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Thalita Hamaoui, *Nascer da terra*, 2025.
Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery

CHANNELING THE PRIMORDIAL PULSE OF NATURE: AN INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST THALITA HAMAOUÍ

BY ELISA CAROLLO
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Her visual language draws from the Tropicália movement, reprocessing Western forms through a distinctly Brazilian lens of rhythm, light and color.

Thalita Hamaoui's paintings are at once fantastical, primordial landscapes and holistic visions of nature's generative force, where everything belongs to the same unified whole. Within her canvases, all elements exist in continuous interrelation, participating in an unending cycle of growth, efflorescence and transformation. The lush tropical flora of her native Brazil resurfaces through a painterly language that feels both meticulous and rhythmically instinctive—an alchemical process in which inert matter is transfigured into something vibrant and alive.

Her oil wax pigments, drawn from the very essence of Brazilian nature, seem to return to their organic origins as they settle on the canvas. Like layers of earth, Thalita Hamaoui's paintings depict stories and lived experiences, unfolding through an energetic act of creation. They germinate, expand and evolve across the pictorial space as if animated from within, and the viewer is drawn into this quiet metamorphosis, invited to contemplate the cyclical and visceral rhythms of life and the latent, transformative power coursing through both nature and the artist's gesture.

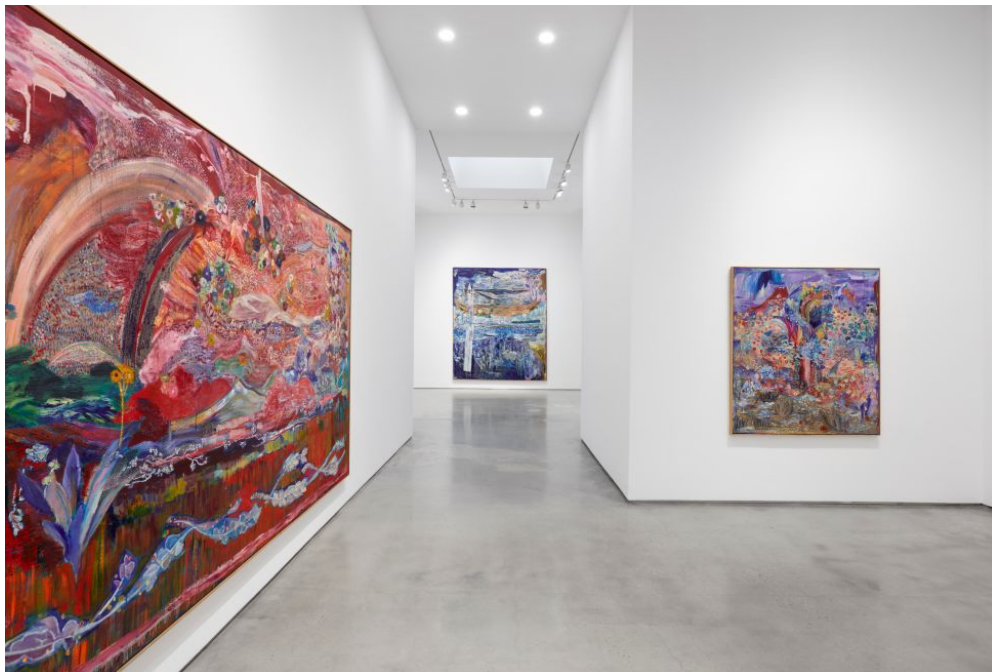
For her debut at Marianne Boesky Gallery, Hamaoui titled the exhibition "Nascer da Terra," which can be translated as either "Born of the Earth" or "Birth from the Earth." Each variation holds a slightly different nuance, yet both convey a primordial connection to a fecund, generative Earth viewed from a distinctly feminine perspective. What the artist

attempts to capture is nothing less than nature's breath, the pulse of the soil, the spirit of becoming—a force akin to Henri Bergson's *élan vital*: not mechanical, not reducible to chemistry, but a creative and intuitive propulsion that animates life beyond the grasp of deterministic law.



