

HYPERALLERGIC



Depicting Nature's Rebellion Against Humanity

By: Zachary Small
April 17, 2017

Calling Thiago Rocha Pitta's art "environmentally conscious" wouldn't be quite right; rather, his work argues that the environment *is* conscious. On view at Marianne Boesky Gallery, *The First Green* is a multimedia installation exploring nature's growing revolt against us. Rocha Pitta's version of nature is immortal and quick, operating on the microscopic and macroscopic levels to reclaim land lost to humanity.

The exhibition begins in a dark antechamber faintly illuminated by the projection of a primeval waterscape. Titled "Before the Dawn," the film meditates on biology's origins, observing the otherworldly [Hamelin Pool](#) in Western Australia wherein the water's marine microorganisms strongly resemble the stromatolites found in fossils 3,500 million years old. Many point to the Hamelin Pool as the origin of life, and Rocha Pitta attempts to mythologize that connection. Crystalline waters perfectly reflect the pool's rocky outcroppings into a sky lush with the deep blues and oranges of a setting sun. The composite image resembles an asteroid field, a symbol of Earth's celestial connections to the wider universe. By collapsing scientific fact with aesthetic wonderment, Rocha Pitta transforms the Hamelin Pool into a biological nativity scene of cosmic proportions.

Emerging from the darkness, we find ourselves in a white gallery dotted with green frescos. Gradually shifting in tonality between light and dark, "Seascape with Cyanobacteria" immediately recalls the exponential growth of bacteria living in a petri dish. The frescos blur the distinction between art and nature,

using abstraction to mimic the process of cellular mitosis. Replete with exploding green blotches, Rocha Pitta demonstrates the quiet violence of the microscopic world; it is a place where cells reproduce and die with unfathomable speed. And as the cyanobacteria multiply, they crowd and darken Rocha Pitta's frescos. The series concludes with only a few smudges of green paint across a black background.



The exhibition's untitled centerpiece exhibits a more macroscopic tension that we must reckon with: the fight between urbanization and vegetation. (More specifically, the piece evokes current debates in the artist's native Brazil where deforestation has made a terrifying comeback.) Yet it's hard to tell who is winning the battle between industrialization and Mother Nature. From one perspective, the cement veil opens its gaping maw, releasing a mound of mossy greenery onto the gallery floor. Alternatively, the cement looks ready to devour the vegetation, signaling an end to the free wilderness that Rocha Pitta so obviously prizes. Yet I think a third perspective best reveals the artist's vision. Rocha Pitta's work expresses delight in the limitless, entropic values of nature. The environment's ability to adapt over time is slow, but signals an immortal resilience that manmade materials fail to replicate. Accordingly, the menacing cement veil is locked in stasis, but the vegetation in "Untitled" continues to thrive. With each passing moment, it is slowly overtaking the cement veil. Every new sprout multiplies the moss's domain.



In Rocha Pitta's work, nature becomes an agent of the unexpected, unseating our expectations of a docile or even victimized ecology. Life is hard work, but our conception of human endurance on this Earth looks myopic when compared to nature's. Humans play the short game, bulldozing over microorganisms that started life millions of years before we did. Nature, however, plays the long game, waiting for the dust to settle before it mounts an assault.

