

nara roesler

sérgio sister



sérgio sister

b. 1948, São Paulo, Brazil, where he lives and works

Sérgio Sister started painting in the late 1960s, at the same time when he was working as a journalist and became engaged with political action. In 1970, Sister was arrested for his militancy. While detained for 19 months at the Tiradentes Prison, in São Paulo, Sister attended painting workshops held at the institution. As a part of Geração 80, Sister revisits an ancient theme in painting: the interplay between surface and three-dimensionality, in an attempt to liberate painting in space. What marked his production at that time was the superimposition of autonomous chromatic layers coexisting harmoniously side by side.

Today, his work combines painting and sculpture. He uses supports derived from found structures and from systems designed to serve our everyday needs, as we can see in the *Ripas* series, produced since the late 1990s (strips), and in *Caixas* series, produced since 2009, whose names are appropriate of the manufactured products from which they derive. These are sculptural paintings made from found wooden beams that resemble crates, porticos, or window frames. Sister paints the beams different colors and assembles them into configurations that allow various depths, shadows, and experiences of color to emerge.

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selected solo exhibitions

Pintura entre frestas e cavidades, Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil (2023)
Pintura e vínculo, Nara Roesler, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2021)
Then and Now, Nara Roesler, New York, USA (2019)
Sérgio Sister: O sorriso da cor e outros engenhos, Instituto Ling, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2019)
Sérgio Sister, Kupfer Gallery, London, UK (2017)
Sérgio Sister: Malen Mit Raum, Schatten und Luft, Galerie Lange + Pult, Zurich, Switzerland (2016)
Expanded Fields, Nympe Projekte, Berlin, Germany (2016)
Ordem Desunida, Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil (2015)
Sérgio Sister, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brasil (2013)

selected group exhibitions

Co/respondences: Brazil and abroad, Nara Roesler, New York, USA (2023)
Entre tanto, Casa de Cultura do Parque, São Paulo, Brazil (2020)
A linha como direção, Pina Estação, São Paulo, Brazil (2019)
The Pencil is a Key: Art by Incarcerated Artists, Drawing Center, New York, USA (2019)
Géométries Américaines, du Mexique à la Terre de Feu, Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris, France (2018)
AI-5 50 anos – Ainda não terminou de acabar, Instituto Tomie Ohtake (ITO), São Paulo, Brazil (2018)
MAC USP no século XXI – A era dos artistas, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo (MAC USP), São Paulo, Brazil
25th São Paulo Biennial, Brazil (2002)

