

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Ren Ebel, "Vivian Suter," *Artforum*, March 23, 2020

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS



View of Vivian Suter's "Tintin's Sofa," 2020.

Vivian Suter

CAMDEN ARTS CENTRE

Arkwright Road

January 17–April 5, 2020

After her studio in Panajachel, Guatemala, was destroyed by Hurricane Stan in 2005, Vivian Suter began adapting her painting practice to her

temperamental environment. She started painting large abstract washes of color outdoors, leaving the unstretched canvases to dry in the jungles near Lake Atitlán. Pigment, house paint, fish glue, rainwater, leaves, mud, and errant marks left by plant and animal life combine to form energetic compositions inspired and manipulated by nature.

For "Tintin's Sofa," the Swiss Argentine artist's latest exhibition at Camden Arts Centre, scores of these paintings hang in an improvised arrangement, obscuring the gallery architecture with dense canopies of canvas. Nearly two hundred untitled works appear overhead, on walls, in clusters at the center of the room, or staggered across entranceways so that visitors must pass through

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them. Some hang in tight succession from large racks, like outfits in a walk-in closet. Some are buried in piles laid out around the floor. Others hang outside in Camden Arts Centre's garden. The paintings themselves depict swirling leaf- and shell-like forms in black, orange, and clay red, or hazy pools of blue, beige, and aquamarine. Others verge on the representational: what might be a Matisse-inspired still life or a brushed outline of Suter's dog (after whom the show is named).

Despite its blooming excess, the exhibition is rooted in subtle tension. Surrounded by these canvases, one feels their obdurate weight, gravity, and dangling frayed ends (inseparable from the thought of Suter painting them between downpours and dragging them across wet earth). Yet the artist's splattered, hasty brushwork imbues her forms with a sense of motion. Some rise like vapor, while one swampy color field, thick with teal and grass-green paint, percolates like a petri dish. As a single composition, "Tintin's Sofa" describes painting as a kind of refuge, an act of shelter-making as the storm rages on.

— *Ren Ebel*