

**Mário
Pedrosa
Primary
Documents**

MoMA



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Edited by

Glória Ferreira

and Paulo Herkenhoff

Translation by

Stephen Berg

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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c. 1958

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Mário Pedrosa at Alberto Magnelli's
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Mário Pedrosa and Lula (Luiz Inácio
Lula da Silva). 1980. Centro de Docu-
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Foreword

This is the seventh in an ambitious series of documentary anthologies that began in 2002 with *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art*. Published by The Museum of Modern Art's International Program and generously supported by its International Council and other donors, these books are intended for English-language readers with a serious interest in modern art and provide access, often for the first time, to important source materials in translation.

Paulo Herkenhoff, the acclaimed Brazilian curator and museum director who served as MoMA's Adjunct Curator of Latin American Art from 1999 to 2002, proposed the present volume as one of a trio of documentary anthologies focusing on key personalities and moments in the history of Latin American art. The first of these to be published, *Listen, Here, Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde* (2004), presented art and performance from a celebrated decade of production in Argentina. The second, *Alfredo Boulton and His Contemporaries: Critical Dialogues in Venezuelan Art, 1912–1974* (2008), traced the beginnings of art history and criticism in Venezuela through the writings and correspondence of its first major author. *Mário Pedrosa: Primary Documents* completes this series with a wide-ranging selection of texts by one of Brazil's most influential intellectuals of the postwar period, whose writings have never before been translated into English. Pedrosa was a courageous political activist who was twice exiled by repressive governments but later participated in the formation of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's Workers' Party. He was also an erudite theorist and outspoken critic, the most important voice of his time in the world of Brazilian modern and contemporary art, as well as a pioneering curator and museum director.

According to a famous observation attributed to the legendary musician Tom Jobim, "Brazil is not for beginners," and MoMA is fortunate indeed to have had a long and continuous engagement with the country, dating back to the 1940 show of the paintings of Candido Portinari and the influential architecture exhibition *Brazil Builds* in 1943. In recent years, the Museum has exhibited the work of two major women artists of the postwar years, Mira Schendel (2009) and Lygia Clark (2014), both of whom were championed by Pedrosa in writings that appear in this book. We returned this year to the subject of Brazilian architecture in our exhibition *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955–1980*. We also take great pleasure in the close personal contacts we have enjoyed with leading personalities in the Brazilian art world, many of them members of our International Council. In addition, we are particularly proud to be the first institution to present Pedrosa's writings to the English-speaking world since—as noted in the pages to come—his passionate engagement with the radical implications of modern art was in part inspired by a visit to the Museum's exhibition *Alexander Calder: Sculptures and Constructions* (September 29, 1943–January 16, 1944), seen during his exile in the United States.

For this publication we owe a very special debt of gratitude to Vera Pedrosa, Mário's daughter and a distinguished diplomat in her own right, and to her children Bel, Quito, and Livia. Their gracious support was indispensable to this project from its inception, and we are particularly grateful to Quito for compiling the chronology of his grandfather's career.

Paulo Herkenhoff had hoped to edit this book himself, but his responsibilities as founding curator of the Museu de Arte do Rio de Janeiro (MAR), which opened in 2013, intervened, and we were fortunate indeed that the prominent critic and historian Glória Ferreira was able to take over from him as editor of the publication. We are indebted to Ms. Ferreira—for her deep knowledge of the history of modern Brazilian art and her exceptional dedication to this publication—as well as to Margareth de Moraes, who ably assisted her as our on-site administrator in Rio. With advice from a small committee—including Lauro Cavalcanti and Catherine Bompuis in Rio; and Jay Levenson, the director of our International Program, and Luis Pérez-Oramas, the Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art at MoMA—Ms. Ferreira worked tirelessly to assemble the texts included in this volume and to commission new contextual essays, ensuring that the book contains up-to-date materials on the continued relevance of Mário Pedrosa’s thought. Ms. Ferreira, Mr. Cavalcanti, and Ms. Bompuis also contributed new essays to the book, as did Kaira Cabañas, Marcio Doctors, and Adele Nelson. Sarah Lookofsky, Assistant Director of the International Program, energetically and insightfully shepherded the book to completion.

Each volume of the Primary Documents series has been fully underwritten so as to keep its cost within the reach of students, and we are indebted to the generous support of our key sponsors, led by the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, for making the publication of this volume possible. We are particularly grateful to our other principal sponsors: the Fundação Roberto Marinho, under its President, José Roberto Marinho, and its Secretary General, Hugo Barreto; the Ministry of Culture of Brazil, and especially Minister Juca Ferreira; and the Brazilian Consulate in New York. Generous support has also been provided by The Fran and Ray Stark Foundation, Louis Antoine de Ségur de Charbonnières, Andrea and José Olympio Pereira, Frances Reynolds, and Jack Shear.

—Glenn D. Lowry

Primary Documents



Translator's Note

The selection of writing contained in this anthology draws from seven decades of feverish intellectual activity by Mário Pedrosa, and the present rendering of it in English represents three years of uninterrupted work translating and contextualizing people, places, and events across several continents for the Anglophone reader.

The bulk of Pedrosa's writing was done for periodicals, with all of the drawbacks and inconveniences that journalistic activity in pre-digital times entailed. He was afforded little or no opportunity to revise most of his texts as many times as he may have liked. Deadlines needed to be met. Thus the long, conversational sentences so typical of a brilliant mind proceeding from association to association, from deduction to conclusion, weaving back and forth across centuries of theory and images to make his points—the full impact of a quicksilver intellect that characterizes his prose—were not infrequently set in type with essential punctuation marks such as commas, periods, and quotes either misplaced or altogether omitted. Successive reprints and collections of his writing have largely overlooked such details, and much of this dynamic flavor has been lost. One of the things that this translation has attempted to convey is the passionate quality of his discourse.

Another pitfall for a translator tackling Pedrosa has to do with his abundant use of citations. The scope of his reading, his sweeping knowledge not only of art but also of many other subjects—including philosophy, architecture, poetry, music and science—may be verified in text after text. To the patient, discriminating scholar or translator, one accustomed to hunting down references—while stopping short of the complete critical edition that a thinker of his distinction has long merited—it soon becomes clear that the critic quoted from memory a great deal of the time and, no matter how prodigious his ability to recall, that faculty occasionally faltered, which easily explains how an “involuntary sacrifice” mentioned by Baudelaire becomes “voluntary” in one of Pedrosa's many essays on criticism, to give but one example.

In this edition, whenever it has been possible to verify a quotation, a citation has been provided in an endnote. Contextualizing information offering background on people or events important to understanding the material is also included as endnotes. Rare instances of notes by Pedrosa or from the time of any given text's original publication are included at the bottom of the page on which they appear.

Like the Greeks, Pedrosa was fond of neologisms. Most of these would require so much explanation that it was ultimately decided to translate rather than reproduce or explicate them in order to ensure the general fluidity of his writing.

Throughout, first names have been added in brackets with the exception of the rare cases in which we were unable to confirm identity.

The author's use of capitals has been retained.

Pedrosa often integrated foreign-language terms and phrases into his writing. These have largely been translated, except for instances in which we felt it added something to the understanding of the writing.

In the section “Correspondence,” all of Pedrosa’s letters were translated from the Portuguese except where noted. Vera Pedrosa has told me that her father generally avoided writing in English. Additionally, she reports that her mother, Mary Pedrosa, reviewed his texts whenever she was called upon to do so: “Whenever she was not at hand, his wording of that language would probably have been unusual. His French was far more precise.” Illegible words in the correspondence have been replaced [—].

Having accounted for the systematizing of *Mário Pedrosa: Primary Documents*, some acknowledgments are in order. The original invitation to be part of this project came from Glória Ferreira. For this opportunity, I am deeply grateful.

For more than three years, Jay Levenson, MoMA’s Director of International Programs, has provided me with unfailing support and encouragement. David Frankel, Editorial Director at the Museum, was my earliest interlocutor, and his answers to my queries were always as detailed as they were illuminating.

My indebtedness to editor Libby Hruska, and, at a much later stage, to Evelyn Rosenthal, is immense. Without their intelligence, patience, discernment, and sensitivity, my undertaking would undoubtedly have fallen far short of its principal aim: that of rendering Mário Pedrosa’s distinctive and highly original voice in English.

Thanks also to Gillian Sneed for her meticulous research in locating frequently obscure original quotes in a veritable Babel of languages.

Finally, I am beholden to Vera Pedrosa for the gentle openness with which she shared memories of her father and concurred with my understanding and interpretation of his voice.

Stephen Berg

5. Art Criticism

Introduction Rodrigo Krul

This section presents the trajectory of Mário Pedrosa's art criticism in Brazil, encompassing his transition from political and literary criticism to art criticism proper. It begins with an early—and rare—foray into music criticism, "Villa-Lobos and His People: The Brazilian Perspective" (1929), and also includes a later work combining literary and art criticism, "Miró among Poets" (1976), both originally published in Paris. Pedrosa's visionary introduction of the concept of postmodernism is described for the first time in 1966 in his essential text "Environmental Art, Postmodern Art, Hélio Oiticica."

Considered the first manifestation of Marxist art criticism in Brazil, "The Social Tendencies of Art and Käthe Kollwitz" (1933) introduced the German artist to Brazil, even as it welcomed to the country the universality of social art. "Portinari: From Brodowski to the Washington Murals" (1942) caused discomfiture by countering prevailing views about the artistic development of a national artist-hero, as well as by corroborating the necessary expansion of the Brazilian art circuit beyond the official domain of the state. In the text's discussion of the development of the "great synthetic art" of the mural in both North and South America, Pedrosa also reveals his view of the equator not as something that separates the two hemispheres but that, instead, brings them together.

Pedrosa recognized and celebrated avant-garde art. He referred to Alexander Calder's experiments with motion as "the ideal suspension bridge that connects the spatial arts to those of succession in time." The encounter between artist and critic developed into a lifelong friendship, and Pedrosa dedicated "Tension and Cohesion in the Work of Calder" (1944) to his artistically revolutionary friend.

Pedrosa discusses the foundational artists of Brazilian modernism in texts such as "Lasar Segall" and "Di Cavalcanti" (both 1957). He also examines their European precursors in "Giorgio Morandi" (1947), which illuminates "the mystical artist, [who was] severe and wise enough to love lifeless things," and in "Modulations Between Sensation and Idea" (1950), about Paul Cézanne, which precedes the decade that defined Brazilian art's autonomy and its ideological and sentient transformations, achieved through the experiments undertaken by Art Informel and geometric Abstractionism, Concretism, and Neo-Concretism. He also turns his critical attention to artists who are "primitive" at heart but nonetheless engender transformations in "Advantage of the Primitives" (1959).

Ivan Serpa's meeting with the artists who orbited around the Grupo Frente was recorded in "Ivan Serpa's Experiment" (1951) and in "Grupo Frente" (1955). "Ethical discipline and creative discipline" were common sense among these artists' unique temperaments and poetics during the period in which they were magnetically drawn to Serpa, an artist who also happened to be the teacher of Aluísio Carvão, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape (all of whom are accorded individual texts selected for this section). Those three were joined by Lygia Clark, and by Franz Weissmann—who is present in this section in the text on his special room at the eighth edition of the São Paulo Bienal, in 1965.

"Concrete Poet and Painter" (1957) introduces the word and image experiments undertaken by poets Décio Pignatari and the brothers Haroldo and Augusto de Campos. Pignatari, along with the painters such as Waldemar Cordeiro and Luis Sacilotto, is also discussed in "Paulistas and Cariocas" (1957), in which Pedrosa reflects upon the cultural and regional aspects of Brazilian art by means of the differences between the two principal Brazilian economic centers, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Pedrosa's struggle for the ideological emancipation of abstract art in Brazil produced texts on the trajectory of two artists who contributed a great deal to the

critic's thinking: Alfredo Volpi and Milton Dacosta. About the former—the artist who acted as a bridge between Brazilian modernism and Concretism—he published “Volpi, 1942–1957” (1957), and, about the latter, “Milton Dacosta: Twenty Years of Painting” (1959). He discusses the abstract Art Informel school in his assessment of the São Paulo Bienal's fourth edition, in 1957—the so-called Tachist Bienal—in “After Tachism” (1958), as well as in “Iberê Camargo” (1958) and “The Two Positions; or, Pollock and Vedova” (1959).

Both “Lygia Clark; or, The Fascination with Space” (1957) and “The Significance of Lygia Clark” (1960) are included here, the former being the equally essential albeit less well-known of the two. Written two years before the Neo-Concrete manifesto, the earlier essay provides a critical introduction to the transitive power of Clark's investigations known as *Bichos* (Critters) and her discovery of the organic line, crucial to the revelation of space as “composed of vectors that allow us to have a phenomenologically affective rather than a purely sensorial awareness of it.”

The presence of the historical avant-gardes in Brazil in the 1960s was brought about in part by the rise of Pop art, and Pedrosa deals with that movement's reverberations throughout the country, as mediated by society's relationship to its icons, myths, and detritus, in “Klee and the Present” (1961), “From American Pop to Dias, the *Sertanejo*” (1967), and “From the Dissolution of the Object to the Brazilian Avant-Garde” (1967). In the late 1960s and the 1970s he also published reflections on some of the country's most important artists in texts such as “Mira Schendel” (1963), “Anna Bella Geiger” (1968), and “Camargo's Sculpture” (1975).

In “Hélio Oiticica's Projects” (1961), Pedrosa discusses not only that artist's innovative maquettes but also the need to update the function of museums around the world. To the critic, museums were like “houses, laboratories for cultural experiments.” This transformative view was put into practice throughout his activities as director of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo at the start of the 1960s and, scrupulously, as the creator and organizer of the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende, in Santiago, in the 1970s.

Pedrosa's critical trajectory is marked by the belief that art and politics are the inseparable protagonists of a single action: the “experimental exercise of freedom”—his most famous utterance, reiterated here in his conversation with the artist Antonio Manuel in 1970. —*Rodrigo Krul*

• • •

Villa-Lobos and His People: The Brazilian Perspective

A very distinguished French poet whose art criticism is somewhat excessively aesthetic has said of [Heitor] Villa-Lobos's music that he could not accept it because he did not love brutality. But . . . can one demand, for example, of the *Sacre* [*du Printemps*; Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*] that it be pretty? Is it reasonable to want everyone to sing with the subtlety of [Claude] Debussy? A musician is not a music box that depends only upon the hand that turns the crank. He does not sing in the abstract. He is *possessed*. He is inspired. And the inspiration is as noble in its expression of softness and subtlety as it is in expressing violence or savagery. Taste is not found at the source of poetry, it does not flow with inspiration. It comes *afterward*. One finds it only later, in aesthetics. Meaning that if one does not take Brazil into account, one cannot understand Villa-Lobos. It is as if one were to expect a wild rose to bloom from a cactus instead of its own wild red flower. Because an artist's art that is unconsciously marked by his people's way of feeling—as deeply and inevitably saturated by the nature of his country as Villa's is—cannot be exquisite or fine, but must be like him: fiery and wild, sensual and sentimental, complex and solid. He has the naive and total sincerity of a mountain torrent. Nowadays Brazil continues to find itself at a primitive stage. But its primitivism is not a matter of fashion; nor is it due to this conscious, healthy search for renewal, for rejuvenation of sources for which European intelligence, too tired and too charged with culture, has felt such a deep need. Our primitivism is simpler and less refined; it is quite simply a historical period in our process of growth and development. Intelligence is not yet our affair, but sentiment, or even sentimentality. The *pathos* of the Germans. Until now, it is the people who have been our only great ingenuous and unconscious creator, of which rudimentary and interested art is no more than the direct expression of their rough joys and sadness. As everywhere, it is the magnificent tree from which the power of fertility is always awakening. Villa-Lobos has had the predestined luck to be the first conscious thrust of this tree. His work is an extremely personal creation, yet one in which the materials were taken from there. He has built his hut with wood from the forest that surrounds him.

Perhaps Brazilians are able to evoke at random whatever part of Brazil has entered the artist's imagination as nature, as a living thing, acting upon it and allowing it to help shape their sensibility: the popular dances and rondos beneath the palm trees and stars of the Northeastern beaches, the beat of the *catêretê*¹ at the forest's edge, the *macumbas*² and witchcraft of the blacks on the outskirts of cities, the *serestas* [serenades] and *choros*³ in the cities, the traditions and felicitous improvisations of Carnival in the capitals, etc. . . . Or even something more vague within the Brazilian vastness. . . . Things from deep in the woods: the mysterious Brazilian forest, filled with familiar legends and demons, where the wildcat lives with the Great Snake and the legendary descendants of tribal hero Macunaima,⁴ and the great rivers, majestic and deep, these great, fantastic beings that have always inspired childhood fear, attraction, and worship in Brazilians, from the depths of which rise enchanted palaces, dwellings of "Iara"⁵—the mother of the waters, with her green hair, our godmother, etc. . . . Throughout Villa's body of work—above all in his symphonies—one feels the reflection of these things. I believe it is only that which he ultimately calls the ambiance of the "Choros." And it is upon this vague and undefined ambiance that the rhythms come crashing down, literally, as if moved by the evident and imperious will to give it a precise form, of shaping almost everything in their image. Thus, one can easily understand the predominance of rhythm in this work, and it is from this

that it draws its form. For here it is the typical element, the concrete expression of race. This rhythmic is specific to the national popular music. One need not seek out external cultural or social causes in order to explain it, as has been done so often. The “Choros,” for example, have never needed Stravinsky, jazz, or other foreign influences in order to exist. Everything that was necessary to their creation existed in Brazil. V. Lobos did nothing but obey the imposition of his environment and his race. Its form is born from the fusion of primordial rhythmic elements that are embryonic or already extant in our popular music—for example, from Brazil’s unique syncopation that is spontaneously born from the soft, gentle national prosody,* the *maxixe*,⁶ rogue of coastal cities, from the *choro* oblivious of its Spanish nobility, bastard of civilization in the wild land where the guitar was replaced by the *cavaquinho*⁷ (viol), etc. . . . A profound interpreter of his people, his rhythmic is nothing but the brilliant, albeit unintentional, development of popular expression.

In certain parts of Brazil, we remain so close to nature that we can see (so to speak) the act of birth, the concrete source of many of our collective popular creations. One can almost see the moving work of anonymous creation in action. Such is the case with some of our legends, poetry, and music. One is able to feel how, for us, music and poetry are still enmeshed. One must think of Greece or of early Christianity. “This intimate connection with the spoken language that characterizes Greek music,” according to [German music critic] Paul Bekker,⁸ may also be found among us. Like the Greeks, our (mostly illiterate) popular singers “do not know measured rhythm in today’s sense, and they stress their singing generally in accord with the laws of their language.” Medieval music was also decisively marked by the historical process of the people’s growing individualization that was seen in Europe and that gave birth to several national cultures that had come to replace the unique culture of the period—the international culture of the Church. From the universal, sacred form of music that it had been, as sung in church, it became profane and national, “dependent now only on the physiological conformation of peoples and the language that they speak.” With us, things happened conversely. No growing individualization of the peoples; more of a growing mixture of peoples. Several totally different races from opposite meridians met at a given moment upon the virgin soil of Brazil: the free Indian, the Portuguese conqueror, and later, the African slave. These diverse peoples have nothing in common, nothing approximate, nothing similar: races, customs, language, foreign—almost inimical—civilizations. Nothing but the earth beneath them as a common denominator. Each with its totally opposite linguistic and musical ways.† In the end, because of the superiority of their culture and their civilization,

* See “Ensaio sobre a musica brasileira” [Essay on Brazilian music], by Mário de Andrade. According to this author, whose authority among us becomes greater with each passing day, there was a conflict between the directly musical eurhythmics of the Portuguese and the prosody of Indo-American songs found also among the transplanted Africans. The characteristic Brazilian rhythm emerges from this conflict, the Brazilian having an entirely fantasist way of giving rhythm and producing a somewhat freer and more varied rhythm. To him, rhythm is, above all else, an element of racial expression.

† To the Indian, music is never profane in Bekker’s sense. It is never lyrical in nature, never of a purely individual psychological order. It is always sacred, religious, in the sociological sense; commemorative and ritual music. It does not know exclusively musical rhythm. While the black man, forcibly torn from his environment and his tribe, was transplanted to Brazil, there to live oppressed by a social institution—slavery—his music is not religious or sacred, it evinces no commemorative nature, etc. But perhaps, because of the miserable and painful conditions of its existence, it has already taken root in motifs of a psychological order. Except that its cultural and social state is too primitive and its individuality still too rudimentary for this to bring about the blossoming of any such manifestation of lyricism—of a purely personal music. On the other hand, this very state of primitivism, its sharply defined ethnic type and the terrible identity of its living conditions, gave this music if not an organically collective character, then at least a formidable unanimous force, expressed by rhythm. However, for the Indian, the character of his music—if not expressly collective but above all impersonal and a-psychological, sacred and ritual—is given, one could say, by the strangely

the Portuguese got the upper hand and imposed their language. But in the clash of the two other opposing prosodies (the Indian and the African), Portuguese laws of prosody were transformed, giving birth to our current Brazilian prosody—completely different from that of Portugal. We can still feel the evident signs of this prosodic struggle in our very free popular way of singing,‡ in which only tempo counts, but not the measure framed in the European style—a way that, transposed to accompanying instruments, has become over time a specific element of Brazilian music. Also, among us, the evolution of our music always moved in tandem with the evolution of language; it did not *follow* it, as was the case in Europe. It was, rather, the mirror that reflected, in a large image, in slow motion, the whole of the formative process of our national prosody so that once this process was fixed, it saw itself fixed as well. But from this moment on, their destinies parted: Music now goes its own way, alone, fully independent of language. And soon, it moves from being sung to being played, frees itself completely from poetry, etc.; and this process continues until the emergence of artistic music and personal creation, of which Villa[-Lobos] represents the summit. Meanwhile, language has quite another destiny. The process of its individualization, of its nationalization, has not overtaken the framework of its prosodic evolution, of its physiological transformation. But all of its theoretical structure, all of what makes its spirit and its cultural tradition, was preserved, and its aesthetic obstinately resists all change. This is understandable, for it is a well-known phenomenon that every culture must, by definition, preserve itself, persist in conservation. And what does this mean? In the long run, it resulted in an ever-growing separation between our *spoken* language and the Portuguese we write. The literati wrote one language and the people spoke another. The two did not understand one another; they did not have a common means of communication. They did not know one another, and—with a few rare exceptions—intellectuals and men of letters felt like strangers in their own country, exiles in their own culture. Under these conditions, one can easily see that music—in its essence farther removed from any form of intellectuality, more independent from cultural necessity—should have taken precedence over language. For in a country made up of different races, each with its particular linguistic traditions, it was only natural that music should then have more easily become a more indeterminate means of communication, to be certain, albeit one that is also a good deal more universal and suggestive than the word. It came about without anyone's realizing it, the great collective voice of the people, the expression of its joy and its sadness, of the entire subjective life of the race. Thus, that which, in other countries, generally falls at first to language, to poetry, was here the mission of music. If the refined literature of the cities did not understand the uncultured and ungrammatical poetry of the people, and if they, in turn, could neither love nor understand or even recognize their literature, then at least music—with all of its formidable faculty of suggestion and its less intellectual and more instinctual character—could have a chance to move city folk, including intellectuals and artists. This is what happened. Nowadays, of all the intellectuals of the last generations, there is not one who is unaware of the crucial role of music in the making of our national culture and in the spiritual awakening of

melancholy, mysteriously vague melody, without the slightest formal frame. . . . What is certain is that for the black man, rhythm did not come as directly from the prosody, as with the Indian. It is already more musically individualized and translated into another social state. The personal lyrical note, psychological individuality—only with the European, Portuguese, or Spanish does one find an already more complex sensibility, marked by an entire cultural tradition, expressed by language and by music, already totally separated from the former.

