

## VIDEO: Adriana Varejão, Defining Color as Language with “Polvo” at Lehmann Maupin

by Dion Tan 15/05/14 7:00 AM EDT



[Adriana Varejão](#), one of Brazil's leading contemporary artists, continues to tackle questions of cultural identity in her multi-disciplined approach to art. This time, she illustrates Brazil's 1976 racial census by painting her self-portrait in various skin tones for her latest exhibition “*Polvo*” at the Lehmann Maupin Gallery.

The triptychs of 12 paintings were inspired by the government survey in which Brazilian citizens were asked to describe their own skin color. The survey generated more than 136 different descriptions that influenced Varejão to reinterpret those poetic colors onto her serene self-portraits, while juxtaposing them with rigid color charts. She even created her own tubes of 33 skin tone paints and named them based on the census list, such as *Sapecada* (Flirting with Freckles) or *Café com Leite* (Milky Coffee).

“I think that the color is not so important in this work,” said Varejão. “It’s much more about the name and telling color is language.”

*The exhibition at [Lehmann Maupin](#), 540 West 26th Street in Manhattan, is open through June 21.*