
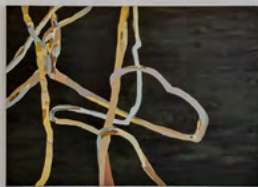


*Preguntas a la Isla (Questions to the Island)*

Diablo Rosso (Panama)  
March – May 2026



 "Preguntas a la Isla"  
obra de arte contemporáneo





On Barro Colorado Island, the landscape is not treated as a backdrop, but as an interlocutor encountered through sustained looking, where perception shifts over time.

Each artwork series emerges from a precise inquiry—into colour, distance, form, object, and light—developed through direct experience of the site. Rather than explaining the ecosystem, the work proposes tools for perception: indexes, cuts, perspectives, and chromatic and material variations that function as devices of attention. The studio moves into the field, and the field enters the studio through processes of observing, collecting, comparing, and looking again.

*Preguntas a la Isla (Questions to the Island)* brings together works produced during extended stays on Barro Colorado Island (STRI) during 2025 in dialogue with a related series created in 2014. The exhibition functions as an open archive of observations—variations, comparisons, and successive approximations—where the landscape is not fixed, but held in the interval between seeing and understanding. Here, artistic methods shift from representation to research: a sustained effort to attend to the complexity of a living system, and to allow the familiar to become unfamiliar again.



I

*Estudios de perspectiva*, 2025

series of 12

graphite on paper

21 × 29.6 cm (28.8 × 37.4 cm framed) each

During my stay on Barro Colorado Island last year, I made a series of drawings depicting dead palm leaves that had fallen to the forest floor where they formed accidental sculptural compositions. During earlier visits to the island, I had noticed these distinctive structures created as palm leaves dried and collapsed. Over time, I became increasingly interested in their formal qualities.

Because of the stiffness and fibrous consistency of the leaves, they retained sharply defined edges and planes as they decayed, producing unexpectedly geometric shapes in which perspective became visible. These angular forms stood in marked contrast to the surrounding vegetation, where growth is typically dense, layered, and soft.

