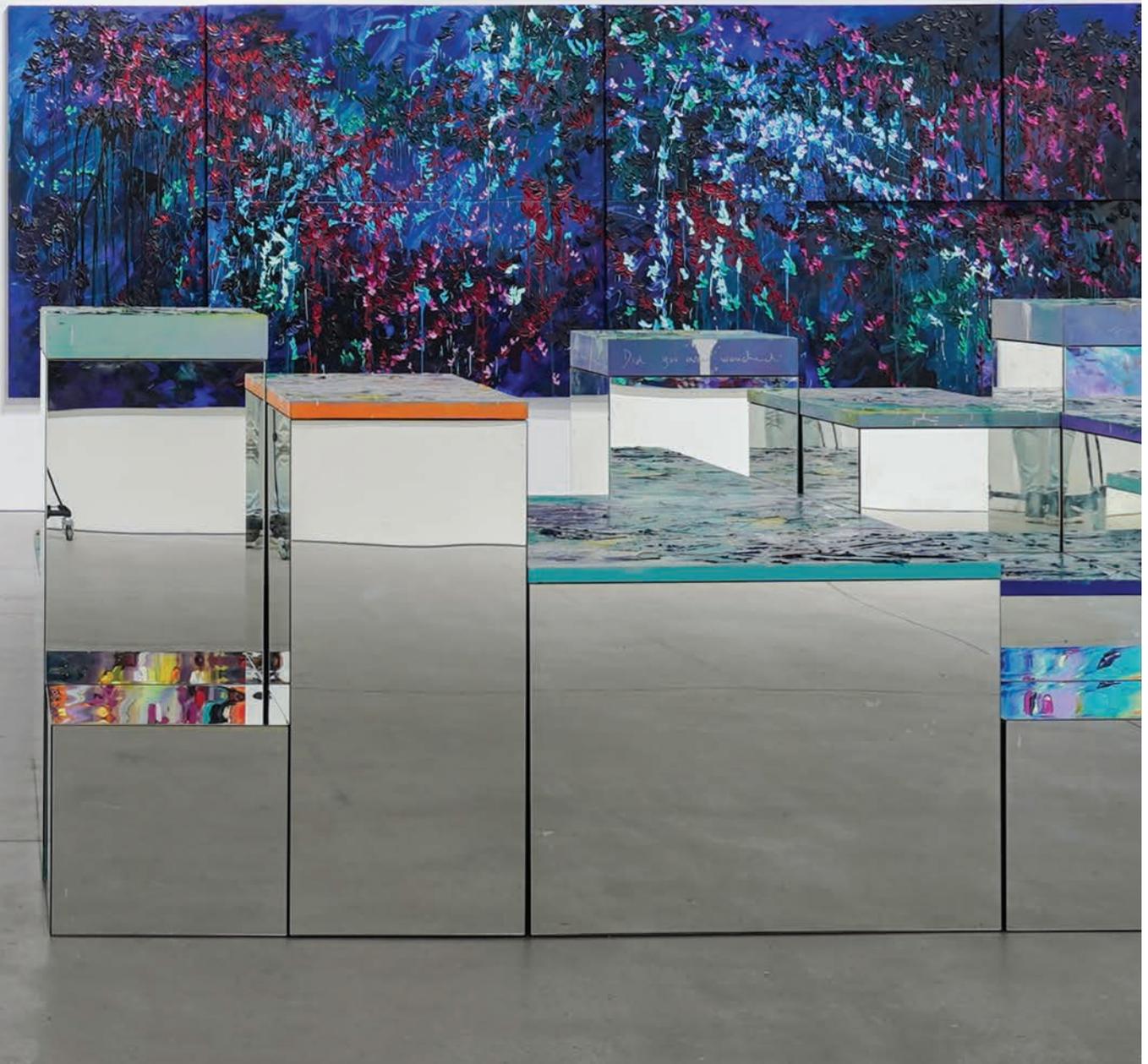


# A Pioneering Vision

Portuguese-born architect and visual artist  
Ana D'Castro on incorporating art into public spaces  
and creating sensorial experiences



WORDS: SARAH JOSEPH





What do the first 30 minutes of your day look like, your morning routine? I walk every day at the park in my community, it's my meditative moment that sets my creative mindset for the day. I enjoy the early sunlight which is the sharpest between 5:30am to 6am, as it casts light onto nature – the entire process is magical.

What inspired you to go into the artistic space and how did you define your medium? I was raised in an artistic environment. My grandfather was a painter, so at an early age, I had been exposed to the world of fine arts. My parents always shed light onto the world of Arts and Culture in all forms, since my early years. I had been taken to museums, poetry readings, ballet and music performances. It eventually became very natural to me, to appreciate beauty in all forms. Additionally, my father always took me with him on long expeditions into nature and from an early age I was nurtured into appreciating natural beauty and small details.

