

Name of the exhibition:

Pau-Campeche

Name of the artist:

Flávia Vieira

Name of the curator:

Sofia Lemos

Name of the venue:

Boavista Gallery – Galerias Municipais de Lisboa

<https://galeriasmunicipais.pt/en/exposicoes/pau-campeche/>

Opening and closing dates:

16.04.25 – 31.08.25

Exhibition text or press release:

Text by Sofia Lemos

Trees are an invitation to think about time and to travel in it the way they do,
by standing still and reaching out and down. [1]

Plants do not begin at the beginning. [2] They emerge from the middle, from the thick of things, neither entirely of the earth nor wholly of the atmosphere. Rooted in soil yet reaching for the sky, they connect environments continuously through space and time. Long ago, their presence transformed Earth's atmosphere, weaving the air we breathe, turning light into matter and possibility into form. Defined by deep interrelation, plants are not passive intermediaries but active agents of transformation, dissolving boundaries between species, forms, and modes of living. Their existence is a "transitive life", [3] entwined with everything that is and has ever been.

The Palo-tinte tree (*Haematoxylum campechianum*), also known as logwood or Pau-Campeche in Portuguese, embodies this entanglement, shaping parallel histories of colonial trade and artistic expression. Native to Central America, its richly pigmented heartwood shaped both the material and symbolic landscapes of pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica. Before colonial powers turned it into a global commodity, Palo-tinte colored bodies, textiles, and rituals in deep shades of red, black, and blue. The Spanish Crown quickly recognised its value as a dye, turning its harvest into an industry woven into the fabric of colonial modernity.

In 2023, during a residency at Matadero Madrid in partnership with ArtWorks, Flávia Vieira began researching what became the script for *El Otro Color* (2025), a moving-image work that explores the archives of the Museo Nacional del Prado, the Museo del Traje in Madrid, and the Jardín Americano in Seville. Filming at night, she captured the tree's branches and leaves in slow, circular movements, revealing their depths through shifting light. Their darkness gives way to the details of paintings by Spain's masters, Diego Velázquez and Antonio Moro, among others, who depicted the Spanish Habsburgs in vivid black hues between the 1550s and the 1630s.

A woman's voice reads fragments of Vieira's conversation with psychologist José Luís Gomes, reflecting on alterity and ambiguity in human relationships. This dialogue led

Vieira to perceive Pau-Campeche as an elusive, colonial object of desire—perpetually out of reach, yet ever- present. This notion unfolds through a letter to the tree, transforming the film into a vegetal journey: from cotton to paper, bark to ink, clothing to power, loss to archive, and from the Americas to Spain.

The tree's transitive life extends beyond the screen into a large-scale sculptural installation at Galeria da Boavista: a metal structure meanders through the gallery space from which textiles dyed with Palo-tinte in varying shades of black are suspended. In a play of opacity, the fabrics, echoing the tones of Prado's paintings, reveal a life-sized set of metal and ceramic sculpture, evoking the tree's fragmented presence—out of joint yet still resonant.

Vieira, an artist trained in Fine Arts in Porto based in Brazil for the past fifteen years, works across sculpture, textiles, and ceramics to explore the cultural histories of making. Her research into natural dyes informs her concept of “botanical diasporas”—the ongoing entanglement of nature, history, and culture seeds migrate and plants are uprooted and transplanted elsewhere, affecting their environments. As a symbol of desire and displacement, Pau-Campeche reminds us that vegetal lives cast long shadows, whispering unfinished histories, inviting us to listen.

Sofia Lemos



1 Rebecca Solnit, *Orwell's Roses*. London: Granta Books, 2021, p.5.



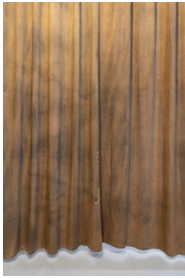
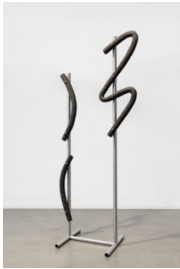

2 The idea that in vegetal life, everything starts from the middle stems from readings and discussions with philosopher Michael Marder over the years. See *Time is a Plant*. Boston: Brill, 2023; *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives* (co-authored with Luce Irigaray). Columbia University Press, 2016; *The Philosopher's Plant: An Intellectual Herbarium*. Columbia University Press, 2014; and *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*. Columbia University Press, 2013.