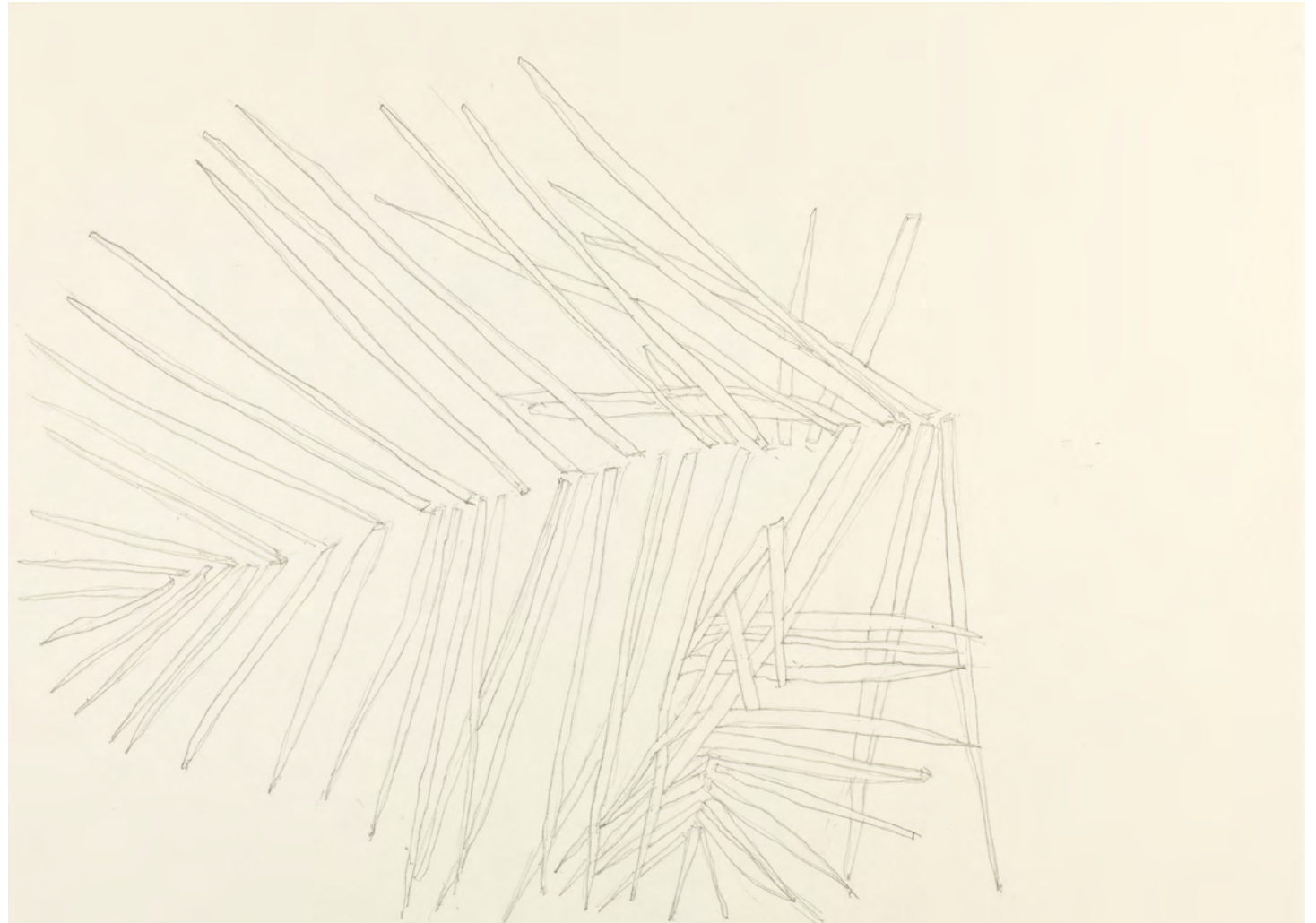








process



## II

*Cross Section Lianas*, 2014

series of 5

watercolour on paper

24 × 30 cm (28.8 × 37.4 cm framed) each

During my very first stay on BCI in 2012, I met Stefan Schnitzer, founder of the Schnitzer Lab whose research focuses on the presence of lianas—long-stemmed woody vines that climb trees in search of sunlight at the forest canopy. These plants are ubiquitous in tropical forests and play a powerful, often disruptive ecological role. On my initial encounter with the rainforest, I thought that lianas were responsible for the visual disorder of the landscape: they tangled space, blocked vision, and created

a sense of impenetrability. Over time, however, I came to appreciate their structural force and ecological significance within this complex ecosystem.

During this stay, I produced a series of line drawings (20 works, pencil on paper) examining their entangled forms, later exhibited in various venues. I also created a series of watercolours based on cut cross-sections lianas, studying their internal structures and colours. This series, *Cross Section Lianas*, is presented here for the first time.









process



III

*Lianas A, B, C*, 2025

oil on canvas

85 × 120 × 2.5cm



For ten years, the forms I had drawn of lianas remained in my mind. I always felt that these images had the potential to be developed further as larger paintings incorporating colours. In 2024 I organised a stay at BCI with the aim of collecting the colours needed to realise this idea.

The resulting series of paintings emerges from a combination of processes: the original liana drawings made in 2014, the colour gathering carried out a decade later, and the subsequent development in my studio in Amsterdam.









IV

*Palms index, 2025*

*Leaf litter index, 2025*



In 2012, during my inaugural residency at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI), I began working with tropical leaf litter on Barro Colorado Island (BCI). I installed ground “traps” in the forest to collect fallen plant material, which I carefully drew, resulting in the *Leaf Litter Trap* series—31 works based on dead vegetal matter. This early study formed the conceptual foundation for a new phase focused on the colour brown, revisited with more than a decade of accumulated experience.