You love to create work on a large scale – why does this speak to you more? I believe that when working on large scale formats you are faced with a greater challenge, and therefore the creative process involves a deeper understanding of scale and proportion. In my last exhibition “Enchanted Gardens” I painted large formats such as 6m wide by 2m high and 4m wide x 2m high pieces which were exhibited at the gallery. You can appreciate the importance of scales with these works of art, there are two important scales which include a close up, when you are painting the canvas with a minimum distance and the large-scale format is when you see the work from afar and can appreciate its dimension. This is the most difficult element to achieve when painting such large formats, as you have to imagine how the painting will look from a far distance. You have to anticipate the abstract process and create studies of how you want to proportion your painting, the movement of the painting and the colours that you'll place in the determined areas. At the studio, the space is limited and definitely not as grand as the gallery, where you can really immerse yourself into the canvas and experience it from different points of view.

Can you expand on your creative process and do you have a particular time when you feel most inspired to work daily? You don't wake up to inspiration as an act of magic, you work through the day to find it. I work every day with a systematic routine, it's not a luxury that I wake up and feel. It is the determination and the constant hard work that brings a consecutive evolution of the works. My most inspiring moments come alive during the creative process itself. It is only when you are so absorbed and consumed by your works that you really start to understand the materials and their poten-

tial. For Instagram, when I'm at the studio working on several pieces in parallel, I discover a new technique and ponder upon my previous process to evolve upon that.

Your works will be displayed at Expo 2020 Dubai. How did this incredible recognition arise? Currently I have a large solo show at Leila Heller Gallery in Alserkal Avenue and this is a great showcase of my latest work. The invitation to participate in Expo 2020 came from the Portuguese Pavilion Director who invited me directly to contribute with my works. I will have an external urban art installation, a large painting and an artistic video about my work and the process behind it displayed over the main Pavilion façade.

How has your work progressed since you first started and what has influenced this change? My process consists in painting several pieces at the same time, and by doing it so there's an element of infectious dialogue between all the artworks; as if during the process of creation, they contagiously impact each other. On a subconscious level I'm constantly being fed by the evidence itself, therefore there's a

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constant obsession of mitigating the action of matter and form and elevating it to a pure and perfect residualized outreach. Throughout the creative process there's a continuous practice of realization and elimination of ideas, fundamentals and paradigms, reinventing the theory per se and persistently searching for knowledge and perfection. The progression and mutation of the processual interplay embrace a journey of destructive creation. The artwork series comprise one of the main signature techniques of the artist, the impasto, subdividing it into three main categories represented into the series. The first being uniform relieve, then soft petals, then imperfect violent patches. The different series stand as an example of how the serial and cycle work affirm the processual in art. There is a constant evolution of the technique, and by exploring it, manipulating and revisiting the action in itself, we can understand the variation of the conceptual idea.

Do you have a piece of work that is most special to you? Yes, my favourite painting is Water Lilies dated 2016, every time I look at it, I fall in love, there is something special about it that I cannot explain.

What drives you to continually create and grow? My extreme ambition. Creating is like breathing for me, I cannot live without it. It is a constant intellectual development of how you process the world around you and how you transform the emotions associated with this act of living. My continuous curiosity for the world out there and life in general, this is what makes me grow, I always want more. Which other artists are on your radar? I am fascinated by Gerhard Richter, Mark Rothko, Monet and Georgia O'Keeffe. These have been my lifetime inspirations. I am also greatly inspired by Olafur Eliasson and Samia Halaby.

What advice would you give now to your younger starting out? No advice really, life should be unpredictable, that's why it's worth living. The only constant is that you must always believe in yourself no matter what; determination is key.

What is your advice on buying art? One must buy what connects with yourself. I don't have a rationalized theory about this, for me art should ultimately connect with you, it should be a very natural and organic relationship between the artwork and buyer, whatever connection or feeling that is, there must be a connection.

This is 'The Renegade Issue' – when have you needed to take this approach to life and who else to you is a true renegade in their field? I am an artist, architect and a mother of three children. Can you imagine how many times I have been labeled and put in a box for having to choose between one or another? Critics like to think you cannot be an artist if you are an architect, or you abandon your kids to pursue a career? In general society loves to label and categorize people. There are very few people/ administrations that value and appreciate the empowerment that comes from crossing boundaries and disciplines. I truly believe that creativity is nurtured into the crossing of disciplines, I personally get my inspiration from all corners, music, ballet, fashion, contemporary dance. It is truly how you look at the world and educate yourself that you grow. I would say that as a renegade and for me if I look into my life, one of the main aspects that defines my personality is that I am honest and unapologetic, I really don't endure situations I don't like, I always speak my mind and I leave when I had enough. Life is too short to endure situations that don't benefit you, you must have the courage to face reality, admit your failures and mistakes and move on by learning from it. It is even more important to appreciate your victories and celebrate your achievements, this is what gives you power for life. Most of the times we don't celebrate ourselves enough, we tend to criticize or victimise it.