‡ But all of these romantic subtleties of song are not always prosodic. Occasionally, they even contradict the laws of prosody. Yet they are always purely physiological—even choreographic—in essence. They are free movements determined by fatigue and developed from fatigue. Etc. (See Mario de Andrade: *Ensaio*, etc.)

the collective soul. Can one now imagine the importance that an oeuvre like that of [Villa-]Lobos might have in such a country? This importance spills out beyond the framework of the art of music. A higher echelon of culture has been achieved. The path has now been cleared for personal creation—a dangerous path among all others, leading from the collective to the individual. In the drama of our culture, it is the individual spirit's turn to play the starring role. Instead of a poet or a thinker, it was a musician that succeeded in expressing himself before the others. He was the first individual manifestation of Brazilian consciousness to express itself globally. This is a recognized fact that already implies a certain definition of our spirit and of the direction that our culture will take. In its future investigations, our critical and speculative thinking must forcibly take this fact into account. For it seems that fate has committed us to music—that is to say, we will never do anything other than see life but we will also listen to it, and the world will always be less of an image than a chord—a melody before a drawing; a process more than a definition. So, what is there to say? Will our culture be *musical* or will it not? . . . In any event, the work of Villa-Lobos is an already resounding confirmation of the soundness of the orientation and thought of the modern Brazilian generations.

—Originally published as “Villa-Lobos et son peuple: Le Point de vue brésilien,” *La Revue musicale* (Paris), November 1929.

Notes

1. A Brazilian dance of Amerindian origin also known as *Catira* in which two guitar players sing and direct the progress of hand-clapping and foot-stomping dancers.
2. Generic designation given to various Afro-Brazilian syncretic cults, generally strongly influenced by religions such as Candomblé, Umbanda, and Espiritismo (or Spiritualism), among others.
3. A genre of Brazilian popular and instrumental music. Choro compositions are virtuosic and feature improvisation. The emblematic instruments of the genre include seven-string guitar, piano, flute, *cavaquinho* (a four-stringed guitar), and mandolin. The “Choros” cycle is considered an important group of compositions in the work of Heitor Villa-Lobos.
4. The central character of the eponymous book by Mário de Andrade, published in 1928, Macunaíma was an antihero who embodied the various traits and stereotypes of Brazilian folklore and culture.
5. Also known as Iemanjá or Janaína, Iará is the queen of the oceans, according to the mythology of syncretic Afro-Brazilian religions.
6. A musical genre and type of ballroom dance of accelerated rhythm, brought over by slaves from Mozambique during the 1870s. It was influenced by the tango of Argentina and Uruguay.
7. A small, four-stringed guitar. The instrument originated in the Minho region of northern Portugal and was widely introduced in Brazilian culture, especially in samba and choro.
8. Paul Bekker, *La musique: Les transformations des formes musicales depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Payot, 1929), originally published as *Musikgeschichte als Geschichte der musikalischen Formwandlungen* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1926). Pedrosa's quotations from Bekker may be paraphrases from the French edition or his French translations from the German edition.

The Social Tendencies of Art and Käthe Kollwitz¹

In the present social state, with society divided into two irreducibly antagonistic classes, with the means of production needing once again to be socialized and the technical-industrial apparatus enabling man to impose his rational will upon nature, the decadence of past mythologies finds itself in various stages of ruin, according to the social group in question. With the bourgeoisie's advent as the dominant class, the scientific concept of nature was finally constructed. A new general concept of the world is now needed, one in which both society and nature are scientifically and harmoniously integrated. This concept can only be the work of the proletariat.

Once the general concept of nature has finally been elaborated, modern artists take possession of it and attempt to extract from it a synthetic image that is the expression of its sensibility. As for the concept of society, in order to impose itself conclusively, the general theory still in the making requires winning the battle against the forces of reaction, and its destiny is thus confined to the final outcome of the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Hence the individualization of the modern imagination, which signals the artistic expression of our times. Just as Greek art unconsciously drew the forms of its creative imagination from the arsenal of its mythology, modern artists do nothing more than unconsciously extract the aesthetic forms and accomplishments of their creations, not from a mythology, but from a scientific and rational concept of nature.

The total scientific synthesis between the two concepts, which until now have not adapted themselves to the mind of modern man, shall represent a decisive stage in the historical and cultural development of humanity.

After the revolutionary storm of 1848, [composer Richard] Wagner wrote: "In its flowering time, Grecian Art was *conservative*, because it was a worthy and adequate expression of the public conscience: with us, true Art is *revolutionary*, because its very existence is opposed to the ruling spirit of the community."² Nowadays, art can only be restored to its former dignity and represent a social function, though perhaps with a loss of its aesthetic purity, if it opposes itself to the accepted values. In a society shot through with the most terrible class antagonisms, it can only achieve public consciousness or, at least, some form of public class consciousness, by being revolutionary. Only one of the two embattled classes has the right to represent this form of general consciousness. Not only because of its growing numbers, but because of the formidable historical role it is destined to play, this class is the modern proletariat.

Originating as they do in the bourgeoisie, the great majority of current artists have not yet conquered within themselves the profound socio-philosophical antinomy that dominates our time. And this is the impasse from which they cannot extricate themselves. Their efforts are great, but unilateral. They reacted legitimately and in a timely manner against Impressionism, that extremely individualist delinquency at which art had arrived. They made an effort to cease contemplating the spectacle of the world, united only by one or two of man's most primary and miserable perceptions. They intuited more than they understood that our senses cannot today be used narrowly and empirically, divested of their entire technological and philosophical system. Faced with the vast material accumulated by the great modern industry, they paused, hesitant and intimidated. The vastness of that field completely removed from them all social perspectives. They occupied the same position as that of an ordinary laborer who spends his time turning a screw without any understanding of the overall process of production.

Formidable steel curtains have been drawn to reveal to the artist's imagination the prodigious dimensions of an arsenal infinitely more wonderful than the workshops of Vulcan and Mephistopheles, which are modern industry and technology. Finding it impossible to comprehend it in its totality, the individual imagination was rendered partial, and a new process of division of labor and specialization further developed in the field of aesthetics, while the branches of art—already so separate—were yet again subdivided, with the emergence of new modes of expression of infinite possibilities, such as cinema. In this case, the burning thirst for synthesis contained in every artistic manifestation came up against insurmountable social and technical obstacles. The productive, legal, and educational conditions of the ruling order do not allow them to be vanquished.

Everywhere, in all of its episodic or partial differences, the simultaneity and generalization of the movement called modern art reveals its true social character. It was neither anyone's individual caprice nor a superficially fashionable movement. It was a moment in the historical evolution of aesthetics and an imposition of the productive and cultural forces of the age, demanding expression in a nobler social form. But that movement remains unfinished and shall be no more than an evolutionary process, likewise marked by bourgeois duality; its purely natural or technological concept still excludes society—which explains its chaotic nature and the impression it produces of a workshop in which (separately, and amid complete disorder) the various parts of a work were being mounted which it is still impossible to perceive in its entirety.

This social and philosophical eclecticism is visible in all artists, even the most objective and systematic ones, and in those whose work is most disciplined, such as Picasso. All of them are marked by a latent subjectivism which manifests itself every time that—leaving aside the immediate technical problem at hand—they generalize, seeking to explain their own aesthetic concept. And they take personality itself as a universal step, thus divesting itself of the materialist austerity with which they believe in the existence of exterior objects. Impressionistic in their interpretation of the world, these artists are dehumanized, separate from society—that is, from its vital problems; they become corrupt and idiotic, restricting their social plan and their aesthetic concerns to a puerile game of forms and still lifes. To them, society itself and even men are a type of still life.

However, social dynamics do not allow the human spirit to remain paralyzed or imbecilic in this ideological and aesthetic infantilism.

Whereas the magic sparks of blast furnaces and the bold forms of prodigious machines fill the minds and imaginations of some of today's artists, others—as a requirement for integration of the human spirit, as a necessary expression of the modern sensibility—rise up and move away from the field of still life and purely technical experiments to observe society in its living, dramatic fermentation. These will seek the elements of a poetic expression equally modern in contemporary social relations.

This is why the artistic field is aesthetically and socially divided. On one side is the art of those creators who became absorbed by this second nature superimposed upon the primitive one which is technology (our modern and mechanical nature), completely disconnected from society, partially through narrow-mindedness, partially so as not to take a stand with regard to the implacable battle of the two enemy classes. The air in this stuffy environment becomes stale, and they grow pale within a suffocating, egocentric individualism at the service of a parasitic caste or in hermetic dilettantism for a half-dozen initiates. They return nostalgically to the ivory tower, amid the fabulous steel mirages that surround them. On the other side we have the social artists, those who move toward the proletariat and, in an intuitive anticipation of sensibility, are able to discern the future synthesis of nature and society, finally divested of the idealisms of educators and of the mystical convulsions of worm-eaten mythologies. This is what explains the realism of the proletariat and of the artists that express it.

Such is the case of Käthe Kollwitz.

The foregoing general classification of artists³ is also determined by the immediate or indirect aesthetic purpose with which they imbue their work. Individual art is a relatively recent invention. Through a deadly subordination to technology, the purest modern artists have resolved the problem of modern mechanical nature by

abolishing man—social man—from his universe. And the problem of modern art was thus averted, its solution being purely transitory and empirical. The social demands which grow vertiginously do not, however, forgive these artists such prestidigitations, and will ever more impertinently slam shut the doors of sensibility. All that is vital and embryonic within current society no longer subjects itself to this humiliating subordination to the machine. The time of this subordination is long gone. Today, new men once again claim restoration of their primacy over the superhuman and gigantic mechanical entity which they themselves created. It has been a long time since the time of instinctive revolts against it. It has been a long time since men rose up against the machine with sticks and clubs, in the name of the old distaff and the domestic spindle with which they wove their coarse garments, as in the episode of the Silesian weavers who inspired Käthe Kollwitz's earliest etchings.

As the opposite of nature, social motifs become increasingly richer and clamor for integration into the modern work of art. The social drama we experience possesses the strength and breadth that inspired the great subjects of Greek tragedy. Although tendentious due to a fatality of our age, the motifs that inspire our social art tomorrow will lend a character of more profound inner balance, for they will be integrated into the impersonal or asocial technological motifs manifested in modern art. It will be the superior art form of a new age, through nature's integration in man. But this is still the music of the future.

If, in the course of economic evolution, the process of the social organization of labor unleashed a formidable concentration of productive forces, it also brought together the living field of the workers in a single organic unit—shaped from the same social mass and forced into externally imposed discipline—with an implacable and impersonal precision. If blind and passive submission to nature created the discipline of Catholicism, man's brutal and economic subordination to machinery forged cohesion and collective will, the class consciousness of the proletariat. Another society formed inside bourgeois society, in underground mines, in tenements and in suburban clusters, under the roofs of great factories, in the caverns of foundries and boilers, in the core of machines, in contact with motors. And it holds the key to the world in its rough, coal-blackened hands. This is the only social group born with the machine and dispossessed by it, but the only one able to understand its secret and which will place its large, violent hand on the vertiginous and wild steering wheel of the machinery and lead it like a meek lamb.

This new world forces all men who still remain outside it to take a given social stand. The destiny of Käthe Kollwitz's art, then, does not lie in art itself. It lies socially in the proletariat. It is a partisan and tendentious art—but what astonishing universality! For, in representing the social expression of the new class—the future mistress of society's destinies—what she aspires to through the miserable oppression of the present hour is a superior new humanism, an authentic new classicism that emerged dramatically and spontaneously from life itself.

Here lies the first profound general aspiration that emerges from the German artist's work—an aspiration, which must not be mistaken for accomplishment. It is the secret of her universality. The social sentiments she expresses possess a Beethoven-like grandeur and latitude.

For all the outmoded aesthetic refinements that characterized him, [the English critic John] Ruskin put forth the risky argument that the value of artistic production is determined by the elevation of sentiment expressed in it, exemplifying this by stating that a miser cannot write poetry about lost money because such a poem would move no one. We do not want to discuss the case, but what is important about it to

us is the miser's social position. From the societal point of view, it is obvious that his socializing function would not appear here. For nowadays, under given moral and economic conditions, said socializing function depends primarily on the social position that is occupied. It depends on class. War is a subject that inspired Kollwitz's most remarkable prints and drawings, and yet the tremendously moving power of these pictures depends principally on the social position from which they were made. This is war as seen by the people, war on the other side of the social barricade, as felt by the proletariat, without ideological or tendentious distortions, without the ignoble patriotic masturbation with which it is exalted, without the enticement of unknown soldiers or comic opera heroes, without glory, without fat or star-studded generals, without guardian angels or charitable ladies who send bonbons and cigarettes off to the trenches. Kollwitz's war contains nothing but anonymous and monstrous sacrifices, nothing but widows who have lost everything, in poverty and in pain, nothing but large hands forever idle, gathered like a pair of useless objects upon the formless body, nothing but mothers—an organization of mothers united, their arms entwined like barbed wire, in defense of what children they still have (see fig. on page 55). It is the unarmed and humble people, on one hand; on the other, war—an elemental, inexorable, terrifying, and ubiquitous force, like some cataclysm of nature. The people in the prints seem to be unaware that war is made by men, that it is a social product, so great is the impersonality and the enormity of the catastrophe that crushes them. The artist essentializes the problems, and her achievements possess the virile force of simplification. Those small lithographs contain such socializing power that they assume the proportions of a medieval fresco.

Meanwhile, there is no art, there is no aesthetic prowess, there is no technical mastery capable of expressing the same emotional intensity, the same universality, setting itself between the creator on this side of the barricade and the social position of the bourgeoisie. Let a war scene be drawn and viewed by the ruling classes, and from the artistic perspective it is only possible to achieve art by expressing the grotesque: otherwise, the work shall not convey more than the most vulgar and conventional academicism. When [German artist] Georg Grosz depicted war from an individual perspective, it was through his avenging satire that he achieved great art. But to express war by particularizing it in the tragic or sympathetic image of a general, king, or profiteer is an aesthetic problem that challenges all the talents and technical resources of even the most brilliant modern artist.

Her attitude to war defines Kollwitz's dominant social tendency—*loyalty to her class*. That is the special trait of her art. The daughter of a stonemason, she remains throughout her entire long life a stonemason's daughter, a member of the proletarian family. Neither the triumphs of her career, nor the snobbery of fashion, nor the successive technical groups and schools she found along the way separated her for even one instant from this loyalty. Born to art under the sign of naturalism, thereby was her artistic apprenticeship made. [Novelist Émile] Zola's *Germinal* and [playwright Gerhart] Hauptmann's *The Weavers* marked the beginning of her work, just as they had been landmarks for an entire literary age in France and in Germany. Her etchings of this early period were inspired by those two creations. Naturalism issued her artistic passport. And it was natural that it should have been thus—that sincere and popular nature would necessarily absorb the will, the desire to grasp social poverty to the depth of its drama and of its secret, as contained in naturalism. But what the latter did not manage, due to its own flaws and literary affectation, the passivity of its distorted and microscopic lens, she was to achieve and surpass. She expressed the best and most profound elements of naturalism—which was overall a great literary

abortion, in any event. Compared to her, [German artist Max] Liebermann was a retrograde academic.

Kollwitz's second period, in which she achieved the inner assurance and plenitude of her art, coincided historically with the transition of the German proletariat to a higher stage of collective organization, having emerged victorious from its long struggle against the Bismarckian order. She then found in Marxism the complete expression of her theoretical conscience. The doctrine of scientific socialism appeared for the first time as the proletariat's specific and already practically proven weapon in the struggle for its emancipation. Thus the first revolutionary class organization, its political party (which was then social democracy), and its first great artist in the person of Käthe Kollwitz simultaneously emerged.

Up until then, other artists, among them those of the naturalist school, had already created literary and artistic subjects from the lives of the proletarian masses. But the artist who had made it the purpose of her life or work to express the collective and sentimental life of the proletariat as a class was unknown in the history of art. For her, this is more than an unexplored and interesting subject; it is the very condition of her art, the primary cause of her sensibility.

Her attitude toward the popular masses is more than an aesthetic stance. It is a social imperative she cannot escape, a system of life. It is already a political attitude. All of this is contained within this permanent trait of class fidelity. All the schools faded away; the aesthetic revolutions followed one after the other. Naturalism fulfilled its function and disappeared. The romantic wave of Expressionism flooded the country, inaugurating the literature of appeals and manifestos, socializing itself through war, and afterward, the storm quietly retreated and the individuals returned to their places. All of the modern aesthetic isms come and go contemporarily and successively, from Futurism and Cubism to Dada and the most recent, Neorealism, yet Käthe Kollwitz continues her unaltered and unalterable course. Only the artist is enriched with all those currents and deepens her art, perfecting her technique and specifying her intentions. The work thus has the dramatic and internal continuity of a running river, furrowing its bed ever deeper and accelerating—in a progressive and harmonious arrangement—the flow of its waters to the sea.

Her subject matter at the beginning of her career may be episodic or historical, still subordinated to anecdote, as in the *Weberzug* (March of the weavers) etchings. But little by little they become universalized, losing that anecdotal aspect while gaining depth and generality, and becoming (so to speak) a single subject or theme. It is war, death, hunger, the people—the anonymous life of the workers: a pregnant mother, a breast-feeding mother, a father killed in the war, the unemployed, a widow, prisoners, a proletarian demonstration, etc.

And yet the artist has her preference within the proletariat itself, for in addition to her class, she belongs to her sex. She is the artist of proletarian women. Their profound, instinctive popular strength, their immense capacity for affection and suffering, that joviality and sympathy despite everything they face in life—all this she carved into the moving simplicity of wood, with a severity that is almost hostile, but accentuated by the contrast of the violence and depth of sentiment expressed. The dramatic intensity revealed by the violated wood is such that in it, the work of art achieves the ideal unity and integration of the artist's truth and sentiment and the inner capacity for expression of the material itself.

This depth of sentimental understanding that she displays is one of the most typically feminine traits of her sensibility. And it might explain the absence in her prints of the enemy class, which appears in them only indirectly, in the guise of a *social*

fatality. That dark environment that envelops her figures represents the social fatality of the enemy class; the painful and tragic life of her people betrays the feminine reaction of her sensibility, which is purely instinctive and sentimental. The proletarian woman has not yet moved beyond that primitive phase of class consciousness. However, the almost complete absence of any trace of nature already demonstrates that all the evils come from society, from men.

The historical process of the making of class consciousness begins with a sense of solidarity during calamity, and so its first expression necessarily takes on a defensive form. But because of this awareness that the ills and miseries suffered by the people are of a social nature, a rustic proletarian mother has a deeper and truer understanding of life in the profound simplicity of her ignorance and her class instinct than a millionaire's daughter or any Princess Bibesco.⁴

The medieval plagues that regularly destroyed whole populations provoked, under the apocalyptic fear of these calamities, formidable convulsive explosions of hysteria and mysticism. The calamities that currently crush the popular masses are far from being less tragic or less apocalyptic. But, as is demonstrated by Kollwitz, the hysterical collective neuroses no longer appear. Under the terror of hunger and the horrors of war that shine with sinister light in the eyes of her children and her women, no gaze any longer lifts itself to heaven, nor are hands clasped in prayer. But here and there, flashes of conscious hatred already shine in bright pupils and a few fists are clenched.

The enemy no longer appears in those lithographs, but Kollwitz's people have already understood that their tragedy is a social one. Nevertheless, under the immensity of the calamities, they have not yet had sufficient time or energy to reflect upon them. Mired in suffering to the roots of their souls, all of their moral energy is concentrated in a heroic resistance to it. Kollwitz is the painter of the proletariat's cosmic sensibility, and this sensibility, like that of every young society, has no inaccessible ruffles nor interior affectations, has no purity of sentiment or intellectual refinements. It is simple and banal, but it is immense.

