

Written By Anna Woodward

Rafa Silvaes Interviewed by Domenico De Chirico



**How would you meticulously describe your practice? What is your process and how do you form your composition?**

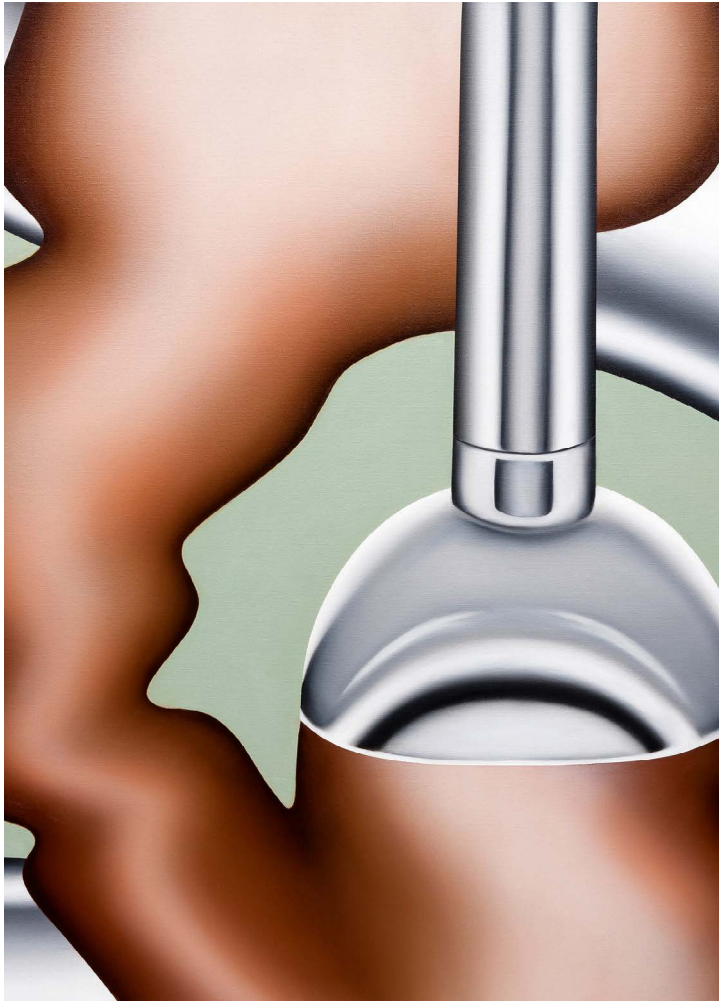
I work primarily in oils, my practice is very objective and studio-based. I also work with quick sketches, manual and digital collages. It usually starts with a specific sensorial desire. It can be a visual or tactile memory, a feeling or a craving for something that isn't quite clear at first. In "Dust" for example, I wanted to create a fatty shape that looked like a comfortable stuffed cushion. When it was done, I thought it reminded me of a wavy smoke, or of a very dense and smooth sort of dust. Then I thought of it coming - I don't know if it's being sucked in or coming out, from a metallic tubular object.

At first there is a desire for some type of surface, a colour or a shape. I'm really into gradients and I enjoy blending the painting out a lot. Sometimes it gets to a point that it's hard to stop, paintings have to be playful to me. It relates a lot to make-up processes, where you set colours, darker tones and highlights. It looks rather rough in the beginning but suddenly, you rub a dry fluffy brush and out comes a brand new face. I really enjoy the transformation aspect that make up and paintings can provide.

With drawings it's the same, I tend to smooth drawings out with my wet fingers, which for some of the drawing tutors I've had in the past, this was a bad thing to do. I do gradients very unapologetically even though sfumato techniques can be a bit controversial. When I'm making drawings while I'm on the phone, not thinking about anything related to the work, that's when these forms and metallic shapes appear.

I see them everywhere on the side of writing notebooks and lists. So I guess it's something that drives me and it's the way I know how to do things. They also link with the subject matters that I'm interested in.

