

Lucas Arruda *Assum Preto*

May 2–June 15, 2024
537 West 20th Street, New York



Lucas Arruda, *Untitled (from the Deserto-Modelo series)*, 2022
© Lucas Arruda. Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

David Zwirner is pleased to present new work by Brazilian artist Lucas Arruda, on view at the gallery's 537 West 20th Street location in New York. The exhibition includes paintings and a site-specific light installation from his ongoing *Deserto-Modelo* series, marking the artist's fourth solo presentation with the gallery.

Assum Preto continues Arruda's investigations into the painted medium and its ability to serve as an evocative and transcendental conduit for the unveiling of light, memory, and emotion. The exhibition is titled after a species of blackbird native to eastern Brazil—whose mundane birdsong, according to local tradition, is said to transform into a beautiful melody if the bird's eyesight has been shaded. As the artist explains: "It's as if, when the bird has everything in sight, and is full of information and distractions, it can't organize itself. Only when it's no longer surrounded by images, can it organize everything in its head. In a certain way, I think this has to do with light.... For me, light is related to remembering."¹ In the works on view, light takes on a multitude of forms, surfacing in various physical, ideographical, and affective manifestations.

The exhibition is primarily composed of new paintings from Arruda's established body of seascapes, junglescapes, and abstract monochromes; together, these works bring about a complex understanding of landscape as a product of a state of mind rather than a depiction of reality. The works on view are notable for their fogged colors—exploring subtle but intricate variations within a single hue—that range from dense reds to ethereal and almost intangible veils of white. For the monochromes, Arruda adds layer upon layer of pigment to pre-dyed raw canvas in an attempt to replicate its tinted hue in paint, methodically returning to each work for weeks or even months on end until the composition slowly builds into a hazy and ever-shifting wall of light.

¹ Lucas Arruda, "Lucas Arruda in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist," in *Lucas Arruda: Assum Preto*. Exh. cat. (Madrid: Ateneo de Madrid and Fundación Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, 2022), p. 22.

The seascapes and junglescapes, on the other hand, are made on prepared surfaces using a reductive process whereby the impression of light is attained through the subtraction of pigment. Devoid of specific reference points, Arruda's seascapes are all grounded only by their thin horizon lines. Above and below this border, charged atmospheric conditions engage further dichotomies between sky and earth, the nebulous and the solid, the psychic and the visual. The jungles, by contrast, dwell in verticality; their genesis lies in the artist's formative memories of the verdant foliage outside his bedroom window. For Arruda, the quasi-mythical scenery of the Brazilian rainforest coaxes out tensions between reality and human imagination. Towering and impenetrable, yet containing a sense of the infinite that surpasses its physical bounds, in Arruda's work the jungle becomes a site of power and enlightenment as much as it is a harbinger of darkness and uncertainty—a place where one can be lost to the world and find themselves again.

As curator Lilian Tone writes: "[Arruda's] paintings suggest a tenuous, fugitive, and mediated relation to nature as that which informs an aesthetic language. As viewers, we tend to make sense of the slightest mark within an open field, to immediately perceive a horizontal line as a horizon line, to create clouds from a change in direction of brushstrokes, and to perceive ground from a thick impasto. Arruda makes paintings we experience as at once beyond abstraction and yet before representation."²

In *Assum Preto*, Arruda debuts a group of small-scale, semi-abstract paintings that are constructed from a lexicon of symbolist motifs, marking a new turn in the artist's practice while also harking back to the planar and architectonic forms that characterize his early oeuvre. In these works, he takes visual cues from the geometries and rich colorscapes found in the Brazilian modernist paintings of José Pancetti (1902–1958), Alfredo Volpi (1896–1988), and Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato (1900–1995). Arruda handles his brush lightly but with intense control, creating clouds and thickets of markings that delicately carve through the painted surface of the canvas in a manner recalling the textures and physicality of intaglio printmaking processes. Potent and open-ended, the symbols and motifs that populate these compositions—darkly brewing storms, empty canoes, and strings of outdoor lights—visualize the themes that permeate Arruda's body of paintings, including the artist's own dreams, experiences, and intuitions, through the lens of the sacred and the surreal. The images shift in and out of focus, as if hovering at the precipice of memory itself.

Additionally featured is an example of Arruda's site-specific light installations. These works comprise a pair of vertically balanced rectangles rendered directly on the gallery wall—the top one created through a light projection and the bottom one physically applied with paint—thus translating the genre of landscape into its most elemental form.

Born in São Paulo, Brazil, Lucas Arruda (b. 1983) received his BFA from Faculdade Santa Marcelina, São Paulo, in 2009. In 2023, Arruda's work was on view in *Assum Preto*, a site-specific solo exhibition, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, that was presented in the library of the Ateneo de Madrid. A solo exhibition of the artist's work, *Lugar sem Lugar*, was on view at Fundação Iberê Camargo, Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2021, and traveled to Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, in 2022. The artist's first large-scale institutional solo show, *Deserto-Modelo*, was on view at the Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany, in 2019. Arruda's work has also been included in numerous prominent group exhibitions worldwide, including *38° Panorama da*

² Lilian Tone, "Painting as Liminality," in *Lucas Arruda: Deserto-Modelo*. Exh. cat. (Kassel/Cologne: Museum Fridericianum and Buchhandlung Walther König, 2022), p. 149.

Arte Brasileira: 1000°, Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo (2024); *Liquid Intelligence*, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid (2023); *Natureculture*, Fondation Beyeler, Basel (2021); and *Luogo e Segni*, Punta della Dogana, Venice (2019).

In 2018, a monograph on the artist was published by Éditions Cahiers d'Art, Paris, with texts by Fernanda Brenner, Chris Sharp, and Hans Ulrich Obrist. In 2020, David Zwirner Books published a comprehensive monograph on Arruda's work, with texts by Will Chancellor and Barry Schwabsky. In 2022, the Fridericianum, Kassel, published an accompanying catalogue to the artist's 2019 solo exhibition, with texts by Vincenzo de Bellis, Fernanda Brenner, Marlene Bürgi, Lilian Tone, Theodora Vischer, and Moritz Wesseler.

Arruda's work has been represented by David Zwirner since 2018, and he has had three prior solo exhibitions with the gallery in London (2017), New York (2019), and Paris (2022).

His work is included in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo, New York; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Fondation Beyeler, Basel; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Museo Jumex, Mexico City; K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong; Kunstmuseum Den Haag, The Hague, the Netherlands; Long Museum, Shanghai; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Pérez Art Museum, Miami; Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo; Pinault Collection, Paris; Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Tate, United Kingdom; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Arruda lives and works in São Paulo.

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