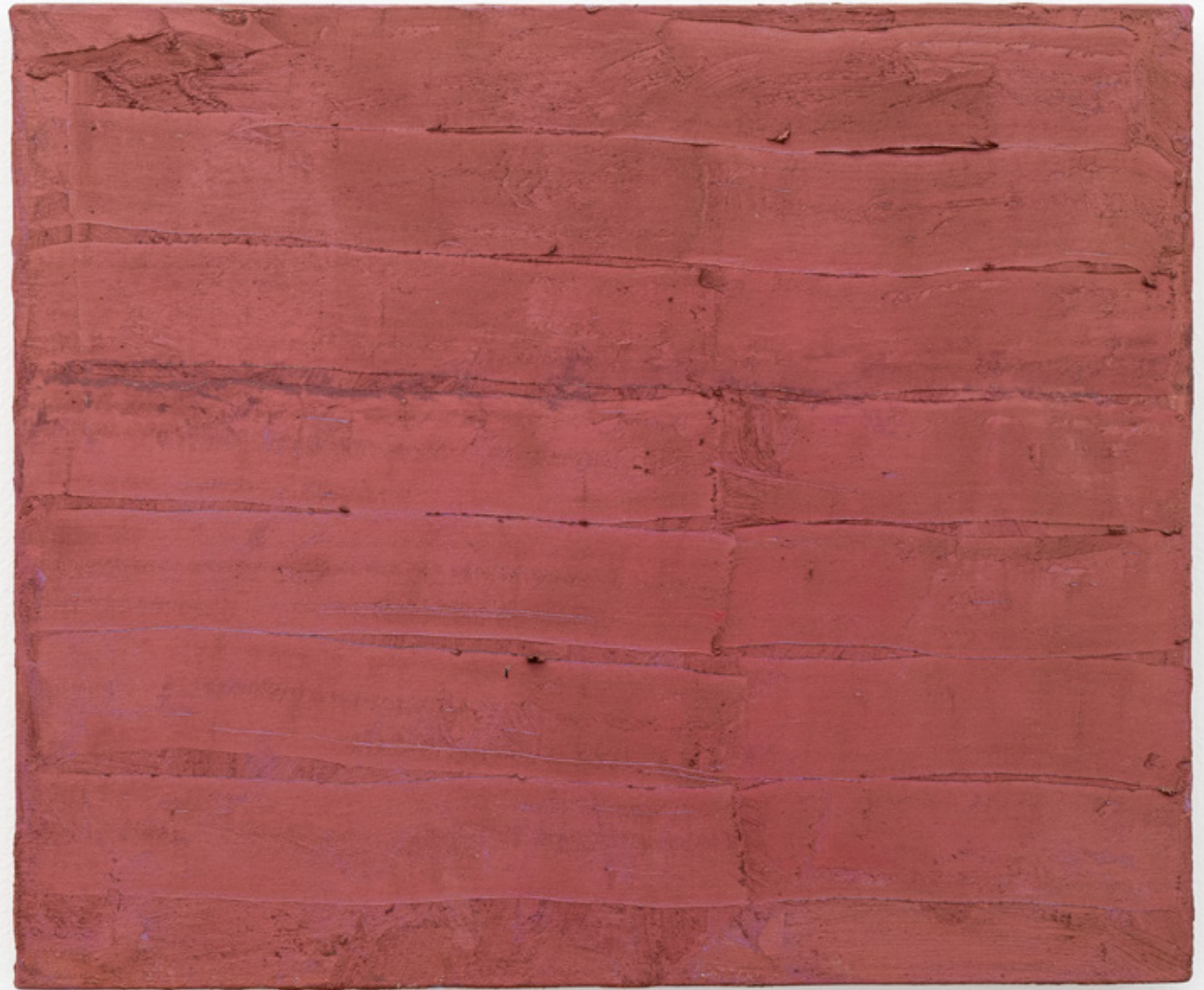
selected collections

François Pinault Collection, Venice, Italy
Fundación/Colección Jumex, Mexico City, Mexico
Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil
Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), São Paulo, Brazil

4	paintings
28	tridimensional works
44	drawings

paintings

Sérgio Sister's practice is founded in painting. His canvases are expressions of a 'dense paintings that were rich in texture and surface tonality, and fundamentally monochromatic' as put by curator and poet, Luis Pérez-Oramas. Sister has dedicated himself to the Monochromatic since the 1980s, when he resumed his practice, becoming, in the words of Pérez-Oramas, 'one of the most subtle and complex bodies of monochrome painting in the Americas.'



Untitled, 1991
oil paint on canvas
50x60 cm | 19.7 x 23.6 in





Sister's practice, however, began in the mid-1960s, when he attended the studio of artist Ernestina Karman (1915-2004) (1965-1967), and classes at Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado (Faap). At that time, he had already received critical acclaim after participating in art salons, in addition to the 1st Young Contemporary Art, at the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC USP) in 1967.

Untitled, 2014
oil paint on canvas
38x46 cm | 15 x 18.1 in

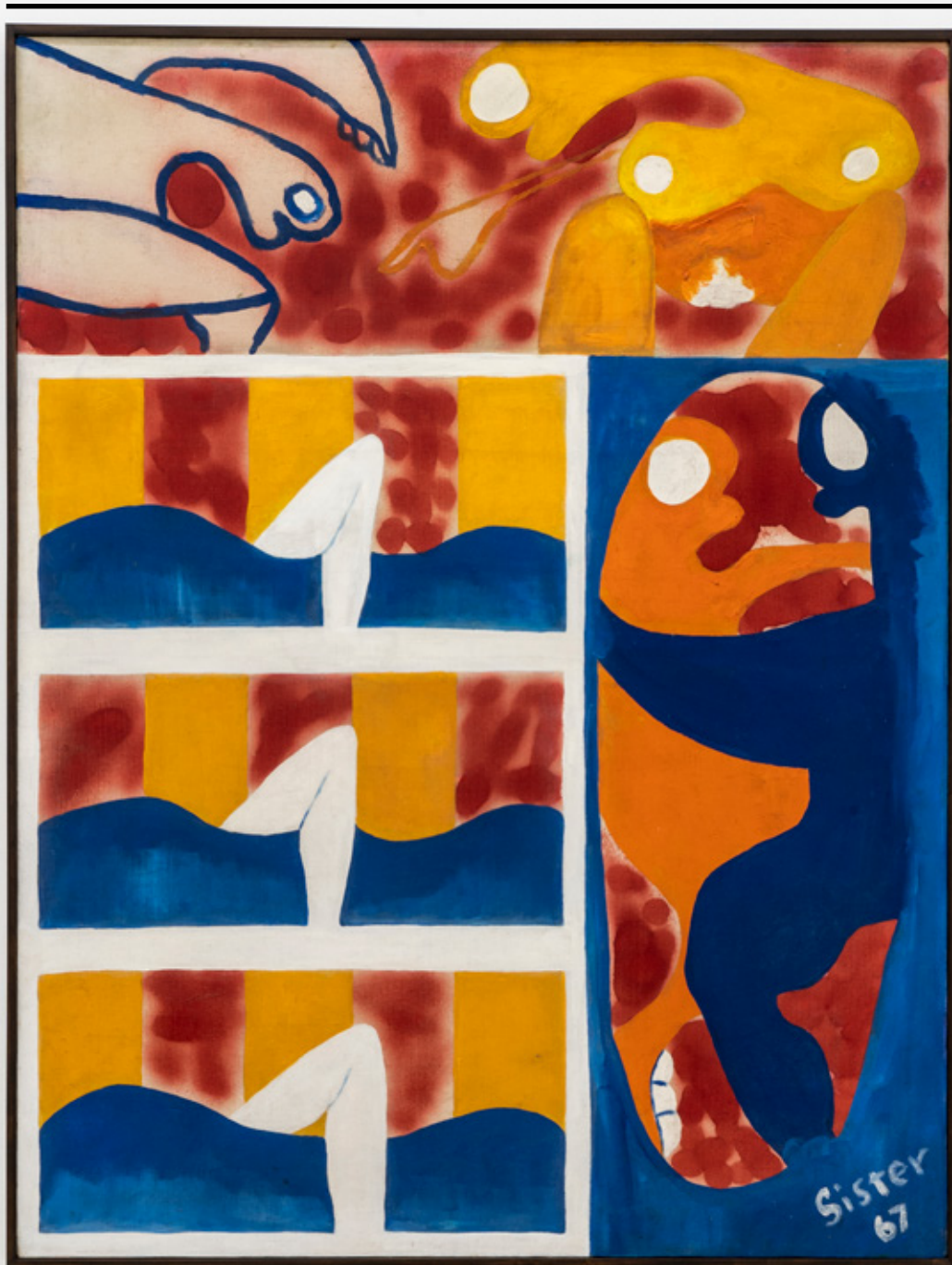
His paintings in the early years, that became known as his first artistic phase, were markedly influenced by the aesthetics of the New Figuration, especially the approaches of Antonio Dias, Claudio Tozzi and Rubens Gerchman and of *Pop Art*, featured at the 9th Biennial of São Paulo (1967)—where Sister participated—also featuring works by Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg and Roy Lichtenstein, in addition to works from the French Nouveau Realism movement.

