

October 22, 2024

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Dear Fernanda,

It has been so long since I last saw you. Although we talk every day and I feel like I know what's happening with you and your work, it's not the same. When you send me pictures of your ongoing paintings and I comment on them, I always remind you: no matter what I say, trust what you see. I'm only seeing half the picture. It's just an image. That can never be the same as the real thing.

It's interesting that so much of your work comes from references to photography or even illustrations of plants and other living creatures. Sometimes you've seen and photographed them yourself, but other times, you've learned about them from teenage science books or academic articles that go far beyond our understanding. Then, you merge those references and create hybrids—or thrybids (if that's even a thing)—that don't actually exist in our world. Will they ever exist? Or have they existed before?

Last week, I was shocked to discover that someone had cut down the papaya tree in my condo's garden. The doorman said they were worried about its height and that it might soon block the view of my neighbor who lives on the first floor. How can a papaya tree block someone's view? It was such a young tree, about to bear its first fruit, and suddenly, it was gone. I told him that next time this happens, he should let me take the tree home and try to grow it indoors. Maybe it would never bear fruit, but at least it would live, with some sunlight and water.

This little anecdote made me think of what we've been talking about, Fe. How do big cities coexist with the bits of nature they allow? Here in São Paulo, our hometown, even if we try to control, fence in, or prune our trees, they seem to know how to find a way around us. They embrace our fences or convince us that their shapes and colors are more interesting than our attempts at pruning could ever be.

There in Paris, where you've been living since you left São Paulo (and me), you say they do it differently. They control nature. They shape trees into circles or even squares. Is nature the same as landscape architecture to Parisians?

Noticing how both of these big cities coexist with plants is what led us to this exhibition. Does it happen the same way in all metropolises? Is it different in Brazil because we're mostly a tropical country? Or is that just a preconceived notion that haunts both foreigners and ourselves when we're missing home? Does São Paulo have bigger trees? Greener trees? Is Paris more flowery?

I've been taking a lot of pictures of plants to send to you, in case they interest you for your paintings. You've also been sharing a lot of pictures of plants with me. We've tried to see if we can find the same plants, even though we're photographing in such different places. We've researched the native origins of the species we observed, wondering if our Colonial past could be seen in those origins. But something happened in the middle of our research.

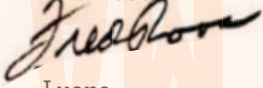
You've been living in transit, in residencies, working in different studios, and meeting new people and things. I've been living on the same block where you used to live. I still take my dogs to the same park, Praça Buenos Aires. Interestingly, from the pictures I sent you, the ones you liked the most are the ones from around my apartment. I'm sure you already know them well. You knew that papaya tree, and you knew that huge ficus tree in the park. You used to see it every day. The same goes for the common *Costela de Adão* (apparently called "Swiss cheese plant" in English), or the bromeliads that your paintings can't live without. The pictures I sent you that showed any trace of those two plants got heart reactions on WhatsApp. I've chosen to interpret that as you missing home.

For whatever reason, certain elements of your work keep insisting on reappearing. But even if I wanted to, I could never say they look the same. They've been hybridized with creatures you've encountered in Joshua Tree, California, in Paris, France, and beyond. You've literally become the figure of the artist in transit. Your home now is at the borders.

At first, this exhibition was meant to contrast two sides of you. The first was supposed to reflect where you came from. We thought it should feel safe, warm, and comfortable. The second was meant to radiate movement, instability, and adventure (maybe?). But as it turns out, those two sides can't really be separated. The group of paintings we see today all reflect the tension between what is home and what is deviant. As the Brazilian poet Manoel de Barros (1916–2014) wrote: "From where I am, I have already gone."

The truth is, you've always been deviant, my friend.

With love,



Luana