

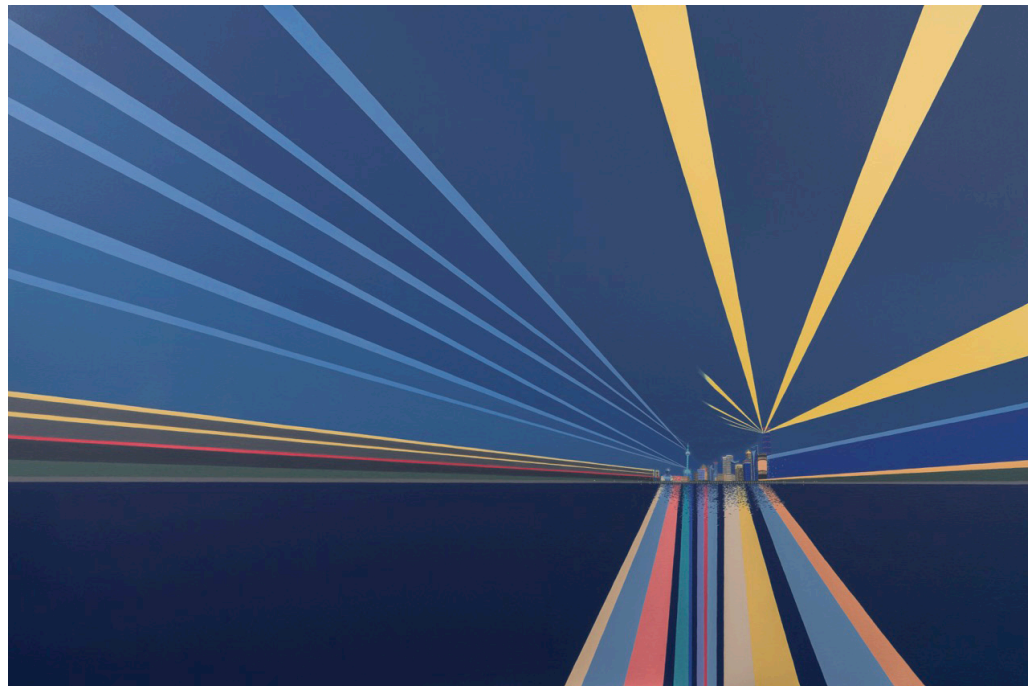
# Carolina Fontana

## Z·E·N - The landscapes of absence

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Press release

Carolina Fontana  
*Z.E.N Shanghai (Pearl Tower  
esmeralda)*, 2024  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 150 cm  
Courtesy of the artist  
and Xippas gallery



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### The Landscapes of Absence

Xippas Punta del Este presents, in its new space in Manantiales, Z·E·N, the first solo exhibition of Carolina Fontana at the gallery. In this project, the artist presents her most recent painting work, generically titled Z·E·N. These works originated after two trips (Shanghai and Girona) that Fontana made between 2019 and 2021, that is, at the beginning and during the Covid epidemic.

### Notes on Carolina Fontana's Recent Work

*"A Zen monk must lack a fixed dwelling, like the clouds, and firm support, like water."*

Eihei Dōgen Shōbōgenzō

In Western thought (from Aristotle to Heidegger), the idea of essence, what is invariable, unchanging, and perennial in something, and thus constitutes its nature, is associated with the image of the house and the home. In this sense, essence is what subsists and what resists change.

In East Asian culture, existence is the non-essence and is related to walking, to not dwelling. The quote from the Zen Buddhist master Dōgen encapsulates his fundamental teaching: dwelling in no place.

The philosopher Byung-Chul Han explains that in the East “this difference between being and path, between dwelling and walking, between essence and absence, is decisive.” In summary, in the West, essence subsists as a house, in the East, it is a path, a non-essence.

Although Fontana had previously addressed in her work reflections on absence and presence in relation to the body, the singular context of the epidemic generated other reflections connected to being and the perception of contingent reality, as well as the media as mediators of that reality.

This epidemic gave rise to an unprecedented global situation, resulting from the combination of various health policies that, in general, imposed mandatory lockdowns, strict control of movement, and extreme preventive measures. This was further compounded by the monopolization of audiovisual space by the media.

These concerns materialized in different projects, such as the multimedia installation (Disociaciones 2021). In 2022, the artist resumed painting, creating a series called .net, which can be interpreted as a unique recovery of the landscape genre. In this series of paintings, panoramic images of different cities (Shanghai, Paris, or Montevideo) are juxtaposed with those of motherboards, also known as base or main boards, which are printed circuit boards where the components that make up a computer are placed.

These paintings project ambiguity, as it is difficult to quickly recognize the difference between these two elements. In this way, these works aim to question the relationship between the macro and micro, and at the same time between the concrete world and the digital one, projecting them as mirror images or difficult to separate. In other words, as interconnected real worlds. Similarly, in mid-2022, the artist began a new series called Z·E·N.

As we approach the painting PdE rojo (2024) by Carolina Fontana, a triptych nearly 5 meters long, we are enveloped by its subtle colors and lines, creating a feeling of connection with what is represented. However, if we look closely at the work, we notice in its center the representation of a view of Punta del Este, which projects as a pleasant evocation, like a *fond déjà vu*. If we define this work as a landscape, it does not seem to assert itself as a stable place, but rather as an absence.

The works in the Z·E·N series are articulated in a complementary relationship between a place represented accurately (the photograph of a small landscape) and a spectrum of colors generated by this, occupying the majority of the surface of the work. These vectors, which vaguely reference lines of perspective in Renaissance tradition, project a particular illusion of enveloping space.

Fontana destabilizes our gaze by creating an image where the figurative contrasts with the color planes that open up and seem to search for an exit or escape from the canvas. A tropism that, if it didn't find the spatial limits of the surface, could engulf the surrounding space and include us.

Zen is a Japanese school of Buddhism. The word zen means meditation and is intimately related to *zazen*, which means meditating while sitting. The artist offers a free and subjective interpretation of Zen, relating it to the beauty of what is not fixed, but rather something floating, without limits.

Once again, Byung-Chul Han explains that in Japan, what is beautiful “is not the clear or transparent (of a landscape), but what is not sharply delimited.” In Zen Buddhist painting, there is no differentiation between light and darkness; the landscape floats in the emptiness of the white sheet, whereas in Western painting, light has a heroic function, trying to annihilate, like the sun at dawn, the darkness.

In the works of Carolina Fontana, the figurative seems to emerge from a moving spectrum, from an indefinite and abstract space, from an absence, and at the same time, those images of cities we can recognize seem to generate those vectors, where there is no difference between light and darkness, because everything dissolves into immaterial planes of color that envelop us, like a non-essence.

The essence of a landscape, which is established in the relationship between an individual who observes and the geography that is observed, does not seem to be fulfilled, since everything dissolves.

Manuel Neves  
February 2025