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Dust, 2020, Oil on Linen, 70 x 80 cm

**As stated, your painting compositions merge through the juxtaposition of shapes, colours, volumes, and a set of images that include everyday objects and elements that possess a strong mundane appeal. Is there one thing that really connects all of these omnipresent elements? What is the criterion for you to choose them by? Are you always on the lookout for new objects to include in your artwork?**

I don't usually search for them, they end up finding me. I like portraying household and mundane objects because I am surrounded by them everyday. Suddenly there is a twist and they provoke some odd sensation in my perception. I look at them differently, they spark and then I'll use it in a composition.

In a sense, playing with ordinary things is much more fun for me. I also really enjoy finding ways of humanising objects, seeing them as portraits and characters that use make-up and possess human desires, such as lust, vanity and sexuality. So to me the sensual aspect I find in them it's what connects everything.

**Can you please describe the color palette in your paintings?**

For a while I would mainly use black and white paint because it was cheaper and an easier way to do paintings. I basically used ivory black, titanium white and burnt amber to warm the grays up. Doing black and white metallic figures was a great starting point. Then I started adding colours gradually. At the moment there is more of a pulsing desire of inserting elemental and highly pigmented colours to contrast with the metallic figures and volumes in the compositions.

**Can you please describe how theatricality and aesthetics can coexist in absolute harmony in your work?**

I like thinking of how we manipulate things in our daily life. It is very random and also insane how things come inside and out of tubes, pipes, holes. We deal with matter without really noticing it. It is like a mechanomorphic ballet. I also like thinking of how present shiny mirrored elements surround us in daily life as well. As if we needed some type of existence validation by seeing our distorted reflection while we use these objects.

**Looking at the past, what are the biggest influences on your practice?**

It's fair to say that modernist painters from Brazil such as Tarsila do Amaral and Vicente do Rego Monteiro are quite present in my visual memory. I like their simplicity, their painting application, colors and contrast transitions. I also really enjoy Picabia, Leger, Oldenburg, Hockney and lately I've been obsessed with Fra Angelico's paintings, it's always a joy to look at them.

**By referring to the artist statement, you talk about fetishism, objectification, and self-image: how do you relate them to each other artistically speaking?**

I would say that themes that may be associated with the work are rather secondary. I don't think about them when I'm doing the work, they arrive after. It's rewarding when someone comes to me with a different perception that I've never thought about. You can always relate subjects such as objectification and fetish to any work of art really, especially paintings. All sorts of really "honest made" and the most gestural poetic pieces are destined to be fetishised. Evidently, there is an attempt to insert a self-critic aspect in a humorous way in the work, but at the end it is the sensorial aspect and painting itself that drive me.

**Would you say that your work is introspective?**

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I used to have very romantic views on being a painter and an artist in general. I've always thought solitude was important for you to get clearer inspirations and insights. After working as other painters' assistant and putting to work, I became more down to earth about it. Paintings are also very physical and include mundane tasks. It is hard work and when you've got studio problems coming up, you realize the importance of the dialogue. The conversations that occur between me and the work, and peers are very valuable and they add a lot to the process in general.

## **Did you always want to be an artist?**

My views on being an artist have changed a lot through time. But it took a while for me to realise that I could make a living as a professional artist. I've done lots of different jobs that had art involved and I've worked in backup plans aside from being an artist most of my life really. In fact, I've put this idea off constantly by thinking it was difficult. Eventually, I realised I didn't really want a backup plan and I decided I had to go for it no matter what.

## **Is it possible for you to separate your work from your life?**

The separation is important even though everything is super connected. I like to have a clearly defined working discipline, but there isn't a switch to turn on and off ideas or to control when and where they come. But when everything is merged, personal life and studio time, it gets distracting and very easy to procrastinate. What works for me is a degree of balance.

## **How much does your motherland affect the "feel" and the decision-making in your own practice? It seems like our past inevitably influences us, even if we don't realize it at the time. What about the virulent present time?**

Brazil affects me in many ways. Despite the difficulties we are facing at the moment, Brazil is a mixture of opposites, tragic and fantastic, delicious and disgusting, abundant and precarious. I see some synergy between these contrasting aspects and my work. I think it is very similar when it comes to the pandemic. I see it as a period of transition and learning. It's difficult and frustrating but it will lead us to new understandings.

