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Reviews: New York Adriana Varejão Lehmann Maupin

By Robert Ayers

Brazilian artist Adriana Varejão works with a variety of materials, often depicting cold and disorienting interiors, such as tile-clad bathrooms and saunas, that almost suggest an Escher-like impossible reality. Although she dealt with similar concerns in this exhibition, Varejão exercised a restraint that had been absent in the past.

The two large paintings and ten related works on paper (all 2009) elicited a remarkable number of moods from the simple tiled rooms. The graphite drawing *Diva Divina* (Divine Diva), for example at first resembles an ordinary domestic bathroom. Sunlight streams through a high window, and the air is filled with soap bubbles. The only odd note is the lack of any other bathroom fittings – water taps, shower curtains, a bath mat – that might render the room useful. The sense of unease extended to the other works on paper. *O Especialista* (The Specialist) includes a low-tiled platform on one side, conjuring a morgue or a charnel house; *O Convidado* (The Guest) features a tiled column partly obscuring a blood-spattered floor; and the interconnecting chambers in *O Seductor* (The Seducer) bring to mind Piranesi's prison etchings.

Varejão also indulges her anxieties in large scale and in color. *O Iluminado* (The Shining) – a nearly 20-foot-wide acid-yellow tableau – reveals a ghastly cavernous suite of torture chambers, rendered all the more alarming by the gentle sunlight that filters through them from the upper left. Like all the rooms in this show, these are devoid of human beings, although the bloodstains that darken the channels running across the floor hint at the horrors that might have taken place here.