

Katie van Scherpenberg
Booth S23
Spotlight, curated by Camille Morineau
Frieze Masters 2022



Born in São Paulo to European parents (her father Pieter was a naturalised Dutch citizen from Germany and her mother Mildred was Norwegian) in 1940, Katie van Scherpenberg soon moved to the US, then Canada, finally settling in London, where she lived until 1945. Van Scherpenberg's formative years were spent between Brazil and Europe, completing her studies in England, and a two-year scholarship granted by the German government in 1961-63 that allowed her to study painting in Munich with Georg Brenninger (1909-1988) and in Salzburg with Oskar Kokoshcka (1816-1986). Van Scherpenberg returned to Rio de Janeiro in 1964, one week after the military coup that installed a dictatorial regime that would remain in power for the next two decades.

In 1968 she took the radical decision to move and settle in the remote Amazonian island of Ilha de Santana. Here on an island by one of the world's most important rivers, she spent most of the next 17 years. The absolute lack of professional art materials drove her to research ways to make natural pigments from soil. Speaking about this period her life, the artist recounted: 'You could say that the river was, among other things, so much paint, for it contained a large quantity of pigments (ferrous oxides) from faraway places, and together with this paint it brought me a whole lot of information. In this sense, the river is somewhat like a painting...A river is like life, it is never stable, by its very nature - particularly the Amazon.'