Rooted in both Brazilian tropicality and Eastern European inheritance, Hamaoui's work merges ancestral memory with lived sensorial experience. Nina Jacobi

As we move through the show, Hamaoui describes her works as internal landscapes (both mirages and inner visions) that allow her to construct an interior world while channeling and elaborating the energies she absorbs from tropical nature. Though based in São Paulo, she tells *Observer* she feels a persistent urge to reconnect with the natural world. "You drive an hour and a half," she says, "and you're somewhere in the middle of the chaos of the forest." Yet the generative, unruly vitality of the tropical landscape is not captured or subdued in Hamaoui's work. Rather, it is fully embraced, absorbed and internalized, then transfigured on the canvas.



In "Nascer da Terra," Hamaoui channels a feminine vision of creation—fluid, intuitive and rooted in the fertile tension between inheritance and invention.

Photo by Jason Wyche

Her densely layered, vibrant surfaces may initially recall the fragmentation of Pointillism, and she readily acknowledges her admiration for Bonnard's saturated, symbolic palette. Yet her visual language aligns more closely with the cannibalistic ethos of the Tropicália movement, devouring and reprocessing Western influences while fluidly merging them with a uniquely Brazilian sensitivity to rhythm, light and color. The result is a hybrid grammar of form that feels fresh and alive.

"I was born in 1981, during the final years of Brazil's military dictatorship," Hamaoui says. "Although I didn't live through that period directly, I grew up in a country still profoundly affected by it—one that was actively seeking openness, freedom and the rebuilding of democratic values."

As she explains, Tropicália emerged as part of that countercultural wave, playing a pivotal role in resisting authoritarianism. It was a creative eruption that gave rise to a generation of bold, singular artists. "Their work celebrated Brazil's richness while offering sharp commentary on the country's political and social challenges, often navigating censorship and repression," Hamaoui notes. "They taught us that there is no single Brazil, no fixed aesthetic, no one history. It showed how art can be a form of resistance, of collective reflection, of reimagining the nation. And that, for me, is profoundly liberating."



Thalita Hamaoui, *A noite, a travessia, a memória*, 2025.

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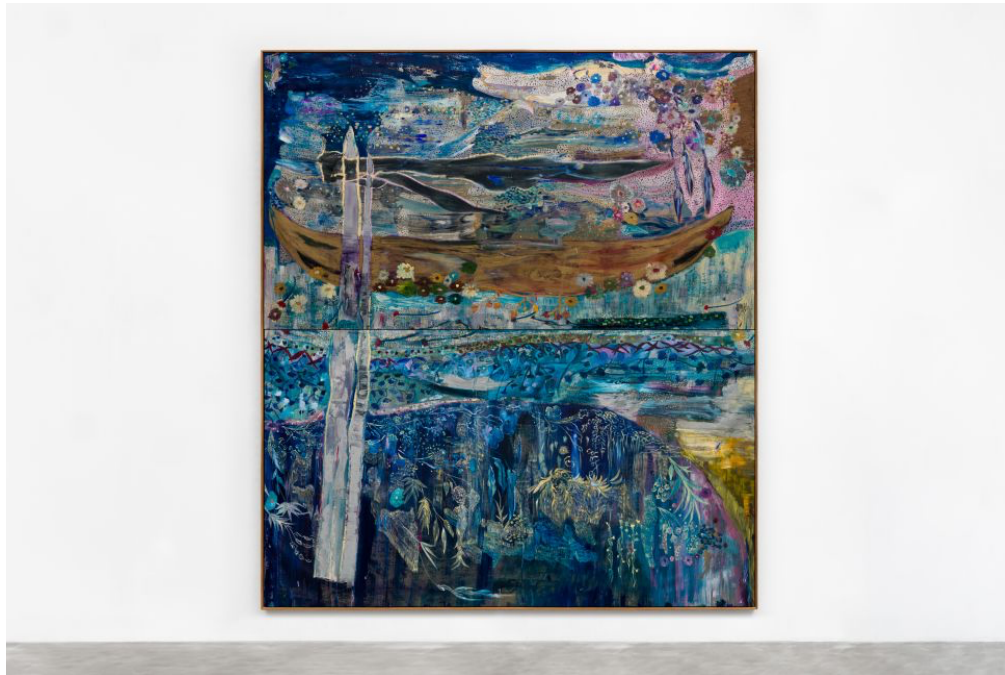
At the same time, personal and ancestral memory flow through this body of work, which emerged from a desire to recall the stories her grandmother once told of Romanian forests and distant villages Hamaoui never visited but nonetheless felt intimately tethered to.