In curator Tadeu Chiarelli's analysis, '(...) the vivacity that emanates from the paintings is remarkable. They are finely tuned into the hustle of the metropolis, the perversities of mass society and the dangers of the dictatorship (that was gradually showing its real face). The artist demonstrates a strong belief in the pictorial, a confidence in both what, and how, it was able to expose. These paintings show how Sister—akin to other artists from his generation—managed to infiltrate and claim the codes of the most prominent trends of his time (pop art, new figuration, etc.). They are marked by a sort of visual architecture, evoking the pages of a comic book, which could equally be a response to the concrete movement that was still very strong in São Paulo at the first time (possibly in a similar way to Claudio Tozzi's first works).'



Untitled, 1966
oil paint on canvas
116 x 148 cm | 45.7 x 58.3 in





This period of Sister's work however, was marked by a political event. In 1970, the artist, then an activist and a student of social sciences, was arrested, and spent the next 19 months incarcerated, first in Deops where he was tortured for a month and then, in Tiradentes prison, where he spent the following 18 months. The experience did not dissuade him from creating new work. On the contrary, with materials brought by his then-girlfriend—and now wife, Bela—during the visits, he was able to continue his artistic practice. During this time, Sister came into contact with other artists and architects also detained there, with whom he enjoyed both material and intellectual exchanges.

Untitled, 1967
spray and acrylic paint on canvas
116x89 cm | 45.7 x 35 in

At the time, *pop art* appeared with even more force, in view of commentary on daily prison life, integrated with the criticisms of the national political situation. Regarding the relationship between images from the popular imagination and the engaged discourse, characteristic of Brazilian art at the time, Sister says: 'We embraced pop art because it looked like a modern version of art, suited to our revolutionary ideals. It was aggressive, ironic, good-humored, and it provides an arsenal of icons that could feed our discourse.' Although these works formally distance themselves from those produced in the second phase of his career, we can identify several fundamental aspects of Sister's painting within them, such as, the importance and abundance of colors, the flatness of the composition due to the deliberate lack of perspective and the sense of motion through contorted brushstrokes.

Nada além do óbvio, 1971
acrylic, wood, cloth,
ribbons, fuses, electric
cable, paper on canvas
90x110 cm | 35.4 x 43.3 in

→
exhibition views
Imagens de uma juventude
pop – pinturas políticas
e desenhos da cadeia
Nara Roesler
São Paulo, Brazil, 2019











Untitled, 1967
 spray, collage, thread
 and acrylic paint on canvas
 116x80 cm | 45.7 x 31.5 in

→
 exhibition view
 Then and Now
 Nara Roesler
 New York, USA, 2019



After his release, Sister's practice waned, emerging again in the mid-1980s. This new artistic chapter, monochromatically inclined, is according to Chiarelli an affirmation of 'elements that constitute a painting, which were revered in modernity, as a strategy to demarcate his own field of action: the reiteration of two-dimensionality; the focus on the act of painting; and the deliberate use of monochrome to emphasize particularities. (...) the lower tones tend to reinforce the flat dimension of the painting and highlight the painter's action on the surface.'

Untitled, 1993
acrylic paint on canvas
33x33 cm | 13 x 13 in





The continuity of the modern project of the autonomy of art, through the exploration of its constitutive elements also appears in the comments of the critic Rodrigo Naves: 'Sérgio Sister is indeed somewhat of an enraged modernist who insists on seeing painting as an autonomous process, averse to the contamination of reality and its limitations.' Naves continues: 'His paintings do not bring the concerns of major formal transgressions. What characterizes them is, rather, an effort to make expression difficult, to make it adherent to the time spent in making the canvases.'

As seen by the previous comments, this work received great attention from critics, in view of its renewing power of the artistic field, based on its most fundamental elements, light, color and motion, implementing them in an exploration committed to difference, creating colored compositions with unique and subtle effects from the superposition of colored areas on the same surface.

