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Event Horizon

Fernando Mello Brum

23.01.26 – 14.03.26

Opening 23.01.26, 18h – 21h

The most beautiful experience we can have is the feeling of mystery. It is the fundamental emotion, the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder is as good as dead; their eyes are dimmed.

Albert Einstein¹

In 1928, an American telecommunications company hired a young physician named Karl Jansky to investigate the various interferences affecting their radio voice transmissions. At just twenty-three years old, Jansky responded to the assignment by building a large, improvised and wonky thirty-meter-long antenna, with several rotating metal frames mounted on top of four wheels. Somewhere in between a piece of agricultural machinery, a set of ambulant gym bars, and a minimal kinetic sculpture, the device was mockingly nicknamed by his colleagues *Jansky's Merry-Go-Round*.

Its steady movement and constant rotation were designed to capture all the possible sources of radio noise: electrical storms, industrial machinery, transmitters, and other atmospheric disturbances. The timing and intensity of these signals were logged continuously through a pen-and-paper annotation system, a kind of mechanical logbook of invisible activity. Amid this symphony of silent interferences, one signal stood out. No matter where the machine was placed or towards which direction it faced, there was always a faint but persistent hiss whose origin was impossible to locate. After more than a year of observation and several failed hypotheses, Jansky concluded that the signal originated neither from the Sun nor from Earth, but from an unimaginable distance, somewhere outside the solar system.²

There is something that attracts me, almost in an unexplainable magnetic way, to the idea that Fernando Mello Brum's work could function as a similar kind of recording device attuned to specific graphic, textural, chromatic and poetic signals from his surroundings. His practice also seems to emerge from prolonged observations and repeated acts of attention to the ineffable and to the imperceptible. Although the 'antennas' through which he gathers these fleeting impressions take different forms — fast drawings, photographs, poems, loose sentences and even digital sketches — they are all recorded to be eventually introduced in his paintings. As Jansky's rudimentary machine, these canvases rely on humble means, yet are also directed towards a pursuit of expansive and ambitious questions. The brushstrokes and occasional traces of charcoal and pastel in his compositions do more than give new form to certain signals; they articulate a pictorial and theoretical inquiry that seeks to trace the elusive connections between astrophysics and the arts. Is it possible that the seemingly distant realms of the cosmic invisible, the poetic unnameable, and the pictorial unrepresentable actually converge on the same horizon?

This exhibition, Mello Brum's first solo-presentation with the gallery, can be read as a polysemic, open response to this question — something closer to an oracle's riddle, or to an inaudible hiss rather than to a definitive answer. The title of the show, *Event Horizon*, introduces his ongoing line of inquiry, while simultaneously taking us back to the distant source of the signal discovered by Jansky. On May 15, 1933, the mysterious hiss was broadcast live on NBC radio; millions of Americans heard it without knowing exactly what it was, or where it came from. Only several years later it was discovered that the hiss came from a black hole located some thirty thousand light-years away from our tiny planet.

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Although the term has long been part of my everyday language, I only recently began to grasp, however vaguely, what a black hole actually is. Apparently it forms when stars stop burning. Because of their immense mass, the only force preventing them from falling is their constant combustion. When this burning fades and the balancing force disappears, the star's own weight becomes overwhelming, causing it to collapse inward under its gravity, gradually giving rise to an immense void. In common parlance, a black hole is often imagined as a place from which there is no return — and that is actually true. In astrophysics, this point of irreversibility has a precise name: the event horizon. This threshold marks the limit beyond which nothing can be retrieved, where visibility, measurement, and knowledge fail, and where time itself appears to stretch. It constitutes a *non plus ultra*, beyond which reality as we know it ceases to function as a referent.

I find this cosmic application of the terrestrial notion of the horizon particularly compelling. On earth the horizon carries similar connotations: it is more than the line where land or sea meets the sky. It functions as a boundary that creates a duality, a tension between the *here* and *there*, the *visible* and the *invisible*. Long associated with desires of transcendence or imagined futures, the horizon is not a real division, it is a fictional, abstract line: we can observe it, represent it, even paint it, yet we can never reach it. The history of painting has long engaged with these properties, using the horizon to structure space and to convey meaning: from the fixed perspectival systems of the Renaissance, the Romantic horizon charged with longing and infinity, the colonial period landscapes where it was invested with masculine reveries of conquest and domination, to its gradual disappearance and dissolution in modern painting with the abandonment of realism the subsequent emergence of abstraction. It is within this astronomical, philosophical and historical notion of the threshold, this horizon at which meaning and understanding begin to shift, in science as in art, that Mello Brum's abstract paintings situate themselves.

Grounded in an exacting attention to the world, Mello Brum's practice lingers on marginal, almost negligible phenomena: mould spreading across a surface, the texture of a wall, subtle combinations of colours, the perfect geometry of dried branches. These seemingly futile details that hover at the edge of most people's radar, often occupy a central place in his work — as in that of the poets he admires, notably the Brazilian poet Manoel de Barros. As in a kind of pictorial event horizon, once these elements cross the threshold of the artist's multimedia annotations and enter his paintings, their original identity becomes unreachable. They no longer function as referents anchored in reality, as they now inhabit a liminal area where reference collapses and time itself is altered. As time stretches in the event horizon, these works seem to invite a slower gaze and a sustained engagement with mystery.

