

**cássio vasconcellos**  
a picturesque voyage  
through brazil  
curated by ana maria belluzzo

**opening**  
august 17, 2024

**exhibition**  
august 17 – october 12, 2024



## the fantastic power of the eye

ana maria belluzzo

The unexpected images that Cássio Vasconcellos has been creating, since the 1980s, constitute a coherent domain of the artistic being who looks around and realizes the profound changes that affect the lived experience in the post-modern world.

Initially, his explorations focused on the photographic capture and interpretation of the natural environment. The visual artist creates candid conversations based on his relationship with urban, global and natural environments, constructed through the use of different photographic strategies, in which sensitivity sets the tone for technology.

Being from urban São Paulo, he pursues the photographic visibility of the metropolis through ways of feeling, dispensing discursive content. On his journey through São Paulo, the surprise factor appears around every corner, in opposition to what our eyes already know. It prepares for oddities. It takes advantage of fragments of built space and the loss of vision of the whole, leaving the viewer with the opportunity for visual play in the face of the erasure of the city's memory.

As well as traversing the urban map, his photos also reveal the citizen of the world, willing to configure visual patterns of the globalized universe. After realizing his dream of flying a helicopter, he became strongly connected with the aerial view. Wide views from afar familiarized him with the small things, seen from a distance, and fueled new forms of expression. The deconstruction of the perspective and the abandonment of the three-

dimensionality of small figures gave way to the planar image. Photographic montage began to rearrange the uniformity of the figures, stamped on the field, configuring a new organization of the earth's surface.

Capturing the subject through the lens is not the essential aspect of his photographs. In addition to montage, he uses digital manipulation. The different elements that make up the photographic device create the visual artist's venture into the intricacies of image production.

Images of untouched, primordial nature are singular occurrences in the work of Cássio Vasconcellos and, from time to time, captivate his gaze. The poet Manoel de Barros once said:

“When my eyes are soiled by civilization, there grows within them a desire for trees and birds”.

Blunt cut-outs of nature, carefully enlarged, and installed in the Nara Roesler gallery space, call for intimacy, closeness. In front, the life force of a single organic form radiates out in various directions. The images always challenge the viewer: From what time and place do these images speak to us? How do we deal with the disturbing content of thinking through images?

Faced with the images on display, a botanist would give names to the giant trees, to native plant species; an environmentalist would be curious about the remnants of the Atlantic Forest, penetrated by the photographer; a carioca (person

from Rio de Janeiro) would exultantly identify the horizon seen from the top of the hill. These are just examples that help to guide our attention to: “how does an image makes you think”.

Going further, they would make us reflect on what appears “under our eyes outside our vision”, in the words of Didi Huberman.

The affirmative presence of natural phenomena is symptomatic. It brings real devastation to the fore. Faced with the integrity of the images on display, how can we not think about ecological imbalance?

Thinking through images is well explained by the artist himself, whose desire to photograph a forest reminds us of the fantastic images made by European travelers when they first set foot in our country, in search of knowledge about the riches of tropical nature. Fascinated by the exotic, unfamiliar environment, they translated the sensory ecstasy they experienced into images. The images, which exerted a strong attraction at the time, became a powerful stimulus for Vasconcellos' photographs. I would also like to highlight the fact that his eye was trained at an early age in direct contact with pieces from Paulo Vasconcellos', his father's, remarkable antique collection. Enjoying this rich resource gave him observation habits, awakening an affinity with works of art and a taste for imagining extraordinary things.

In search of photographs of natural phenomena, the naturalistic explorer carries motifs engraved in his memory. Aspects of the Brazilian wilderness incorporated out of pure empathy and based on memories of drawings and engravings by European artists and scientists who once were here. In



deference to the photographer, the vision of these traveling artists can be admired in this exhibition, through works that visually express the complexity of forest life. They are:

*Floresta Virgem do Brasil*, 1822, metal engraving by Claude-François Fortier, based on a drawing by the Count of Clarac;

*Forêt Vierge (Le bords du Parahiba)* and *Valle da Serra do Mar (Chaine de Montagnes pres de la Mer)*, lithographs by Ch: Motte, based on drawings by Jean-Baptiste Debret. Published in: *Voyage Pittoresque et Historique au Brésil*, Paris, Firmin Didot Frères, volume I, 1834.



Count de Clarac, a French diplomat and archaeologist, managed to draw the forest, in line with the advances in knowledge at the time. His enlightened contemplation of nature combined art and science. Clarac's engravings were recognized by Alexander von Humboldt, considered to be the most faithful depiction of nature in the New World. The German scientist conceived of nature as a whole and revealed that living forms were not separated from their geographical distribution, based on latitudes and climates.