Untitled, 1995
oil paint on canvas
120x140 cm | 47.2 x 55.1 in



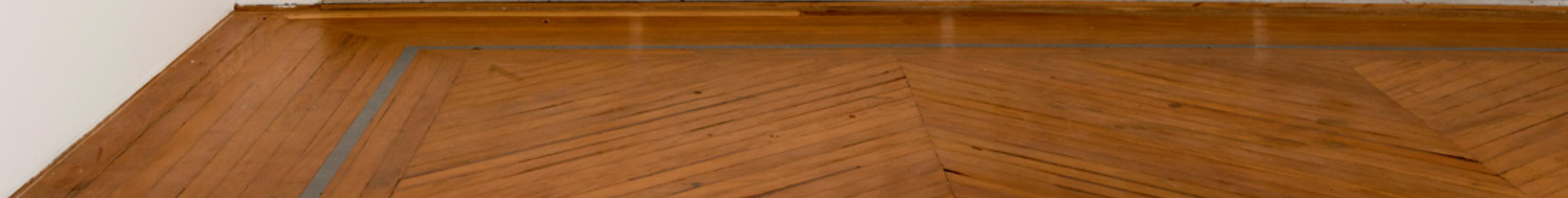
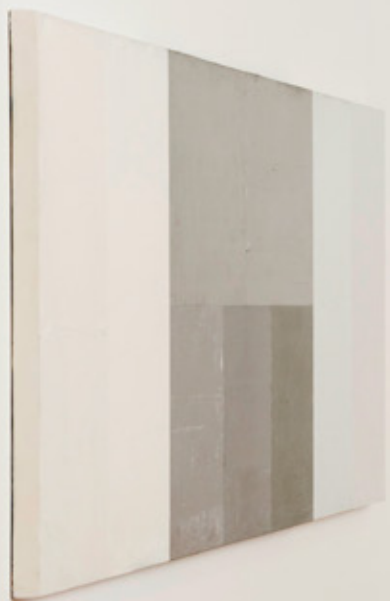
Imprinting his work with energetic brushstrokes that break with the unity of the surface, and revealing the presence of the artist's hand, Sister activates colors by enhancing the movement of the light. 'At the heart of Sérgio Sister's work is the attentive, accurate and patient analysis of the simplest element of visual language: the brushstroke', says critic Lorenzo Mammi. He continues: 'the mark of the brush on the canvas and its reaction to light has increasingly become a structuring element of the picture, and not just a means of representing structure.' The brushstroke, an element that indicates the artist's presence, occurs in abundance, as it does in abstract expressionism, inviting us to look closely, to perceive the richness of nuance in his crisp paint and the different directions of the strokes.

Untitled, 2019
oil paint on canvas
41x30 cm | 16.1 x 11.8 in

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exhibition view
Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo,
São Paulo, Brazil, 2013







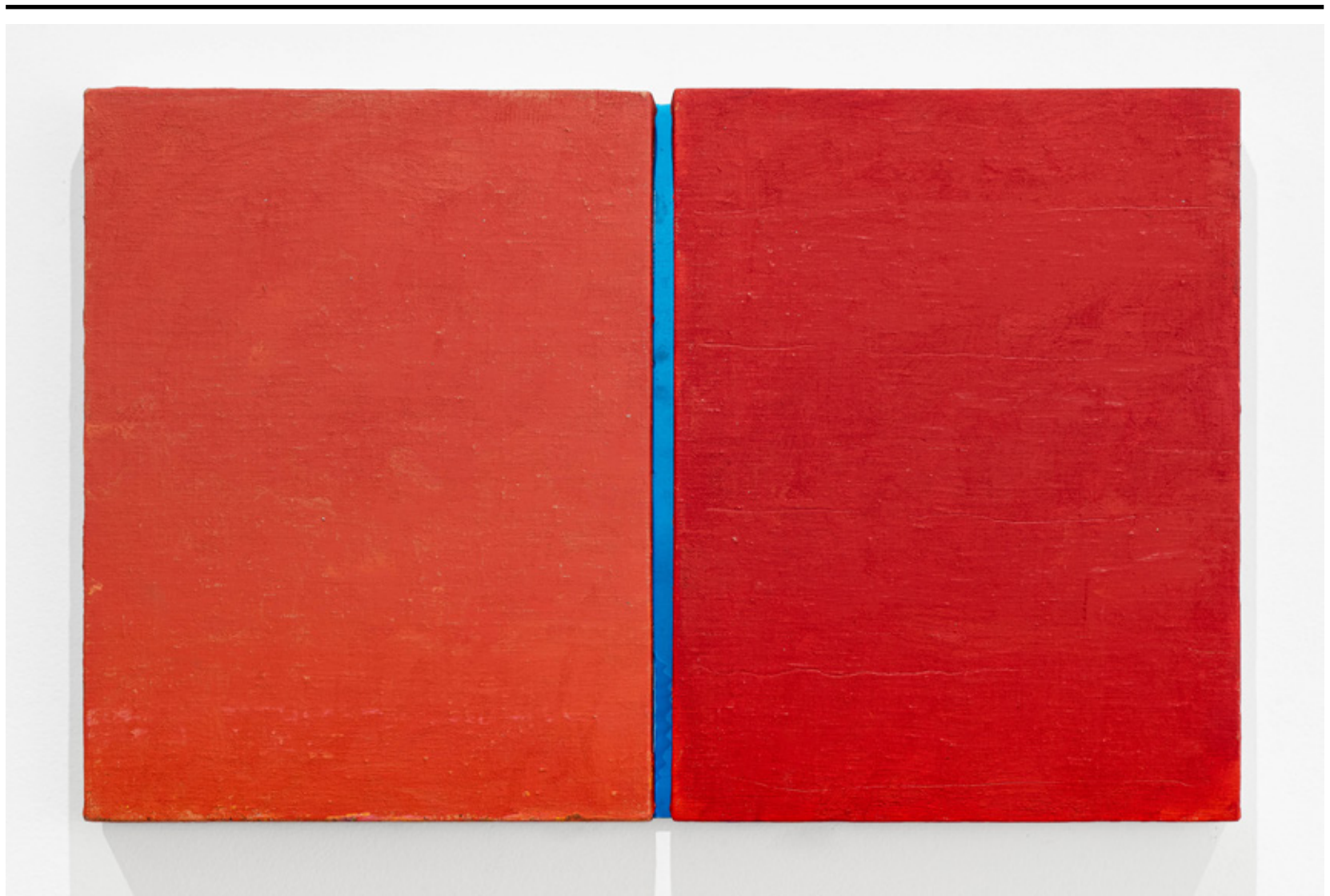


The colors used by Sister 'most of the time, carry supplementary pigmentations or waxes that refer them to other possibilities, either through different luminosities, which distract us from their alleged wholeness; or by opacities that silence them; or even by whitening that weakens them. It is about going, saying, doing, but also encouraging hesitation and doubt', reveals Sister. Mammi also notes that 'For the brushstrokes to have the maximum impact, Sister uses a pigment based on aluminum powder, mixed with oil, wax or soil.' This strategy gives the paintings depth, due to the pulsation of the color, activated by light and motion, also making color variations perceptible.