Not in vain is the proletariat the last class to have emerged in history. Instinctively, in itself, it already feels the making of a new culture, and that culture swells inside it. Its direction and its orientation have already been scientifically formulated, albeit only a part of it—its sensibility—has already found certain forms of artistic expression. Other forms of this expression came to join Kollwitz's historic attempt—the first to appear chronologically. Among these is the cerebral and conscious violence of Grosz's satire, in which hatred of the exploiting class is already the source of inspiration for his drawings and watercolors. While Kollwitz expresses the suffering of the exploited masses, Grosz uses his scalpel to dissect the very souls of the exploiters, tearing out eyes from all the tumors in those swinelike heads and those sclerotic women's faces.

The proletariat is a transitory class. Its existence is conditioned to a constant and terrible struggle for survival. It has no time to spare for stacking weapons and surrendering to the pleasures of gratuitous contemplation and imagination. Its art must likewise be transitory and utilitarian. The noblest expression of it to date lies in Käthe Kollwitz.

Concerned and biased as it is—and partisan by system—there is nonetheless no more profoundly human art. However, the concept of humanity is currently subordinated to a more pressing reality: the concept of class. That which is human to some is not so to others. It is precisely those who most deny this concept that are most instinctively and socially impregnated by it. They do not understand the great artist's

art. They would deny the very sincerity of her work, precisely under the pretext that it is tendentious. Many of them do so because of what they believe to be disinterested conviction, whereas they merely inherited it or absorbed it little by little, day after day, in their homes or schools, in their living environment. Such conviction is the instinct of their class. Observe some of them looking at these prints: the respectable banker or industrialist, the venerable titular clergyman, the noble lady of high society who supports nursery schools and other pious institutions—indifferently or not, they will allow their faded and distracted gaze to travel over the works, to arrive at the end overcome by an accusatory impatience. However, the prints will have other effects on the anonymous mass of uneducated men with calloused hands and ignorant women who do not wear hats. They come away from these pictures with fiery eyes and clenched fists. Today's social art is not, in fact, a delicious pastime: it is a weapon. Kollwitz's work proceeds, thus, to further divide men. The dialectic of the social dynamic which the laws of logic and of individual psychology do not decipher nonetheless leads a work of this kind—so profoundly inspired by love and by human brotherhood—to nourish the hatred of the more implacable class. And with this, its generous social mission is accomplished.

—Excerpted from the work originally published as “As tendências sociais da arte e Käthe Kollwitz,” *O homem livre*, nos. 6–9 (July 2, 8, 17, and 14, 1933).

Notes

1. The excerpt published here was part of Pedrosa's lecture “Käthe Kollwitz e o seu modo vermelho de perceber a vida” (Käthe Kollwitz and her red way of seeing the world), delivered at the Clube dos Artistas Modernos, São Paulo, on June 16, 1933. The version from which this excerpt was taken was revised and altered for publication in four chapters in the newspaper *O homem livre* (The free man) from July 2 to 14, 1933. The graphic work of Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945) aroused the interest of Brazilian artists—among them Lívio Abramo—who were introduced to it at the *Exposição alemã de livros e artes gráficas* (German exhibition of books and graphic arts) (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, 1930). She was also represented in the *Exposição de arte condenada pelo III Reich* (Exhibition of art banned by the Third Reich) (Casa do Estudante do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, 1945), which included works from the “Degenerate Art” exhibition sponsored by the Third Reich (Munich, 1937). She participated in *A arte alemã contemporânea* (German contemporary art) (Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 1956). In 1985 her work was exhibited at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes in *Gráfica crítica na época de Weimar* (Critical graphic arts in the age of Weimar). The Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo owns *Auto-retrato* (Self-portrait; 1919) and *As mães* (The mothers; 1922–23).
2. Richard Wagner, *Prose Works*, vol. 1, trans. William Ashton Ellis (New York: Broude, 1966), 51–52.
3. In his lecture, before discussing the present, Pedrosa introduces a historical overview of the relation between art and work from a Marxist perspective, as well as a discussion of the social character of art in the past.
4. Pedrosa refers here to writer and socialite Elizabeth, Princess Bibesco, daughter of a British prime minister and wife of a Romanian aristocrat. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Bibesco.

Portinari: From Brodowski to the Washington Murals

A son of Italy, Candido Portinari's father came to Brazil at the age of thirteen; likewise Italian, the artist's mother arrived at the age of five or six. They were raised, and then raised their own family, as settlers on the farms near Ribeirão Preto.¹ Born in 1903 at the Fazenda Santa Rosa, the painter was the second of the couple's twelve children. A small town with a population of two or three thousand, Brodowski² was founded around that time, and was born amid farms. As for education, Candido did not go beyond primary school. But he shot down many a bird with his slingshot, flew kites, and often ventured off into the forest rather than go to school. Like everyone



Candido Portinari. *Hill*. 1933. Oil on canvas, 44 $\frac{7}{8}$ \times 57 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (114 \times 145.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund

else, he played soccer with a ball made out of socks, whenever he wasn't playing in a real field with a real leather ball. It was then he dislocated his right thigh, and limped forever after.

A son of the people, his education took place outdoors, in direct contact with the settlers' hard work amid the purple earth of the coffee plantations. His childhood was poor but enveloped in the warm tenderness of a rough family of Italian peasants. From that period, in addition to the images of childhood, he retained his fondness for familiar surroundings and an affection for his family, a sympathy for the common man, for the manual laborer and rough manners, and a certain amount of shrewdness and plebeian wisdom of the *paulista* yokel. One day a painter arrived in Brodowski to decorate the local church. It was a fateful day for the mischievous boy. Off he went to observe. And as the poet Manuel Bandeira said, from being a "spectator he soon moved on to being an assistant and first began to handle paintbrushes."³

This, then, was a double revelation, of painting and vocation. Once he had discovered the latter, he found himself—at the age of fifteen—in the painful circumstance of leaving his family, his beloved Brodowski, birds, bird traps, and paper kites. He moved to Rio de Janeiro, penniless, unprotected, alone, and shy. There were hard years of apprenticeship and the inevitable failures of the early days. He began to understand that art is serious and hard; it is no game. He identified completely with his life; he knew that his destiny was linked to the vicissitudes of his calling. And that is why Portinari was never in his life a dilettante. Just as others learned to become plasterers or marble cutters, he learned the painter's trade. Today, one of the deepest traits of his artistic personality is precisely this artisanal character, which he never let go of.

In order to survive in Rio, the budding artist was forced into various professions, including that of waiter. He enrolled in the contest to enter the living model class at the Escola de Belas Artes,⁴ but was rejected. In 1921, at eighteen, he managed to enroll in a drawing class at the same school, and applied for enrollment in a painting class. In 1922 he made his debut with a portrait that was ignored by the Salão.⁵ The following year he obtained his first triumph: a bronze medal for a portrait. From then on success was more frequent, although still on a modest scale. His rise over the years was constant,

neither sensational nor rapid. In 1924 he experienced the disappointment of seeing his first composition (an oil painting titled *Baile na roça* [Country dance]) rejected by the Salão jury. A small silver medal came in 1925, a grand medal in 1927, and finally, in 1928, the coveted European travel prize for his portrait of poet Olegário Mariano. After that he was off to Paris, Italy, Spain, England. In Europe he saw people, saw the masters, took part in debates, made plans. He scandalized his friends and teachers at the Escola de Belas Artes when he returned without a single canvas, but he brought back more than a picture: in addition to a few ideas, he brought his wife, Maria.

He now began his career as an artist proper. In Europe, Portinari principally studied past European masters. It was only in Brazil, upon his return from Europe, that he discovered so-called modernism. This is understandable: over there, his overriding concern was observing the manner, the technique, the art of the great masters of the past; he visited museums to learn humbly. He had no time to lose himself in abstract aesthetic or philosophical concerns. Only when he was back in his country could he begin to sort out in his mind what it was he saw there; like myself now, instead of museums and their countless treasures of the past and of tradition, he had only to see and consult art magazines or the albums and collections of contemporary artists—in addition to participating in abstruse discussions with intellectuals and men of letters—for the aesthetic problem that emerged to take on primary importance as a consequence of the time and the milieu. Thus, what interested him was not the conservative, necessarily timid, and somewhat provincial academic circles, perfectly satisfied with their not un noble mission of upholding time-honored artistic traditions against exalted iconoclastic youths. Hence his contact with the literary avant-garde of the day.

But let it not be thought that Portinari enlisted himself impetuously in the new troops like some unthinking convert, for he never allowed himself to be swept away by transitory enthusiasms or the influences of fashion. His transition to so-called modernism, or his break with academicism, was a slow, safe, step-by-step process. The proof is that, even while he presented new compositions of a frankly Constructivist or Cubist influence, he continued to cultivate classical art, painting portraits of ladies and gentlemen with artistic authority, pictorial realism, and a nobility of hues worthy of the great tradition of the Renaissance masters.

The works he exhibited in 1934 in Rio and, principally, São Paulo were a result of those early experiments and contacts with new antinaturalist concepts. It might be said that it was there the artist gained his earliest recognition—a recognition confirmed one year later, in 1935, when he received the second honorable mention for his painting *Café* (see plate on pp. 78–79) in Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute contest.

The sentimental theme was the first to appear in his palette. The brown or Brodowskian series dates from this period. His canvases from then are characterized by a vast, predominantly brown surface, sprinkled with accidents of light, representation of its thematic figures, with the uniform play and direction of chiaroscuro, the contented pastiness of the paint, and the transparency of the hues. The outstanding poetic sentiment is conveyed not only by the chiaroscuro contrast but also by the atmospheric or cosmic elements, which recall the great Dutch landscape artists, especially Breughel. In this series, certain colors (particularly brown—the purple earth of Brodowski) contain an element of symbolism, as do the dark skies of the period. It is a sort of liberation from the past, a transcription to the canvas of his reminiscences of his boyhood in Brodowski. Actually, this coincided with the so-called primitivism of Brazilian modern poetry of the period, characterized by a return to the provincial sentimentality of the whiny Romantic poets of the previous

century or an insistence on naive popular subject matter, through anti-intellectual and antiformal reaction.

Childhood memories of an almost a priori subjective inspiration, mere suggestions of light, not quite realistic, not quite actuality—there is nothing in what he did then to suggest the muralist he would become. The most representative examples of this period are *O circo* [The circus]; *O futebol* [Soccer] in its first version, before Portinari modified the ambience, lightening the backgrounds to the detriment of the mystery and suggestiveness of the colors; *Casamento em Brodowski* [Wedding in Brodowski], a watercolor that might benefit from a comparison to the 1940 oil *Casamento rural* [Rural wedding]; and *Morro* [Hill], currently in New York's Museum of Modern Art, which closes the brown cycle, and whose composition is already more complex and the individualization of the figures more marked. This period extended more or less from 1933 to 1934.

Once he had satisfied his demands of a sentimental order, as if in a painful process of affective separation from the past that was necessary to his artistic coming of age, Portinari now surrendered to new aesthetic and technical problems. And he began a series of investigations into materials analysis. He dealt with things separately; the problems of space and perspective—that is, of construction—tormented him. He then abandoned that satisfied pastiness of the paint in the brown series and surrendered to an enormous analytic tension, seeking to translate visual reality into a geometric abstraction of planes and dimensions. In this period, formal play was exclusively subordinated to the need for an abstract definition of form. In order to create mystery and construct the world, he resorted to the lesson of Giorgio de Chirico, with his handling of shadows produced and inverted and the metaphysical spaces of perspective. It is the transcendent problem of composition, the central problem of the period 1934–35. The most expressive works of this period are *Estivador* [Stevedore] (1934) and the admirable *Sorveteiro* [Ice cream vendor] (1934).

The demands of art began to absorb him increasingly. It was the apprehension of pictorial material, that attracted him; fleeing from academicism, he solved the problem through a powerful antinaturalist modeling, which he sought out primarily in Picasso. In his search for the density of bodies and objects, the painter began to treat paint and color no longer as he had done in the Brodowskian period, as a means to exterior sensorial effect, in search of representations of spiritual states, whether conventional or not. The modeling now takes on a brutal concretization, and his figures gain the monumental strength of statuary. What he seeks above all is the integration of composition and mass, something he had not achieved until then in his anti-academic evolution. *Preto da enxada* [Black man with hoe], *Mestiço* (Mestizo), *Índia* [Indian woman], and *Mulata* [Mulatto woman] (1934) all belong to this period.

It was around this time that he introduced a new element to his palette in the modeling of his figures—sensuality, an element that is not exactly abundant in his work. The figures he painted at that time eat up the whole of the foreground, forcing the limits of the oil painting aesthetic to break.

It was the problem of man—of man's reality—that interested him now. His evolution is measured by the evolution of his space and his land, which changes from vast, monotonous, nostalgic, primitive, and plunged in shadow to cultivated earth that is well demarcated by lines and perspectives, geometrically divided by the rows of coffee plantations as a progressive gradation of planes and colors in the depth of its clear, well-lit horizons. Portinari was no longer content with the luminous representation of figures from his early brown period, nor was he satisfied with the formal yet abstract icons that were to follow (*Sorveteiro*), not even the enormous outlines

of isolated, modeled figures. What he wanted now was concrete man, in groups or in his social milieu, at work. In the two imposing figures of *Índia* and *Mulata*, the artist pursues a solid corporality. In *Mestiço* and *Preto da enxada*, the entire canvas is taken up by isolated figures, leaving only the background in perspective, a landscape crisscrossed by lines and signs of man's social activity. Here, he boldly violates the painting's technique and structure. As his figures are projected outside the canvas, the space of the fused background planes is filled with amplitude in an inverted movement. In that sense, there is a profound interior disharmony; the structural unity he had previously found is lost once again (*Café*, the first canvas with this name, and *Sorveteiro*). A profound dualism cuts through all of the painter's work of this period; his destiny depended on overcoming it. The solution he then found was a series of experiments he did while waiting for the wall on which he would spread his work in tempera. The most remarkable of these is *Colona* [Female settler] (1935).

Portinari then abandoned the abstract idealism he had achieved—a pure, transcendent plasticism of sorts—in order to surrender to a struggle against the material in an effort to dominate it. To this end, he sought a tougher, less malleable material, less mundane than oil. Hence his research and experiments with various techniques including tempera, fresco, etc.

Portinari did not arrive at fresco painting through a simple incident abroad, as one might think. It was not knowledge of the murals of [Diego] Rivera or his Mexican imitators that stimulated in the Brazilian painter the idea or the desire to do mural painting. Many who are unfamiliar with his work may think that Portinari's muralism was merely a late echo of the formidable Mexican movement. It was not. The interior evolution of his art allows us to see that Portinari arrived at the problem of the mural organically (so to speak), as the problems of technique and aesthetics matured in him. He first approached it as a problem of interior aesthetics. After the isolated monumental figures and the second *Café*, his experience with fresco work imposed itself naturally as the next step. The powerful figure in tempera, *Colona*—painted in 1935 along with *Café*, of which it is a detail—shows that Portinari was striving for malleable monumental form. At that time, the artist still had no real knowledge of what had been done or was being done in Mexico. It was precisely around this time that he sought to acquire a less haphazard knowledge of what was being done in that country.

It is true that during the period of intense political activity Brazil was then experiencing, there was a great vogue for movements and schools that tended to emphasize the social character or social criticism of art and literature. Naturally, the vogue for the Mexican school of painters was then very great in the country's intellectual circles, but few people actually had any accurate knowledge of it. Even the best-informed did not know much beyond the names of Rivera and [José Clemente] Orozco. Having already mastered modeling, the Brazilian painter set out to study the famous Mexican muralists, especially Diego Rivera—the most well-known of them all. With the proverbial curiosity of a modest and conscientious professional, he even experimented with the famous spray gun for spreading paint, proclaimed as the last word in technique for new modern, so-called open-air mural painting. He studied and tried everything for himself, like a craftsman who is proud of knowing the recipes and secrets of the trade.

However, it may be that the origins of Mexican muralism and of the Brazilian painter's experiments in the same genre were not only rejected at the time but were also purely aesthetic in nature. This explains perfectly why it is not enough to establish relationships of chronological dependency in order to deduce that it was

through direct influence of the Mexican muralist movement that Portinari decided to pursue the same path. Actually, both cases were a matter of the same phenomenon of aesthetic order that was already verifiable earlier in the history of European pictorial evolution. It was a reaction to the limitations of oil painting, which, since the Impressionist movement, had been threatened from many directions by contemporary monumental intentions, not founded upon a new architecture (but upon already crystallized values or ideology and devoid of a collective inspirational power) and by actual dissolution in the face of new needs of expression and of the specific aesthetic of easel painting (the rule of three unities, etc.).

The European artists settled the impasse, deciding to make their own aesthetic revolution within oil painting. Thus it was resolved in depth, because it was impossible to spill over into another domain or genre, and from one analysis to another it led to Abstractionism and Surrealism. Drawing on the enriched material and light achieved by the Impressionists, and the experiments in distortion used in caricature, especially by the formidable [Honoré] Daumier, they deliberately destroyed the surface unity of the picture in a return to the way the primitives treated it. In order to integrate formal needs with distortion in his search for the monumental, Picasso, among others, turned to classical antiquity in his search for solid corporality—heavy, but molded by an antinaturalist process he found in primitive black art.

Generally speaking, it may be said that, whereas the Mexican school principally used the elements of caricatural distortion—drawn not only from the experience in that sense of modern European painting, but from a great national tradition of its own (caricature was always one of the great manifestations of popular art in Mexico)—Portinari mainly used a solid formal distortion of Picassean modeling. The preference in processes of deformity—for monumentality or solid corporality in one (the Brazilian artist) and for social expressiveness in the other (the Mexican muralist movement)—defines the inner force that compelled them to mural painting and the various purposes they were aiming for.

Mexican artists were undoubtedly the first to make use of new experiments that grew out of a need to expand the pictorial field to be broader, less limited to the simple field of technical or aesthetic investigations, whether hermetic or gratuitous. It is their undisputed glory. Having realized the limitations of easel painting, they simply moved on to brushes with long handles: they set oil painting aside and surrendered to fresco work.

It may not be inapposite to observe here, at least in passing, that only in America was the Mexican attempt generalized throughout the whole continent, having become an actual feature of American pictorial evolution (in contrast with European evolution). In fact, if modern painting on this continent did not achieve the depth or purely aesthetic transcendency of modern European painting (centered in Paris), it has nonetheless been here in the American countries (Mexico, the United States, Brazil, etc.) that the boldest attempt was made to create a great synthetic art that could restore the artistic dignity of the subject, lost in purely analytic high modern art, in order to reintegrate human man, social man, into painting, from which he had been excluded.

Other differences in media, objectives, traditions, and conditions also determine differences in the manner of resolving the problem of the mural in both countries. In Mexico this type of painting constituted a profound and generalized social trend, creating a veritable school and a national style. In Brazil, however, it did not have this generalized character, limited as it was to one painter's stage of evolution. It did not quite become a movement here. To the Brazilian artist, this genre presented itself

above all as a means of developing on a broader scale the qualities of structure and all the possibilities of monumental visual art he had arrived at in his oil painting. Moved by intrinsically monumental intentions, he wanted simply to be able to surrender to the desire to experiment with the distortion of form. And he understood that in order to do so, he also needed, if not an architectural group, then at least a wall, without which he would be unable to express or satisfactorily resolve these intentions. However, above all else the Mexican muralist movement aimed to express—whether on the aesthetic or spiritual fronts—the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. There was the social and political revolution itself (which had begun in 1910) and the political activism of nearly all its artists, starting with Dr. [Gerardo Murillo] Atl and [José Clemente] Orozco, who awakened in them the need to seek out public places or to abandon their studios in search of walls to paint. Thus, in Mexico, which was more faithful to the great historical tradition of fresco painting—that is, to the profound social or spiritual meaning to which the genre was always linked, particularly in the age of faith and mysticism of primitive peoples—muralists surrendered body and soul to the militant expression of their passions . . . not quite religious, it is true, but social and political. The Mexicans frequently sacrificed the intrinsic structural qualities of execution to the partisan needs of extrapictorial intention, of propaganda, of proselytizing zeal; the Brazilian painter never sacrificed formal requirements to the element which—in his work—was always external to the subject.

As a survey of “Brazilian industries,” the Ministério da Educação [Ministry of Education]⁶ frescoes possess what Mário de Andrade called a “national functionality.” Yet they are never literally bound to the subject matter of each panel, nor do they seek to demonstrate anything whatsoever. Ultimately, Portinari never saw in these frescoes a mere reality to be expressed; rather, he may have seen them as something to interpret—as far as may be deduced, for example, in the antinaturalistic lighting in many of these murals, in the purely structural criterion of the distribution of light in certain details of the *Algodão* [Cotton] group, in which the foregrounded figures are lit by a symmetrically opposed and arbitrary schism.

In any event, in some of the fresco panels for the Ministry of Education and in tempera paintings of 1936, it cannot be denied that here and there, Portinari allowed himself to be influenced by the fundamental expressiveness of some of Rivera’s murals, especially by a certain way of approaching his subject matter and a certain distribution of groups and composition. Works such as *Carregadores de café* [Coffee bearers], *Menina segurando menino* [Girl holding boy] (tempera, 1936), and *Cana de açúcar* [Sugar cane] (Ministry of Education fresco) are more indicative of this. These recollections have already led more than one critic and painter—in the United States especially—to err with regard to the chronological order of many of the painter’s paintings, attributing works from an earlier (pre-mural) period or series, such as *Morro* or *Estivador*, for example, to more recent periods, after 1936 or to the period of the Ministry fresco works. This actually shows how Portinari’s evolution proceeded in an entirely different and independent manner from the evolution of the Mexican School’s most distinguished representatives. And if his Rio murals may seem colder to many, or less original than the Mexican ones in their exaltation of violence or in their contagious expressive power, in other aspects—their authentic structural quality, for example—they often surpass much Mexican fresco work.