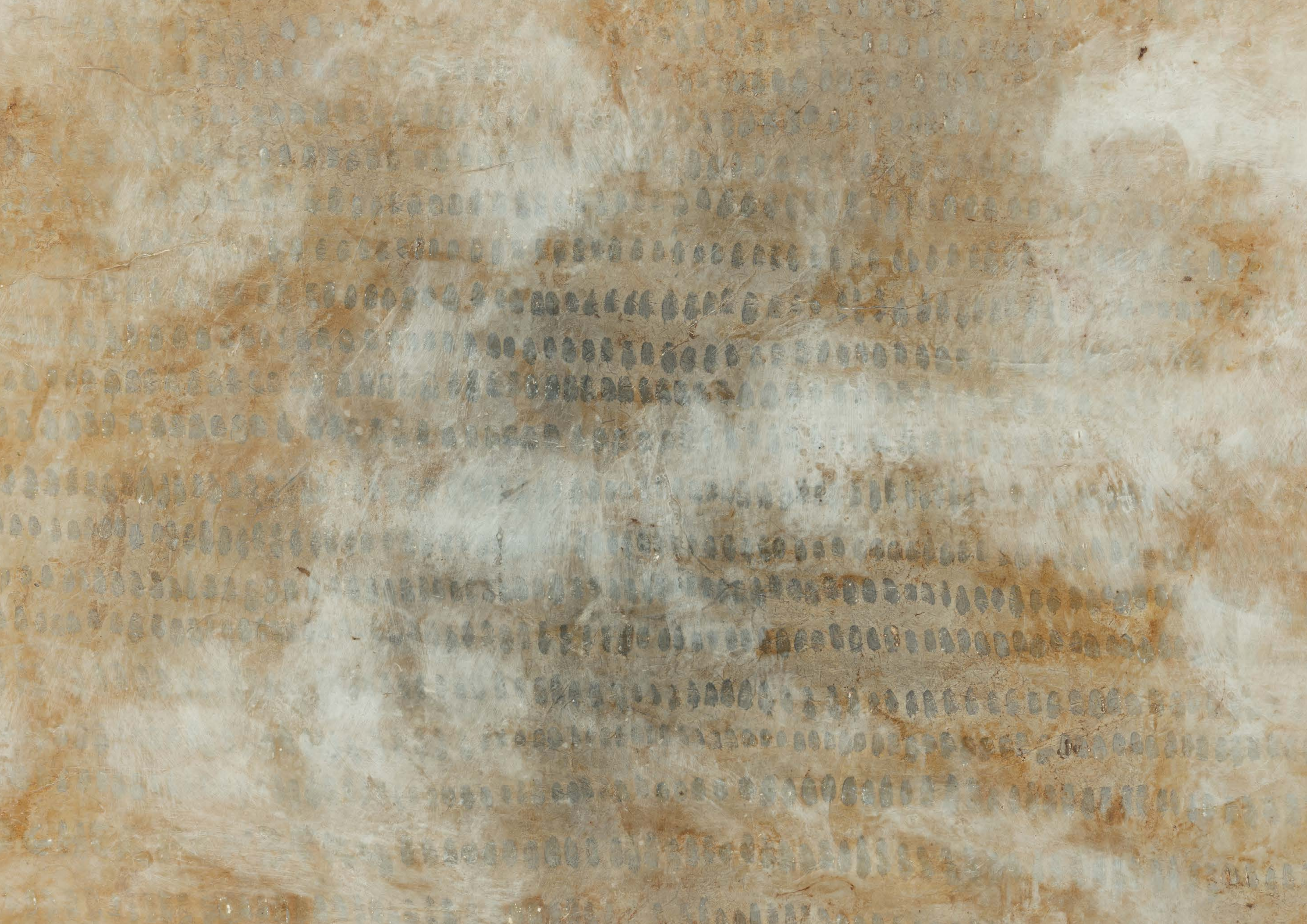
Material Paintings

1980s/1990s

While living on the remote Island of Santana in the Amazon delta, van Scherpenberg did not have access to conventional painting supplies. This forced her to experiment with different natural pigments and a wide variety of materials that often incorporated found objects. Exploring the dynamics of the relationship between support and material, she prepared mixtures made with gesso, tempera, sawdust, wax, and other materials onto plywood boards, adding pigments onto the surface to create abstract works in which form and materiality are highlighted. Speaking about this period, van Scherpenberg stated that these works gave rise to 'the idea of a succession of forms leading to the unknown, the fundamental, the sacred thing, and finally painting as a road to knowledge.'



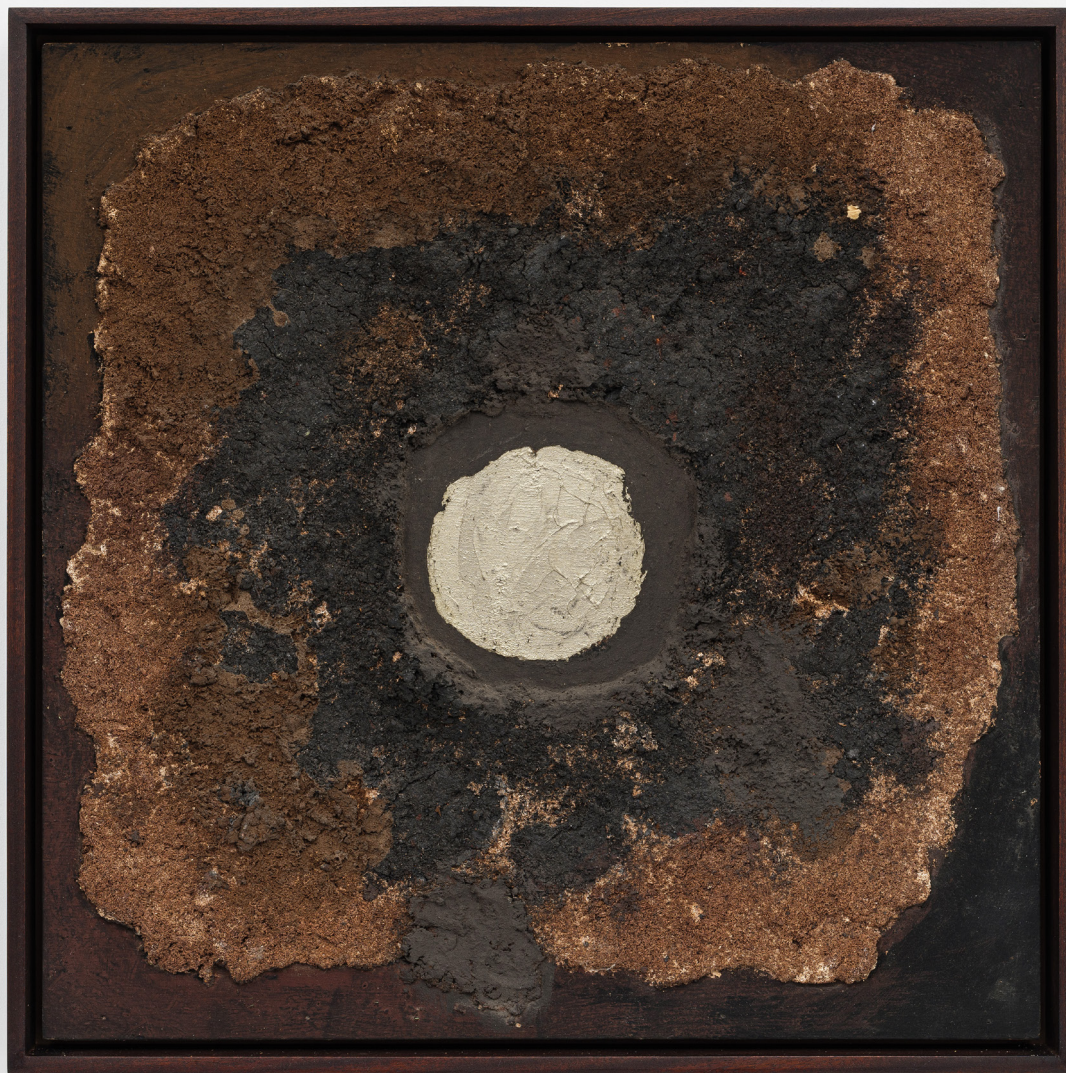
Narciso, 1994, Encaustic, soot and wax on Japanese paper, linen and marine plywood, 110.5 x 161 cms, 43 1/2 x 63 3/8 in