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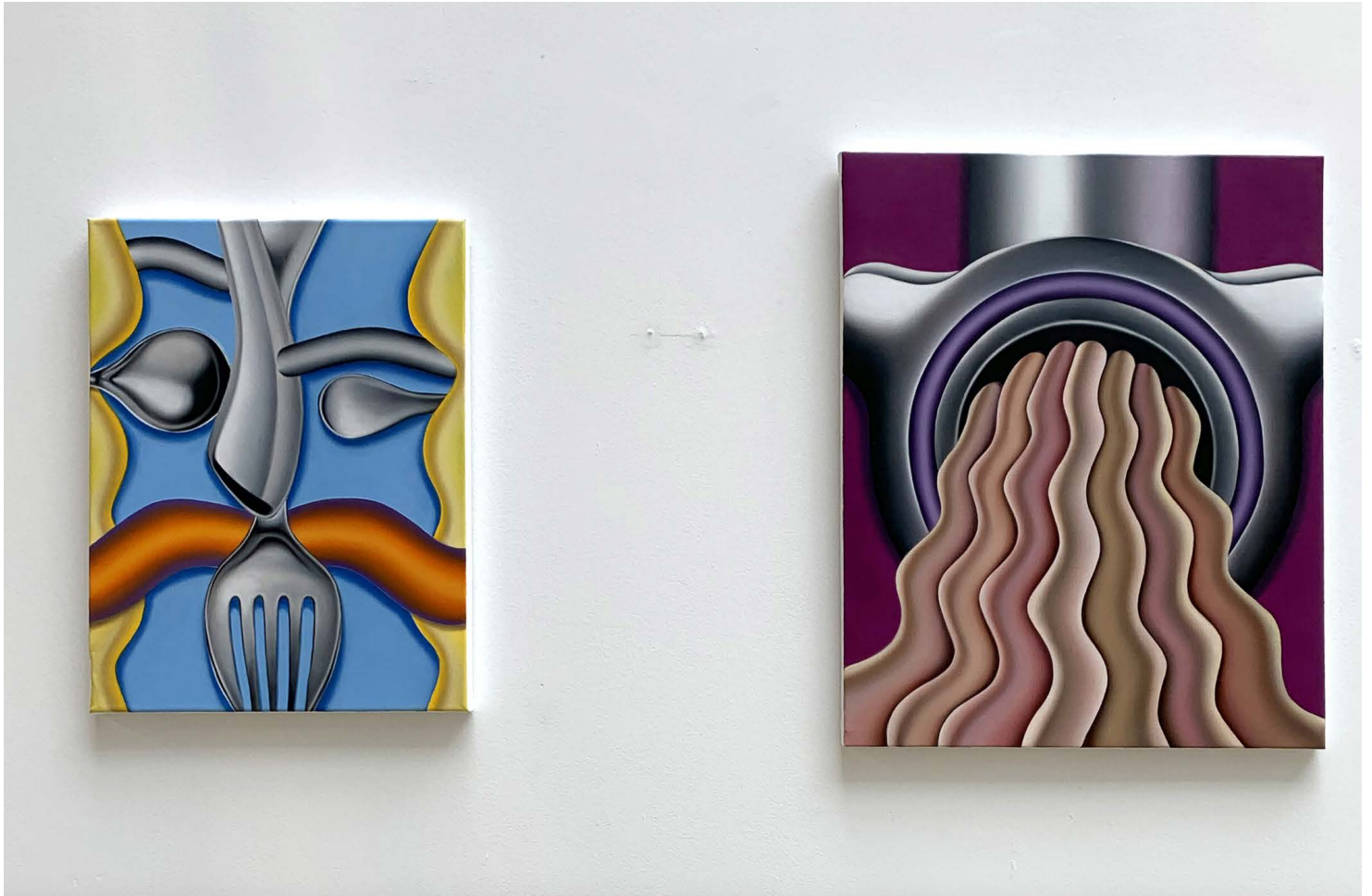
Drool, 2020, Oil on Linen, 20 x 30 cm

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Tache, 2021, Oil on Canvas, 30 x 40 cm and Minced Meat, 2021, Oil on Linen, 40 x 50 cm



The Artists Contemporary Installation of Rafa Silveiras Solo Exhibition