Alongside or above reality, formal intention was always present in Portinari’s fresco work. He is forever fleeing—even when he makes the greatest concessions to the element of reality or the didactic, which he calls illustration. And yet the surrealism is profound and organic, perhaps an echo of his rustic origins. This innate plebe-

ian, rural element is what stays his hand, what weighs upon his paintbrush, delaying or preventing it from freeing itself—or once and for all straying from it—in order to surrender to the abstraction of pure formal expression, regardless of what he may be depicting. For this very reason, his attraction to murals possesses a deeper, more organic quality, no longer a mere consequence of opportunity or other external circumstance. Portinari tends to seek—and will forever, constantly seek—a fleeting synthesis, dramatic in its precariousness between form and abstraction, between pure pictorialism and life. This dualism imbued his early work with drama. It does the same for his current work, and will continue to do so for his future work.

Through a natural law of compensation, while Portinari filled the walls of the Ministry of Education with monumental figures, he took advantage of the experience he was acquiring to—in a return to the easel—surrender to a freer cadence in the oil paintings he never abandoned. One of the most characteristic features of the new trend was undoubtedly the emphasis on antinaturalist reaction. The artist seemed anxious to free himself of the demands of surface unity and of the rigors of an almost static composition, as required by the material he now worked with and the subject he was constructing. It might be said that he felt oppressed by the contingencies of the Cyclopic work he did at the insistence of purely—or necessarily—national subject matter, by the legitimate fear of falling back onto the facilities of conventional description and, above all, by the lack of resonance or . . . by the excessive resonance of racial and social (which is to say national) myths, which he created throughout the course of his work.

The works of this period are characterized by a sort of “escape,” of flight and liberation from the demands of a genre too closely bound to the subject of external social reality. Because of this, now, by contrast, in his new canvases and in his panels for the New York World’s Fair,⁷ for example, the concerns with composition tend to give way to invention, the unity of surface to discontinuity, and realism to surrealism. Formal objectives and research fall back into the shadows, and elements of imagination are foregrounded. In this sense, it is interesting to observe the revival of certain themes and objects of childhood. And there is a noticeable return to the balloons and mast poles of São João, to the scarecrows—enriched, it is true, by a new arsenal, this time drawn from the life of the Brazilian worker and having become an almost symbolic constant in the apparatus of accessories of his new paintings and latest panels: those of the New York World’s Fair and, now, of the Hispanic Foundation in the Library of Congress [1941], in Washington. This return to the so-called poetic subjects of childhood is a matter of mere psychological annotations, already dissociated. It is more of a bath in a field of inspiration that may be extrapictorial, but is purely individual and aesthetically rethought. In search of lost time, or for some other reason, in an attempt out of time, the artist draws the subject matter of his new works from almost subconscious images. In his eagerness to give artistic life to these more intuitive processes, he delimits the field of the canvas, divided into isolated or hierarchized planes within the rules of perspective. One of the most representative works from this period is *Espantelho* [Scarecrow], currently in The Museum of Modern Art collection in New York. In this way he re-creates the experiment of European modernism. But it is worth repeating that he submits it to a constant verification in the murals. Thus, their function is to “provide support” to the artist when he returns from his aesthetic digressions. Portinari’s pictorial soul is currently made from a mixture of plebeian realism and a romanticism nostalgic for beautiful colors, for beautiful blue skies. For this very reason, his plunge into concrete irrationality is not a deep one. His current use of certain Surrealist procedures (*Espantelho sob as estrelas* [Scarecrow under

the stars], 1940) did not lead to pure automatic or irrational association. His objects still do not function symbolically; that is, they are not quite what the Surrealists call a “poetic event.” The course or functionality of his objects, even the most gratuitous ones—his blue trunk, his somewhat pythonlike rope, his gourd, the scarecrows, even the ox skulls on the roads—is not diverted in other directions or to other, unpredictable ends. No universal or ill-timed displacement of objects is to be found in him. The scarecrow may still appear amid ox skulls and in front of endangered plantations. These objects are symbols, but of another kind. They do not come from automatism or from merely irrational associations or even from suggestive associations provoked by any sort of external mechanics (the Surrealist artist has the right to make use of the latter). They are permanent symbols, still bound to certain already established or sentimental psychological constants, and therefore realistic in a certain higher (a priori) sense, susceptible to experimental generalization within a preestablished harmony. These are romantic qualities; they are not the qualities of an investigator of irrationality.

From Surrealist painting Portinari draws only the atmospheric tone. Yet, like the Surrealists, he never did—and perhaps will never do—pure abstract painting. For instance, in 1940, alongside his freest and most abstract experiments, he returns not only to anecdotal painting (as in *O filho pródigo* [The prodigal son]), but, especially, to treating it in an almost traditional manner, in its presentation and meaning. Like those of the Surrealists, the elements that constitute his paintings are, ultimately, united by an ever-present reasoning which, although devoid of specific realistic suggestion, implies the existence of a “subject.”

The walls of the Hispanic Foundation in the Library of Congress afforded Portinari the opportunity for even bolder achievements in mural painting. They are panels done in dry tempera, nothing but lime wash and sand. Outside his country, outside his familiar birthplace and environment, the artist felt less rooted, freer to surrender without obstacles of any kind to the demon of his virtuosity, to his most hidden impulses, to his inspiration. Never again (and this may be immediately gathered at first sight), at any other moment in his mural work did he feel freer, more unobstructed, or more inclined to perform such dangerous technical gymnastics or violent distortions. These compositions were executed in the grip of a profound sense of inner freedom.

Dedicated to America, these panels were supposed to contain Spanish and Portuguese deeds in the New World. The new land explodes tropically in furry animals, in gigantic trees. Heroic winds blow indiscriminately from land and sea, from one to the other, bringing a powerful and organic smell of sea air from the high sea, or the hot breath that emanates from the animals, from the people, from the woods, from the wild earth, and finally disperses in the ocean. In strong, evocative language, the panels of *Descoberta da terra* [Discovery of the Land] and *Desbravamento da mata* [Entry into the Forest] speak of all this. The other two, *Catequese* [(Catechesis) Teaching of the Indians] and *Descoberta do ouro* [Discovery of Gold], tell of other aspects of Hispanic-American colonization.⁸ They are moved by other internal machinery and their rhythm is provided by other evocations and other mysteries.

In Portinari, fresco work and murals are always a moment of synthesis within the curve of his creative evolution. Before each wall he must cover, it seems that he will come to a conclusion, making use of all his accumulated experience, yet it is only a temporary stop . . . until he resumes his forward march. In these current panels, the artist's deep intention is no longer to define abstract forms, but to reduce forms to creative abstraction. His purposes are no longer purely constructivist, in any sense

of assembly or structure, but free creation. This is his period of creative freedom, the conversion of form into abstraction within the pictorial matter.

Through processes far removed from any prescription, he tends to what might be called a demythologizing of his icons, his images, and his landscapes, in a flight from the external contingencies of environment and of time, whether national or otherwise, and eats the fingers of his black men, deconcretizes the forms of his beings, intensifies the violent operation of contrasts, multiplies geometric signs in a yearning for abstraction, seamlessly joins irreconcilable colors, destroys perspectives and fuses planes, even to the detriment of the compositional balance or immediate representation—all in exchange for a nod of universality. He degeographizes his world and its symbols, never hesitating to upset the primary harmony in order to achieve—through a succession of dissonant chords—a more transcendent and silent harmony. From the panels for the New York World's Fair, which already represented quite a departure from the murals of Rio de Janeiro, to those of the Library of Congress, the distance traveled is considerable.

Of all the panels in the Hispanic Foundation, the closest to the previous ones—above all to the murals of Rio de Janeiro—is undoubtedly *Desbravamento da mata*, the one about the *bandeirantes*.⁹ Its figures are separated by immense tree trunks that lose themselves vertically in the heights among shadows that sink into the woods and warm hues of red earth carpeted in vermilion flowers and furry animals. The vertical élan of the trunks is interrupted by the horizontal depth of the earth. Cutting almost diagonally across the foreground, which glows with the heat of burning earth and living flowers such as cactus, the cold hues of a modeled blue stain prepare a brusque transition from ember to sky blue—an environment for the large figure lying prone on the ground, which gives the painting its sense of depth. A projection of magnificent decorative trunks that succeed one another down to the bottom further elongates the figure into the canvas, while a realistic and treacherous anteater emerges from behind a tree, on the heels of the thirsty *bandeirante* drinking from the river. In the foreground to the right, in a zone that is fully incandescent, a bearded, belligerent-looking *bandeirante* wearing a loud shirt with a red lozenge print, holds a blunderbuss in one hand and, with the other, holds a strange animal—half-owl, half-woodpecker—to his chest like some shiny badge. In the other corner, to the left, another figure in hues of gray, in half profile, balances out the reckless hero of the opposite angle. Farther away, its back to him, is another figure also in hues of gray. The details of the arresting design—the hands, the butt of the blunderbuss, etc.—are powerful fixations. The warm foreground hues are tempered by the somber, fleeting, cool greens of the forest, although the dense environment they create and the contrasting backgrounds emphasize the majestic stasis of the entire composition. Even the vivid, corrosive, hirsute animals—the armadillos, anteaters, or capybaras and their coats of fur, which antagonize the spectator—are motionless despite their frightened, sparkling eyes, the only self-propelled creatures in this scene of great decorative power.

After we leave the still atmosphere of *Desbravamento da mata*, we are bathed in the extraordinary joy of this other panel animated by the breath of the great ocean winds that blow from the high seas, the *Descoberta do ouro*. White, gray, blue, green, brown, red—within this chromatic scale the artist has constructed the New World. From one transition, from one stain to another, light, a great deal of light, air, open air, gyrating and blowing from all quadrants. A shaky vertical across the middle of the picture runs from a heavy, dangling cable that hangs from on high; descending from left to right in a diagonal the large white sail awkwardly bisects the vertical line. A powerful figure in gray, white, and blue, grips an oily tackle. Further right, the back

of another figure, in a position that is the symmetrical opposite of the first, tugs at another rope. Emphasizing the shrouds, with the same dangling cadence, a rope ladder descends parallel to them, sectioned by the intervals of its rungs. The precarious vertical in the center does not succeed in imposing itself as dominant because the rhythm of the diagonals, the movement of the foregrounded figures, the very texture of the oily shrouds prevent it from doing so. The movement is decidedly downward, in the direction of gravity, signifying that here nothing is heraldic or meant as solemn representation. The background stains, their arms raised, support the vertical, as does the atmospheric transparency of the seascape in the upper left corner. But the central figures, vibrant in their exuberant materiality, are more powerful.

Here, the heterogeneity of the painting's surface does not balance the aesthetic of the figures, for they are ruled by a powerful, wide motion of their own; on the contrary, it is the geometric forms of the planes—the triangular sails—that attenuate, with their static vibrant quality, the heavy cadence of the volumes of the foregrounded planes. The entire panel is divided into three parts; the great white sail is a triangle that eats up the upper third of the surface. Its hypotenuse cuts the picture diagonally and meets the line of the ship's side off to the right, separating the foregrounds in an opposite direction. Making up the large central plane within the aforementioned angle, busy sailors are crowded together on the caravel's bridge, as in a great luminous focus directed landward. Everything takes place within this central triangle. The rest of the surface is taken up by the foreground that encloses in green the vessel's gray-striped keel.

The subject of this painting is in itself full of dangerous seductions for a less cautious painter. The natural beauty of the seascapes, of the caravels already much conventionalized by romantic prints, is an obstacle and a dangerous invitation to condescension. Portinari set aside all concession to historical convention, and there are no grand captains or beautiful caravels in his painting. Of the sea with its beauties, of the easy subject matter so pregnant with literary intentions, such as this one of the discovery of the New World, the artist allowed only a small cranny on a triangular plane in the left corner of the panel. And he did it in a masterful way. In the background, between the extremity of the large sail and the side of the ship, is a gash of brilliant blue, green, and white space that allows us to see a tiny piece of the new land as if a curtain had been raised (O, Castro Alves!),¹⁰ an authentic seascape with its ocean of stormy waves, with foam, with poetic sails, under a beautiful blue sky, etc. This small open space on the panel's surface provides an extraordinary sense of spectacle, and is really meant to be seen and appreciated from inside the caravel. It is quite spectacular, for a spectacle it is, and a dazzling one—the sight of a new and unknown land. So this bold use of the conventional, of literary inspiration, produces a thrilling contrast with the serious, objective, and stirring materiality of the men in the foreground and the disinterested structure of the entire composition.

The painting is permeated with ravishing lushness and freshness. The formal distortions of the figures are marked by the lazy cadence of the hanging ropes. In the cadence of the volumes and the lines we seem to hear the rhythm of a work song rising from the unanimous, collective effort of the sailors. Everything contributes to centralize all attention upon these figures and testify that the credit for the discovery belongs to them.

In *Catesque* the plastic monumentality takes on a special prominence. Here, the figures tend not to be dissociated; instead, they are integrated into a solid, still group in the middle of the panel—the six-figure composition that the artist had already employed in an oil painting of 1936. In a great integrative movement, everything contributes to cen-

tralize and unify the central figures. The warm brown earth possesses nearly the same burning, hostile structure present in that of the *bandeirantes*.

First of all, it is a land filled with thorns, as evidenced by the catechists' huge, naked, deformed feet. Extending along the sides in a large brown stain that spreads like oil across the vast surface of the panel, it fades away into the background over a fence that gives way to the blue stains of the blended sky and sea. Behind the figures lies an inner field flooded with light in which a gray-green ox gazes in stupefaction at the scene before him, suggesting the silence of the incomprehensible; in the same field, another apostle—a gray stain—leads an Indian child in blue by the hand. A blue mortar produced by shadow is the solitary utensil in this third vast, empty space, not to mention the reverberations of warm hues that mottle the luminosity of the zone. Here, the play of shadow and light has a grave intensity. The luminous field arrests the figures in the central group and isolates them, endowing them with a strange solemnity, while the burning stains of earth enhance the rich material of which the figures are made. From here, ectoplasmic shadows run upward from the extremity of the catechist's habit, reaching his splayed hand, upon the shoulder of the figure standing behind him and extending all the way to his crown, only to continue along the raised arm of the other Indian woman bearing a basket upon her head. These dark stains envelop the large figure of the seated Indian woman who is listening to the preaching of a Jesuit with a powerful protective halo. Everything converges upon her or moves toward enveloping her. The unfinished face of the catechist is illuminated, as is the space, the zone of passage from one body to another. At right, another imposing Jesuit figure holding a child recalls an icon of Catholic hagiography. This figure offers his right side, also plunged in shadow, to the central group, in an unreal yet impressive contrast to the play of light that illuminates the group from the opposite side, casting everything in an anti- or supernatural clarity.

The entire panel is animated by a circular enveloping movement from right to left. The same direction is also marked not only by the circular line of the interior field, but by the pirogues anchored in the blue background, as if forced by the curve of the arch that delimits the panel to circulate within this gyrational movement itself. This extraordinary rotational movement in the air—which is cosmic and does not lie in things—is broken only by the enormous upright figures of a priest and a child to the left, in their strange and dramatic verticality. Without this group the composition might possibly have lost its equilibrium, resolving itself in a uniform and monotonous movement in which the solemn stasis, the mysterious power of catechesis, would vanish.

Descoberta do ouro is undoubtedly the freest and boldest painting. It is the most advanced point in Portinari's pictorial evolution. Here, the antinaturalist contrast between light and color takes every liberty. The secret of the composition lies in appearing not to exist. Yet the figures are arranged in a cross—or an x—which gives them all an almost cosmic structural unity and, at the same time, an extraordinary power to disintegrate, for it permits a rotary movement that prevents the figures from projecting themselves in every direction. In the same way, powerful dissonant chords dominate the cacophony that threatens to erupt from the contrast between black and white, between blue and red.

The subject is more distant than ever; except for structural and abstract considerations, one cannot penetrate its inner balance. Blue, blue, blue is the dominant color, with unpredictable accompaniments in gray, white, red, green, black, and brown. From the deep blue of the foreground, reaching in distance from the bottom up, all shades of blue reverberate in an infinite scale of values. The extraordinary vibrancy of

the paint in the play of tiny translucent fish, whether living or linear, imparts an even more emotional palpitation. High in the upper section the sky blends with the same range of blue, reinforced by white undertones. Previously, in order to make his plastic figures stand out in relief, he ordinarily brutalized the picture, ignoring the accessories or the secondary planes. Now, he leaves the figures in the center of the panel, and loses himself in the Benedictine figure of those blue stains of its water.

The dominant hue is counterbalanced by the green hues of the boat's hull, by the red of a prospector's shirt, by the gray, by the black and white of the figures. But it is the dominant hue that bathes the violence of the disparate figures in loud or somber shades, or in neutral ones of a soothing sweetness.

The triangular noses, the checkered outfit or the one in black, white, and red lozenges serve to placate the concretizing, anecdotal power of the figures of the highly formalized black men and their formidable hands, transforming them into colors, into stains, into volumes, disembodiment them.

One figure in the composition attracts our attention: the one in red lozenges holding a prospecting pan that appears in the right foreground. Above it, another black-and-white checkered figure is a *pendant* to that one; between the two, the gray stain of the figure leaning over the side of the boat is, in its neutral gradation, the center of gravity of the entire system of radiation that detaches itself from that stellar composition. The red lozenges in the foreground are practically the only warm hues in the entire panel. They undoubtedly provide a shock to the overall harmony, the transparency and the soft repercussions of the cold tones in a minor key. Without those loud reds, the ambience would be different; it would be placid and homogeneous. Many would have preferred it so. They clearly create a difficult dissonance; the contrast is painful. But they belong to the internal logic rather than to the intuitive method of composition. In a violation of the laws of perfect accord, the artist restores formal truth to the drama that is represented—diabolical excitation of possessed figures prospecting for gold. The possessed are wearing checkered shirts, immersed in the great sweetness of the very different atmosphere, so strange to the vibration and excitement of those mechanized dolls, doubly slaves, to gold and to society.

Without that red and its derivatives, the scandalous violence of the exaggerated gestures and hands, severed fingers, and dismembered arms flailing in air, brandishing a horrible brown mass, would not succeed in clashing, submerged in the irresistible melody of blues and grays and in the imponderable scheme of its hues. The composition would be “gold on blue,” yet it would engender no visual drama. In this manner, with this dissonance, the ultimately external (though specific) purpose of mural painting—the expression of a reality, whether concrete or transcendent—is restored without leading the artist to succumb to the banality of conventional description, keeping him within the domain of pure creation.

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Notes

1. Brazilian municipal district in the interior of the state of São Paulo, almost 200 miles (313 kilometers) from the state capital, São Paulo.
2. Brodósqui, or Brodowski, is a Brazilian township in the interior of the state of São Paulo, located 18 miles (29 kilometers) from Ribeirão Preto.
3. Manuel Bandeira, “Biografia de Cândido Portinari por Manuel Bandeira—Junho 1943,” in *Portinari* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1943), p. 5.
4. Escola Nacional de Belas Artes (National School of Fine Arts), now Escola de Belas Artes, is part of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.
5. The annual show of the former Escola Nacional de Belas Artes.

6. A watershed of modern architecture in Brazil, the building of the Ministry of Education and Health (Palácio Gustavo Capanema), in Rio de Janeiro, was designed by architects Lúcio Costa, Affonso Eduardo Reidy, and Oscar Niemeyer, with the consultancy of Swiss/French architect Le Corbusier. Completed in 1947, the building's construction introduced functionalist architecture in Brazil (as well as elements such as the *brise-soleil*), which the Brazilian state adopted for its developmentalist project, including the construction of the capital, Brasília (1958).
7. In 1939 Portinari executed three panels for the Brazilian pavilion of the New York World's Fair.
8. These are the titles as given by Portinari (Portuguese), according to the Portinari collection Web site <http://www.portinari.org.br>; and the Library of Congress (English) on its Web site: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/portinari.html>. Pedrosa gave the titles as *Descoberta* (discovery), *Bandeiras* (flags or banners, but see n. 9, below), *Cataquese* (catachesis), and *Garimpo* (gold fields).
9. Literally “followers of the banner,” *bandeirantes* were members of sixteenth-to-eighteenth-century slave-hunting expeditions (called *bandeiras* [flags]), made up of Indians (both slaves and allies), *caboclos*, and whites (the captains of the *bandeiras*). Originally formed to capture and force Amerindians into slavery, the *bandeiras* later focused on finding gold, silver, and diamond mines, venturing into unmapped regions in search of profit and adventure. From roughly 1580 to 1670 they hunted slaves; from about 1670 to 1750 they pursued mineral wealth. These expeditions also expanded Portuguese America from the smaller boundaries of the Tordesillas Line to roughly the same territory as current Brazil, and the mineral wealth the *bandeirantes* obtained made Portugal's fortune during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
10. Antônio Frederico de Castro Alves (1847–1871) was a Brazilian poet. His best-known poems are lyrical and heroic, marked by the abolitionist cause.

Tension and Cohesion in the Work of Calder¹

Clearly weary of the narcissism of the Greeks and the Renaissance Italians, modern sculptors since Brancusi have at last refused to continue to deify the human body. Consequently dehumanized, the gods have died, deserting the Earth.

Apollinaire's verses still ring out to modern ears: “*A la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien*” [You are weary at last of this ancient world] / “*Bergère ô Tour Eiffel . . .*” [Shepherdess O Eiffel Tower].² Later, during the early days of Cubism, [Robert] Delaunay introduced the new iron Shepherdess on the banks of the Seine to painting. Her beauty was finally proclaimed without restraint by all and sundry—engineers and poets, painters and Anglo-American tourists. The promotion of the Eiffel Tower as a work of art constitutes a watershed moment in the artistic history of humanity.

Sculpture ceased to perform the function of giving human shape to gods and mythological abstractions, or deifying men of flesh and bone. Public squares became practically depopulated. The census must have revealed a notable drop in the birth of statues. Were it not for the extraordinary and unexpected market created by the administrators of the time, they might have halted production of those works. For that, at least, they served a purpose. . . . Those who produced that sculpture of apotheosis should have been grateful to all the Caesars who were eager for glorification. . . .

