

The exhibition *Patricia Leite – Olho d'água*, presented by Instituto Tomie Ohtake, reflects a vital part of our mission: to introduce artists' works to renewed and expanding audiences, sharing a narrative that weaves together different aspects of a poetic vision through a fresh curatorial, exhibition, and critical perspective.

Olho d'água gathers around 30 works produced over four decades. Curated by Germano Dushá, the show traces the artist's trajectory, from her early pastel works on paper and acrylic paintings on canvas made in the 1980s to her most recent series of objects created between 2020 and 2025. Made from found materials such as glass, wood, pebbles, and beads, these pieces establish a dialogue with her two-dimensional works and the larger body of the exhibition, primarily composed of oil paintings on wood – which have solidified her exploration of figurative expression in relation to recognizable landscapes.

Patricia Leite's work was first presented here in 2016 as part of *Aprendendo com Dorival Caymmi – Civilização praieira* [Learning from Dorival Caymmi – Beachside Civilization], an exhibition that explored what poetry, song, and art can teach about ways of inhabiting the Brazilian cultural landscape. Since then, we have learned that her pieces, imbued with the imagery of natural elements, are able to spark meaningful conversations about environment and memory. Now, we have the opportunity to further these dialogues as we walk through this very space that, in recent years, has hosted exhibitions featuring works by Leda Catunda, Anna Maria Maiolino, Vânia Mignone, Iole de Freitas, Maria Lira Marques, Mira Schendel, and, of course, Tomie Ohtake.

We extend our gratitude to the Ministry of Culture for making this exhibition possible through the Culture Incentive Law (Rouanet Law). We also thank Mendes Wood DM gallery and our partners for the presence and support, as well as the collectors who kindly lent their works, allowing this project to come to life. We invite you to celebrate Patricia Leite's production and to reaffirm, together, Instituto Tomie Ohtake's commitment to promoting and strengthening Brazilian culture.

– Instituto Tomie Ohtake

Patricia Leite – *Olho d'água*¹

*A beam of light trembles:
a stroke that opens a new reality.
It shows the organic geometry of the hills
fitting into improbable arrangements,
the eye of the earth filled with water
until it becomes a river
and, in the falls,
descending swiftly, once and for all,
the wet green of the forest
and the arrival of the grass ignited by the solar ray,
the changing blue of the first sky,
and from the peak of noon on the beach
to the intense darkness of the dense night
in which the stars appear
in a silvery spectacle,
comforting us after the death of the day,
when the clarity, once total, fades away
reducing the colors,
on the thread of nostalgia,
leaving us at the mercy of the immensity,
the vast expanse,
from where we came
and to whose arms
we will surely return,
only to begin
everything again.*

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The exercise about the energy and dynamics that shape nature, in a free play with its lines of force, is at the heart of Patricia Leite's work. Over 40 years of her career, the artist has followed a path that brought together various interests and mediums, yet preserved the same pictorial desire, characterized by synthetic solutions, large blocks of color, and intentionally open and fluctuating strokes. In her works, a sensitive tear in the void pulses until it splits into a chromatic quiver – like a small horizontal portal that radiates a range of lights, aspiring to new possibilities. From this movement of opening, things emerge in their essential manifestations, from the most elemental, such as the firmament, the Sun, the Moon, the stars, plains, seas, and mountains, to the ornamental ones, which provide the finishing touches to reality as we know it.

¹ “Olho d'água” is an expression in Portuguese that carries a dual meaning: it refers both to a “water spring”, the natural source from which water emerges, and to “water's eye” or “eye of water”, evoking a poetic image related to reflection, depth, and perception. This ambiguity suggests both a place of origin and the flow of water, as well as a way of seeing.

Her areas of interest are diverse, encompassing art history, Brazilian music, cinema, and literature. Similarly, her sources of inspiration are many: experiences etched in memory, photographs she has taken or found in the world, verses from poems, song lyrics, great artistic achievements, scenes from films, and anecdotes collected from mythologies, novels, or conversations with friends. In a balance between the magnetism of Brazilian identity and a universal calling, her work celebrates what is unique in Brazilian culture without, however, limiting itself. Although scenes of Brazilian forests and coasts are recurrent in her paintings, there is always a desire that points to the core of human experience. From the regional to the global, and from the grand narratives to the most mundane aspects of everyday life, whatever concerns her and captures her attention is absorbed and metabolized with due calm. First, these fragments settle into a mental field to then be studied for their emotional and material qualities, until they take form in compositions that synthesize nature in an intertwining of feelings and meanings.

Her works propose a vibrant reorganization of natural phenomena, emphasizing the result of encounters between different elements in the world. The chromatic fields juxtapose organically, creating contrasts in a free geometry and forming landscapes that are more or less discernible, sometimes more solid and calm, at other times fleeting, as if flowing quickly. However, the vibration of the stroke always stands out: varying lines that bubble, outlining things without closing them, in order to highlight the elastic movement of life. The loose and vigorous step, marked by fluid gestures and dynamic rhythm, denotes the bodies' ability to transmute, whether in relation to the larger world or to their own constitution, as if the substance that composes them were in continuous action. With an intensely graphic style, the artist works in the elegant weaving between simplification of form and emotional depth. Instead of documenting these fragments of the world that crossed her, Patricia Leite creates what she calls "sensations of landscapes", schemes that reconstruct places from their evocations. Although economical in their fundamentals, her paintings transliterate the deepest aspects that landscapes inspire, summoning a myriad of emotions.

