



LUIZA GOTTSCHALK

BY BARBARA POLLACK

Between the mountains and the metropolis, Luiza Gottschalk was born in 1984 in São Paulo, growing up in the Serra da Mantiqueira Forest. Reflecting her memories of this experience, Gottschalk's paintings are multilayered collisions of color, texture, and emotion, capturing the perspective of a child confronting towering trees. In order to underscore the intensity of this experience, Gottschalk combines bright colors—greens, blues, reds, purples—achieving a remarkable palette. More to the point, she has invented an original technique for applying these colors, creating an energized surface and horizons of endless depth.

Generations of Brazilian artists moved from representation to abstraction in the 20th century in hopes of encompassing the diversity of cultures and the variegated visuality of their home country. Gottschalk also interweaves representation and abstraction, avoiding dead-ends by continually refreshing her ideas. At the beginning of her development, the artist would strive to find resolution in her compositions, highlighting recognizable aspects of the countryside such as a waterfall or a sunrise. These discernible narratives often conveyed a vocabulary, or better yet, a mythology, reminiscent of the indigenous culture of Brazil. As the work has evolved, the compositions have grown much denser and challenging with a strong connection to abstract expressionism.

Gottschalk's landscapes are lush and intriguing and their complexity stimulates the viewer's sense of sight. As she has worked and reworked her compositions, the paintings have only grown increasingly abstract. For example, in her latest cycle of four paintings referencing the four seasons, *Spring* (2023) stands out for its endless inventiveness. Here, bright pinks and reds peek out from a dark green mass and an orange and pastel blue horizon conveys a sun-filled dawn. In contrast, *Summer* (2023) is more legible with its focus on two hawks flying across a sunset. The surfaces of both paintings are textural and tactile, achieved by Gottschalk laying cotton cloths on the painted primed canvas and rubbing her fingers into the colors freely. Her studio is filled with colorful cloths that result from this process.

Firehorse (2023) perfects this meeting of abstraction and figuration with the image of a horse lunging towards the viewer against a background of red, orange and a cloud of periwinkle and blue. This painting reads like an almost-forgotten memory, an image of an experience that may or may not have happened when the artist was young. There is a touch of surrealism in these works, a playfulness that should not be overshadowed by her freewheeling process.





Oil and water do not mix, yet Gottschalk uses this known chemical reaction to great effect by mixing oil paints and watercolors, embellished with lines from oil sticks. This causes the liquid to pool, propel and even crack as it dries. Though all of this seems to happen randomly, the effect is totally intentional. It is Gottschalk's way of perfectly communicating the complexity of the forest, the way untamed nature bombards us with patterns and textures that sometimes make it hard for us to find our way. Getting lost within these paintings, however, bears rich rewards.

An example of this effect is a not-yet titled painting in Gottschalk's studio in São Paulo that appears to be a mixture of indefinite orange forms. However, the inspiration is based on personal discoveries. On a trip to the Amazon rainforest, the artist's husband and daughter visited the Rio Negro, which Gottschalk describes as "a big black river that turns orange in the sunset." Reveling in the myths surrounding this site, including the legend of the Pink Dolphin, and a chance encounter with Hokusai's magnificent print, *The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife*, the artist began to add elements of bodies emerging from dark waters. The final image contains both biomorphic forms and stains of paint which can be interpreted as either a nightmare or a daydream.

This is process-painting of the Global South with movement and meanings stemming from an amalgamation of cultures. Music and movement and dance are all part of Gottschalk's experience, before entering the Armando Alvares Penteado Foundation (FAAP) in São Paulo, where she received both undergraduate and master's degrees. Yet, she achieves an unstudied freedom through her personal physicality and the sight of her children at play. Gottschalk balances spontaneity and control in every work like a couple in sync on a dance floor.

Now, after ten years of perfecting this approach, Gottschalk is first-hand discovering international comradeship for her visceral artworks. Two outstanding, women painters—Donna Huanca and Vivian Suter— share her exploration of abstraction that springs from performative and installation practices. All three of these artists create exhibitions as immersive experiences, saturating the gallery with their artworks. In the last three years, Luiza Gottschalk has grown her practice including GLADE, Oscar Niemeyer National Museum of the Republic / Brasília, BR, 2022; Ensaio Aberto, Praça das artes, São Paulo, 2019; and Acidente, Estação Satyros, Praça Roosevelt, São Paulo, 2016 as well as a series of notable group shows in Brazil and abroad.

According to Gottschalk, Brazil is essentially about mixing—identities and cultures—rather than clinging to a singular stereotype. For this reason, she values juxtapositions as found in nature, rather than a civilized single point of view. Through her work, we can appreciate a shift in perspective, literally within a painting but also in our understanding of Brazilian contemporary art.