In opposition to the visual realism that had persisted without interruption since the Renaissance, the new sculptors discovered a different species of realism, one that has already been called “mental”³—that of the primitive peoples, or the type revealed in Romanesque art, for example. Like the savages, they came to see with the spirit rather than with their eyes.

In search of other subjects—other forms—for inspiration, those sculptors rejected not only the eternal problems of solid volume but also the traditional working materials used since Donatello and Michelangelo. Or when they concerned themselves with or made use of these, they did so to other ends. Many then turned to a new, essentially modern myth—the machine; others turned inward to themselves; still others turned to neither of these, but to nature, the universe.



Alexander Calder. *Gibraltar*. 1936. Lignum vitae, walnut, steel rods, and painted wood, 51 $\frac{7}{8}$ \times 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ \times 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (131.7 \times 61.3 \times 28.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist

Chinese Taoist artists had already considered the principle of symmetry (so pronounced in the stylized art of Byzantium) to be derived from contemplation of the human form. However, beginning with the Renaissance—the age of the apogee of drawing based on this form—the mobility and formal fixity that triumphed in the West through Byzantine art slowly disintegrated. From then up to the present day, the historical curve moved toward a growing freedom of drawing, which gained in free rhythms and flexibility what it lost in formalistic fixity. And those are the elements that make increasingly definitive contributions to modern formal expression.

Throughout this process, as we approach the modern age, drawing tends to reveal increasingly marked affinities not only with the arts of

primitive peoples but with the refined and formal art of the Chinese—so opposed to Byzantine hieraticism and so free! In order to avoid symmetry (which is deadly to the soul of drawing), they really turned their backs to the human form. And then they discovered the tree, combining the asymmetry of branches with the equilibrium of the whole. Thus, they came upon the principle of “asymmetrical equilibrium.”

Abandoning the slightest hint of the human body and arriving at the Chinese principle of asymmetrical balance, [Alexander] Calder⁴ also sees in the tree, in the vegetal, one of the richest sources of inspiration for the invention of his objects; there he finds suggestions for new forms that are much more fecund and varied than that of the human figure. Yet without Taoist symbolism and idealism, which sees in the tree a unique and sacred source of rhythmic asymmetry, he is able to draw inspiration from everything that translates itself into a system of planes and lines, and not malleable or solid volumes—the foundation of classical statuary.

He prefers to look for masses within the industrial field—pistons, cylinders, prisms—in short, in geometric solids. Because of its balanced asymmetry, the tree provides him with linear suggestions, an apparent automatism of movements, an indispensable mobility; the same is true for animal or human carcasses, whose structures resemble those of the tree (spines, vertebrae, skeletons), because of the arrangement of their planes and their precise outlines.

Indeed, whereas the mineral interests us especially for the rich material of its infrastructure and its surfaces, its power of attraction over men is limited. However, the vegetal exerts an inexplicable fascination, the secret of which may lie in its contained emotion, the tremulous and sober murmur of branches or trembling petals. In its fragility—constantly exposed but continually palpitating and present and brave and affirmative—lies the great lesson of the vegetal to man, to the human soul.

In Calder's work one feels the penetration of nature by inanimate means. It is filled with the nonhuman world—animals of the early geological eras or the limits of biology: insects, plants, algae, protozoa, mushrooms. And alongside these man has his modest place in the universe (for it is not the central place) as one and as part of nature. Thus, Calder turned to the geometric and the organic, to mathematical figures and natural forms, to machinism and the vegetal, to celestial bodies and the earth's animals, to nature and science—that is, to the universe and man as extended by technology and armed with all of his activities. In the latter quality, the machine also entered his world with the other things of the universe, plants, animals, crystals, stars, microbes, snails. In this way, he put an end to the hackneyed, discredited, and empty sculpture of futile apotheosis and dead allegories.

Calder's sculpture overflows from the field of sculptural traditionalism's specific activities. Setting aside the chronic preoccupations of volume, modeling, and surface, the only thing he retained from ancient academic art—and in this he displays a characteristic feature of modernism—is an interest in the possibilities of his material. His research into this is remarkable. As an example, no one equaled him in the depth with which he is able to follow the insinuations of wood all the way to nuance. And what he can do with wire is unsurpassed. For this very reason, Paris dubbed him "*le roi du fil de fer*" [the king of wire]. Nowhere is his marvelous intuition of the material revealed with greater splendor than in the admirable *Apple Monster*, which he was able to draw from wood as if moved by some divine sense or mysterious faculty for intimate communication with things, his hands deprived of any tool, like those of a magician or a happy midwife. His path unimpeded by all academic hindrances, he set off on a new trail that, little by little, led him farther away from the ultradecadent statuary of [Auguste] Rodin or even the work that issued, physically regenerated, from the powerful hands of [Aristide] Maillol.

Inspired by the abstraction and disinterested art of painters such as [Piet] Mondrian, [Fernand] Léger, and [Joan] Miró, he abandoned his old articulated toys and wire sculptures. In Paris, around 1931, he began a new art, pure and severe, that he defined with cold scientific rigor as "vectorial schemas," later sonorously baptized by another painter ([Jules] Pascin) as "stables."⁵ Although it then consisted of pure geometry in space, dominated by rigid lines of wire, the formal organization of those new things is of a density greater than everything he had made until then, with the exception of his earlier admirable figures in wood. In the making of these vectors he now combined other materials with wire and achieved a flexibility that wire alone was never able to give him. Thanks to this fluidity, his objects gained in formal latitude, creating relationships more weighted with universality and freed from any contingent or unilateral limitations.

His stables—compositions and objects not endowed with the ability to move—are fixed pieces made with wire or steel, assembled as a total form and made of partial patterns representing nothing objective. At times, their power of suggestion is greater than that of the mobiles, and many evoke animal forms.

In the stables Calder sought to arrive at the object's ideal relationship within the universe—as an abstract thing resembling nothing else that naturally exists, created by him, and for which he had to find in space a unique place of its own and fix it there for all eternity. Thus, what attracted him in this static category of objects is what he himself called "a sense of cosmic relationship."⁶

[Naum] Gabo, before him, had gone down this new path when, for the first time in sculpture, he introduced real rather than mentally represented movement. Yet Calder, not content with a single movement, soon rendered the contribution of this

new factor more complex. In fact, by introducing real movement into the structure of the object, he enriches it extraordinarily, despite the strictly sculptural qualities of the material with which he is working—wire, glass, steel, etc.

To him, the new objects (which Marcel Duchamp had called “mobiles”) are no more than “plastic forms in motion.”⁷ But this is not a simple motion of transference or rotation but of different types, speeds, and amplitude which, when reunited, combined, or composed, produce a resulting whole. And he explains: in the same way that one can compose colors or forms, one can also compose mobiles . . .

Although they exist in a state of rest, in themselves these mobiles are truly perfect compositions. When activated, they evolve in space, filling it with suggestions that give the object a strange power of fascination.

We can propel a mobile by breathing on it, and its arms or petals or balls will agitate themselves and draw in the air a succession of unexpected forms that transform themselves one after another in some kaleidoscopic vertigo, from bird to flower, from fish to comet, from tree to animal, and so forth.

Calder thus went off in search of the pure, naked rhythmic gesture that lies behind the linear representation of the drawing and is, so to speak, the initial impulse, the spring of the entire effort of graphic expression. With this he achieved the core of the formal experience in this sort of hunt for the kinetic gesture that finally manages to reveal to us, as if it were the Aristotelian impulse of the prime mover, the point from which every object in the world begins and takes on life. The subjective impulse that leads the artist to express himself in formal terms remains active and dynamic, through movement, in the created object itself. For Calder, this incorporation has a “contrapuntal value”⁸ which comes to adorn the formal concept with a quality of pure abstract choreography. Although it is only a mental state, gesture precedes and does not detach itself from the realized creation. Its object acquires the resonance of an instrument that dances or vibrates upon being touched.

Some of the various movements of the mobiles develop in a succession of scales; others are delicately balanced; others are animated by the action of gravity; others tend, on the contrary, to elevate themselves like captive balloons; others flail about aimlessly in currents of air, like weather cocks; and still others evolve by means of an electric current. In these mobiles, Calder combined active space with equally active time.

Calder’s mobiles are usually suspended from a fixed point and the motion develops within the closed system that is thus created. Whereas the amplitude and the different speeds of motion within the system seem to withdraw the overall plane from the object, destabilizing it through a chaotic multiplicity of conditions, the disorder fundamentally obeys a succession in time. By supporting the entire system upon a fixed point, when its parts describe their orbits or their various movements (pendular, circular, or elliptical) they may well be delayed along the way, yet they tend to close the cycle, returning to their point of departure—the object at rest. Thus, motion is not arbitrary and has succeeded itself in a predetermined formal design.

Having captured motion in his constructions, Calder launched the ideal suspension bridge that connects the spatial arts to those of succession in time. Without moving, the statue presents itself to the observer as if it turned around itself in a circle. Music, however, which flows in time, does not turn in a circle but is rather like a river that runs. In Calder’s experiments with motion, there is an effort at surpassing both arts.

This brings unpredictable consequences to his constructions. The new structural factor he introduces might be called—without insult, perhaps—a fourth dimension:

the time factor, closely and truly linked to a special function, the generation of a new, total but open form of an object in space: space-time as a result of formal creation. Hence the rhythmic vitality that is the secret, the soul of Calder's objects.

Energies set in a rhythmic relationship—that is the formula of his modes.

Early on, his experience distinguished two forms of movement in the mobiles: the one produced by crank or motor, connected to the object, and the one freely produced by any fortuitous impulse; the objects thus move and swing naturally, suspended, hanging from wire and even from string.

His first mechanical motion mobile was driven by a crank fastened to the outside of a small wire box, which made a wire fish move. Hence the idea of substituting the crank for an electric current or motor was born naturally. It was the natural transition of a simple machine to a composed or complex one. Instead of an outside crank handle to create a simple back and forth movement, he places a motor to activate an entire complex organism fitted into a panel of primary colors within which geometric figures gyrate or evolve according to a rhythm set by the machinery.

With their petals and leaves, wires or rods, wheels or spheres in a state of rest ideally silhouetted in the air, the free-moving mobiles surrender completely to chance. It is to chance that the geometric or living, natural figures generated in space appeal. When they leave their state of rest, they dance in the air or outline or expel firework roses, embryos of unknown beings, suggestions of animals, of birds, of things that lived only in spatial virtualities.

Nevertheless, it is not the mere visual perception of an object at rest or in motion that inspires him; it is the malleability of imagination. In these wind-driven mobiles, it is precisely the idea of total form in full bloom that he allows the imagination—or chance—to complete. He neither copies nor transfers movements, or details of real objects or figures, or their parts, as in the succession of frames in a movie. The total formal concept may remain in a latent state (when the objects are at rest); but in the process of making it unravel within the confines of the large external contour, he goes beyond the simple representation of movement in painting or sculpture, which remains in the realm of the purely mental. Thus, chance is allowed to drive the imagination . . .

And yet, whereas there is no place for a more lofty role for imagination in his motorized panels, there is, however, a circle that constantly closes and recloses itself. In an unwinding movement, the figures generate themselves in space, and space seems to deplete them, to empty them, returning them by means of some cyclical fatality to nothing—that is, to the initial position of rest—and the cycle recommences.

Through repetition and detailed, part by part translation of the volumes and masses in action, it is the idea of circularity itself that leads mechanical motion to present us with a total formal concept, rather than a sort of photograph or faithful reproduction of things in natural motion. Let us here compare this to the mechanics of the sea which, though monotonous in their repetition, always strike the imagination as something eternally new.

In its precision, the motorized movement of the panels possesses the cyclic rhythm of the laws that govern the movement of the spheres. It is the route of the stars through infinite space. In fact, his mobiles have their origin in cosmic associations. Calder even named the first one *Relação terrestre* [Terrestrial relation]: two wire circles projecting a diagonally sectioned sphere.⁹ The same idea is repeated, only with greater complexity and accomplishment, in his *A Universe*.

The monotonous tone engendered by the repetition of movements in these panels has the fascinating inevitability of the attraction of celestial bodies and the

underlying joy of the periodic returns predicted in the sage's calculations or the philosopher's speculation. The throes of their spiral-like movements possess something that leads us to hope for the disclosure of the secret of things. The ascending effort of these forms reminds us of a Gothic boldness in its keen, romantic reaching for the heights, those geometric figures elevating themselves in waves over seas, love, or music, only to crash—suddenly exhausted—from the supreme apex. The sphere falls from the top of its coiled spring and balances itself dramatically and silently in space, to the invisible beckoning of gravity. Prisms and cones acquire drama by themselves. Geometry is rendered volatile in ballets.

Calder discovered the relationship between the perennial and the fortuitous, and disclosed what it is that imagination may owe to mechanics when he compensated the standardized rhythm of the crank- or motor-driven objects through the use of free rhythms, thus overcoming the limitations of Constructivism and entering the world of organic forms. The resulting rhythmic freedom is intensified, and the unfinished quality of his juvenilia (such as the circus dolls) now takes on unsuspected depths of suggestion. The shadow play of his suspended mobiles is projected with enigmatic charm.

In surrendering to the free rhythms, his compositions gain in suggestions of volumes, inflating themselves in their swaying mobiles or outlining swollen gestures of plasticity in the air. The virtual images suggested to us by these gesticulating mobiles achieve a very much more voluptuous and malleable transparency, deeper and less anecdotal than the empty volume of the early heads and figures in wire. The suspended mobiles attain an almost absolute virtuality, open to all possible combinations within their spatial relationships. Suddenly, it is a spider that dissolves into a monster or a reverberation of stars, in metamorphoses that succeed one another without interruption under the magic wand of chance.

In turn, the old static sculptures that were previously executed on a simple plane are now complicated in the last large stables as objects of densely structural organization that take on an enormous power of fascination.

Recently, possibly pressured by wartime difficulties in finding material for his large, static steel monsters, Calder created a new category of stables which he called "Constellations." They are usually radial or star-shaped pieces of unfinished, unpainted wood fastened to one another by thick, rigid iron wires in such a way that they may be propped up against a wall, on the floor, without special bases or pedestals. When fastened to a wall, they seem to adhere to it in a strange parasitic succession, like a snail or an oyster. Some have the prickliness of a cactus. Others, more structurally ambitious, with larger dimensions, are supported by the ground, whence they bloom with an impetus of rays that freeze in space. They point brusquely in opposite directions, in a dizzying array of disconcerting gestures that are nonetheless charged with mute apprehensions.

It is not a passing impression, a "fleeting moment" (his own expression), that Calder captures with his objects; with them, he seeks to realize, or find—and thus he defines his own artistic concept—"a physical bond between the varying events in life," calling them "abstractions that are like nothing in life except in their manner of reacting."¹⁰

In them, motion does not seek to capture an instant; on the contrary, it seeks to achieve the most eternal, perennial, immutable qualities of the concept of the dynamics—that is, its perpetual and unlimited virtuality—which paradoxically manifests above all when at rest. Rest potentially contains all ideal forms, released from all convention or representation. If form is the irreducible source of all kinetic ideas,

motion is the latent principle of form; it is the generating source of all form. Calder's objects are constructed to allow all possible variations of form.

Visual and spatial unity reveals itself in the scheme and contour of the external lines or planes and the convincing, functional force of the materials used. What keeps the artistic group cohesive and united is the power of affirmation of this total unity, in powerful contrast with the surrounding space.

The flailing arm movements of his mobiles do not signify desperate cries for help or incoherent, isolated gestures; instead, they are organized evolutions, in spite of their appearance within a special whole. The complete image of a form finally revealed springs from the full unfolding of the movement of all the arms (thorns, branches, stems, stalks, wires, etc.) in all of their possible variants. It is only when the movements of the parts have been fully produced that the perfectly finished outlines of the object in its whole and ultimate form is achieved. It is a fleeting, luminous instant of integration with cosmic reality. Thus, the object's spatial unity becomes concrete, and the formal legitimacy of the work manifests itself in all its silent and astonishing clarity.

The dialectic opposition that tempers his objects—mobiles and stables alike—is produced above all by the antithetical play of tension and cohesion, of balance and asymmetry, of the static and the dynamic. In certain mobiles the tension is conveyed by a state of pathetic equilibrium, when the object is at rest and its parts are of an almost sectarian individuality; and, alternately, a totalitarian cohesion, when the object is in motion.

What provides cohesion to the free-rhythm mobiles is motion itself. However, in the large stables one feels the presence of two hostile forces confronting one another—tension and surrounding space. The same thing happens in the Constellations.

In the nonmotorized mobiles there is a weakening of cohesion to the advantage of a greater flexibility, a variation of patterns, spontaneity of the end result; in the stables, there is greater cohesion and less variation, but the greater care enables a structural precision. The free-rhythm mobiles lack the formal authority and weight of the materials used in the large stables. However, being more flexible, they possess the seduction of the unfinished. Such is the authority of heavy metal, of steel, as opposed to the freedom of cheap string and shards of glass. In the absence of internal cohesion, these free-moving mobiles gain in improvisation, in suggestibility—elements necessary for capturing the fullness of form in absolute space.

In the stables, the full force of internal cohesion that radiates from the vital center is tremendous; otherwise it would not overcome the extraordinary tension of the parts, of the outline details, or the seductive invitation to dispersion. Here, dispersion and tension are reconciled at last, after a battle with whose heat the air still seems to be impregnated.

However, cohesion in Calder does not have an organic or functional quality. It does not come from the convergence of all the parts in order to achieve a common purpose, external to the object's intrinsic, disinterested nature. The cohesion of his panels is not functional because nothing is intended as a direct function of parts that do not propose to represent anything. Here, among other elements, cohesion is given by the very rectangle of the panel or by the background before which the parts move.

The necessary opposition between opposite tendencies such as gravity and the expansionist impulse—that cosmic fascination with distant and disparate relationships between objects that move freely in space, and the pervasive need for content, for formal malleable substance, that overflows from each thing, from each one of Calder's creative thoughts—also comes from the tension of forces, lines, and planes,

and not of ponderable mass. Even in the large stables with heavier structures, opposition emerges—whether from the tension of the angles, of the lines (of force, therefore), and from the vital center or from the centrifugal force of the object's solar mass, or from the tension-gravitation antithesis; never from mass against mass.

In the stable he titled *Gibraltar*, for example, along with local contrasts between the various material treatments (polished matter—unpolished matter, etc.), there is a clear opposition to gravity between the sphere and the inclined plane of mass; between the sphere and the mass—as in other objects, the resistance to gravity that comes from other geometric forms (cylinders, cones, spheres) and the ascending mechanical impulse that drives the volumes in an upward spiral-like movement are also visible.

Like a good engineer, Calder never forgets to submit his mobile objects to precise equations of weight and balance. In many abstract painters—poets driven by the whip of inspiration, by the gusty winds of the unconscious, like Paul Klee—those forces they unleash, like evil spirits, end up escaping the artist's control. Not in this open-eyed dreamer who—Arielesque appearances to the contrary—knows how to coordinate ethereal images with precise mathematical calculations. One of his secrets is, precisely, the use he makes of the materials of modern industry in which the functional, utilitarian element is decisive, but giving it an unexpected right to fantasy, a right to stormy marriage with the imagination.

However, Calder did not become a slave to functionality through the use of these industrial materials; by shaping them with the drive of fantasy itself, he altered their course, distorted their forms, and, with them, their utilitarian and conventional fate. He knows how to assault the very functionality of the material in order to highlight its formal dramatic quality. Thus he made of mechanics a system at the service of nothing, working for nothing, for dreams and speculation—to move nothing at all, not to make money.

The idea of dynamic forms emerged in Calder as an engineer's idea. He was looking not for any sort of symbolic representation of action, but for the pure, abstract concept of form. Before reintroducing the organic forms rediscovered in Miró, he had approached the problem of formal kineticism, intent on discovering the relationships between two or more objects in space. For this very reason, he initially avoided any natural or organic form, precisely in order to gain intensity in creative abstraction and not transform the incorporation of movement into an anecdotal resource, a mere unfolding of pantomimes with marionettes or representational images of real organic beings.

But when he was able to reintroduce organic forms into his work without fear of distracting the spectator's attention from the disinterested formal purpose he was aiming for, a new character arrived to inhabit his objects: humor—the humor that reappears on its return trip from the nostalgic period of the circus and the wire faces.

Fleeing from immediate reality—of the Abstractionist sort that never lost its smile—Calder began to draw from the rhythm of chance or from mechanical rhythm forms that occasionally suggest concrete figures or motifs from the world of living beings. For his Abstractionism—which is poetic, concrete (in the experimental sense), rather than doctrinaire—is the child of a permanent enchantment with the world, of a perennial state of grace that constantly expects the rehabilitation of all the sublime and radiant virtualities that may be hidden in the universe.

Also not to be found in his work are gestures, lines, or planes signifying conventional functions or symbols (such as, for example, an extended arm), with the inten-

tion of mentally conveying to us the idea of action. They are there, yes, but they are spatial and malleable forms, with clearly defined outlines and silhouettes, and pure, real movements, in a state of rest or not. Calder's art knows only one functionality—that of the very material in which he works, the one that is vital, inherent to matter, and no other one that is external or foreign to its intrinsic property. Even when he creates things—objects, so to speak—with practical, external purposes, the work's utilitarian purpose is fused in the perfection and elegance with which he integrates and submerges it within the power of suggestion unique to the material of which the object is made. Thus, its suggestive power—that image of cosmic equilibrium with which he charms or intrigues us—comes from the pure gratuitousness of its movements and from the abstraction of its forms.

But this impassioned follower of Abstractionist Constructivism, who disrespected genres and modes in sculpture as well as in painting, who unites the most unmistakable purism with the almost subjective poetry of Surrealism, who ultimately disdained the conventional materials of both arts—who is he? A painter? A sculptor? He is an artist-mechanic, a disinterested constructor-creator, an engineer of art; a mathematician and planner of the nonimmediate and of fantasy; the exploration of that species of dynamic automatism that is his wind mobiles owes itself partly to the “automatist” art experiment of Miró and [Hans] Arp. The introduction of chance, of the fortuitous, may come from a distant echo of Dada. In Calder, there is always an element of mockery, of disrespect for the ancient canons, for academicism . . . whether old-fashioned or modernist, a disrespect that recalls Dada. A joyous, optimistic Dada: this is a paradox that only an American might assuage.