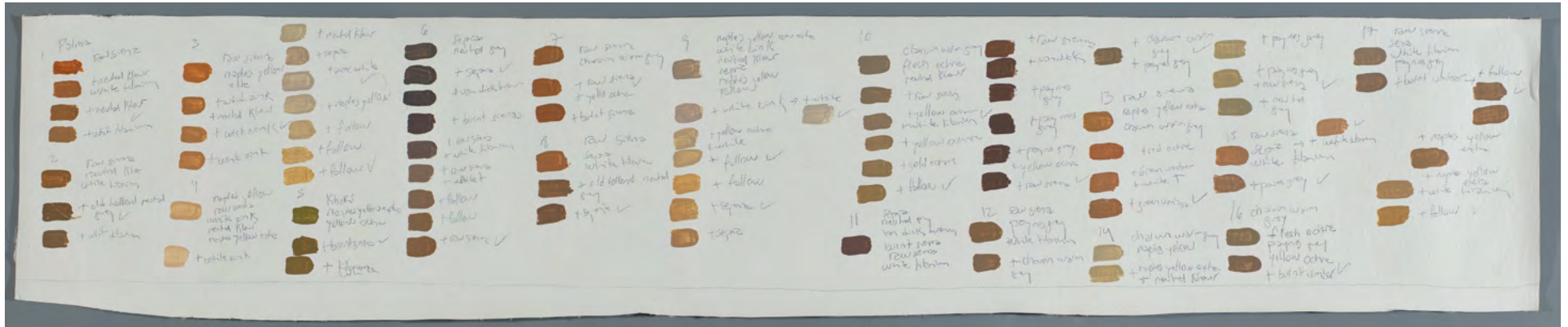
Returning to BCI in 2025, I shifted my attention from form to chromatic variation. During a four-week stay on this 1,500-hectare primary research site of STRI, I compiled an index of brown colours derived from leaf litter. This field-based method extended my ongoing practice of colour cataloguing across diverse ecosystems, from tropical forests to mineral-rich landscapes, from Malaysia to Central Andes. Leaves gathered on site were processed into colour samples at STRI’s visitor centre, where close observation of subtle tonal differences became both a scientific-like study and a painterly enquiry, linking fieldwork to subsequent studio production.

IV

Palms index, 2025

acrylic and graphite on canvas

variable dimensions



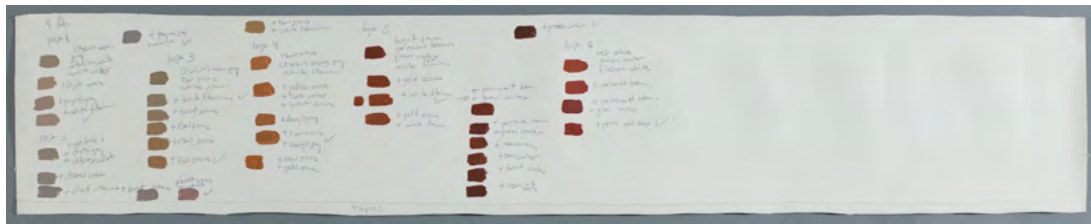
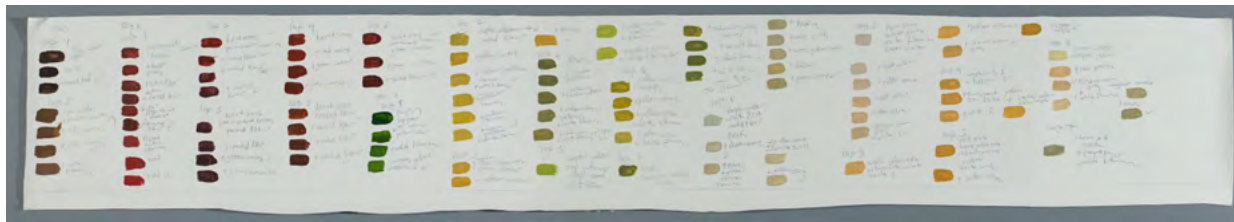