Interpreting a work becomes an invention when it is translated into another context. Cássio Vasconcellos' exhibition presents sensitive apprehensions, informed by a gaze decanted in time, before the proliferation of organic forms. It frees up space for our dreamlike reverie, intricate plant formations intertwined in the coexistence of species. It creates evidence of the vital forces of living beings in movement. Otherwise, what are they saying: a landing of small bromeliads on the branches of the trees?



Or the sinuosity of the water flowing from the spring in low the hillside?

These are choices worthy of a painting, to the point where the author associated with the picturesque landscape.

In effect, the artist refines the values inherent in photography, accentuating and transforming transforms records of reality, which are interpreted using digital editors. The image takes on an expressive by appearing coated with plastic, graphic and tactile dimensions, and being reproduced in an enlarged print. Under the command of the writing of light, the luminous rays emitted by the vegetation reach us. Backlit views introduce the subject/observer inside the forest. On the other hand, the blur of the background of the photos and the blurred appearance of the plants, tend to recreate enigmatic, even fantastic, scenarios. fantastic. They evoke dreamlike sensations. The vision of nature escapes us. The unreality of the landscape is also insinuated by the extreme of magnified details. Images transport us to a fantastic, sometimes fantastical world.

Have a good trip, Cássio!

## images

cover *Viagem Pitoresca pelo Brasil* # 189, 2024. [detail]

### img. 1

Claude Fortier. *Fôret vierge du Brési*, 1822  
buril, 68 x 87 cm | 26.8 x 34.3 in

### img. 2

*Forêt Vierge (Le bords du Parahiba)* e *Valle da Serra do Mar (Chaine de Montagnes pres de la Mer)*, 1834.  
litogravura, 23,6 x 36,4 cm | 9.3 x 14.3 in

### img.3

Jean-Baptiste Debret, *Forêt Vierge: Les Bords du Parahiba*. 1834  
litogravura, 23,6 x 36,4cm | 9.3 x 14.3 in







*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 172, 2021*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
133 x 200 cm  
52.4 x 78.7 in









*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 177, 2022*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
133 x 200 cm  
52.4 x 78.7 in









*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 182, 2022*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
270 x 180 cm  
106.3 x 70.9 in





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*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 186, 2023*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
270 x 90 cm  
106.3 x 35.4 in





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*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 187, 2023*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
120 x 360 cm  
47.2 x 141.7 in  
(2 panels of 59.1 x 70.9 in each)









*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 132, 2023*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
225 x 150 cm  
88.6 x 59.1 in













*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 143, 2017*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
120 x 180 cm  
47.2 x 70.9 in





*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 70, 2016*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
150 x 225 cm  
59.1 x 88.6 in









*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 189, 2023*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
120 x 240 cm  
47.2 x 94.5 in









*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 190, 2024*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
150 x 300 cm  
59.1 x 118.1 in









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*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 188, 2023*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
150 x 300 cm  
59.1 x 118.1 in









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*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 191, 2024*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
150 x 225 cm  
59.1 x 88.6 in









*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 192, 2024*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
120 x 180 cm  
47.2 x 70.9 in









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*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 194, 2024*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
150 x 100 cm  
59.1 x 39.4 in









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*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 195, 2024*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
150 x 100 cm  
59.1 x 39.4 in









*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 196, 2023*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
100 x 400 (100 x 200 cm cada)  
39.4 x 157.5 in (39.4 x 78.7 in each)