But is there not also a Surrealist influence here? In fact, this fortuitous element is one of the essential factors of Surrealist inspiration. Free movement beckons to chance, at the mercy of an unseasonable wind, of an unexpected gust of air, like reversals of fortune—there is some quality of automatism that probably comes to him from Miró, who was trained in the invocation of that demon's spells and powers.

One can already see that the automatism of the wind mobiles is not subjective; it is not psychological; instead, it comes from a total abandon to the external adventure of nature, or the observer's initial impulse. Something akin to a musical phenomenon is also taking place here, something that depends on various objective and subjective external factors, so that their magnificent unexplored sonorities may develop in time. Not only in the introduction of the time factor, but in the need to count on the chance factor (subjective disposition or external natural accident, winds or calm, static equilibrium or tension of dramatic vitality), this art achieves the pure state of music that purists and transcendentalists of the nonobjective and of creative abstraction so crave.

If—as it has been said—architecture is “frozen music,” the Calderian mobiles are forever unplayable “visual music.” They are for “reading” only. Evoking the rotation of celestial bodies, the transference of their forms in space grips and fascinates us like the silent music of the spheres. Uniting life and abstraction, conjoining humor and mechanics, they navigate between the two great wings of modern art: Surrealism, with its incurable romanticism that occasionally degenerates into anecdotal charade, and Abstractionism, whose obsession with formal purity often resolves itself between a sort of Baroque mysticism and pure puerility. The novel world of Calderian creation is one of total disacclimation.

—The original text, “Tensão e coesão na obra de Calder,” was written in New York, September 1944 (see n. 1, below).

Notes

1. This study, along with parts of another text, “Calder, escultor de cata-ventos” (“Calder, Sculptor of Windmills”), was published in Mario Pedrosa, *Arte, necessidade vital* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria e Editora Casa do Estudante, 1949). It was also used in the proceedings of the conference titled “Calder e a música dos ritmos visuais” (Calder and the music of visual rhythms), delivered in the auditorium of the Ministry of Education in Rio de Janeiro and at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo in 1948 to mark the occasion of Calder’s exhibitions in those cities.
2. From Apollinaire’s poem “Zone” of 1913.
3. Translator’s note: *Cosa mentale*—a thing of the mind, or a matter of intelligence—was Leonardo da Vinci’s aphoristic epithet for painting, and may well be applied to all works of art.
4. A friend of Mario Pedrosa’s, Alexander Calder (1898–1976) wrote of his close ties to Brazil in his autobiography *Calder, An Autobiography with Pictures* (1966). The Museu de Arte de São Paulo collection includes the following works, all originally designated “Untitled” by Calder: *MóBILE* (c. 1948); *Composição com fundo amarelo e vermelho* (Composition with yellow and red background) (1945); *Composição com meia lua* (Composition with half-moon) (1945); and two works from the Composition series (1946). In 1959 he held an exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, which was introduced by Pedrosa and Fernand Léger. Regarding the artist’s sojourns in Brazil, see *Calder no Brasil: Crônica de uma amizade*, ed. Roberta Saraiva (São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo/Cosac Naify, 2006), published in English as *Calder in Brazil, the Tale of a Friendship* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2009).
5. According to the Calder Foundation, it was Jean (also called Hans) Arp, not Pascin, who coined “stable”: “In response to Duchamp’s term ‘mobile,’ Arp asks sarcastically, *Well, what were those things you did last year [for Percier’s]—stables?* Calder adopts ‘stable’ to refer to his static works.” <http://calder.org/life/chronology>, “After 12 February, 1932.”
6. Alexander Calder, quoted in *17 Mobiles by Alexander Calder* (Andover, Mass.: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1943), p. 6.
7. Alexander Calder, quoted in *Modern Painting and Sculpture*, exh. cat. (Pittsfield, Mass.: Berkshire Museum, 1933), pp. 2–3.
8. *17 Mobiles by Alexander Calder*, p. 6.
9. The work Pedrosa refers to here is Calder’s *Croisière* (1931), one of his first abstract works (though not, in fact, a mobile).
10. Alexander Calder, “Comment réaliser l’art?,” *Abstraction-création, art non figuratif*, no. 1 (1932): n.p. (a statement accompanying a reproduction of *Croisière*); English translation by the Calder Foundation, available at <http://calder.org/life/selected-texts>.

Giorgio Morandi

In modern Italian painting, so full of tenors and baritones, Giorgio Morandi¹ is a chamber musician who avoids fermatas, high Cs, and theatrical tirades.

In fact, he is the least “Italian” of the country’s painters, although, perhaps for this very reason, he may be the most universal of them. Morandi is one of those rare personalities who pass fleetingly through schools and fashions, but without leaving pieces of himself in these forays, because for him it was never a question of presenting himself as an “-ist” of any sort, whether Futurist or metaphysician, Cubist or Fauvist. His trajectory through those schools or fashions is like the projection, in ever-greater circles, of the shadow of a young tree that grows.

In the midst of the modern vortex, Morandi retains the humility of the medieval craftsman and the artistic purity of a Bach. Like the air balloon navigator who throws ballast overboard in order to climb to ever more inaccessible heights, the painter from Bologna divests himself, first, of everything of the seductive world of anecdote, in a country that loves opera and theater, and then of figurative mythology, among a people who worship gesture, statuary, and monumentality.

From reduction to reduction, he also bids farewell to himself in order to dedicate himself exclusively to nature, but through the contact of his sensibility with the world of inanimate things, of ordinary household objects. Morandi did not participate in this Cyclopic and irrational task to which so many modern artists have dedicated themselves—that of contributing to the making of a new mythology, transforming gods into mannequins and heroes into ghosts, hovering above the tops of skyscrapers in today’s metropolises. Rather, he resembles Pascal’s thinking reed, bending before

the mystery of humble, lowly things. His attitude is that of the ant that stops before each pile of dust, each leaf particle it finds in its way.

To Morandi a treetop contains the universe, and a door or wall garlanded with leaves might well make up the world. His landscapes are “the landscape,” and in this man does not participate. What for? And he reduces them to the essence of natural things: in these landscapes the colors are substantialized in light, the forms are final, and what there is of man in the painting is reduced to the inevitable outlines, to his work. Man is not there in person because he is man—the mystical artist, severe and wise enough to love lifeless things, and the tree and light, while erasing himself before the work itself. The creator does not need to appear within reach of the object, for he knows how respectable the effort is and how contemptibly temporary the results.

In lieu of mythology, he concentrates on the soulless object in search of matter. His still life is truly still, given that he fears subjective expansionism even in organic matter. It is mineral nature that absorbs him, in the forms shaped by the artisanal hand of the potter, the glazier, or the spinner. The ceramic vase fascinates him, as does the glass bottle or the age-old amphora.

When art strips itself even of such extremely humble depths, it means that for the creator, the universe can no longer be measured by geographical extension or the illusions of spatial perspective. It condenses itself in the palpitation of inanimate matter, in the vascular porousness through which even stones breathe. Imperceptibly, through the power of patience, tolerance, and prescience, the artist approaches the mystery of life.

Morandi allows colors to desert his canvas of their own accord, like a breeder who opens the cage one day and sets his birds free into the blue sky. From this flight of colors some blue remains, or a few rays of green or purple that end up languishing in the gray—the color of things, the color of world. An object in itself is gray, as “gray” as a day of isolation and loneliness that never clears to reveal the sky.

With this world of intuitive gray, he stirs and mixes his bottles and his vases, giving each a hue of its own. Yet, from the place it once was, this hue inexplicably winds up being the flickering material quality of all objects.

At the age of fifty-seven, however, Giorgio Morandi of Bologna, Italy, is turning his back on museums and, exchanging [Jean-Siméon] Chardin’s snuff box or [Paul] Cézanne’s apple for the bottle, is formally reconstructing the world of domestic objects revealed by his eighteenth-century forerunner, adding to it the museum dignity that his French grandfather, the master from Aix-en-Provence, so assiduously sought in his own still lifes and landscapes.

Cézanne’s “primitive” experiments were somehow “realized” in Giorgio Morandi’s bottles and amphorae. Probably a shy man, this Morandi is, nonetheless, a rebel who lived through fascism, whatever his external attitude may have been—heroically solitary, of a ferociously anarchist individualism. Even though his art may appear submissive, is he not an uncompromising revolutionary? None of his contemporaries broke away with greater bravery from his country’s whole pictorial tradition. Nevertheless, he remains the purest of modern artists and, at the same time, the most archaic of them, because his artisanal soul, entirely devoted to the daily re-creation of flasks and bottles, requires the gifts, wisdom, and patience of the explorers.

Only now is Morandi’s success becoming somewhat generalized. That is what is currently happening in Switzerland, in England, and in France itself. Within his own country, his name is already spoken with profound reverence. An art as naked and severe as his is the kind that takes a while to reveal itself in all its fascination. But once revealed, it endures. Its triumph is assured, and the artist’s name will probably be remembered by those who succeed us as one of the few authentic masters of our age.

Note

1. Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964) was close to Mario Pedrosa who—in addition to the text published in this volume—also wrote “Um dia de Morandi” (A day with Morandi) (*Jornal do Brasil* [Rio de Janeiro], October 27, 1957), about a visit in the artist’s company to the Basilica of Santa Maria dei Servi in Bologna, to view a work by the Florentine painter Cimabue (c. 1240–1302). He participated in the second and fourth editions of the São Paulo Bienal (1953 and 1957), where he received prizes. On Morandi and Brazil, see Maria Cristina Bandera, “Morandi y la sala especial,” *IV Bienal del Museo de Arte Moderno: 1957, São Paulo, Brasil* (Navarra, Spain: Fundación Museo Jorge Oteiza, 2007).

Modulations Between Sensation and Idea

[Paul] Cézanne¹ was probably the first Western painter to have been aware of the not only active and autonomous but constructive function of color in painting. His innovations sprang from this awareness. Alongside a concern for rendering natural forms as geometric by reducing them to their essential structures, he sought a new method of his own to produce the effects not of volume but of solidity or corporality. It was in discussing the problem with the painter [Louis] Le Bail that he redefined the old concept of modeling: “One ought not say to model,” he explains, “but to modulate.”²

What does it mean to modulate? To alter color even as the object withdraws from the light, moving from hot to cold. The phrase has been interpreted to mean simply the suppression of linear drawing, as is usually done through the creation of volume-space relations, exclusively through the system of color contrasts. But, as [art historian Erle] Loran demonstrated in his rigorous treatise on composition in Cézanne,³ it is actually not a matter of any mysterious process of drawing with color and avoiding the line. Ultimately, the formula expresses the idea that space advances and retreats only because of the impact of these chromatic alterations that move from hot to cold and vice-versa.

In his diagrams, Loran demonstrated that the basic spatial relations remain (and quite clearly so), even when all modeling is eliminated, for analysis, and when the fundamental planes are marked only by contours. Modulations are, therefore, the specific means of highlighting the effects of three-dimensionality, as a counterpoint to planes that cross one another, retreat, or advance. The color superstructures are synchronized with contours that, although neither firm nor continuous, are at least sensitive and, at any rate, present.

The extreme complexity of modulations upon the surface of Cézanne’s paintings does not abolish the line (he is too classical and architectural to dispense with it); what he does is to give it a caprice, an arbitrariness it did not have in the static splendor of the Apollonian Renaissance, thus revealing its Baroque affinity with the lurching nervousness of El Greco’s drawing. No artist made as much use as he did of this invention so rich in surprises and mysteries for drawing, of this toy for concealing planes or edges that alternately lose and find themselves.

At once Impressionist and classical, it is no surprise that his works reveal a structural complexity hitherto unknown. In the great compositions (the landscapes of Mont Sainte-Victoire and the Bibemus quarry, in figures such as, for example, that of the *Man with Crossed Arms*, and even some of the watercolors, such as the *Bathers*), Cézanne achieves a synthesis of all the formal elements. His thought was divided between his zeal at grasping the sensations—or his “small sensation,”⁴ as he

used to say—and his profound intuition of architectural form. Hence the self-taught man's difficulty in "realizing," according to his craftsman's terminology, because to him, "to realize" meant to impart to the art of constructing a painting the materiality with which a mason builds his wall, setting brick upon brick. He would remain eternally divided between the abstract architectural sense and the insurmountable fascination for the charms of sensitive, fugitive, and mysterious matter, a sin that the Impressionists—those sybarites—introduced for all time to the world of painting.

Within his temporary and precarious artistic synthesis, Cézanne arrived at a solitary position, as solitary as his own life had been. Two contemporary currents converged toward it: the Impressionist current, which led to playing upon the surface of things, to remaining within the appearance of Nature's most transitory phenomena, obeying, therefore, an exclusively optical, sensorial, scientific perspective; and the extension throughout the centuries of the classical ideal of formal construction, albeit dulled by the realism and imitative conventionalism still dominant in his day.

This solitary position becomes quite clear and sharp when one learns of his reaction not only to his Impressionist colleagues but to painters of younger generations who already admired him, and, finally, to the great, established names of the early Renaissance in Italy. [The painter] Émile Bernard, after telling him one day that Gauguin (who had barely begun to make a name for himself) was one of his great admirers, heard him reply rather unpleasantly that he would never accept the absence of modeling and gradations in painting; that Gauguin was no painter, for he had produced nothing but "Chinese images."⁵ Turning to the past, he was no kinder to the great Cimabue or to Fra Angelico. He believed there was no flesh in Angelico's creations, whereas he himself was a sensualist.

In fact, his form stands out increasingly from Impressionist form. Renoir also painted Cézanne's cosmic passion, the Mont Sainte-Victoire. It is instructive to compare the same subject as painted by the two masters. [Art historian Lionello] Venturi was the first to show us the differences, basing his observations precisely on this parallel. These do not lie only in Cézanne's firmest contours, especially in relation to the mountain. In Renoir's picture, it distances itself, disappearing on the horizon, in the mists typical of aerial perspective. However, in Cézanne the monumental mass rises up in all its height and advances across successive planes. Thanks to the more constructive formal resources, its location within deep space is absolute and clear. Fully outlined and developed, erupting from underground like an immense tumor, it tends toward the foregrounds and thus returns—through a complicated play of advances and retreats—to integrate itself in the painting's two-dimensional plane. Despite his being a great artist, Renoir's view of the Mont Sainte-Victoire is a feminine one—sweet, poeticized, perfectly coherent with the realistic viewpoint, but very far from the formal, dramatic organization of Cézanne's vision.

Cézanne's constructive side was so pronounced that, also starting from the concept that the line is an abstraction, he nevertheless did not deny it, as the Impressionists had done. He introduced it into his color system, superimposing it upon color modulation, which was his contribution to Impressionism's theory of divided color. Yet even so, he shared the dominant prejudice according to which the line is a purely decorative formal element, it being impossible to create space and depth through delimited planes and contours alone. However, [Vincent] van Gogh and, later on, the great modern masters already showed how it is possible to suggest a sense of space simply through the use of lines and large colored planes. In fact, the Byzantines and the Chinese had demonstrated this long ago.

At any rate, in his most balanced paintings Cézanne revealed this possibility to the men of his day, who were still bound to the canons of academicism. Enchanted by the discovery of modulation through color, he always tended to use only the new process for the work's merely constructive aspects. Be that as it may, the process of dividing the colors systematically into a series of small planes that tend to accompany forms in their corporality proved to have a more pronounced structuring power than the Impressionist juxtaposition of multicolored dabs, in the search for effects of atmosphere and light. The warm, vibrant quality of the surfaces and their coloring comes from this place. The lines are then let loose, zigzagging, meteoric, fusing so perfectly within the total scheme of intense color that the entire structure seems to be built with no armature. It is his miracle. This is what gives his greatest paintings the same sense of grandeur that exists in Bach's sonorous system.

It was in reference to this achievement that he said, "Drawing and color are not distinct from one another; gradually as one paints, one draws. The more harmonious the colors are, the more precise the drawing will be. Form is at its fullest when color is at its richest."⁶ The contours are defined simultaneously with the burgeoning of the colored areas. When the colors become more intense—or richer or more translucent—the contours are altered once again, from layer to layer, so as not to be absorbed. It is a new system of using line and color, for both are now conveyed to the forefront simultaneously.

Loran saw in this process the deepest synthesis of rudimentary formal elements since Titian and the other Venetian colorists. However, in his *Treatise on Painting*, the Cubist and Futurist painter and theorist Gino Severini challenged this explanation, attempting to demonstrate its practical irreconcilability. Severini remarks that Cézanne himself was always chasing after the contour but, overpowered by the richness of his own temperament, he found himself constantly constrained by color, which thus transformed itself from means to end.

Severini is an idealist, formed by the school of linearism of the classical masters. The son of Greco-Latin culture—which, moreover, led him to the adventures of Futurism and Cubism—is revealed within this idealism. For him, the perfect balance of form and color must be clearly achieved in the mind before undertaking to execute a work of art. To him, it seemed materially impossible to find this balance outside, in motive—that is to say, in the subject or external stimulus, as Cézanne would have it—for the Frenchman sought it in the point of contact between his self and nature: in sensation.

In his effort to fuse the two elements, sensation became a purpose, when it was the ideal of the museums that Cézanne was looking for. Severini further observes that, in spite of his tendency to the classical, Cézanne's art is almost Impressionist and, therefore, more instinctive than thought.

Severini does not comprehend Cézanne's effort to reconcile the stain of color and the contours, or the elements of the pure sensation of thought without the discipline of a priori intelligence. For the Italian Futurist, a classical art requires a real preliminary method of idealization, circumscribed by a comparative canon. This idealist method does not take into account the irreducible antinomies of the physical world and the artist, the dialectical opposition between the sensorial and the intellectual, between material resources and technique, conscious will and the demands of the unconscious, all of which are present in every creative activity.

We stand before a formal idealism that is foreign to Cézanne's carnivorous temperament.

Despairing at and tortured by the insoluble contradiction between formal intelligence and unattractive, objectionable sensibility, the master of Aix hung on with tooth

and claw to what he called his “small sensation.” Like one possessed, or, put another way, like a galley slave with a heavy iron ball chained to his ankle to prevent him from fleeing, Cézanne was also chained to the muddy earth of sensations. However, with the stubbornness of Sisyphus, he never ceased to forge ahead with his intent to fuse the two irreconcilable elements of the ideal and the reality of physics. Steering clear of the sensorial deliquescences to which Impressionism was being reduced, however, he refused to enter the museum as one might enter a convent—that is, by checking his goods or worldly illusions at the door—for before he knocked at that door he wanted to obtain the reconciliation of contour and the stain of color. Thus, he hoped to put an end to the eternal dialogue, achieving the longed-for synthesis of his sensitive reactions as a man exposed to nature and to culture, abstract thought, the ideal.

His work may be defined as an endless modulation between sensation and idea.

—Originally published as “Modulações entre a sensação e a ideia,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), April 2, 1950.

Notes

1. The work of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) was introduced to Brazilians in three group exhibitions of French art. In Rio de Janeiro, *150 anos de pintura francesa* (150 years of French painting) (Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, 1940); *A nova pintura francesa e seus mestres: De Manet a nossos dias* (New French painting and its masters: From Manet to the present day) (Ministério da Educação e Saúde, 1949), when art historian Germain Bazin gave a lecture on his work; and in São Paulo, *Quatro séculos de gravura francesa* (Four centuries of French printmaking), presented in a special room at the fifth edition of the São Paulo Bienal (1959), where the lithograph *Self-Portrait at the Easel with a Beret* (1898) was exhibited. The Museu de Arte de São Paulo collection includes *Scipio, the Negro* (1866–68); *Paul Alexis Reading a Manuscript to Zola* (1869–70); *Rocks at l’Estaque* (1882–85); *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress* (1890–94), and *The Great Pine* (c. 1896).
2. Louis Le Bail quoting Cézanne, in Émile Bernard, “Paul Cézanne,” *L’Occident*, no. 32 (July 1904): 23–24.
3. Erle Loran, *Cézanne’s Composition: Analysis of His Form, with Diagrams and Photographs of His Motifs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943).
4. Geffroy Marbeau quoting Paul Cézanne, cited in Richard Shiff, “Sensation, Movement. Cézanne,” in *Classic Cézanne*, ed. Terence Maloon (Sydney: Art Gallery of NSW, 1998), p. 26.
5. Paul Cézanne, letter to Émile Bernard, quoted in William Rubin, “Modernist Primitivism: An Introduction,” in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: The Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, ed. William Rubin (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), p. 12.
6. Paul Cézanne quoted in Émile Bernard, “Paul Cézanne,” *L’Occident* (July 1904): 17–30, in P. Michael Doran, ed., *Conversations with Cézanne* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 39.

Ivan Serpa’s Experiment

In this amorphous, invertebrate country of today, the formal experiment that Ivan Serpa proposes to us in his show at the Instituto Brasil-Estados Unidos is worthy of our fullest attention. Here is a young painter who, in his first solo exhibition, presents a small body of work that is direct, frank, bold, and, above all, set upon a firm and modern course (see plate on p. 84 for a similar work).

Despite all the virtualities with which he is undeniably endowed, Serpa divests himself of exhibitionisms, of the usual academic tricks from the pictorial kitchen in which he was a virtuoso, in order to enter through the tallest narrow door of formal abstraction. However, it is not easy to remain aloof to the seductive power of that sensitive geometry of pure lines and forms evolving within the space of the rectangle.