"In the early stages of painting, I often asked myself: What should I paint? That question led me to the memory of my grandmother's stories," Hamaoui says. "Once, I decided to paint her house in Bucharest—a place I've never visited, but which had taken form in my imagination through family narratives. I spent around one hour painting the house, and ten days painting the landscape around it." That experience made clear to her that her work would revolve around landscapes, personal memory and movement.

These recollections act as imaginative seeds, drawing the viewer into the process and turning them into participants in a mnemonic and affective oscillation, a pull that moves in and out of the picture plane. The movement is not only visual

but also psychic, mirroring the artist's own navigation of the tension between remembering and inventing. Her gestures become a means of survival, an effort to preserve not only fleeting images but also multisensorial experience from erasure.

In spontaneous mark-making, she engages in a near-ritual act—not to overwork the canvas, to hold the energy within, to embrace the overflow. Her approach resonates with what feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray described as *écriture féminine*, an embodied, fluid, and generative form of expression. Hamaoui's painting becomes a space where feminine subjectivity and bodily memory converge, a site of continuity that connects across generations.



Thalita Hamaoui, *A linha que separava o céu da terra*, 2025.
Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery

One of the show's most majestic and commanding canvases, the diptych *A linha que separava o céu da terra* (2025), stands as a striking testament to Hamaoui's evolving visual language. Split across two panels, the work evokes inverted dimensions through which to perceive reality: the overworld and the underworld, the earthly and the otherworldly, the conscious and the unconscious. The viewer is drawn into a suspended limbo rather than a resolution, where positions shift and interchange.

At its center, Hamaoui introduces visual echoes of tidal movement oscillating between moon and boat. Lunar shapes have recurred in her recent work, she explains, but in this piece, she eventually recognized a boat within the arc. That recognition sparked a poetic and mnemonic association with something she once read: "we all come from a boat." The phrase unlocked a dense symbolism—the boat as origin, as migration, as mythic vessel; as container of memory, survival and transformation.

Born to a Romanian mother and Egyptian father who each migrated to Brazil before her birth, Hamaoui grew up in the interstices of multiple worlds, between cultural, spatial and temporal dimensions. "As the daughter of immigrants, I grew up between two worlds: the vibrant, chaotic energy of Brazil, and the cultural references of Eastern Europe and the Middle East that filled the homes of my childhood," she says. "My father's family was expelled from Egypt during the 1973 war, and my mother's family fled Romania years earlier. Because of this history, my relatives are scattered across many countries."

Once this familial context is understood, the painting reveals itself as a kind of abstract, metaphorical cartography—an evocation of how human evolution unfolds through resistance, resilience and adaptation, propelled by nature's unpredictable forces and shifting political tides. "The sea, both as metaphor and physical presence, has always lived between us, linking stories and cultural universes," she reflects.

Hamaoui is deeply attuned to the generative potential of intercultural fluidity: the foreigner not as outsider but as a figure who unsettles fixed identities, making space for adaptation and transformation. It is in that liminal movement where something broader is accessed—a shared human journey shaped by contingency, rupture and continuous becoming.