Untitled, 2019
oil on canvas on aluminum
226x200 cm | 89 x 78.7 in

→
*Pintura com ligações
prata e laranja, 2021*
oil on canvas and aluminum
24x53 cm | 9.4x20.8 in





*Two reds with
blue link*, 2019
oil paint on canvas
35 x 56 cm | 13.8 x 22 in

→
exhibition view
Ordem desunida
Nara Roesler
São Paulo, Brazil, 2015





We can see how the irregularity of the brushstrokes expands the possibilities of the movement of light, bringing out the rich subtleties of the color surfaces. For critic Alberto Tassinari, 'Sérgio Sister's paintings seem to keep the light. Opaque, sometimes milky, they are paintings—paradoxical and luminous. Although they are always painted in a dominant color, it is not so much about color that they speak of, but, about a repose of light.' His practice, then, seeks to integrate fundamental elements of painting to generate unique results, revealing the originality of each composition and each color from its relationship with others in the painting and with the environment in which it is inserted.

Light green over blue, 2015
oil paint on canvas
25,4 x 34,9 cm | 10 x 13.75 in

→
exhibition view
Pintura com ar, sombra e espaço
Nara Roesler
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2017



tridimensional works

Over time, the colored surfaces of Sérgio Sister's paintings began to take on other forms. The artist not only superimposed colors and hues, but began to juxtapose them, in compositions of loose geometry, in which the surface of the canvas is divided into segments with tonal and color variations. The objective of these works was to "connect two different bodies of color on the canvas, without corrupting the power of each one of them in a simple arrangement of stripes," says Sister. He also states that "different colors coexist in a balanced way with each other when pacified by their tonal likeness."

Tela com tiras, 2015
oil and vinyl paint
on wood and canvas
31x20 cm | 12.2 x 7.9 in





These artistic ideas intensified with the incorporation of three dimensional elements into Sister's practice. This change in direction happened thanks to a chance encounter, while Sister was experiencing a moment of crisis regarding his usual, two dimensional work. In his building's garage, Sister found a pile of discarded fruit boxes used to pack tiles. The artist used these boxes and experimented with them, painting the wooden strips with colors, creating small chromatic environments.

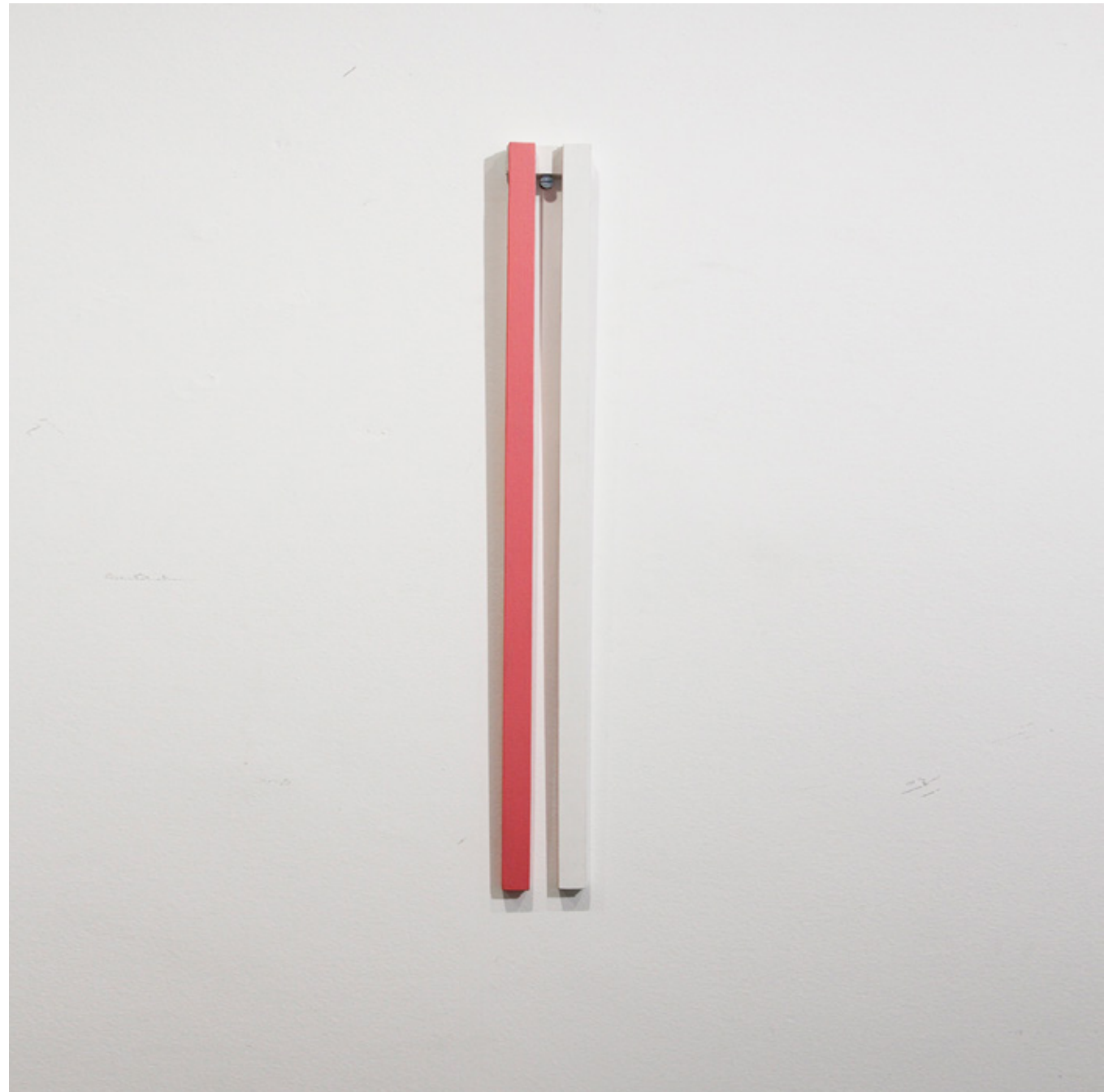
Box 93, 2010
oil on wood
38 x 24,5 x 8,5 cm
15 x 9.6 x 3.3 in