The harmony that exudes from the surface of his canvases even seems easy. Laymen, lightweights, or empirical and reactionary curmudgeons will say (*do say*) that it is no more than a “cold,” “ornamental” exercise of neatly drawn geometric lines and figures. There was even one critic who, in an attack on Ivan, took me to task

because, in my brief catalogue introduction to the painter's show, as a way of supporting the artist's sincere effort, in passing I had used the expression "privileged forms" to designate the geometric figures of the circle and the square. I was labeled "literate" (as if the word were an insult), and was even taught a lesson according to which the circle, the square, and other strong, regular figures are not "privileged forms" but, rather, "natural, living forms." I am not sure why, but Cézanne also joined in the dance—perhaps because he professed "spheres, cones and prisms" as foundations for the structure of his compositions. However, in reality I have nothing to do with the critic's refutation, because the expression I employed is just scientific terminology created by modern psychology in order to point out the greatest power of impression and persistence in perception, experimentally verified, of the most regular and symmetrical geometric forms. The expression reflected nothing qualitative in any aesthetic sense or even in terms of simple individual taste.

But let us leave these taunts aside and return to our much more interesting exhibition. The impression of assurance, balance, clear beauty of hue and form, apparently the fruit of easy virtuosity, actually shows a self-control of mediums that is rare among artists his age. Indeed, Ivan has already achieved a degree of simplification that is not for those who aspire to it but for those who are able to achieve it. In discovering the world of visual abstraction, Kandinsky moved from impression to improvisation and, from there, climbed all the way to construction! As one of his Brazilian grandchildren, Serpa starts out from the master's final period, though in a still elementary manner, compared to the complexity of the formidable Russian discoverer's formal organization.

The struggle for simplification was the artist's great dilemma in this early stage of evolution. During the years of apprenticeship, ever since he began to look to Braque in search of something new in the domain of painting, Serpa was unable to find just what he wanted. And it was not until quite recently that he found a path to order, to inner discipline, to architectural space—his own path. Traces of such groping, of such hesitation may still be found in the present show, particularly in the drawings. Indeed, in some of these, the scheme of the lines does not always follow the direction of the planes, thus muddying the rhythmic limpidity. Until then, painting was a manual ability exposed to the winds of momentary influence. Only a love of order, of neatness, of nicely finished work stood out from among his intrinsic qualities, yet all of it was drowned out by an exuberance of superficial and external details, and a rash propensity to assimilate foreign formulas and apply them immediately at the first possible opportunity. In light of this excessive and passive faculty for learning, assimilating, and digesting foreign things, many doubted his inner strength, his artistic authenticity. In reality, he was working through the process of his artistic training. It was his way of preparing himself, of completing a painter's apprenticeship.

In this struggle with himself and with foreign influences, he eventually found himself. He then rediscovered the integrative (and, in itself, beautiful) power of the line. An entire series of abstract drawings served to free him from the purely figurative or purely sensorial residues of which he had had enough. Thus, the fundamental problem of space emerged from his mind, from this play of lines and planes in the small space of the drawing, in all its importance. He approached the canvas with linear freedom—above all with a free hand (ultimately, a free mind) that was able to guide him in the creation of formal rhythm. He had found himself.

Yet the earliest attempts are reduced to a sort of scaffolding, an analytic structure rigidly tied to the two-dimensionality of the canvas. Powerful generating lines mark circumferences, etc., upon the canvas. The arabesque is beautiful, but nothing

moves—everything is static. Early on, however, these lines disappear and what was schematic becomes living and dynamic. The large forms come unmoored from the surface, releasing themselves into space. The forms are still extremely simple, “privileged,” closed. But they are animated by a dynamic force that interweaves them in a cosmic movement rich with relationships and harmony. They are never isolated, and they come from this inter-relationship in which they coexist with the power of fascination and persuasion that they hold over us.

Colors vibrate one moment and reconcile themselves the next, although their overall function remains subordinated to forms—the principal protagonists. But, to judge by what he presents to us, the artist’s intention is to give color an increasingly important role in its relationships to forms. The same may be said of a better, more pictorial treatment here and there, of the material, of the texture of his paintings. These problems are secondary to the aims of Serpa’s art, and they will mature naturally under his brush, even as his spatial world expands and becomes richer.

There is currently much talk in Brazil about functional painting, at the service of architecture. However, what has been done in this field so far is empirical and improvised and, above all, disconnected from the formalist, purified spirit of modern architecture itself. Ivan Serpa’s exhibition shows that a new solution to the problem—to the fusion of the two arts, under the primacy of the first—is already beginning to emerge, and is worthy of examination by the nation’s architects.

—Originally published as “A experiência da Ivan Serpa,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), August 18, 1951.

Grupo Frente

Nowadays, the idea of a “group” is suspect—especially in a country like ours, of amorphous if not imbecilic individualists always ready to let themselves be mobilized by the first street vendor to come along. Particularly when the street vendor dresses loudly or hawks the wondrous virtues of political propaganda. For it was within this skeptical and superficial environment of ours—whose superstitions are even more superficial—that the Grupo Frente appeared, and has kept going to this day.¹

Its members are all young, and the allegiances that have marked its growth have invariably been those of still young personalities. This means that the group is open . . . to the future, to generations in the making. Even more promising is the fact that the group is not a restricted clique, nor much less an academy in which little rules and recipes for making Abstractionism, Concretism, Expressionism, Futurism, Cubism, Realism, Neorealism, and other isms are taught and learned. Does this statement astonish you? Well then look, just look: here is Elisa [Martins da Silveira] alongside [Ivan] Serpa; [Carlos] Val next to Lygia Clark; here are Franz Weissmann and Lygia Pape; romantic Vincent [Ibberson] leaning against Concretist João José [da Silva Costa]; and Décio Vieira and Aluísio Carvão, brothers, yet so different! Not to mention that terrible Abraham Palatnik, inventor, builder, maker of mobiles and artist of intelligence, who spares neither half measures nor concessions to those between here and there. However, the skeptics and the amorphous should not laugh.

These artists did not come together as a group out of worldliness, pure camaraderie, or by chance. Their greatest virtue continues to be the one it always was: a horror of eclecticism. They are all men and women of faith, convinced of the revolutionary,

regenerating mission of art. One thing unites them, and this they do not compromise, ready to defend it against everything and everyone, placing it above everything and everyone—freedom for creation. In defense of this moral postulate they give or beg no quarter.

Such a stance does not mean they endorse the ridiculous Parnassian principle of so-called art for art's sake. To them, art is not an activity of parasites, nor is it at the service of the lazy rich or political causes or the paternalistic state. An autonomous and vital activity, it aspires to an exalted social mission, namely to give the age style and to transform men, teaching them to fully exercise their senses and to shape their own emotions.

The Grupo Frente artists pursue ethical discipline and creative discipline: they would otherwise not be able to experiment as freely as they do. The path to ethical discipline is opened to them by this fanatical search for quality that characterizes the effort of an Ivan Serpa, or by the lofty, noble ambition for architectural integration that characterizes the effort of Lygia Clark. With the discovery of modulated surfaces upon which the line is actually incised or merely suggested by color contrast, Lygia takes a bold step toward integration because she abolishes the intrinsic difference between the painting in itself, the boxed panel, a facade, a wall, a door, a piece of furniture: everything in a building that is a living organism thus becomes part of the same creative thought, the same spirit of synthesis that aspires, simultaneously and inseparably, to functionality and to beauty. For some time now, Serpa has surrendered to the invention of his high-temperature collages and, recently, to experiments with the as-yet-unexplored world of textures in which a sensitive but controlled material submerges in its transparencies or in its opacity, in the contingencies of precarious sensorial reality, the lofty pure forms of geometry.

Actually, one of the present show's points of interest are the albums with various textural experiments in every sort of material, from tulle to alphabetical signs from typewriters to cheap wrapping paper. Everyone collaborates in this dissection of matter, including the group's most recent recruits. These activities thus draw its members into productive practical activities which, tomorrow, may bring about a considerable improvement in the quality of industrial products. Modern industry needs the essential and pressing collaboration of artists, under penalty of never elevating itself to the height of the cultural demands of the society it serves. Without this collaboration, it will never exceed the scope of the petty and merely utilitarian empiricism in which it works, never succeeding in ennobling our civilization with the formal quality (perfect synthesis of function and form) of its articles, as did the artisanal activities of the great creative ages of the past, such as medieval craftsmanship.

Unlike most of the others in the group, for Franz Weissmann the experiment almost never appears freely, as in a game. Rather, it only appears in depth in the work, as the fruit of mature reflection. His experiments succeed one another like hours in a day; however, their making takes up but one among the many, many hours of the days and nights consumed by experimentation, consumed by experiences. This does not mean that, amid his efforts to grasp space by articulating it with the line or the plane in trihedrons, tetrahedrons, or polyhedrons, a momentary experiment does not crystallize itself like some sort of baroque intermezzo for a flute player, for instance. Weissmann worships wire and steel thread, entertains himself most pleasurably with strips or sheets of aluminum, with yellow metal and other materials he finds in practical use in automobile repair shops.

Aluísio Carvão grew tired of experimenting with easel painting and now vacillates between flat surfaces and three-dimensional objects that he eventually suspends in



Mário Pedrosa (center) and Grupo Frente. 1955. Collection Ferreira Gullar

space, to avoid the fixity of a still, flat view in exchange for the multiplicity of colored and formally living surfaces. With Décio Vieira we have painting of predominantly sensitive qualities, which does not, however, escape from the rigor of an intelligence that, because it conceals a certain measure of irony and perhaps even of skepticism, nevertheless ceases to act to correct—whether through measure or through proportion—the excesses of the sensitive or . . . even of good taste. With growing boldness, Lygia Pape engraves in black and white and in color, in rich, delicate material, forms that become increasingly pure and universal, even as the formal idea is enhanced. The artist also gives us another measure of her worth in the jewelry collection she presents. And what to say of João José, the group's most rigorous Concretist? That working with progression and alternate rhythms, with deliberately elementary forms, he offers us living, expanding surfaces. It is an artistic vocation in progress.

There are others to mention, including the strong coloristic temperament of Vincent, the Englishman. Yet we are not cataloguing names. However, let us reserve a few lines to say something about the apparently unusual presence here of rebel individualists such as Elisa Martins or the lad Carlos Val. The former makes paintings that are notorious for being completely instinctual, yet in which the “figure” is so detailed that its particulars are eventually transformed into lines, into planes, into pure tone. Hence the presence upon the canvas of sewing stitches or colored, shiny embroidery of great pictorial richness. The seemingly rarefied atmosphere of experimental Concretists and Abstractionists (in which Elisa was actually trained) appears to be what best stimulates the reactions of her direct, simple temperament, which is opposed to theories. Carlos Val is the cherub of the group. He is one of those painters who springs from the cradle with an irremediable vocation. Though he is still an adolescent, his line has recently taken on an extraordinarily vigorous formal drama that is quite rare in these parts. It is the medium that Val uses to fuse to the tempestuous backgrounds of his drawings and paintings the silhouettes, shadows, and increasingly archetypal figures of his imagination—like his beloved horses, which he has painted since childhood in the purest, most beautiful and disconcerting hues.

This concludes the Grupo Frente's introduction. Thanks to the Museu de Arte Moderna's fine initiative, the group will reach the public at large through the show now being inaugurated. The honor paid to them by the museum is well deserved, and with it the Museu de Arte Moderna accomplishes its mission of stimulating new values and stimulating the public through the contact it establishes between them. The experience of such contact can only be fruitful, even though public reaction may not be immediately favorable—or even if it is hostile. Lasting friendships are not always forged at first sight. Yet something tells us that this exhibition will be successful:

that it will be a landmark in the process of winning over scholarly opinion for contemporary art, for the truly living art of our time. If, however, these hopes should be dashed, it will not mean the battle is lost. It does not mean that we need deny the high quality of what most of these young artists have already achieved; above all, it does not mean we should deny that they are right in their efforts and on the right path. Nor, still, should it stop us from writing that they have already achieved considerable creative ability. It was neither pride nor controversial diligence that led us to make these statements; on the contrary, we have been guided by humble, resigned, and well-seasoned patience.

To uphold one's own convictions is the supreme courtesy we owe to those who disagree with us. It is proof of our respect for them. And it follows that, with public support—or without it—we should allow ourselves to become irrevocably committed to expressing here our conviction that the present collective display of this fistful of impassioned artists can be compared with the most vibrant art of its kind that is currently on exhibition in the artistically valid capitals of the contemporary world.

—Originally published as “Grupo Frente,” in *Catálogo 2ª Mostra do Grupo Frente* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, July 1955).

Note

1. Formed in 1954 by artists Ivan Serpa, Aluísio Carvão, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Décio Vieira, Carlos Val, João José da Silva Costa, and Vincent Ibberson; they were joined in 1955 by Abraham Palatnik, Franz Weissmann, Hélio Oiticica, César Oiticica, Elisa Martins da Silveira, Eric Baruch, and Rubem Mauro Ludolf.

Concrete Poet and Painter

The Concrete poets have not only abolished verse; they have raised their aesthetic spears against poetic discourse. Nevertheless, in its specifically affirmative-apologetic-supportive mode, poetic discourse concedes a preferential place to what is signified. This is why [Walt] Whitman was able to write, “Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles.”¹ Elevating the senses to a preferential place, the poet positions himself as a sort of symbolic antenna, picking up the primary experience.

From the outset, his attitude to things is one of direct experience. “Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles . . .” Setting aside the American bard’s naturalist, romantic pantheism, one finds in him the purely descriptive (that is, phenomenological) approach that the poet, sated with today’s science and theory, so fervently seeks. The Concrete poets relate to the visual arts and to music in order to arrive at the nakedness of perception, the virginity and purity of the initial, global, perceptive blow of the *gestalts*. This is why they readily abandon verse, with its wanderings, its caesura, its invincibly cultivated, erudite, conceptual nature, in order to contact and become attached to the raw object, to an experience that is still this side of concepts, this side of the inevitable logical-associative, speculative-psychological chain. They want to start from “the direct and immediate datum of experience in relation to a concrete world of meaningful objects.”²

This is why the graphic-spatial image initially represents such a prime element in the poetic *démarche* of a Décio Pignatari or a [Ferreira] Gullar. They want to *previously see* the poem, and this can only be done through perception—that is, *seeing* a form or a formal nucleus: in short, an object. So it is logical that the result of a

formal-sensorial experiment should be called an object-poem. Haroldo de Campos, perhaps the most romantic of the Concretists, sees his poem take shape even as he hears the sound of its words—like a continuous thread—partly, perhaps, directing his spatial arrangement of them.

Even in precise engineer constructors of poems such as Augusto de Campos or Décio Pignatari, concrete poetic activity is always passionately phenomenological. They start with a word, but they disconnect it from everything that came before or after it, disassociating it like a loose link from the immemorial wholes from which it came and from the usual structures through which it circulates. To what purpose? To isolate it, to render it an indifferent thing, an object as yet undefined and nameless: in short, as a composite of sounds and letters, phonemes and diphthongs, divested of its immemorial logical-connotative functions, of its intrinsic conceptual nature. What remains of it? A mere phenomenological object, immediate, primary data for direct experience. (In abstruse philosophical language it would be—at best—a Husserlian “pre-perceptive essence.”) Of course, if this is their starting point, they must return once again to the world of concepts, the world of the word.

But let us now examine the Concrete painter according to theoretical orthodoxy, especially to that of the *paulistas*—of a Waldemar Cordeiro, for example (see plate on p. 81). The painter proposes to follow a *démarche* that is precisely opposite to that of the poets. His ideal is to divest himself as much as possible from all direct phenomenological experience in search of pure intellect. He would like to execute a pure, perfect mental operation—like the calculations of an engineer—that is foreign or indifferent to any modality of personal experience. Pictorially speaking, he is completely uninterested in the qualitatively good or bad execution of the painting. What interests him above all else is the precise externalization of visuality itself or, better yet, of the visual idea that . . . he designed, conceived, planned. Why, then, is he a painter? Because the idea conceived and transferred to the canvas is supposed to be seen and read upon the plane by perceptive eyes.

The usually serial form (triangles, squares, curves, etc.) is exhibited with the greatest possible precision, all else being accessory, including the colors that one should ideally be able to phone in to the optician’s lab, in accordance with the specific number of its chromatic wave or vibration. Thus, even color—the essential, primordial domain of every phenomenological approach—is relegated to outside the artist’s primary experience and transformed into resulting objective experiments that are already perfectly catalogued (that is, conceptualized). The Concrete painter aspires to the moment in which his own hand will become unnecessary to the making of a painting.

Thus, the poet leaves the specific field of verbal rhetoric, of logical-significant discourse—the natural environment in which words are born, live, grow, move, transform themselves, and die—to begin his investigations anew, with the virginity of primary experiences, at the level of practical-phenomenological intersensorial activities in which the painter or the musician acts. The Concrete painter, on the contrary, wishes to achieve the clarity of symbolic logic, breaking any commitment to past phenomenological experiences. He would like to be a machine for elaborating and making ideas visible. The phenomenon of this disparity of attitudes deserves to go on record.

—Originally published as “Poeta e pintor concretista,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), February 16, 1957.

Notes

1. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2004), p. 44.
2. R. B. MacLeod, “The Place of Phenomenological Analysis in Social Psychological Theory,” in *Social Psychology at the Crossroads*, ed. J. H. Rohrer and M. Sherif (New York: Harper, 1951), pp. 215–41.

Paulistas and Cariocas

We have long reflected upon the preliminary need for theory that characterizes certain peoples or, rather, certain cultural groups, when confronted with others for whom “theory” is not necessary or always comes a posteriori. For example, why is it that the Italians are always more theoretical than the French, the Germans than the English, the Russians than the Americans, the Spaniards than the Brazilians, and the *paulistas* than the *cariocas*?

Argentinean and Uruguayan artists, critics, and essayists always seem to be bigger know-it-alls—more intelligent, really—than we Brazilians of all colors, from all corners. There they are, beyond the Plata, artists and critics alike, their theories always on the tip of their tongue. As for us over here, we are always lazier, more negligent, perhaps concealing a smidgeon of skepticism or humor behind this laziness or this negligence.

What is curious is that inside our country, between the two most important intellectual metropolises—São Paulo and Rio—we may also notice something of this difference in attitude. Ever since the Modern Art Week [Semana de Arte Moderna],¹ São Paulo has presented itself to Rio as the driving center of aesthetic ideas and theory. Not only was modernism born in *Paulicéia desvairada* [*Hallucinated City*],² but its doctrine and theory were defined and codified there. Shortly after he published *A escrava que não é Isaura* [The slave who is not Isaura; 1925], Mário de Andrade used to say, half ironically, half seriously, “First a book of poetry, then a book of wisdom.” As we know, the book condenses the aesthetic of the new modernist poetry.

The young Concretists of São Paulo hold the same concern for “wisdom,” alongside that of “poetry.” Between a [Décio] Pignatari and a [Ferreira] Gullar, the former is clearly more of a theorist than the latter. At the level of painting and the visual arts, the contrast is even more striking. The *paulista* painters, draftsmen, and sculptors not only believe in their theories but also follow them to the letter. (Of course, we are not referring to [Alfredo] Volpi, the old, still glorious master, above all isms and schools, who lends the young Concretists the generous and protective gesture of his solidarity.)

In comparison, the painters of Rio are almost romantics. In one group as in the other, the color treatment is very different. Here and there, in spite of one escapade or another in which one can see sensual or expressive lapses in color (in a [Hermelindo] Fiaminghi, or even in a [Waldemar] Cordeiro), the *paulistas* introduce a deliberately elementary chromatic vocabulary.

The chromatic variations are only of a dynamic visual order, as to brightness, vibration, and saturation—hard surface colors bound to the “procrustean bed” of formal patterns. These are usually of pure figural predominance—that is, powerful forms, in the gestalt sense. Severe and rigorous within their visual discipline, whenever *paulista* painters avoid symmetry they do so in order to reveal its presence, *quand même*. In I don’t know which one of his *Concreções* [Concretions] (the magnificent one with the black triangles, in horizontal parallel series in relief on a white background, aluminum sheet), [Luiz] Sacilotto gives us an excellent execution of his idea, based on the perceptual ambivalence in which the black triangles—extremely powerful closed forms—suddenly allow the white background to take the foreground in a series of visual triangles that act as if they were virtual shadows of the black series (see plate on p. 81). With this, the white gains an unexpected virtuality, and the captivating play of visuality continues to alternate itself indefinitely. In this work, the figures elude the quantitative limitations of metric geometry; that is, the triangles depend neither

upon the size nor even upon the rigidity of their form: their fundamental properties become dependent, above all, on the general position of the lines and points at which they intersect; from there, they grow and move as the gaze travels across their series. Even in his *Concreção* [Concretion]³ numbered before this one, Sacilotto begins with a spiral whose axes make up an irregular angle, the sides folding up on themselves. In this work, the artist still shows the scaffolding of his idea and, by virtue of a certain contempt for the spatial power of color, the drawing becomes rigid and ends with two figures—two hourglasses, one fixed vertically, the other horizontally—with what is ultimately a sort of perfectly three-dimensional central vanishing point, in the old manner.

Although he is approaching it, Maurício [Nogueira Lima] has not yet arrived at the freedom with which Sacilotto is already beginning to move. Cordeiro nourishes his idea and transposes it to the canvas, as a draftsman draws his object on a board. There is a sort of return to the center of the painting as a hierarchical place destined to the figure—I mean, to the form.

Carioca artists are far from having the severe Concretist awareness of their *paulista* colleagues. They are more empirical, or perhaps the sun and sea induce in them a certain doctrinaire negligence. Whereas they love above all else the canvas, which remains as the last physical-sensorial contact with matter and, through it, somehow, with nature, *paulistas* love the idea above all else. In this sense, Décio Vieira is a sensual cat that exudes aristocratic indolence, agility, and intelligence. What concerns him is the space of the canvas he articulates with subtle precision, although it is disguised by a loving brushstroke in highly personal, effusive, and nondelimiting colors. He is an Abstractionist rather than a Concretist. The other *carioca* painters also commit sins of heresy.

