

GABRIELA MACHADO: TOWARDS HER MAKING

In early episodes of the so-called history of art, the emergence of easel painting coincides with the pursuit of elevating artistic practice to a higher social status. The primary strategy was to associate art with intellectual labor, positioning painting as the most "mental" of the visual arts. Thought, it was claimed, preceded execution. Painters, throughout history, sought recognition for the quality of their making—and they achieved it. Moving away from the idea of manual, mechanical labor, painting seemed to wish to deny the hand. Yet the hand teaches; the body is not separate from the mind; gesture holds memory. The outcome of this reconciliation appears in pictorial images, in the virtuosity of the brushstroke, and in a familiarity with technique—technique that is, in itself, a form of expression.

Long before this, the act of applying pigment to a surface was already taking place on planes most intimately connected to the body: walls. From domestic interiors to monuments, it is as though archaic painting was made to shelter the body—a function that is, in essence, architectural. This kind of making does not vanish with the advent of easel painting, but becomes compartmentalized within the historical divide between body and mind, between fine and applied arts. It persists in the realm of labor, in the hands of the artisan, accustomed to bodily engagement with the pictorial.

It is this memory of parietal image-making that Gabriela Machado evokes in her latest series of paintings. The new works seem to reclaim the relationship between painting and wall, lost with the historical emancipation of the framed canvas. Beginning with their expanded scale—almost architectural in nature—the works approach the wall itself, establishing a different corporeal dialogue. Interior painting lingers in an affective memory that does not distinguish between erudite production and vernacular expression. Gabriela's body has always been surrounded by painting, whether on walls or on canvas.

Another architectural element introduced by the artist is the treatment of certain pictorial components as if they were stained glass. Solid colors projecting into space—perhaps unsurprisingly alluring to painters—are rendered in paint, which is no simple feat. The translation from glass to pigment sacrifices something of the original, yet gains much in the new language: it is freed from dependence on sunlight, more malleable under the brush, and capable of surprising when its luminous surfaces meet the viewer's gaze.

There is a quality in painting that can only be attained through accumulated experience—acquired through persistent doing. It is a matter of routine, of disciplined practice, of knowing what acrylic paint does to the

image, to the layers, to the texture. A familiarity gained only with time and consistency. To approach a large canvas, the hand must be “warmed up,” already trained by the daily exercise of painting. The moment of approaching the canvas becomes a kind of “attack,” a nearly uninterrupted gesture made after intense preparation, allowing no room for reversal. One may add layers, but never subtract. The moment to stop is delicate—only when the painting acquires an element of surprise. And it is difficult to be surprised by painting, when so much has already been done. Still, the pursuit must remain within sight.

The familiar gesture, the vibrant colors, the spontaneity of forms, and the ordinariness of subjects remain present here, now accompanied by new lessons: the play of layers and textures, the exercise of transparencies, and a reconciliation between the transformation of form into figure against a pristine ground and the impulse to cover the entire surface. At different times, one approach or the other may have prevailed; here, the two alternate. The result is the alluring pictorial matter we have come to recognize in Gabriela Machado’s work—now with a complexity that resists the fleeting, frictionless images of our pocket-sized present. These paintings command the viewer’s gaze, inviting it to roam each element and brushstroke.

The title itself already gestures toward a kind of generosity — *Para seu fazer (Towards Her Making)*— offering something to the viewer: one who sees, reflects, and moves. One who ascends and descends through the shifting heights of this exhibition, which possesses mass, volume, and pulse. This is a relationship that is not solely intellectual, but physical. If our bodies can be stirred by these grand masses of color, painting becomes, at once, part of this world and a device for imagining others.

Bruna Costa, 2025