The first manifestation of this body of works was the *Caixas* series, soon followed by the *Ripas* series, in which thin strips of wood were covered in color and hung side by side, just a few centimeters apart. These narrow areas of color create a kind of rhythm that is different from the paintings, in which it appears through motions. In this case, the interval between the colors creates a kind of visual composition corresponding to musical chords, with different notes making sounds together.

“To improve the flow between the concrete space of the wall and the slats—I almost always introduced a color that had some familiarity with the projected shadow of the slats (grays) and also with the white wall itself. Thus, the eye could run more fluidly between the painted sections and the rest, like a collaborative game between the colors and also between the colors and the space,” explains Sister. The deliberate choice of certain tones aims to create different relationships, whether of harmony, through proximity, or of contrast. A chromatic approach that began to be investigated with greater vigor from the 2000s onwards.

Rosa e Branco, 2018
acrylic paint on wood
64 x 7,5 cm | 25.2 x 3 in





Ripas parede 6, 2019
oil paint, vinyl paint, canvas
and aluminum on wood
2 parts of 64 x 11 cm | 25,2 x 4,3 in
3 parts of 80 x 7,5 cm | 31,5 x 3 in

→
exhibition view
Pintura e vínculo, Nara Roesler,
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2021





For Tassinari, “in the *Ripas* series, Sérgio Sister finds a solution of a different kind, not through painting but through combining different colors under the same light, which is the light of the world itself.” The series unfolded into other ways of applying color on three-dimensional elements. In some cases, on the same wooden slab, he cut grooves between the colored surfaces. In others, he juxtaposes wooden cobblestones painted in varying tones, articulating them in different ways, sometimes juxtaposing them horizontally or vertically, or connecting them with wires, creating distinct relationships and arrangements. In the last series, *Tijolos*, named for their similarity with bricks, Sister also introduces other materials, such as aluminum, with which he creates objects of the same dimensions with surfaces that reflect light and the environment, interacting with other elements and forming a composition.

Tijolinho, 2014
oil on canvas on wood
18,5 x 23 x 8 cm
7.3 x 9.1 x 3.1 in

Tijolino vertical, 2015
oil on canvas on wood
and steel cable
99,5 x 6,5 cm | 39.2 x 2.6 in





Tijolinhos, 2013
oil on canvas on
wood and aluminum
26 x 39 x 8 cm
10.2 x 15.4 x 3.1 in



In 2003, in an exhibition at the 10.20 x 3.6 Gallery, he used larger wooden boards, covering them with color, to create an installation. Hence, the *Pontaletes* emerged: a set of thin wooden columns, similar to those used in the construction of concrete slabs. Tassinari emphasizes that, “these are Sérgio Sister’s most playful works. They are somewhat reminiscent of a game of sticks, happily arranged to simply connect beams, or, in other sections, acting like self-absorbed marble that seems to quarrel with the other props, carrying the reminder that happiness, if it comes to the world, also comes by overcoming the heavy, the serious, the sad.”

Caixas, the most evident result of Sister’s encounter with fruit boxes, has become one of the artist’s most iconic form of investigation into the relationship between color and space. These objects, built by Sister, create a kind of small ecosystem, in which the different colored bands create visual dialogues, projecting shadows, as he plays with depth between the different areas of color. Despite being a regular structure, there are endless possibilities for innovation and the creation of various visual rhythms, depending on the arrangement of the wood. This is further amplified by the diverse array of colors that he employs.

Pontalete # 1, 2007
oil on canvas on
wood and aluminum
12 pieces of 250 x 250 cm
12 pieces of 98.4 x 98.4 in





Pontalete # 8, 2007
oil on canvas on
wood and aluminum
8 pieces of 250 x 20 x 250 cm
8 pieces of 98.4 x 7.9 x 98.4 in



Pontaleta # 03, 2007
oil on canvas on
wood and aluminum
15 pieces of 250 x 500 cm
15 pieces of 98.4 x 196.9 in

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exhibition view
Nara Roesler
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2017



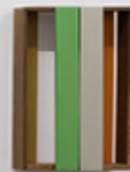


Terceiro fundo # 16 e 21
[díptico], 2013–2014
oil on wood
53x30x15 cm each
20.9 x 11.8 x 5.9 in each

→
exhibition view
Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo,
São Paulo, Brazil, 2013

→→
vista da exposição
Pintura com ar, sombra e espaço
Nara Roesler
Rio de Janeiro, Brasil, 2017





drawings

Drawing has always been present in Sérgio Sister's practice. It often accompanies the pictorial work itself, revealing reverberations between both processes. In the first phase of his work, from the mid-1960s to the beginning of the following decade, the compositions had psychedelic colors, flirting with the language of comics and creating critical narratives about Brazilian society and politics, as well as taking a look at daily life in prison. Curator Camila Bechelany notes how in these works "the figures' faces became more caricatural, with more-or-less identifiable characters—like Uncle Sam, for instance."