Almost a century after Jansky built his antenna and detected the sound coming from beyond our galaxy, a giant telescope took the first image of a black hole³. In its way of inhabiting both reality and abstraction, this photograph makes me think of Mello Brum's works. The image presents a dark void encircled by a reddish-orange halo that, if stripped of its scientific context, could almost be seen as a painting; yet it depicts something real, whose immense scale and mysterious functions renders it, in a sense, abstract. In this way, a cosmic discovery — as Jansky's hiss, the discovery of black holes, the existence of event horizons, or the publication of their image — seem to share some affinities to abstraction on a two-dimensional canvas. These phenomena do not simply point to the emergence of something new, but are all occurrences that give some form of estrangement, as they recalibrate the ways we perceive and comprehend the unknown, inviting a different gaze and a slower tempo of attention. As Russian literary critic Viktor Shklovsky argued, art should resist immediate absorption, prolonging the time of perception and thereby estranging objects and forms, ultimately renewing the act of looking.

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The same year the image of the great void was captured, William Basinski released his album *On Time Out of Time*, incorporating the sound of two black holes merging 1.3 billion years ago into an ambient and drone-based composition — another attempt that renders an imperceptible cosmic event audible. It seems to me that Mello Brum's work somehow resonates with this sensibility, not only Basinky's album, but to ambient music in general. This proximity might be evident not just in their attention to subtleties and shared strategies of fragmentation and reconfiguration, but in the way both demand a different mode of listening. As Brian Eno famously observed, ambient music accommodates multiple levels of attention without ever imposing one. It can be easily ignored or deeply absorbed, revealing all its delicate textures, shifting timbres and nuanced layers only to those who are willing to pause. I believe a similar reward awaits those who take the time to slow down with Mello Brum's paintings.

In this journey that the artist takes us between the cosmic and the earthly, if one finally suspends the desire of immediate comprehension and decelerates the pace of perception, his paintings — like ambient music or cosmic observation — could demonstrate that knowledge and wonder do not emerge from certainty or immediacy, but from sustained engagement with the unfamiliar. Whether encountered in a patch of mould, an abstract painting, or in an inaudible sound from deep space, mystery and beauty act as a force of estrangement — displacing scale, destabilizing language, and undoing the illusion of human centrality. As Einstein suggests, the capacity to wonder is the cradle of all disciplines, a fundamental mode of knowledge and survival. In this sense, Mello Brum's work aligns painting, poetry, and the luminous metaphors of science, by their shared forces of defamiliarization: in their endless ways of making the world strange again.

Mattia Tosti, 01.2026

Notes:

¹ Einstein, Albert, *The World as I See It*, Citadel Press, 1930

² Rovelli, Carlo, *White Holes*, Adelphi, 2023

³ This image was captured by the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) in 2019. It is not a single telescope, but a global network of radio observatories who have worked together to create this two-dimensional representation.

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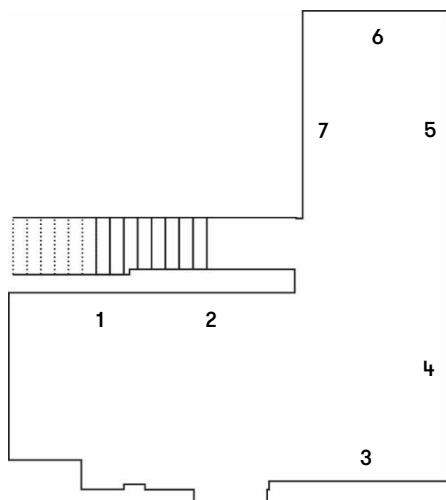
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GALLERY 1



1. Firestorm of stars, 2025

Oil, oil stick and charcoal on canvas, 150 x 120 cm

2. Não tem altura o silêncio das pedras, 2025

Oil and dry pastel on canvas, 150 x 120cm

3. Estrela de neutrons, 2025

Oil and oil stick on canvas, 96 x 76 cm

4. Betelgeuse, 2025

Oil and oil stick on canvas, 160 x 130 cm

5. Pale blu (supernova), 2025

Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm

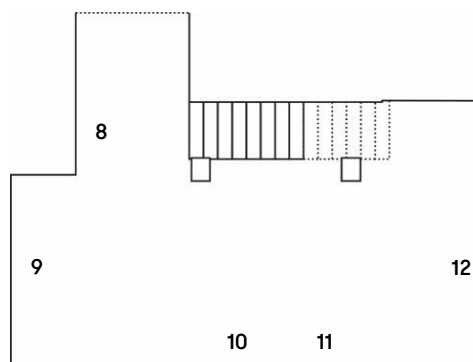
6. Turbulent indigo, 2025

Oil and oil stick on canvas, 160 x 130 cm

7. Para encontrar o azul eu uso pássaros, 2025

Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm

GALLERY 2



8. Supermassive, 2025

Oil on canvas, 30 x 24 cm

9. Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme, 2025

Oil and oil stick on canvas, 139 x 113 cm

10. Alpha piscium, 2025

Oil and oil stick on canvas, 100 x 80 cm

11. Jardim etéreo, 2025

Oil on canvas, 100 x 80 cm

12. The leaves that are green turn to brown, 2025

Oil and oil stick on canvas, 139 x 113 cm