

SONIA ALMEIDA *The Angle of the Sun's Rays*
by Joan Waltemath

SIMONE SUBAL GALLERY | FEBRUARY 17 – MARCH 25, 2012

A LETTER TO MARGARET NOEL
FROM JOAN WALTEMATH

Dear Margaret,

It's been more than a few years since you last visited me in New York; you wouldn't believe the changes that have taken place since you were here on the Bowery. Galleries are opening all over the neighborhood, even on the first floor of my building where Simone Subal, former director at Peter Blum, has just opened a space.

The striking colors of the current exhibition got me thinking of you. Martin would have loved this work. It's by a young artist from Portugal, Sonia Almeida. Her large orange and turquoise painting, "Diagonal Pathway" (2011), caught my eye as it was being installed. Every time I go up the stairs to my apartment, I find myself looking for it; each time I see it, it gets better. It's constructed in layers that are separate, like in a print, but which seamlessly open up a void with contours both definitive and soft. To enter into the painting's inhabitable space is to experience a resonant depth, both fresh and capable of connecting with the medium's long history.



It took me a number of days to realize all this. Since I had the benefit of seeing the painting again and again for short glimpses, I was able to observe it growing in time and to watch the dense layers unfolding. With our current gallery system it is difficult to find work that rewards sustained viewing, which is not to say it isn't there, only that one rarely spends more than a few minutes in one space before running off to see the next show. As if more was actually more.

"Landscape and stripes" seems so simple at first, a wash over plywood in earthy red brown. Then, a series of strokes that evoke palm leaves blowing in the wind, though they are configured in more or less concentric circles. A rectangle of black-and-white stripes floats above, anchored by the top edge of the painting. I've found myself going back to it again and again. It's one of those paintings in which you can see all sorts of things, perhaps because there is so little in it!

Each series of occurrences on the surfaces of Almeida's paintings seems to be a stand-in for the series of disconnected events that form our daily lives. Particular relationships are configured so that shape, gesture, and color open up to the mind, enabling us to put forward our own order and to make these incidents purposeful.

"I am the sun" is a small work with loosely painted yellow and ochre brushed over earth green and iron oxide. The title refers to a calligraphic line that circles around the piece with strokes radiating from it; it speaks to the interconnectedness of all things. It recalled for me a distant memory: reading the ancient Celtic poems in Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* (1948). "I am the deer. I am the tree. I am the . . ." —they go on and on like this.

Before I go on and on, tell me: when are you coming to New York again? Shouldn't we spend a day together looking at things around the new Lower East Side, talking about all the changes since you were last here?

Herzliche umarmung,
Joan