Chuáaa, 1970
ecoline ink, oil pastel, and
felt tip pen on paper
44,5 x 32 cm | 17.5 x 12.6 in

CHU





Regarding the method and tone used in the construction of these images, Chiarelli writes that “these are scenes that resemble collages, in which the artist represents cynicism, barbarism, and torture: tragic scenes that, perhaps surprisingly, show an almost bitter and sad sense of humor.” There is a consensus that, in addition to being works of art, the drawings produced in this period are also important tools of documentation. As Chiarelli observed, “despite being serious, significant and insurmountable testimonies about the government’s actions against common citizens, the drawings are more than that. They cannot be merely classified as solemn symbols of a regime, of which the artist was one of its many victims. They are documents of a crime, but also of the overcoming of a crime. They are the best response to arbitrariness; simultaneously mocking and self-questioning. The drawings refuse to be simple documents about suffering. They are impervious critical re-elaborations of the wickedness they represent. They are weapons of resistance.”

Brazil, love it or leave it. This way, bye, bye, Brazil, 1970
ecoline ink and hydrographic pen on paper
70 x 50 cm | 27.6 x 19.7 in

Untitled, 1970
hydrographic pen and
oil pastel on paper
33 x 23 cm | 13 x 9.1 in

→
exhibition view
The Pencil is a Key
Drawing Center
New York, USA, 2019







Untitled, 1970
ecoline paint, pencil, oily pastel and
hydrographic pen on paper
32 x 45 cm | 12.6 x 17.7 in





Untitled, 1971
 ecoline ink and indian
 ink on paper
 50 x 70 cm | 19.7 x 27.6 in

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 exhibition view
The Pencil is a Key
 Drawing Center
 New York, USA, 2019

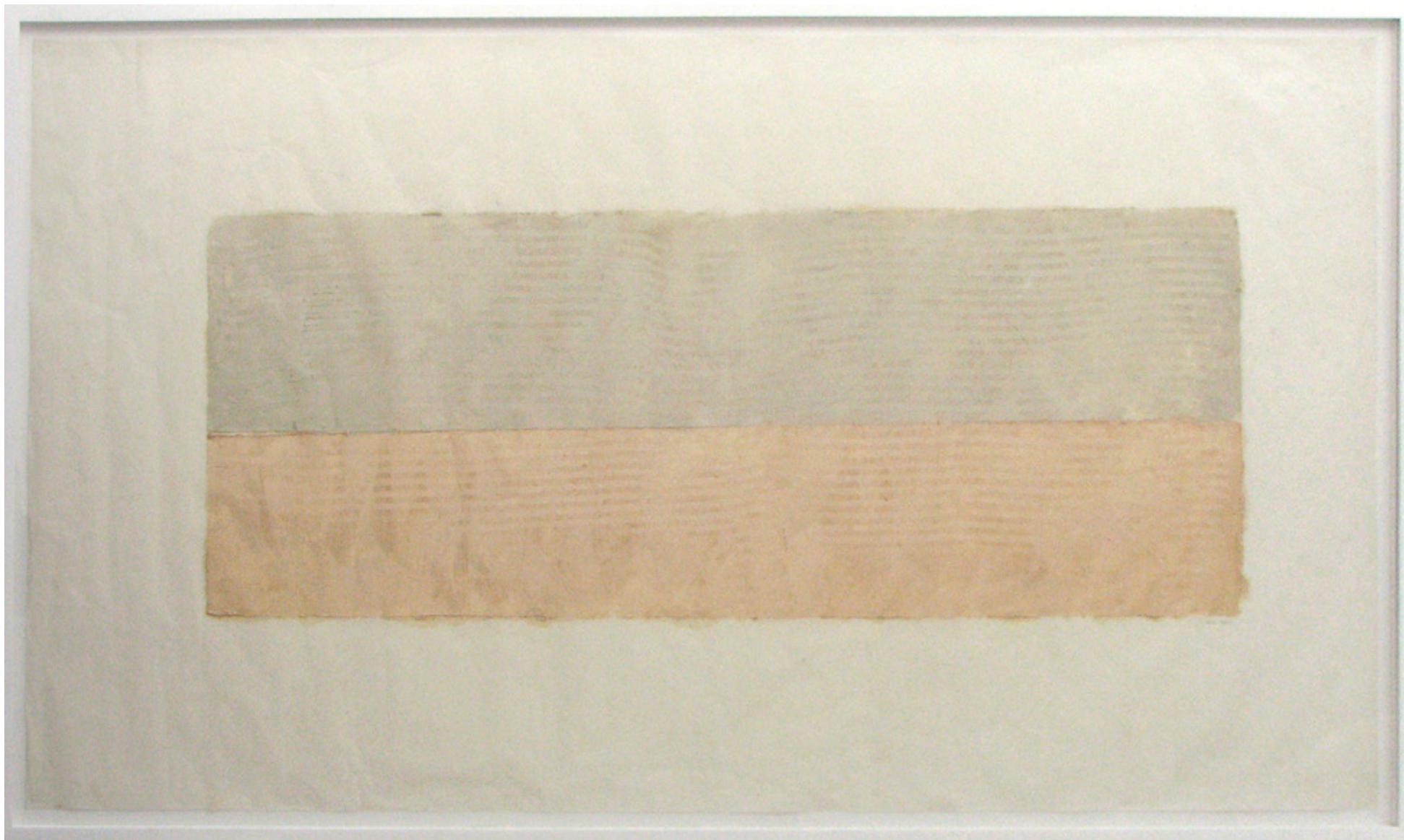


In the 1980s, as he resumed his work, Sister continued to develop his practice not only on screen, but also on paper. These works mainly occurred in two ways. One has a more pronounced visual character, with large areas of color, and the other is more graphic. In both, the artist uses porous papers which, due to their high absorption, allow a certain lack of control, contrasting with the work's rigor and formality.

