic iconography and brands of sporting goods in a domestic and docile familiarity. Catunda's maximalist works posit that, while a conceptualist analysis of image culture isn't a problem per se, it's better achieved through a naturalistic lens.

Leda Catunda, 'Paisagem Selvagem', is on view at Carpintaria, Rio de Janeiro, until 12 October

Main image: Leda Catunda, Paisagem Selvagem II, *2024, acrylic and enamel on canvas, fabric and plastic, 2.8 × 2.1 m. Courtesy: Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, São Paulo/Rio de Janeiro; photograph: Eduardo Ortega*

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