

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Frieze

Luiz Zerbini's fragile patchworks of living things

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At Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, the Brazilian painter uses geometric abstraction as a tool for engaging with endangered ecosystems

Luiz Zerbini is always thinking about squares. Or so he claimed, at least, in an online interview released to coincide with his 2018 South London Gallery solo show, 'Intuitive Ratio'. A surprising fixation, perhaps, for a painter of explosive life. But it makes sense when you see the paintings, which are driven in equal parts by geometry and vital reality. The Brazilian painter's works are situated as much beyond the old schism between abstraction and figuration as they are in the knotty Rio edgelands, where the city and the wild form uneasy symbionts.



Image: Luiz Zerbini, *Diário Selvagem (Wild Diary)*, 2019, acrylic on canvas, 160 × 160 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph: Pat Kilgore

The paintings have been spilling their glow through the windows of Stephen Friedman Gallery for much of lockdown. *Optocinético (Optokinetic)*, 2020 is the star: a large, complex work composed of 32 squares arranged in a four by eight grid. Each square is vividly patterned to resemble a cellular or molecular structure and contains a rounded form with varying designs: bright and radiant orbs, like planets, and curves that cross over into other squares. The viewer experiences an intricate, kaleidoscopic back-and-forth between the discrete elements and the more continuous forms, and between microscopic and planetary scales.



Image: Luiz Zerbini, *Alpinia Purpurata*, 2020, oil on koso paper, 98 × 65 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph: Pat Kilgore

Other, more stripped-down, grid-like works – *Quadrícula Grande (Large Grid)*, 2020, for instance, or *Diário Selvagem (Wild Diary)*, 2019 – are composed only of patterned squares, while two monoprints of plants, *Alpinia Purpurata* (2020) and *Folha (Leaf)*, 2020, accentuate the intricate geometries of their leaves. The seamlessness with which formal and representational elements are embedded in these works is remarkable and has something to say about the history of painting; what is perspective, after all, if not the embedding of geometry at the heart of the visible? But there is an ecology at work here, too, as eternal geometric forms, such as spheres or grids, become inseparable from fragile patchworks of living things. There is no rupture between a stem of red ginger and the planet – these works say – only different ways of looking.