

**MADAT**

Museum  
Art  
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**Vivian  
Sutner  
Disco**



About 40 years ago, the Swiss-Argentine artist Vivian Suter (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1949), after a solitary trip to visit archaeological sites in Mesoamerica decided to settle in Panajachel, on the shores of Lake Atitlán, a small town predominantly inhabited by the indigenous Kaqchikel community, one of the majority Mayan peoples in Guatemala. Since then, Vivian Suter lives and works in a former coffee plantation: a place featuring stunning vegetation, a small forest and a garden, which the artist calls her studio. Here, her work took a new direction. She discovered a stimulating setting in which to pursue her experimental, solitary, and obsessive practice, creating a unique visual language with the living qualities of this place. Vivian Suter usually paints in the middle of the garden. What we observe in her predominantly abstract paintings may have resulted from the view or simply from an inspiring detail or the sprawling vegetation surrounding her. She paints on canvases with grids, which are later removed, and uses various techniques and materials, including acrylic, oil, and pigments mixed with fish glue.

When they are painted outside, where they often remain for days, weeks, or months, the canvases are exposed to the sun, wind, rain, and humidity, incorporating dirt, leaves, debris, and insect remains, and even the marks left by her three dogs: Tintin, Nina and Disco (the most mischievous of them all and the title of the exhibition). It is a *collaborative* work, free from hierarchy and preconceptions, completely open to nature's imprints and random, unpredictable effects, with all its unfolding rhythms, forms, and forces, which both originate and reside in it.

In 2005 and 2010, two devastating storms caused considerable damage to Vivian's studio, leaving a vast number of paintings covered in water and mud. Observing the damaged paintings, she found something unique: the wet and dry earth on top of what she had painted added something that only these kinds of unexpected events and circumstances can yield. It was from then on that precariousness, deterioration, and regeneration – that which asserts the impermanence of the organic – were also seen as attributes of painting, as a complementary way of bearing witness to the intimate and sensitive relationship with the contingencies of nature and meteorology.

Vivian Suter's practice is not organised into series, but one can group together works that seem to stem from the same idea, theme, or creative process, or that have common aspects, similarities, or formal affinities: canvases that accumulate and overlap stains, spills, and multi-coloured paint dragging, forming dense and chaotic planes in which we surmise processes of transmutation and metamorphosis; grids attesting to the view from the parapet in her studio, but which resemble windows; profiles of animals and plants; vertical lines and columns that indicate tree trunks or the stems of bushes, but also horizontal lines and masses that evoke topographical arrangements or earth movements; vertical sweeps that suggest falling motion such as rain; circular shapes that may be inspired by the details of plants, fruits, or dewdrops; non-uniform monochrome planes; drawings that hint at small organisms. Such descriptions are obviously conjecture, hypotheses in a vast horizon of possibilities.

In exhibitions, the paintings can be displayed in different ways: mounted directly on the walls, suspended from the ceiling, or placed in structures similar to those used in Suter's small storeroom in Panajachel. Vivian Suter treats each canvas as something flexible and adaptable that can assume various shapes and positions, with the back often visible and having a similar status to the painted front. Moreover, they have no set position and they can be displayed horizontally or vertically, individually, or as part of a group. The way they are displayed underlines their object-like character, as light sculptures that occasionally sway due to visitor activity and natural or artificial ventilation.

This exhibition brings together more than 500 paintings created over the last ten years, including a significant number of new works. *Disco* is co-produced with Palais de Tokyo, Paris, where it will be presented in the summer of 2025.

Sérgio Mah

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Vivian Suter was born in Buenos Aires in 1949, to exiled European parents – her father owned a textile printing plant in Buenos Aires, while her mother, Elisabeth Wild, was an artist. When she was 12, during the Peron regime, her family relocated to Basel, Switzerland, where she studied painting. In 1982, shortly after her first major group exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel, she visited Latin America, and the following year, she settled in Panajachel, Guatemala, near the Lake Atitlán. The local atmosphere, climate, vegetation, and animals became central themes in her work. Suter's works, painted on roughly stretched canvas and exhibited unstretched, remain untitled and undated. Traces of rain, mud, leaves and also the remnants left by her dogs – Bonzo, Tintin, Nina and Disco – footprints contribute to the organic and

lively quality of the paintings. When exhibited, her paintings are often overlapping, suspended and moving with the wind, air currents or the movements of visitors. Her most notable exhibitions include: Kunstmuseum Olten, 2004; Kunsthalle Basel, 2014; São Paulo Biennial, 2014; documenta 14, Kassel and Athens, 2017; Power Plant, Toronto, 2018; the Art Institute of Chicago, 2019; Camden Art Centre, London, 2020; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2021; Secession, Vienna, 2023. Suter's works are included in renowned collections like the Tate in London, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, and the Kunstmuseum in Basel and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, among others.



All works by Vivian Suter in the exhibition Disco are untitled and undated; made with oil, acrylic, pigment, fish glue, earth, botanical matter, and jungle-based micro-organisms on canvas; various dimensions.

Courtesy of the artist and Karma International, Gladstone Gallery, House of Gaga, Proyectos Ultravioleta; and the collectors Carlotta Testori, Silvia Fiorucci, and Charles A. Pictet.

**Vivian Suter**

**Disco**

30/10/2024 → 17/03/2025

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Sérgio Mah

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**Installation**

Pedro Braga dos Reis

**Agenda**

Conversation at the exhibition  
with Vivian Suter and Sérgio Mah:  
30/10/2024, 18.00.

**Publications**

Catalogue to be published during the  
exhibition in partnership with Palais  
de Tokyo and JRP|Editions, with texts  
by François Piron and Sérgio Mah,  
images of the works and views of the  
installation at MAAT.

**Exhibition sponsor**



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exhibition guide



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