Untitled, 1986

Pigment, plaster and
soot on wood
54 x 54 cms
21 1/4 x 21 1/4 in



Mandala, 1985

Pigment, sawdust, gesso
on marine plywood
52 x 52 cms
20 1/2 x 20 1/2 in





Bicho [Insect], 1986

Pigment, sawdust, gesso on
marine plywood
52 x 52 cms
20 1/2 x 20 1/2 inches





Study, 1986

Pigment, sawdust, gesso and toy
brushes on marine plywood
50 x 50 cms
19 3/4 x 19 3/4 inches





Untitled, 1994 - 1995

Copper oxidized in
vinegar, on paper
33 x 43 cms
13 x 16 7/8 inches

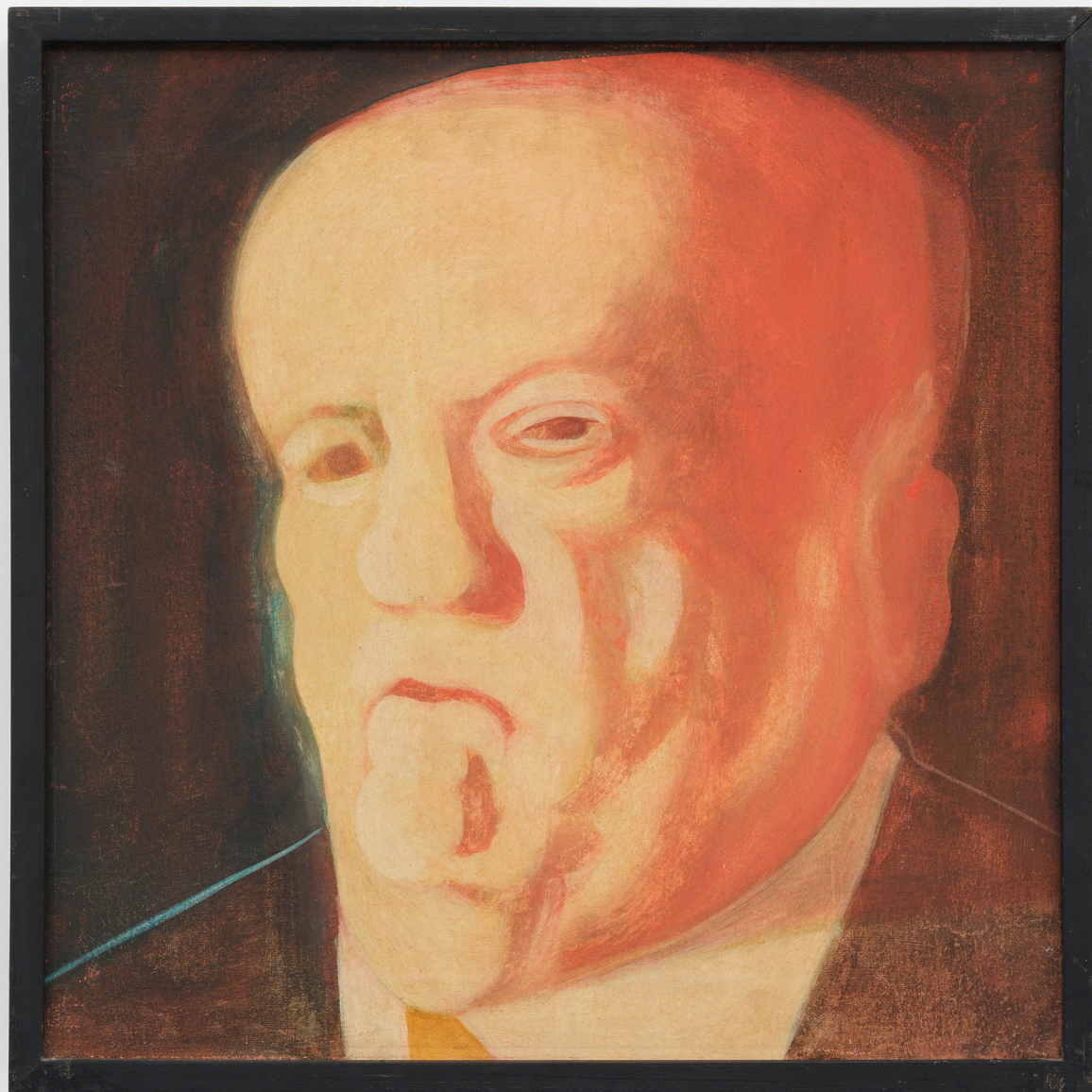


Political Works

Paintings from the 1970s

Van Scherpenberg had returned to Brazil in 1964, the year of the military coup which established the subsequent dictatorship. While in Rio de Janeiro in 1974, she