

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Luiz Zerbini

Juxtaposing organic and geometric forms, Luiz Zerbini's paintings explore the relationship between colour, light and movement.

Luiz Zerbini was born in São Paulo, Brazil in 1959. He lives and works in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Across his career, which spans over three decades, Luiz Zerbini has developed a complex visual vocabulary at the intersection of figuration and abstraction. He first emerged within the generational (and global) 'return to painting' of the 1980s, centred in Rio de Janeiro around the Parque Lage School of Visual Arts and subsequently defined by the landmark exhibition 'Como vai você Geração 80?' (How Are You Doing, 80s Generation?, 1984).

The grid — a formal leitmotif closely associated with modernism — heavily features in the artist's recent paintings, a subtle nod to the mosaic pavements and façades of Brazilian tower blocks. Using it as a compositional structuring device, numerous works show geometric forms juxtaposed with lush, tropical flora. A cacophony of colour, these works convey the immersive and seductive quality of Brazil's natural environment. Flooding the viewer's perception, Zerbini tries to provide the impression of "being in the painting as you could be in a forest." Palm fronds, coiled ferns and roughly textured tree trunks often encroach upon the works' gridded structure. These forms merge with areas of abstract mark-making, demonstrating how the artist appropriates patterns found in nature and incorporates them into his own vernacular. The rhythmic structure of Zerbini's paintings captures the movement of trees swaying in the breeze or bodies of cascading water, lending his works a striking dynamism.

A major exhibition by the artist opened at Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro in June 2024 and toured to Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Brasília in September 2024. He also had a significant show at Museu de Arte de São Paulo, Brazil in March 2022. Zerbini's second solo show at Stephen Friedman Gallery took place in January 2021, following his exhibition in 2020 at Oi Futuro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 2019 Zerbini had a major solo presentation in the group show 'Trees' at Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, France. There Zerbini transformed the main gallery into an urban jungle, combining a large-scale herbarium, complete with a living fig tree, with hyperreal paintings of the rainforest and symbols of Brazilian modernity. A second iteration of this installation took place at Power Station of Art, Shanghai, China in July 2021 and a third iteration at Triennale Milano, Milan, Italy in June 2023.

In 2018, Zerbini's first solo exhibition in a UK public institution took place at South London Gallery, London. Zerbini has been the subject of major mid-career surveys at Casa Daros, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2014); Instituto Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil (2013); and Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2012).

He has exhibited in galleries and museums internationally and has represented Brazil at notable biennials including the São Paulo Biennial, (2010 and 1987); Bienal do Mercosul (2001); Bienal de La Habana (2000) and Bienal Internacional de Cuenca (1996). He is also part of the renowned Chelipa Ferro artist collective. In 1995, Zerbini won the grand prize of criticism in the Visual Arts category of Art Critics of São Paulo Association (APCA). His work is included in several notable collections, such as Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, France; Instituto Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil; Itaú Cultural Institute, Kistefos Museum, Jevnaker, Norway; São Paulo, Brazil; Modern Art Museum of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Modern Art Museum of São Paulo, Brazil and the Pizzuti Collection of the Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio, USA.