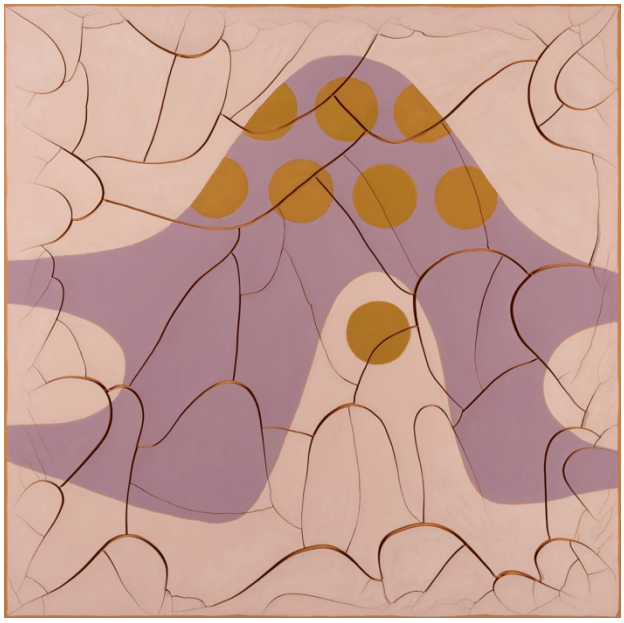
Victoria Miro

Adriana Varejão: *Modernisms*

Exhibition: 12 September–31 October 2026
Victoria Miro Venice, San Marco 1994, 30124 Venice, Italy



Adriana Varejão
Azulejo modernista #4, 2026
Oil and plaster on canvas
150 x 150 cm
© Adriana Varejão
Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

Victoria Miro is delighted to announce *Modernisms*, an exhibition of new paintings by Adriana Varejão.

This body of work is conceived in direct dialogue with the artist's participation in the Brazilian Pavilion at the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia (until 22 November 2026).

While the tile paintings presented in the pavilion draw inspiration from Baroque and religious tilework of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the paintings in *Modernisms* shift the investigation towards Brazil's modern period. They represent a temporal leap: from colonial tilework to modernist tiles, and from a tradition inherited from Portugal to a visual language that Brazil reinvented and made its own.

For more than three decades, Varejão's research has primarily focused on the Portuguese tiles that arrived in Brazil during the colonial period. These images constitute a vast iconographic archive that has nourished much of the artist's production. In recent years, however, Varejão's attention has turned towards a more recent history: the presence of tilework in modern Brazilian architecture.

Beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, tiles came to occupy a central role in shaping Brazil's urban landscape, appearing on façades, public buildings and housing developments. Their revival within modern Brazilian architecture was not a nostalgic gesture but a singular cultural operation. Having been pushed into the

background by movements that rejected everything associated with the neo-colonial repertoire, with the rise of modern architecture, the art of tilework was reborn.

Its return took place when Brazilian modernism found its own way of reconciling tradition and the avant-garde, transforming inherited materials and techniques into instruments for affirming a distinctly Brazilian modernity. Tiles became a privileged element of this synthesis. Rooted in the Luso-Brazilian tradition, they were incorporated into modern architecture not as remnants of the past but as a contemporary language.

'In the wake of Brazilian modernism, the Portuguese colonial tradition of tilework was reinterpreted and transformed into a distinctly Brazilian, modern, and widely shared visual language – one embedded in everyday urban life rather than in representations of permanence and power,' says Varejão.

Over nearly two years, Varejão carried out extensive research into twentieth-century tilework in the cities of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Salvador and Belo Horizonte. Drawing on books, period magazines and an extensive photographic survey of surviving tilework in these cities, the artist assembled an image archive dedicated to this body of work, a visual heritage that remains largely undocumented.

The research moves across different moments within this history, beginning with the tilework associated with the Brazilian modernist project of the 1940s to the 1960s, deeply connected to the integration of art and architecture. This was the period in which artists and architects such as Oscar Niemeyer, Lúcio Costa, Roberto Burle Marx, and, especially, Athos Bulcão made tilework a fundamental element of modern Brazilian architecture. Varejão's research is also concerned with the proliferation of industrially produced and anonymous patterns that, from the 1970s onwards, came to cover the façades of residential buildings, entrance halls, leisure areas, walls, swimming pools and domestic interiors. It was during this period that tilework became part of the visual imagination of Brazil's urban middle class. Countless repetitive, geometric, optical and colourful modular patterns emerged, often without any identified authorship.

This recent research also has a personal dimension, as the artist explains, 'I spent much of my childhood in Brasília, the emblematic city of Brazilian modernism, where tiles are woven into the everyday experience of Oscar Niemeyer's architecture. Since then, they have remained a constant presence in my visual memory and artistic practice.'

More than a historical survey, this exhibition proposes an act of recovery. It seeks to bring to light a body of work that shaped the Brazilian urban imagination and that, despite its extraordinary formal richness, often remains invisible. By revisiting these patterns, the artist aims to recognise tilework as a fundamental part of Brazil's visual culture and as a living link between the past and the present.

About the artist

Born in 1964, Adriana Varejão currently lives and works in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Varejão represents Brazil alongside Rosana Paulino at the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia in a presentation curated by Diane Lima, titled *Comigo ninguém pode* (until 22 November 2026). In 2025, the solo exhibition Adriana Varejão: *Don't Forget, We Come From the Tropics* opened at the Hispanic Society Museum & Library in New York, closely followed by the opening of Adriana Varejão and Paula Rego: *Between Your Teeth* at the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, an exhibition that highlighted the points of intersection between both artists through a combined presentation of more than 100 works. In 2022, Adriana Varejão: *Sutures, Fissures, Ruins* – among the most comprehensive exhibitions of the artist's work to date, featuring more than 60 works from 1985–2022 – was on view at Pinacoteca de São Paulo, Brazil.

Other important solo exhibitions include Adriana Varejão: *Por uma retórica canibal*, curated by Luisa Duarte, Museum of Modern Art, Salvador, travelling to MAMAM, Recife (2019); the French Academy in Rome – Villa Medici, Rome (2017); Dallas Contemporary, Texas (2015); The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2014–15); *Histórias às margens (Histories at the margins)*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (2012), which toured to Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, and MALBA - Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (2013); Hara Museum, Tokyo (2007); Fondation Cartier Pour L'Art Contemporain, Paris (2005); and Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon (2005) amongst others.

A permanent pavilion devoted to Adriana Varejaõ's work opened in 2008 at Instituto Inhotim in Brazil.

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