produced work amongst intellectuals and artists who opposed the Brazilian dictatorship, such as socialist intellectual Loio Pársio, and artist Freidensreich Hundertwasser.

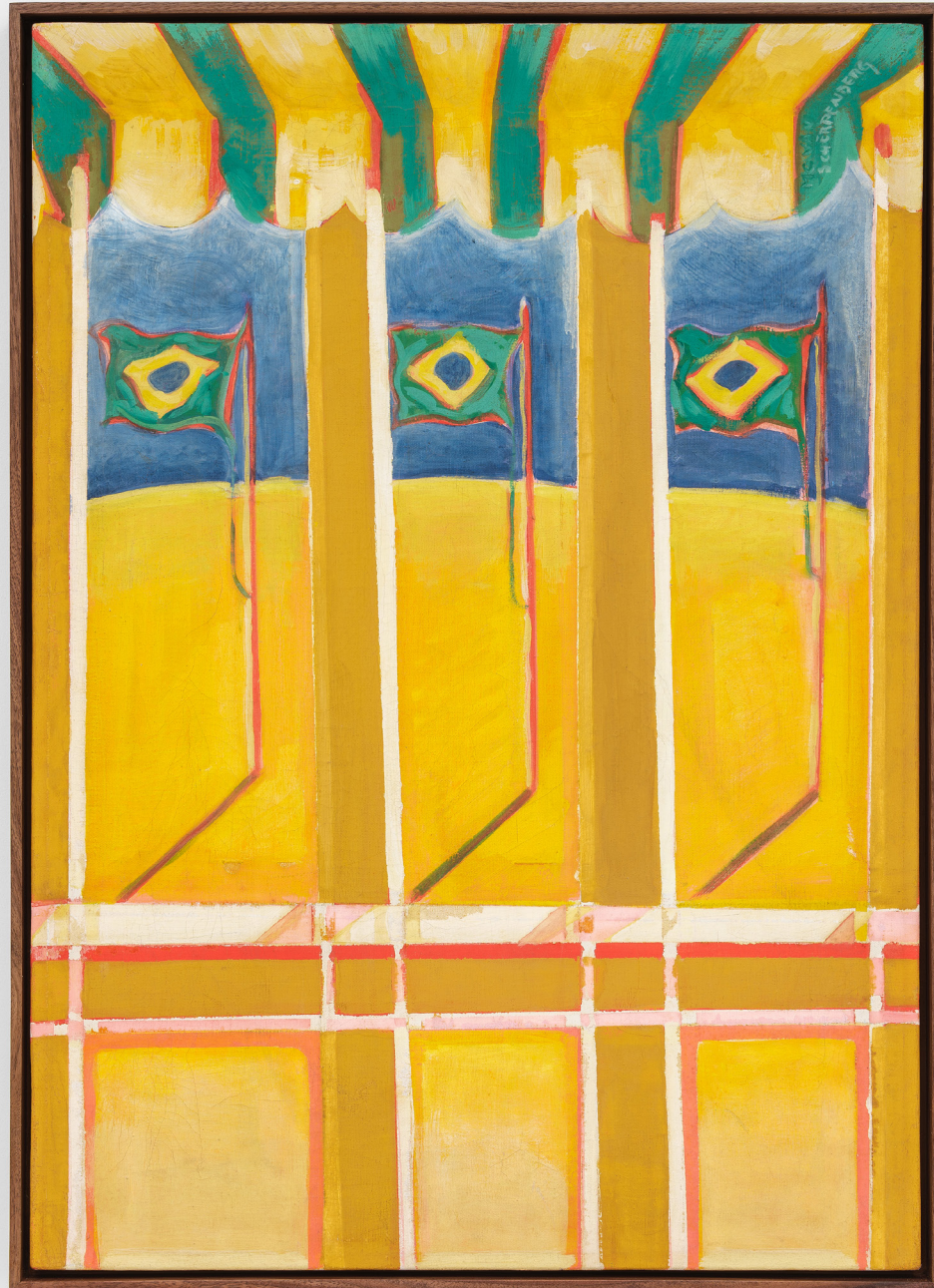
The figures of Brazil's military dictatorship are captured by the artist across a number of works in oil paint and tempera, painted as caricatures with their gormless expressions, dressed in suits and sometimes sunglasses. The works were produced from her experience of military parades and political speeches which she witnessed during the period known as the 'Years of Lead' - a particularly dark period of the dictatorship, triggered by AI-5, the legislation which suspended basic human and constitutional rights.



