

Press Release

Luiz Zerbini

Private view: 7 February 2017

Exhibition dates: 8 February – 10 March 2017



Stephen Friedman Gallery is proud to announce Luiz Zerbini's first exhibition with the gallery. The show is comprised of large scale abstract and figurative paintings and slide collages for which he is known. The artist draws visual references from what he sees around him, borrowing from Brazilian cityscapes, lush gardens, art history and pop culture to produce his work.

Zerbini works concurrently on different formal possibilities, using abstract and figurative elements on their own and in combination. Figurative works such as 'Monster', 'Cabeça d'Agua' and 'Pica-Pau' are inspired by memories and photos of trips in Brazil. He simply paints what is around him; the Gaudi-esque building from an island in the bay of Rio in 'Monster'; the Pica-Pau tree which takes its name from the woodpeckers that live in it; waves in the South Atlantic ocean; and the garden at his studio in Rio. His compositions use classical elements such as veils and windows to the vista outside. Intense colour, metallic paint, and layering with semi translucent pigment bring the surface of the canvas to life.

Zerbini began his career as a figurative painter, finding lasting inspiration in the Brazilian landscape. He then developed a body of more abstract works. These refine and transform the patterns of windows in iconic structures, such as the Oscar Niemeyer Copan building, into paintings of pure geometry that radiate with energy. This was an intentional move towards optical illusion. The surface of 'Double' unfolds like origami and 'Flare' and 'Compasso' use a square grid to create a mesmerising series of circles, half circles and overlapping circles. The latter is Zerbini's newest investigation into the possibilities of the grid. In 'Bambu Amarelo' the geometric waves are punctuated by stems of bamboo. By juxtaposing styles and techniques, organic and geometric patterns, fields of light and shadow, Zerbini creates optical effects that beckon contemplation.

The slide collages in Gallery Two form part of a series that the artist began ten years ago, working from his personal archive and continuing with slides donated to him or bought in markets. They are a forgotten medium and represent a specific period of image production. The collages follow both personal histories and a collective memory. Zerbini leaves notes made by the initial owner visible; 'me in '79', 'Disney' and 'Seaworld July 1979', and in some the original images become part of the work. He adds metallic paint or replaces the slide with coloured gelatine, ordering them in rhythmic compositions that mirror the abstraction in his painting.

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In 1984 Zerbini participated in 'Como vai você, geração 80?' at Parque Lage in Rio de Janeiro, as part of the so-called 'Generation 80'. It was at this time that he first found recognition; and the artists involved are now thought to be some of the leading names in Latin American art. They aimed to revolutionise and revitalise painting, to make it more relevant to modern Brazil. These artists forged work that was fractured, layered and expressive. Their motto was: 'return to painting and (or with) pleasure'. Zerbini is one of the few to have remained dedicated to painting, though his work also includes sculpture, video, drawing and photography. Zerbini has collaborated with Barrão and Sergio Mekler as part of Chelipa Ferro, whose eclectic practice explores the plasticity of sound.

Luiz Zerbini is an artist that constantly expands the possibilities of painting and rejects any potential stagnation, working on many bodies of work at a time. This means there is little linearity in his production. This group of work exemplifies his on-going practice; paintings that explore sensory overload, memory, Brazilian folklore, architectonic forms and luxurious flora. The unique combination of abstraction and figuration renders the works equally surreal and real, and imbued with pure joy.

Luiz Zerbini was born in São Paulo in 1959 and lives and works in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 1982 he graduated in Fine Arts from Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado in São Paulo. At an early age he studied painting with José Van Acker and later studied photography with Carlos Moreira and watercolour with Dudi Maia Rosa.

Gallery hours: Tuesday to Friday, 10am - 6pm and Saturday, 11am - 5pm

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Notes to Editors:

Zerbini has recently been the subject of major mid-career surveys at Casa Daros, Rio de Janeiro (2014); Instituto Inhotim, Minas Gerais (2013); and Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (2012).

He has exhibited in galleries and museums across Brazil and the world and has represented Brazil at notable Biennales including the São Paulo Biennial (2010 and 1987); Bienal do Mercosul (2001); Bienal de La Habana (2000); and the Bienal Internacional de Cuenca (1996). Chelipa Ferro were participants of the São Paulo Biennial in 2002 and 2004, and the Venice Biennale in 2005.