IV

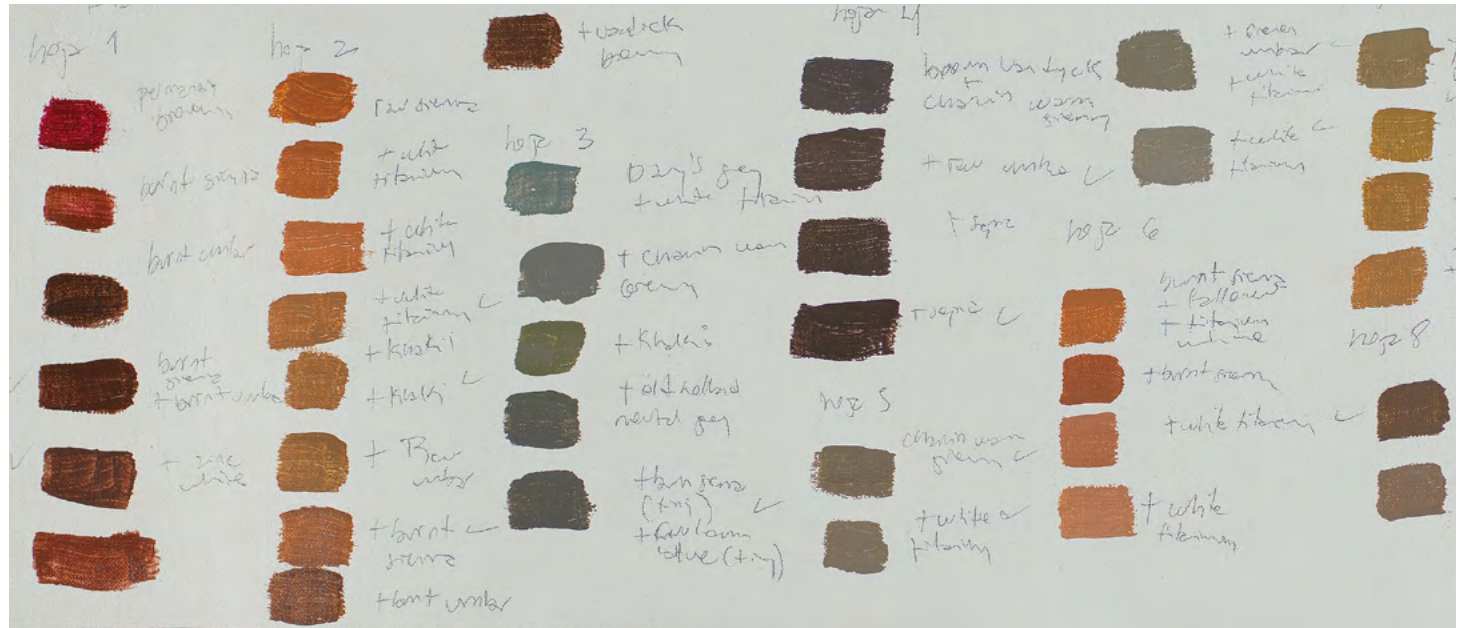
Leaf litter index, 2025

acrylic and graphite on canvas

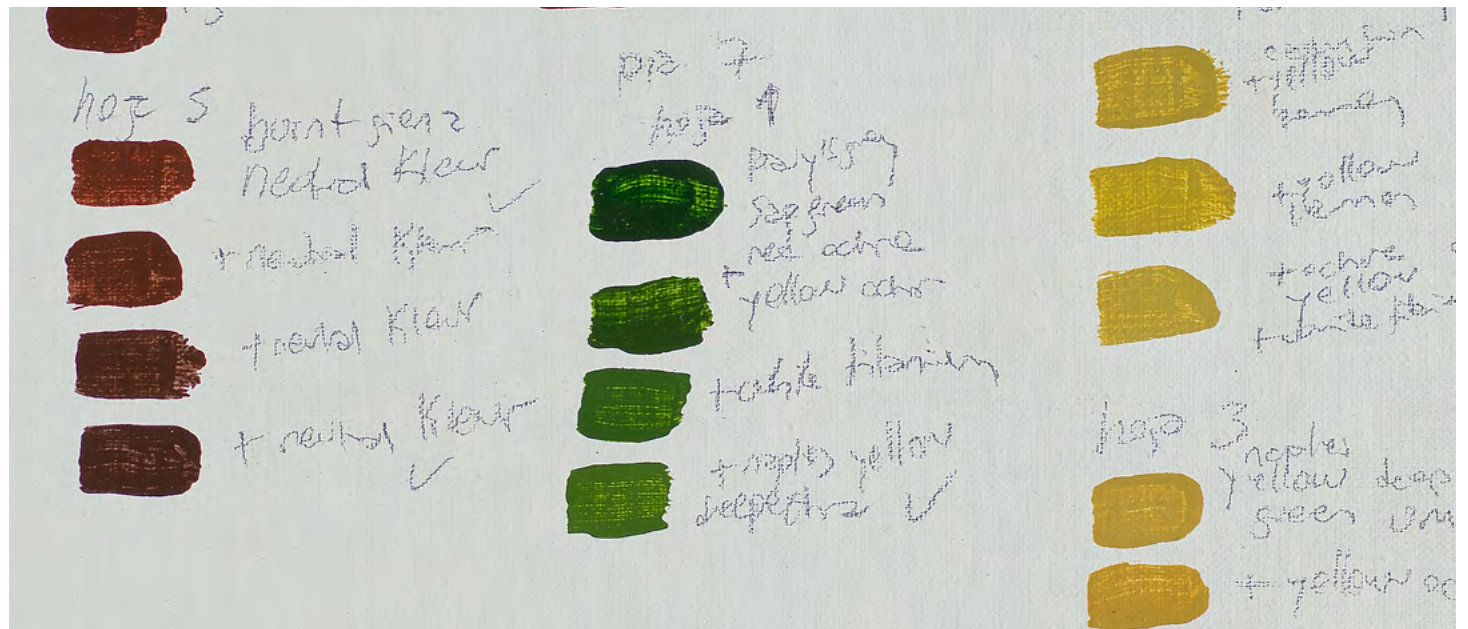
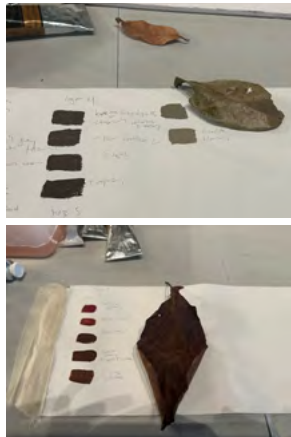
variable dimensions



