

Rafa Silvaes

Tobogã Vesuvius

October 13 – November 11, 2022

Opening reception Thursday, October 13, 2–8PM

Peres Projects is pleased to present *Tobogã Vesuvius* by Rafa Silvaes (b. 1984 in Santos, BR), the artist's third solo exhibition with the gallery and the first at the Milan gallery.

It is not what it seems.

When asked in an interview about the lyrics in the track *The Great Curve* (1980), David Byrne replied:

Oh, boy. You think that's very down and earthy, but I was talking about something metaphysical. That a gesture can resonate outward, like ripples in a pond, causing realms of meaning. An attitude of the body can embody a whole world view [laughs]¹.

These words, by the Talking Heads founder, resonate here with Rafa Silvaes' compositions, as any attempt by the spectator to extract a clear meaning from his paintings only leads to further enigmas. When immersing ourselves in the seven oil paintings brought together in *Tobogã Vesuvius* – either searching (in vain) or not for an unequivocal meaning or sense – our gaze is magnetized by their texture, vibrant surfaces and the affirmation of color that gives us back a range of synesthesia (no longer one sense, but five senses now). In a similar way, Rafa Silvaes' titles ramify interpretations by adding irreverent, ironic and iconic layers to the works.

The precise boundaries between masses and forms are a way of detaching figuration from a single meaning even further. The works' reflective treatments mean that sometimes they are contaminated by neighboring elements and, in other cases, they actually seem completely indifferent, reinforcing the character of collage, that is, elements that formally dialogue but do not coalesce. In these hyperrealist illusions, we are introduced to everyday objects, architectural elements and omnipresent fluids that inhabit placeless landscapes. From the moment when artifacts and architectural elements are de-functionalized and freed from their context, they acquire agency and dignity, and become radical still lifes.

One of the earliest still lifes in Modern history to have existed is a fruit basket painted by Caravaggio in 1596, which functions as a memento mori ("remember that you must die"), as both the leaves and the fruits in the basket show signs of withering and decay. However, in the 21st century, with the advent of nonperishable fast-food sandwiches, botulinum toxins and skin care, perhaps the greatest reminder of the fear of death is to be confronted with an eternally impeccable look. Given that the difference between poison and remedy is only the dosage, it is worth remembering that botulinum toxins, which are secreted by bacteria and can be lethal if proliferated in canned food, can induce a type of muscular weakness that impairs the movements of swallowing and causes breathlessness. However, in tiny doses, Botox triggers a form of facial relaxation that alleviates wrinkles and other signs of aging. As such, in Rafa Silvaes' still lifes, which are free from vestiges, footprints or fingerprints, there is also no rust or abrasion; they are suspended in time and there is possibly no gravity. Along with the absence of human figures in his compositions, Rafa Silvaes work process leaves only minimal suggestions of making, evoking, for a moment, the self-made mythology of paintings governed here by the desires and machinations of automated objects that move, rave and pour the fluids of polysemic metaphors.

"She is moving by remote control [...] Hands that guide her are invisible", reads the lyrics of *The Great Curve*, reminding us of the constructed flows of desire that exist within us, making decisions on our behalf, even when we find ourselves masters of our own intent.

The mutating fluid, which is present throughout the exhibition, shows an explicit voluptuousness that welcomes notes of libido, cotton candy and medically alleviated angst, combined with the vague promise of transcendence via consumption in ideal temperature and pressure conditions: there is no breeze and no horizon, the sky has little or no tonal variation. There is also no illusionist perspective as such: instead, it is about a shallow/flattened space, almost like a backdrop of accentuated diagonals like in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920). But the similarities end there because, in Rafa Silvaes' painting, straight shapes are counterbalanced with curves, creating a pinball slide for the eyes, which are unable to move away from the pictorial surface.

In the tryptic entitled *The Great Curve* (2022) – the biggest painting ever produced by Silvaes – the composition's cohesion gives shape to two homogeneously blue trapezoids and two lateral triangles. In the top trapezoid, we see a thick fluid-like flame; in the bottom trapezoid, nothing escapes from the moving escalator, only its vanishing point, which stands beyond the canvas. In this passive ascension facilitated by the escalator, there is something of stage-setting (theatrical fog), as well as a spiritual and sacrificial allusion. Timeless rustproof surfaces trigger a Prozac trance, an enchantment-mirage as an invitation to a playful ending that activates a certain existential and comical release. After all, we never stop talking about painting.

In *Cleavage* (2022), the aluminium foil from a chocolate bar becomes the cleavage in the title, evoking, at the same time, a landscape. At the top, a flowy chocolate glaze not only frames the rigid chocolate bar in the middle but also comes to the fore, like curtains on a theater stage. It is at this point, when consumption, sacrifice (to get thinner), voluptuousness, and critique walk hand in hand with visual joy, that Rafa Silveiras meets David Hockney, a painter who spent decades drawing surface reflections and the excesses of one pool per household in the suburbs of Los Angeles.

The fluids in *Fuming and Sizzling* (2022), evoke a sterile, desert-like, possibly asphyxiating, scenery and at the same time sand bottles, as if we were witnessing a mini-disaster. This composition of the tragic-ending theme (which can also be comical) references the group of English architects Archigram (Architecture + Telegram). Founded in the swinging sixties, when London was leading the way in revolutionizing customs and thinking, the group of young architects contributed to the discussion with utopian projects. Sent by post, replete with a pop repertoire, photomontages, they exuded the unavoidable irony derived from a sudden post-war morale boost, combined with the colonization of the world by plastic utensils and the crisis of modern architecture. One of Archigram's most emblematic projects is *Walking City* (1964), a moving architectural complex that contains, within its naval and aero-spatial appearance, all the functions of a city able to move across oceans and continents. *Walking City* and other utopian designs of the time circulated across the seas, not on their own, but in international magazines. In 1972, the architect and designer Ettore Sottsass created both a homage and a funeral for the utopias of his time. In *The Planet as Festival (Perspective)*, *Walking City* is in ruins, next to the tips of skyscrapers.

As a correlation with the *Walking City*, in *Maldives Swirl* (2022) – the most architectural composition in the exhibition – Silveiras takes on the outline and intransigent colors of the world's first artificial floating city, bearing the anxiety and practicality of our present day. Such islands will be built as a way of riding the wave of climate tragedy by being able to follow the rise in sea levels, including the right to have the best view of the end of the world. Rafa Silveiras adds a liquid mass to the background, like in a sort of slow-motion shipwreck, more suitable to the reticent optimism of the project on the coast of the Maldives, a country predicted to become uninhabitable by 2100.

– Diego Mauro Ribeiro

This is Rafa Silveiras' third solo exhibition at the gallery. In addition, Silveiras has exhibited in a number of international exhibitions including *Mystic Sauna*, AM Gallery, São Paulo, *Exercise*, Jaqueline Martins Gallery, São Paulo, *Pivô Art Research*, Pivô, São Paulo, *Dizzy World*, Paper Box, New York, *So Confused LOL*, Beo_Project, Belgrade, and *Cover*, São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (MAM-SP), São Paulo. Silveiras earned degrees in Fine Arts from Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado, São Paulo and in Language and Literature from FFLCH University of São Paulo.

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