If, on the one hand, the simplicity of these representations conveys a certain lightness, on the other, underlying tensions are evident. The artist's work balances a sense of wonder before the grandeur of nature – capable of transcending the limits of matter and reminding us of our immaterial essence – and a certain melancholic nostalgia, born from our smallness in the face of such vastness, which inevitably eludes us. In this way, it not only challenges the notions surrounding our perception of natural phenomena but also the limits of producing landscapes through language – that is, the cultural framework we create to make sense of our environment. Ultimately, it is a celebration of life, highlighting the flows of energy that unfold with each new discovery, each new day.

Titled *Olho d'água*, this exhibition brings together around 30 works, tracing a conceptual, formal, and temporal arc in Patricia Leite's trajectory. Featuring pieces from the 1980s alongside new works created in 2025, the show presents drawings, paintings, and objects, offering the public a specific selection that testifies equally to the flexibility and stylistic coherence of an artist as inventive as she is true to her craft. Some of her most emblematic paintings are included – works for which she has become widely known in recent years – which interpret coastal landscapes, fragments of the forest, and starry skies through minimalist means. Also on view are some of her earliest works: a set of pastels on paper from 1986 and her first painting, an experimental act from 1988. These pieces reflect the qualities of her initial artistic explorations, in which total abstraction merely hints at what

would later take on density in her figuration. For an uninhibited imagination, it will certainly be possible to glimpse the principles of a garden, a park, or a mountain range.

Like a loop, the newly created objects – made between 2020 and 2025 – shed light on the fundamental choices in her work. These small pieces, assembled from found materials such as wood fragments, glass remnants, decorative trinkets, and polished stones, embody a contrast between delicacy and the rudimentary, deliberately affirming their incompleteness. Placed alongside her earliest abstract drawings, they seem to give form to diagrams of colors and textures. At the same time, they form small landscapes, recalling the beaches and hills seen in her more recent paintings.

The exhibition's organization takes as its starting point the beam of light and its role as a mediator of optical perception, transforming our understanding of the world and revealing both its material nuances and its atmospheres and auras. Through delicate luminous traces emerging within fields of color, landscapes take shape, shifting between the experienced, the imagined, and the dreamed. At its core, the journey moves through different moments – from the zenith of sunlight to the passage of twilight and the deep darkness of night. In one corner of the exhibition space, the show offers a secluded place, immersed in the dense, mysterious humidity of the forest and the waterfall mist. Within these shifting scenes, small visual epiphanies emerge – enigmas that reveal and conceal themselves in the intimacy of the gaze, as if releasing continuous streams from the eyes, flowing like springs breaking through the earth to give life to rivers.

Germano Dushá

Painting Sensations: A Conversation with Patricia Leite

How did your work begin, and what led you to move from pastels to landscape painting, towards combining figuration and abstraction?

I come from an '80s school, and since my training between the 1980s and 1990s, my production has been rooted in abstraction. This continued until I felt that that language had reached its limits and decided to pause for research and reflection about my work. With unease and study – along with travels where I began photographing – I started to see the possibility of creating a landscape language with my abstract and reductionist vision.

Your work draws from many references beyond visual arts, such as music, cinema, and even personal experiences from your travels. What are some of these references that inspire your production?

Beyond my research and study in the visual arts, my work is based on my daily life, the things I see, music, cinema, literature, and the journeys I've taken.

To illustrate this question, I highlight a series of seven paintings I created based on the final scene of *Zabriskie Point* (1970), an iconic film by Michelangelo Antonioni. I've always seen a painting in the explosion – colorful shards in motion against a blue backdrop (set to the sound of Pink Floyd).

You once said that, in your studio, music is as important as your brushes. How did this deep connection with music begin in your life, and how is it reflected in your work?

I come from a very musical family. My older sisters often gathered friends for guitar sessions in our house, and we constantly listened to music. Also, my father – an important reference for me and a great painter – taught me how to tune a guitar, so both this instrument and music itself are always with me.

Your artwork and exhibition titles often reference shared cultural imagery, as in *Olho d'água*, *Olha pro céu meu amor* [Look At the Sky, My Love], and *Saudade do Brasil* [Missing Brazil]. How do the titles find the exhibitions?

Books fill my imagination, and they often align with the image of a piece, a painting I'm working on. The same happens with song lyrics that lead to the title of a piece or an exhibition.

Your work extends beyond Brazilian themes, yet – within your field of interests – it carries questions and sentiments which are essentially Brazilian. How do you absorb and distill Brazil's imagery in your landscapes?

When working with landscapes, I can't help but be impacted by the lushness of our country, and also by a sense of melancholy over the ongoing environmental destruction in Brazil. It is a feeling of missing – of *saudade*. *Saudade do Brasil* [Missing Brazil] is the title of my 2015 solo exhibition at Mendes Wood DM.

Many of your landscapes strongly evoke the transition between day and night. What does the image of twilight bring out in you?

Twilight has been largely explored throughout the history of painting and cinema. It's an extraordinary light, really – when forms lose their definition between brightness and shadow. City lights flicker on while there's still some glow in the sky. I've always observed this, thinking about the challenge of interpreting this moment's light and sensations through painting.

Twilight is an example of how your work often abstracts landscapes through color and light, resulting in what you call "sensations of landscape". What does this expression mean?

Often, I don't make the subject explicitly clear in my paintings. The sensation comes from the colors and composition that form within the piece, allowing viewers to interpret the image in their own way. The opposite occurred when people tried to identify something in my abstract drawings from the '80s.

This process of not making the painted image explicit involves editing your initial references, whether from memory or sketches. Can you tell us more about this transformation? How do colors and composition emerge?

When I see something that interests me, I immediately imagine how I'll interpret it in a painting. Then, I take photographs and print them with minimal definition (for me, the less definition, the better), as I'm not concerned with an image that is close to reality but rather with distilling and interpreting what I see. Even the light in my paintings is imaginary.