details



process





V-i

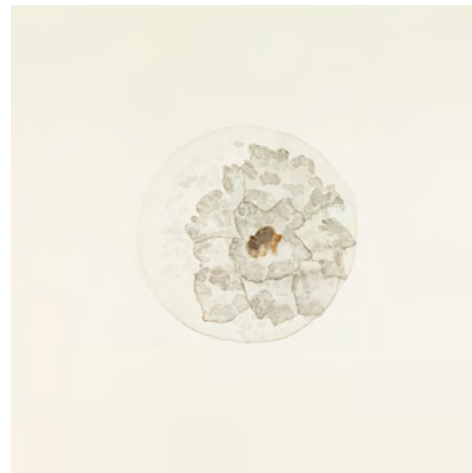
*Circles: Fungi Studies. Series I, 2025*

(not on display)

series of 8

watercolour on paper

20×20 cm each





V-ii

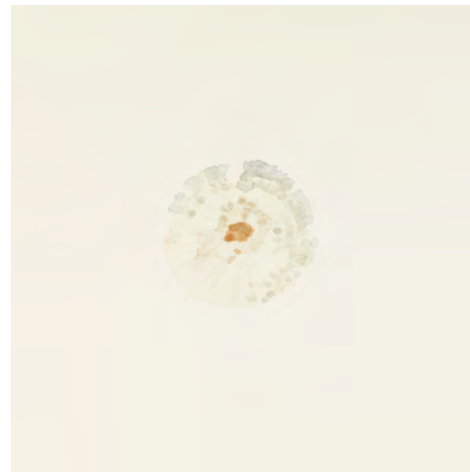
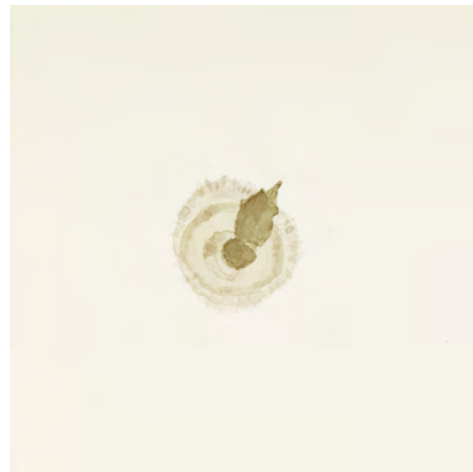
*Circles: Fungi Studies. Series II, 2025*

(not on display)

series of 8

watercolour on paper

15 × 15 cm each





Irene Kopelman  
*Preguntas a la Isla*  
(*Questions to the Island*)

Artist:  
Irene Kopelman

Exhibition venue:  
DiabloRosso, Panama City

Exhibition design by:  
Johann Wolfschoon

Project collaborators and scientific advice:  
Stefan Schnitzer, Erin Spear, William Wcislo

Text:  
Irene Kopelman and Dominik Czechowski

Photography (exhibition):  
Alfredo Martiz

Photography (drawings and index):  
Studio-oppa

Photography (paintings):  
Margareta Svensson

Design PDF:  
Ayumi Higuchi

The project was made possible with the support  
of Mondriaan Fonds during my period as  
Research Associate at the STRI.

I would like to thank:

Johann Wolfschoon and Analida Galindo;  
the following staff and colleagues at the  
Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in  
Panama (STRI): scientists Stefan Schnitzer,  
Erin Spear, and William Wcislo; Joshua  
Tewksbury, Director, and Oris Sanjur,  
Deputy Director; administrative staff Adriana  
Bilgray, Aldy Mariscal, Yacksecari Lopez,  
Nadezhka Veliz, and Jenniffer Saucedo; and  
all the workers on Barro Colorado Island.