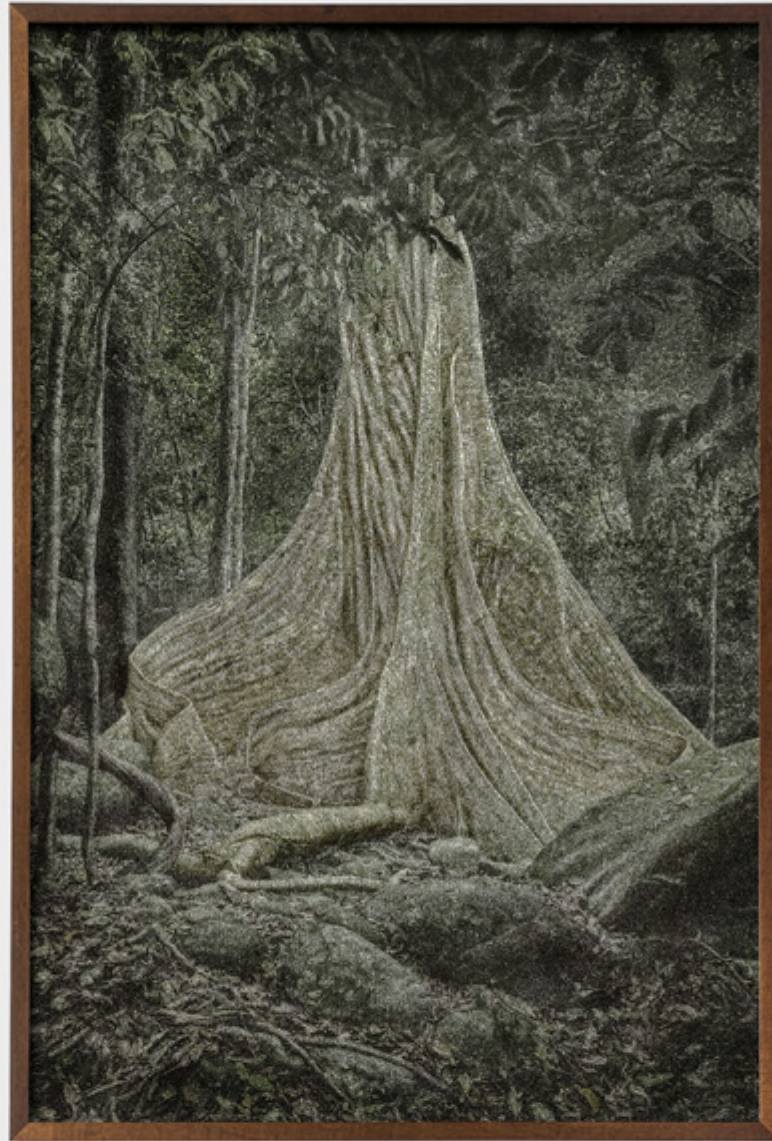








*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 174, 2021*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
unique  
225 x 150 cm  
88.6 x 59.1 in









*Viagem Pitoresca  
pelo Brasil # 197, 2022*  
inkjet print on  
cotton paper  
edition of 1 + 1 AP  
150 x 225 cm  
59.1 x 88.6 in









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## **cássio vasconcellos**

b. 1965, São Paulo, Brazil, where he lives and works

Cássio Vasconcellos began his career as a photographer at the beginning of the 1980s. Though he previously gathered extensive experience as a photojournalist, his artistic work is characterized by fictional imagery, which he derives from elements of reality. His work blurs the boundaries of photography as a genre, creating, instead, an imaginary iconographic vocabulary geared towards a critique of contemporary society. Notably, the artist's use of aerial photography allows for the manipulation of scale and image, which he uses to challenge the viewer's perception of reality. Vasconcellos has published several monographs of his work, including *Brasil visto do céu* [Brazil seen from the sky], Editora Brasileira, 2017; *Panorâmicas*, DBA, 2012 and *Nocturnos São Paulo* [Nocturnes São Paulo], 2002.

Cássio Vasconcellos' photography highlights our society's excessive consumerism, the abundance of products that flood our everyday-life, the uniformity of architectural structures that surround us and the elements that have become emblematic of our culture. Alternatively, his work also explores the magnificence of nature with landscape images like those from the series *Viagem pitoresca pelo Brasil* (2015), with which he joins the long-standing tradition of artists who have attempted to capture the grandiosity of Brazilian flora. His works embody the mysticism of the country's sublime, untamed jungles, creating images that confront the spectator with a reality that is too large for us to comprehend.

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## **selected solo exhibitions**

- *Dríades e Faunos*, Nara Roesler, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2020)
- *Collectives*, St Georges's Gate (Castle of Ioannina), Photometria Festival, Ioannina, Greece (2019)
- *Viagem pitoresca pelo Brasil*, Pequena Galeria 18, São Paulo, Brazil (2015)
- *Aéreas do Brasil*, Paço das Artes, São Paulo, Brazil (2014)
- *Coletivos*, Today Art Museum (TAM), Beijing; Art + Shanghai Gallery, Shanghai, China (2013)

## **selected group exhibitions**

- 13<sup>th</sup> Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2022)
- *Trees*, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris, France (2019)
- *Civilization: The Way We Live Now*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), Seoul, South Korea (2018)
- *Past/Future/Present: Contemporary Brazilian Art from the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo*, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, USA (2017)
- *Aquí nos vemos – Fotografía en América Latina 2000–2015*, Centro Cultural Kirchner, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2015)

## **selected collections**

- Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France
- Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), São Paulo, Brazil
- Museum of Fine Arts Houston (MFAH), Houston, USA



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nara roesler

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