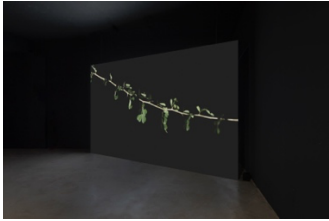

3 Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019, p.47.

Artworks:

Captions for the works according to the images in the folder “Exhibition Images”.

<p>Image Pau-Campeche - 1</p> 	<p><i>Negros, grises, azules, morados</i> Steel and cotton dyed with Pau-Campeche (logwood tree) Variable dimensions</p>
<p>Image Pau-Campeche - 2</p> 	<p><i>Negros, grises, azules, morados</i> Steel and cotton dyed with Pau-Campeche (logwood tree) Variable dimensions and Palo de Campeche #1 Steel and ceramics 180 x 45 x 45 cm</p>

<p>Image Pau-Campeche - 3</p> 	<p><i>Negros, grises, azules, morados</i> Steel and cotton dyed with Pau-Campeche (logwood tree) Variable dimensions and Palo de Campeche #1 Steel and ceramics 180 x 45 x 45 cm</p>
<p>Image Pau-Campeche - 4</p> 	<p><i>Negros, grises, azules, morados</i> Steel and cotton dyed with Pau-Campeche (logwood tree) Variable dimensions and Palo de Campeche #1 Steel and ceramics 180 x 45 x 45 cm</p>
<p>Image Pau-Campeche - 5</p> 	<p><i>Negros, grises, azules, morados</i> Steel and cotton dyed with Pau-Campeche (logwood tree) Variable dimensions <i>Detail</i></p>
<p>Image Pau-Campeche - 6</p> 	<p><i>Palo de campeche #1</i> Steel and ceramics 180 x 45 x 45 cm</p>
<p>Image Pau-Campeche - 7</p> 	<p><i>Palo de campeche #1</i> Steel and ceramics 180 x 45 x 45 cm <i>Detail</i></p>
<p>Image Pau-Campeche - 8</p>	<p><i>El otro color</i></p>

	<p>Video projection 17' and <i>Palo de Campeche #2</i> Steel and ceramics 150 x 80 x 60 cm</p>
<p>Image Pau-Campeche - 9</p> 	<p><i>El otro color</i> Video projection 17'</p> <p>Film Credits Title: El Otro Color Directed by: Flávia Vieira Head of Production: Elisa Celda Photography: Adrián Cores del Río Editing and Sound Design: Óscar Vincentelli Camera Assistant: David Villegas and Virginia Rita Luengo Still Photography: Felipe Huertas Production Company: Lejos Lejos Voice: Elena Galilea Design: Rafa Celda</p>
<p>Image Pau-Campeche - 10</p> 	<p><i>Palo de Campeche #2</i> Steel and ceramics 150 x 80 x 60 cm</p>

Contextualization of the exhibition:

This exhibition starts from an investigation into the historical, cultural, and ecological layers associated with the pau-campeche — a tree native to the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico, from which a black pigment was extracted and traded as a highly valuable commodity during the colonial period. This pigment became iconic, used to dye the garments of the Spanish court. Through installations that combine ceramics, natural pigments, and artisanal processes, the artist reflects on identity, memory, botanical diaspora, and the complex relationship between nature and history.

The project materializes in a film, accompanied by a floor sculpture, and a metal structure with fabrics dyed with Logwood (Palo de Campeche), which is also accompanied by a floor sculpture.

The metal structure was produced in collaboration with ArtWorks (an art production company — <https://artworks.pt>).

The film includes footage from the Museo del Prado (paintings from the 16th and 17th centuries depicting the Spanish court wearing black clothing dyed with Logwood), the Museo del Traje in Madrid (garments from the 16th and 17th centuries dyed with Logwood), and the Jardín Americano in Seville (a garden where the only Logwood tree in Europe was planted for Expo '92; the Jardín Americano was created with more than 300 plant species from Central and South America, which arrived by ship in 1991). Together, these images trace the history of this natural element through museological, archival, and botanical contexts.

Collaboration with Lejos Lejos (https://www.instagram.com/lejos_lejos/) in the production of the film.