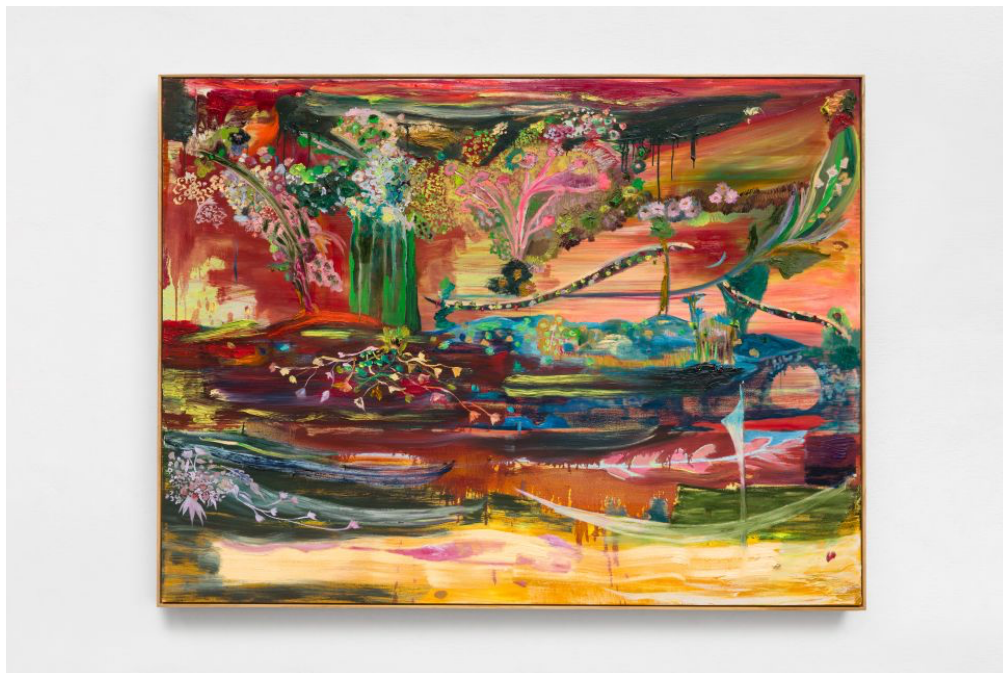
Thalita Hamaoui, *Queda do céu*, 2025.
Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery

In her maternal grandmother's home, they ate Eastern European food, many languages floated through the rooms and she was surrounded by velvet curtains, dramatic mirrors, a piano and heavy fabrics—a layered, theatrical environment. "There were no photographs, and very few records. Only stories told in many voices, across time," Hamaoui recounts. "That absence of visual memory gave rise to a strong practice of imagination from an early age. I created mental scenes from those family tales, which felt both distant and deeply intimate."

Resisting any notion of harmony or linearity, she becomes a receptacle for sedimented, layered narratives—a fertile ground of sensations stirred by the external world. Hamaoui's paintings embrace an energy that is never still; it surges, mutates and reinvents itself through this dialectical exchange, echoing Bergson's vision of evolution as a creative unfolding, born not from order but from an inner tension toward novelty and complexity.

"Since Brazil shaped my everyday life, the imagined settings of those stories were infused with local nature and culture," she muses. "These internal images remain the starting point of my work to this day. Even when I paint something I've never seen like the 'red forest,' I begin with the Atlantic Rainforest where I live: tropical, dense, chaotic, it's my sensorial reference. That's why, when I feel uncertain about what to paint or which path to follow, I return to those memories and the stories that shaped my imagination and continue to guide me in subtle ways."

For Hamaoui, this practice of layering and blending narratives mirrors the experience of literature. "We read the same books, but imagine entirely different worlds from the same story. That's where the power lies: in what each one of us makes of what we inherit." Embracing the coexistence of opposites and a vital polyphony, Hamaoui composes works that weave together diverse sensations. Her densely stratified surfaces often resemble tapestries or embroideries from a distance—textiles of memory and perception unfolding in painterly form.