Untitled, 1976

Tempera and oil on canvas
47.5 x 47.5 cms
18 3/4 x 18 3/4 inches





Comemoração #2, 1977

Tempera and oil on canvas
70 x 50 cms
27 1/2 x 19 3/4 inches



MICHAEL
SCHÜRENBERG

Early Works

Paintings and drawings from Amapá, 1960s/1970s

1968 marked a pivotal moment in van Scherpenberg's life and career. It was the year in which the artist moved to live with her father on a remote island in the Amazon Delta. She would remain there for the better part of two decades, and it would become a vital source of inspiration for her art. Four years prior, van Scherpenberg had returned to Brazil from Europe (where she had been studying) and seemed to be settling into a more conventional career path: she started to show her work in national salons, continued to pursue her studies, and set up her own studio. After her short-lived marriage ended, she took the radical decision to pack up her bags and move to her father's place in Amapá with her young child in tow.

This selection of works demonstrates the instant impact that the Amazon had on van Scherpenberg's work. The works reveal the extremes of the environment: on the one hand they show a place full of beauty, life and greenery; and on the other a harsh environment where things break down and decompose at a faster rate.



Igarapé, 1968

Oil on wood
23.5 x 16.5 cm
9 1/4 x 6 1/2 inches



Amapá, 1968, Graphite on paper, 33 x 48 cm, 13 x 18 7/8 in



August 1968



Untitled, 1972

Mixed media on paper
27 x 22cm
10 5/8 x 8 5/8 in



Amapá, 1971

Watercolour
on paper
23 x 30 cm
9 x 11 3/4 in

Katie van Scherpenberg

Born in 1940 in São Paulo, Brazil

Lives and works in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Selected Solo Exhibitions:

- 2022 Yakecan, Parque Lage, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2021 *Overlooking the Amazon*, Cecilia Brunson Projects, London
- 2019 *Olamapá*, Centro Cultural Oi Futuro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2014 *Pororoca, Amazônia no Mar*, Museu de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2006 *Sin título*, Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas, USA
- 2000 *Feuerbach e eu na Paisagem*, Museum of Contemporary Art of Niterói, Niterói, Brazil

Selected Group Exhibitions:

- 2018 *Feito poeira ao vento - Coleção MAR*, Museo de Arte de Río, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2016 *Ephemera, diálogos e entre-vistas*, MAC Niterói (Niterói Contemporary Art Museum), Brazil
- 2009 *Bienal do Fim do Mundo*, Ushuaia, Patagonia, Argentina
- 2006 *New, Now, Next*, Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas, US
- 2003 *Arte em Diálogo*, MAM RJ (Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 1989 XX Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil
- 1981 XVI Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil

Selected Collections:

- Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas, US
- Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, New York, US
- Gilberto Chateaubriand collection, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- The Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- The Museum of Contemporary Art of Brasília, Brazil
- The Museum of Contemporary Art, University of São Paulo, Brazil
- Niterói Contemporary Art Museum, Brazil
- The Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- University of Essex Collection of Latin American Art (ESCALA), Essex, UK