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**Antonio Murado:**

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**by Alexandre Melo**

Translated from Portuguese by Clifford Landers.

Before a landscape painting, we ask ourselves, "Looking at this, what do I feel?" This question is inherited from the traditional manner of contemplating a painting, but it also comes to us from the culturally determined manner of experiencing a landscape—that is, under the aegis of such philosophical categories as the sublime.

On first seeing Antonio Murado's recent landscape paintings, I asked myself, rather, "Where have I had this feeling before?" Images of real, filmic, and pictorial landscapes ran through my mind, many of them similar to those that in childhood were nurtured by reading accounts of the voyages of polar explorers or by gazing at a map of Antarctica like the one the artist's brother Miguel-Anxo drew and hung on the wall of his bedroom, as we learn from the catalogue. But then I remembered a text by Sergei Medvedev, "The Blank Space" (2000), in which the Russian essayist speaks of the landscape of northern Europe as a metaphor for a specific cultural attitude, in which the immense white emptiness is interpreted as the ideal setting for a receptivity to new discourses and new imagination. In the chapter entitled "The Unbearable Lightness of the North," we read: "Of all corners of the world, North is the furthest. It is the most elusive and the least circumscribed, an ill-defined space rather than a delineated place ."

Medvedev could well be speaking of Murado's paintings, which fall between abstraction and representation, between materiality and vista. They avoid the more common conventions of landscape while at the same time subtly echoing them. This meticulously constructed ambiguity affords us a space for sensorial and speculative freedom similar to that suggested by northern landscapes. The effect of rarefaction that this freedom creates is produced by Murado through sophisticated and original

technical processes that embody above all a systematic approach to materials and their utilization, as well as a rigorous management of accident.

What Murado seeks to obtain on the surface of his canvases is not the representational transparency of a clearly identifiable external reality; rather, it is a degree of density and subtlety of materials capable of evoking the experience of landscape-- not qua landscape but as physical reality. With this objective, as critic Aruna D'Souza points out in the catalogue, Murado makes use of a great variety of unusual techniques, such as running a turpentine-soaked brush over thick layers of oil to obtain a chiaroscuro effect, or blowing on a small spot of diluted pigment to obtain the effect of petals, or spilling turpentine over the painted and varnished surface of the canvas to achieve the effect of corrosion.

The result of these experiments in alchemical materiality is a variegated series of paintings that, with infinite nuance, convey Murado's own plastic versions of the different domains of the life of nature--from the vegetable universe, in paintings that suggest entangled forests, to the zoological microcosm of the "Maranas" (Tangles) series, 1994--2001, in which we feel ourselves transported inside the most intimate of life's primordial palpitations. Murado's frozen landscapes, at the same time dense and deserted, make us believe once again in the capacity of painting to reinvent sensation.



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