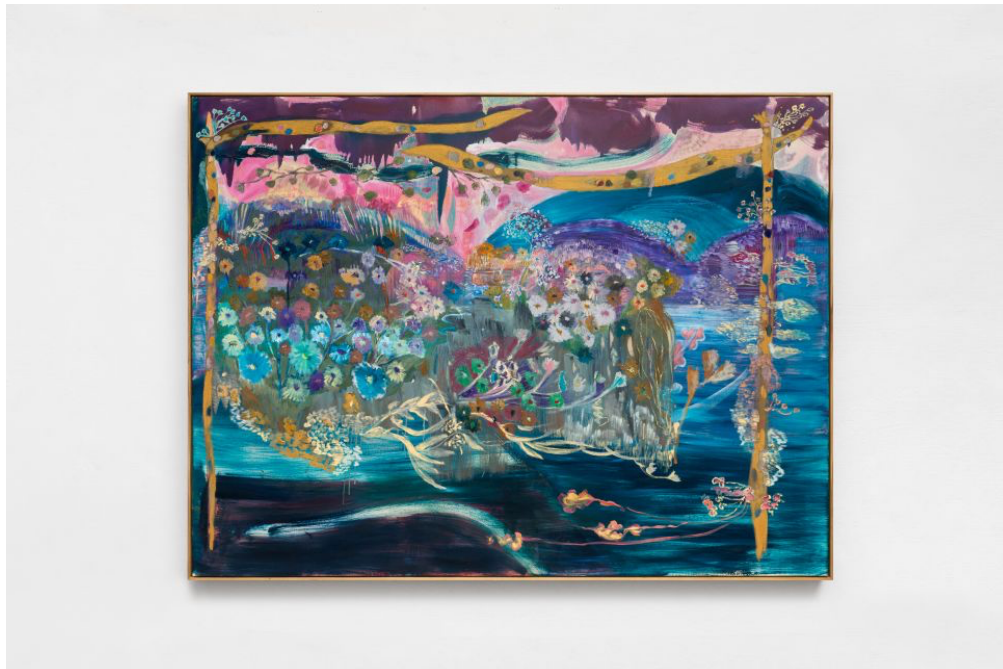


Thalita Hamaoui, *Passagem tropical*, 2025.
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After earning a degree in Fine Arts in São Paulo, Hamaoui spent nearly a decade immersed in the world of printmaking, developing projects for clients that involved dyeing, engraving, transferring, designing patterns and customizing surfaces. “It was a period of both technical rigor and intuitive exploration, during which I learned to observe the behavior of color, understand the nuances of materials and navigate the many stages of the creative process,” Hamaoui recounts. “Painting emerged as a natural extension of that experience: I began with watercolor while participating in painting study groups to structure my experiments.” Eventually, she was encouraged to try oil paints, which opened a new chapter in her artistic journey.

This early foundation in textile printing instilled a deep sensitivity to the structural power of pattern, surface and color saturation, while also sharpening her awareness of how material can hold emotion, memory and rhythm. It is within this calibrated, dense oil viscosity that Hamaoui discovers a corporeal, multilayered logic of becoming—a sensibility that now underpins her painterly approach.

Here, nature is not simply a backdrop but an active, pulsing force of origination that births, breaks and remakes form in a perpetual cycle, always pointing back to the essential rhythms of transformation. What Hamaoui’s work ultimately reveals is that nature is not something to be viewed or studied from the outside, but a condition we are already part of, immersed in its loops of emergence, evolution and dissolution, often moved by impulses and choices whose destination remains unknowable.



Thalita Hamaoui, *Mar de dentro*, 2025.
Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery

Hamaoui approaches her paintings in much the same way: by surrendering to the mystery of creation, she becomes a vessel for its deepest secrets and most enduring values. The result is a series of painterly landscapes through which one can wander, fluctuate, dive and immerse without distinction between earthly, watery, airy or otherworldly experience.

As she clarifies during our walkthrough, each painting is a frame, a window, a portal. Although she works in series (as witnessed in her fertility-chaotic studio in São Paulo), she conceives each canvas as a singular entity, a gateway into distinct journeys that both eye and soul can undertake. Crucially, the viewer is not asked to remain a distant observer, but rather to become part of a whole, an interconnected system and flow to which we all belong.

Ultimately, Hamaoui participates, spontaneously and intuitively, in the mystery of creation. Blurring the lines between abstraction and figuration, between individual and collective unconscious, the works on view at Marianne Boesky Gallery become a kind of time machine to a primordial garden of Eden—a vision of creative genesis where the vital pulse of nature activates its most generative energies.

Thalita Hamaoui's debut U.S. solo exhibition at Marianne Boesky Gallery, "Nascer da Terra," is on view through June 14.