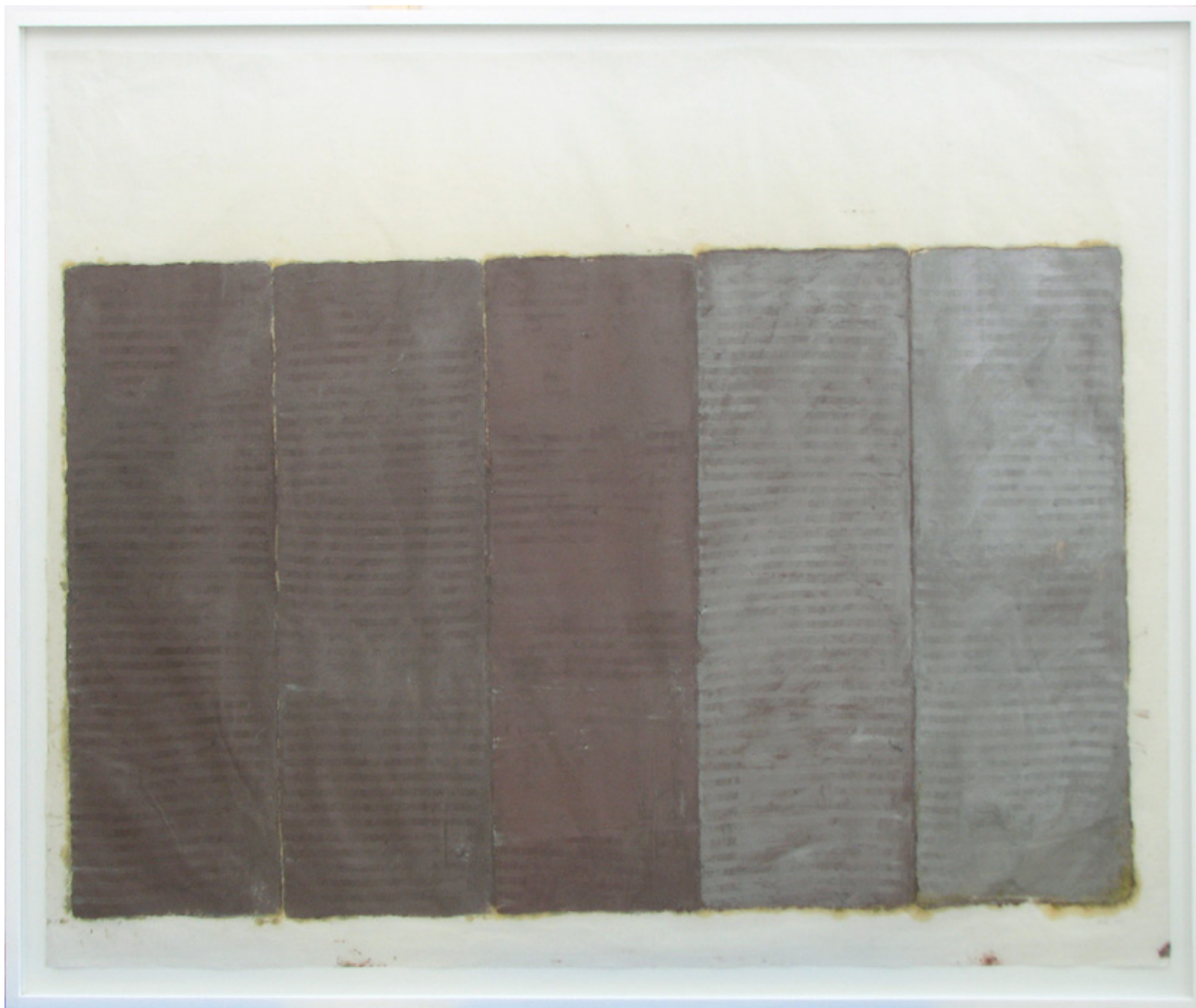
In the works of the first group, we see a hint of his monochromatic paintings, as the artist experiments with different shades on the same surface. These spots, which resemble squares or rectangles, made with oil paint, escape the rigidity of geometry, giving a kind of organic feel to the composition. The works can also be verified by the marks that seem to serve as borders between the color and the white surface of the paper. This, almost like a shadow, is the work of the oiliness of the pigment, which becomes an intermediary space between the materials, revealing their synthesis.

←
exhibition view
The Pencil is a Key
Drawing Center
New York, USA, 2019

Guerreiro, 2004
oil on kozo paper
206 x 105 cm | 81.1 x 41.3 in



Untitled, 2006
oil on kozo paper
100 x 203 cm | 39.4 x 79.9 in



—
Untitled, 2006
oil on kozo paper
100 x 203 cm | 39.4 x 79.9 in



In the second body of work, we see a series of horizontal lines that seem to dissolve. The effect reminds us of ruled paper, or a kind of illegible writing. These drawings allow the two roles of the graphic line to coexist- that of making an image and of writing, whilst remaining indeterminate. For Tassinari, these lines are comparable to the outlining of brush strokes in the paintings, creating both direction and rhythm.

Untitled, 1989
mixed media on Kozo paper
110 x 97 cm | 43.3 x 38.2 in

→
exhibition view
Paço Imperial
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2007

→→
exhibition view
Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo,
São Paulo, Brazil, 2013







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