Their greatest concern is spatial play, so that no piece of the canvas is lost or neglected. Whereas *paulistas* devote greater attention to the conceived form to the detriment of everything else, even if they have to isolate it upon the canvas, *cariocas* still want to integrate it in a well or equally distributed spatial relationship. This is why they are so caught up with negative and positive spaces, giving their colors an equally active function—so as not to allow forms to be distinguishable upon the background.

For the *paulista*, color is a color-surface, pure luminosity, color for a form that functions here as an object. For the *carioca*, color is also space; it is illumination—the vision, so to speak, of empty spaces; it is negative form, as is, in fact, the white background of the triangular series in Sacilotto's prizewinning painting.

Among *cariocas*, João José [da Silva Costa] is the one closest to the *paulistas* or the most rigorous Concretists. But he, too, commits a sin of the flesh, for his dialogue with color still contains secrets of a subjective or expressional order. Be that as it may, in various degrees, the *paulistas* and *cariocas* of the Concretist field represent a good part of Brazil's hopes for the future of its visual arts.

—Originally published as "Paulistas e cariocas," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), February 19, 1957.

Notes

1. See Pedrosa's "Modern Art Week," pp. 177–87 in the present volume.
2. Volume of poems by Mário de Andrade, published in 1922.
3. We believe the author is referring to *Concreção 5628* [Concretion 5628] (1956). See illustration p. 79.

Maria the Sculptor

Among our few sculptors, Maria Martins is a unique figure.

The artist in Maria has the gift of repelling those who come into contact with her work. In order to approach her, one must overcome certain prejudices. And I am not talking about the banal, superficial—though sympathetic—preconceptions that were raised in certain artistic circles upon her arrival. Indeed, Maria came to art late in her career—and what a career! That of an ambassador's wife. She entered this art world of bona fide bohemians or austere and professional craftsmen as surprisingly as a parachutist. Reaction from the bona fides was natural in view of this strange figure from the world of well-to-do snobs and the rich bourgeoisie. However, Maria has not been beaten down by the hostility of the milieu. And she endures, keeps on going, and wins. Today she is an esteemed figure in these artistic circles. And rightly so.

Nevertheless, as an artist she suffers from a capital defect: an excess of personality. It is precisely from this fault that the most negative feature of her sculptural work emerges: its absence of monumentality. She lacks the high sense of form. In her solid works, statues and backs, this lack of monumentality stands out. Instinctively, she attempts to compensate for it through an overflow of highly personal bad taste, in which details join other details in order to represent subjects drawn from the modern literary arsenal about the unconscious. What dominates her figures is a profusion of ambiguous images generated by the same process of free association at the literary-poetic (and, especially, surrealist) level. Maria barrels ahead, her eyes shut, never watching for traffic lights—a dangerous driver. She tends to overexplain her ideas or her extravagances.

The core of her creative drive is not plastic but discursive. In these works, she reveals her sculptor's personality with sublime shamelessness and excessive satisfaction. It is true that, in all this, there is a certain unconscious core of exhibitionism, the fruit of an unmatched psychological infantilism or of total naiveté, which is disarming because it is unguarded, unsparing, and uninhibited. And within this defect or quality—as you prefer—lies the secret of Maria's artistic explanation.

Her idea of sculpture is a literary (and for this reason, romantic) one. Her art world initiation came to pass under [André] Breton's motto, "Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all."¹ That, then, was the period when she surrendered to the punishing winds of the unconscious, previously exploited in writing. The devil of it is that she never achieved automatism precisely because she never ceased to place herself at the forefront of the creative process. Blending exhibitionism and sincerity, her art remains within the zone of the primary sensorial reactions, never achieving the innermost, highest zone in which sensibility and intelligibility become confused. That is why her personality is always excessive; why it is, shall we say, para-artistic. The artist—and the artist alone—already belongs to another, more distant, more solitary region, one that is more inimical to life itself; one in which sensibility is thought and intelligence sensibility. So the monumental work lives for itself, with that terrible capacity for self-isolation, for turning its back on its own creator, that is the hallmark of true masterpieces. Maria's best-executed pieces never detach themselves from her.

The volumes of her bronze, polished metal, or wood sculptures have no consistency, articulation, or hierarchy of planes. They tend to equal one another, treated as if they were only smooth or porous surfaces upon which the artist concentrates her affectations, her fixations, her whims and ideas. In later periods, the solid volumes are emptied, breaches are opened in them, and the surrounding space tends to penetrate them. That is when the sculptor achieves her finest work. She then gives us a

scheme made of branches, vines, and trunks in which the sensuality of the chosen material—porous, unripe, with the consistency of rotted wood—expresses her tortured mind more formally and with fewer sentimental effusions, simultaneously satisfied by a thousand perverse visions. This woman's imagination lacks order. If it had any, her sculptural art would be a consummate one. And Baudelaire's verses, "There, all is order and beauty, / Richness, quiet, and pleasure," might serve as a gateway to the work.² From this, however, we have to remove order and calm. And what beauty remains is that of a valved flower of cruel and vulgar evocations somewhere between the passionflower and basil.

The most authentic thing about Maria's sculpture is its biological two-dimensionality. Even when it extends its reeds or its limbs in space to form a sort of perforated net, in an irregular succession of spans that are often lacking in rhythm, it is the plane that lives, and what stands out is the adherence of the forms. They resemble creepers that, in turn, require something solid—a trunk or a wall—upon which to lean, upon which to branch out. They are parasitical forms that, without a consistency of their own, are only able to articulate themselves, to grow, or to bloom upon foreign bodies. These foreign bodies are always contingent; that is, they signify external nature: they represent the others, or their own body in a final narcissistic effort to endure. Maria's art acts like a leech, a claw of worn-out nerves, though dominated by a brutal will, but which is no more than a desperate caprice, a painful spasm.

But such as she is, in her irrepressible personalist assertiveness, Maria the sculptor exists, and matters.

—Originally published as "Maria, a escultora," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), April 27, 1957.

Notes

1. "La beauté sera convulsive, ou ne sera pas." André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 160.
2. "Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté. Luxe, calme et volupté." Charles Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil and Other Works*, ed. and trans. Wallace Fowlie (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), p. 59.

Lasar Segall

Lasar Segall was the first member of his great generation to introduce modern painting in Brazil, starting with his São Paulo show of 1913.¹ He left us work that was sincere, dense, sad, and somber, even when his subject matter was neither somber nor sad. It might also be said that in the family of Brazilian visual artists he was the first—and may well still be the only one—to have given his art a decidedly melancholy and pessimistic tone.

In general, Brazilian artists are not pessimists and do not linger for long in the clef of human suffering. Among the youngest there is perhaps only one painter whose art, though intensely lyrical, nevertheless prefers to express itself in a minor key: Milton Dacosta. Among established masters, of course, there is the work of Portinari, which is dedicated to the human condition. And yet, even in the series about migrant workers [fleeing the drought in] the Brazilian Northeast—in which the artist attained his greatest dramatic power—it cannot be said that Portinari is a sad and somber painter. Throughout that series one feels a boundless optimism. His skeletal figures in rags and the muted gray tones that cover them symbolize a representation of poverty and

despair rather than any deep, unassailable, internalized sadness. On the contrary, even in Segall's most lyrical and contemplative moments—such as the landscapes of Campos de Jordão² with the little cows—his painting never ceases to let sadness and pain show through. He saw melancholy and disengagement in everything: in animals, in sticks, in stones, in things. This is why, if he always treated the human figure with the artisanal care with which the Cézannes, Van Goghs, and [Giorgio] Morandis treated the still life, it was because the inanimate thing, the mineral and the vegetable, possessed mysterious subterranean communications with the human soul—with man, irrevocably subject to misfortune, incurably torn between nostalgia for his beginnings and the propitiatory attraction of the end.

In referring to Segall's sadness or melancholy, many have spoken of his race. This is a facile psychological explanation. There are other Jewish artists—like Chagall, who also came from Segall's birthplace of Vilna—whose figures are not perpetually stooping or laying their heads down upon stones, upon the ground or a bed (who knows whether to sleep, to rest, or to die). Rather, Chagall's figures fly like birds or angels, moved by a utopian aspiration to heaven or happiness. If there is pessimism in him, it is overcome by escapism, whereas in Segall, pessimism is nourished by a tropism.

On the occasion of his exhibition in 1938,³ European critics and artists, among whom I recall Pierre Gueguen, spoke of certain landscapes and new motifs in Segall's repertory as of "Brazilian painting." Cícero Dias and Di Cavalcanti, whether because of understandable artistic rivalry or for serious reasons, disagreed with this qualification. So did I, as a matter of fact. Of course the landscape was really that of Campos do Jordão: the little cows so elegantly transposed onto the canvas were, indeed, part of that stunning scenery.

But why were they not "Brazilian paintings" to us? Were not the well-rendered burnt hues of the mountain vegetation of Campos de Jordão right there, along with its dense and occasionally translucent air? They were. The painter's sure eye made no mistake, nor did the unsurpassed craftsmanship of his hand betray him. To this day, if we stroll through the paths and cliff sides of the Mantiqueira or the Serra do Mar mountain chains and gaze at the tall hills of burning land or tolerate the peaceful oxen and cows grazing in their pastures, the Segallian vision comes to mind. Down the road, in the middle ground, the gentle animals show us only their skinny, dark flanks, like walls or facades. From below and from outside, oxen and cows lose volume and three-dimensionality. In the repertory of our painting, it was Segall who first saw them in this way.

But does the fidelity of the penetrating Segallian vision give us the right to qualify his painting as Brazilian? We do not think so. Any artist endowed with Segall's powerful visuality could have given us an image similar to that bucolic part of our nature, regardless of the highly sensitive quality of Segall's paintbrush—even if he had arrived in that privileged place on that very day.

However, in many regards, Segall brought us more than a so-called Brazilian painting. He bequeathed to us a profound testimony of an entire period of dramatic contemporary events. But even beyond that, his work was an original and moving solo, with the hoarse, warm sonority of a countrified imposter within the universal cacophony. He had a predilection for minor keys and, for this reason, even when he took on the great epic subjects—*Navio de emigrantes* [Emigrants' ship] [1939–41] (see plate on p. 83), *Pogrom* [1937]—he soon transformed them into lamentations.

Generally so extroverted, Brazilian painting will forever be enriched by his art of complete introversion, contained harmonies, and the profound tenderness of the immortal portraits of Lucy.⁴

—Originally published as “Lasar Segall,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), August 6, 1957.

Notes

1. This solo exhibition took place in a rented space sponsored by Senator José de Freitas Valle.
2. Brazilian municipality located in the Mantiqueira mountain range, in the interior of the state of São Paulo, 173 km from the state capital and 1,628 meters above sea level.
3. During this year he had a show in the second edition of the Salão de Maio [May Salon], held at São Paulo’s Esplanada Hotel.
4. The painter Lucy Citti Ferreira was Segall’s student and model for more than ten years. See <http://www.museusegall.org.br/mlsObra.asp?sSume=15&sObra=46>.

Di Cavalcanti

Today is Emiliano di Cavalcanti day. They say it was sixty years ago that he disembarked in improvised diapers from a coaster that had sailed from Paraíba (the state from which his father—a military man—hailed) onto the shores of this old and well-beloved capital.¹ He is therefore a *carioca*. And no one is more of a *carioca* than Di.

He was the first to depict the people of the hills and suburbs where samba was born. Being the most Brazilian of artists, he was the first to feel that there was an intermediate zone between the interior, the farmland, the vast hinterlands, and the avenue, the “civilized center”: the suburb (see plate on p. 82). This is where the true native of the big city lives. He is no longer a country hick, but neither is he yet cosmopolitan. What happens there is authentic, both in origin and in sensibility.

There, Di sought inspiration, when he ceased being the “minstrel of muted tones,” as Mário de Andrade (the author of *Paulicéia desvairada* [*Hallucinated City*; 1922]) called him in the handwritten dedication with which he offered him the book. (Or was it the Mário of *Há uma gota de sangue em cada poema* [There is a drop of blood in every poem]?)² Thus, no Brazilian visual artist ever became Brazilian more suddenly than he. Not even the admirable Tarsila [do Amaral] of the pink and blue and gold period of chests, Saint John’s feast poles, and country dances, for when she discovered the farm she did so via Paris, [Fernand] Léger, and Mexico.

[Heitor] Villa-Lobos has always and from the start been the brilliant serenader we all admired, even now that he has turned seventy. Di Cavalcanti’s roots also lie in the samba and in the serenade. It was not only the mulatto woman that Di discovered; it was also—and this is of crucial importance—the Port of Maria Angu.³ Until then, only the Pharoux and Mauá quays⁴ were known—that is, as real ports that welcomed and shipped people off to foreign parts, a place of gringos and swells.

Maria Angu is different: it is a port, but a suburban one. The journeys made (or planned) to and from there are not faraway journeys, nor do they involve long crossings: they are always tied to the land. The suburbanite adventure occurs not on the treacherous and abstract seas, or between sky and water, but always around the house or the yard, among neighborhood folk. The suburbanite is indifferent to the landscape which he has, in fact, barely left in order to live urbanely; this is why he is suburban. Because he comes from the countryside, nature does not interest him, and he lodges himself at the edge of the city to enjoy certain comforts and effluvia of urban civilization, without losing the comfort, the relaxation, the habit of enjoying, of slowly savoring—that is, with wise sloth and sensuality—life’s pleasures as naturally as possible or modulated especially by the instincts.

In Maria Angu, a port with no sea or horizons, the women, fishermen, boats, and nets gather as in a marketplace. The landscape vanishes to make way for the suburb. Everything in it is picturesque, sweating with life and human sympathy, yet without space, without horizons. It truly resembles a canvas by Di Cavalcanti. Di lives intensely—that is, lazily in the present. He is an extraordinarily lively machine for feeling and perceiving, never for contemplating.

That is the secret of his novelty. Once in Paris, in exile during the untroubled days before the Second European war, when we saw one another every day, I observed that there was never space, never a sense of vastness or atmosphere in his painting. He was then experiencing one of the most successful periods of his art, rich in color, in the formal, optimistic, lyrical plenitude of its subject matter and in the decorative arabesque. Di took note of my observation, and the next day he showed me a new canvas: a beach with a vast contour, a low horizon, and a dense atmosphere of beautiful blue, green, and gray hues. We discussed the picture and Di left, carrying it off under his arm to his *marchand*, who had a gallery in the Rue de Fleurus, in the heart of Montparnasse.

He was disappointed when he returned, though; the dealer found the novelty strange, preferring the warm interiors and exquisite curtains, the sensual and nostalgic women, the flowers and more flowers that the painter had been turning out at that time. The painter did not insist on the experiment, though at the cost of some disappointment to himself and to us. The dealer did not want to take risks, for he knew from experience that Di's old manner always found a buyer.

These days I am inclined to believe that the dealer was right: Di is too commonplace, too sensorial, too materialistic (an appropriate word) for imaginary constructs or environments devoid of direct human presence. Not in vain did he discover spaceless, sealess, horizonless Maria Angu, with its people, barefoot fishermen with thick hands, sweaty women, boats and sails and nets—all full of life, human gravity, obscure heroism, and sin.

—Originally published as “Di Cavalcanti,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), September 6, 1957.

Notes

1. Rio de Janeiro was the capital of Brazil from 1763 to 1960.
2. Mário de Andrade's first book, published in 1917.
3. Maria Angu beach had a harbor through which agricultural products from the interior passed on their way to the city center from the districts of Irajá, Inhaúma, and Campo Grande—all rural areas with problematic access in those days. The beach became a vast landfill, although one of the remaining stretches is the beach currently known as Praia de Ramos.
4. Built during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Mauá and Pharoux harbors were created to transport passengers to other regions of Brazil and abroad. The deteriorated area, which currently houses the Cais do Porto and Praça XV de Novembro, is undergoing a process of architectural and urbanistic reform.

Volpi, 1924–1957

This Brazilian painter, Alfredo Volpi, is more than a *paulista*—he hails from the Cambuci.¹ He was not born in that neighborhood, but in Lucca, Italy, in 1896. When he was eighteen months old, however, his family—an Italian couple with three children—established itself in the Cambuci which, of Paulicéia's old neighborhoods, is among the rare ones to have resisted progress. For this very reason, it largely preserves its former appearance.

His father tried his hand at several small businesses but, in São Paulo as in Lucca, he was never a success. At sixteen the young Alfredo started off in construction work as an apprentice muralist. However, after elementary school, he worked first as a woodcarver, then as a bookbinder. The third profession was ultimately the one that defined him. At the time he was initiated into the profession, the pure Art Nouveau “floral” style prevailed among its masters. The year was 1912.

From the first day that he began to carry pots and buckets of water and whitewash as well as brushes and ladders for his elders, Alfredo Volpi was a conscientious apprentice. He learned how to mix paint and listened attentively to the masters' teachings when they told him to thicken the paint or to make it more fluid, so that the oil might be more smoothly applied. He began early on to deal with walls, to prepare, plaster, and to whitewash them. And his academy was truly the primitive, good school of the wall painter; in no time, the young Volpi was promoted to “decorator;” a title he bore with genuine pride for a long time and which allowed him to take on contract jobs on his own.

In these authentic, simple surroundings in which tradition reigns and the mastery of a good trade is still respected, aesthetic problems are resolved by themselves: every age has its decorative tenets. As we have said, his was the age of Art Nouveau. The subjects never varied, and everything depended on who had put in the work order: if the client were Italian, decoration had to be in the Renaissance style, but if French or Brazilian, it had to be Louis XV, while the Turks could not do without the “Moorish” style. A good contractor, Volpi satisfied his clients to the letter.

Almost nothing remains of these decorations commissioned according to the taste of the period and the customer: the explosive progress of São Paulo razed to the ground most of the homes he had painted. They were old-fashioned villas and small palaces in which the owner, on his way to prosperity, insisted on having wall decorations in keeping with the dwelling's character. Today, arid skyscrapers devoid of fantasy in which space is parsimoniously used stand where those old, almost never beautiful but almost always comfortable and invariably spacious houses once existed. Still, in his old Cambuci we discovered one old house in the Florentine style, where he had decorated the dining room with classical Greco-Roman motifs and a ceiling over a staircase in the Baroque manner, with angels parading across the heavens or leaning over parapets.

Years later, when Volpi, now aware of the existence of the other type of painting, began to distinguish himself as an easel painter, a spiteful Frenchman called him “the decorator from Cambuci.” Volpi paid him no mind. But in its popularly authentic flavor, the title is truly noble. Indeed, before his name became known outside his neighborhood—that is, throughout the cosmopolitan city center, throughout Rio and throughout Brazil, and even abroad—Volpi was already a celebrity in his Cambuci.

He was sixteen when he began to paint at home, for himself. His first notion of “fine arts painting” was to paint for his own amusement on small, cheap canvases, rather than painting for hire on walls that belonged to others. It was then that he suffered

his earliest “influences”: the boy would stroll along nearby streets or neighborhoods, stopping at certain doors or gates to appreciate the landscapes of entrances to homes, terraces, and porches. He found them amusing. Thus, the anonymous painters of those “entrances” were his first masters.

As a matter of fact, this never changed for him: even in his last Geometric-Concretist period the artist refused to separate what belongs to a school from what does not, what is erudite from what is not erudite, what one learns “through teaching” from what is learned without knowing how—from life, let us say.

Even of the geometric forms and subjects of his most recent paintings, he tells us: “You never know where the elements come from.” They come from everywhere, and he makes triangles from weather vanes, circles from cupolas, and rectangles from little paper flags. To this healthy, jovial, happy man with many adopted children, a fine wife, and a cheerful daughter, with dogs and cats that freely cross his threshold through the little gate from his quiet street, life is truly the supreme teacher.

One may search his work for the influence of noted modern or old masters. He surely never opened a foreign art magazine to study photographic reproductions of Picasso, Matisse, Renoir, Van Gogh, or Gauguin. The fact is, he never needed to seek in others the solutions he found, not in himself (he is not pretentious), but around him, in the simple beings that surround him, in children (who, he says, always surprise us), in everyday things and tasks.

For a while, his companion and friend was a popular painter from Itanhaém² called Souza, from whose landscapes Volpi may have learned to separate the essential from the accessory, one hue from another. Often, Souza and Volpi painted together on the beaches of Itanhaém. Souza was a simple man. He died as he started out: a popular painter; today we say a “primitive.” Volpi also continued to be what he had always been—a conscientious, simple craftsman, even now, when his figure looms large and he is on the way to becoming the first Brazilian contemporary painter and is, at any rate, the one who catapulted the medium into the future, where it is achieving a transcendence never before attained in Brazilian art. And he arrives at the extremes of abstract rationalization, so-called Concretist painting, with no loss of wit; under his brush, the most rigorous geometric subjects are sensitized by a use of color that functions with precision, purity, and a luminous vibration tempered by a touch of unmistakably personal lyricism.

When, around 1912, he began to paint “for himself,” Cubism was all the rage in Paris. By 1922, on the occasion of the Modern Art Week³ at São Paulo’s Teatro Municipal, Volpi already had ten years of pictorial experience. However, in the capital’s suburban circles he already shined. No matter how scandalous the manifestations through which modernism made its entrance in the quiet São Paulo of those days—the very same city that Mário de Andrade called *Paulicéia desvairada* [*Hallucinated City*],⁴ in the throes of a literary ecstasy—this may explain why the event went unnoticed by him. Volpi the decorator knew nothing of the existence of those great cosmopolitan names of intellectuals and artists, and they did not know of the existence of the Cambuci’s plebeian glory. Mário de Andrade and Volpi did not meet or appreciate one another until later, when they drank together until they were “plastered.”

To the young Volpi, there were more than two types of painting and no division between modernists and those who live in the past; there was only painting. And when, in the first show in which he appeared with others, his canvases were classified as “Impressionist,” he was surprised. Surely as surprised as M. Jourdain when he was told that he was producing prose.⁵ This took place in 1924, in the old Palácio das Indústrias. Professional colleagues—all of them from “civil construction”—also showed their



Alfredo Volpi. *Composição com uma bandeira* (Composition with one flag). c. 1955–59. Gouache on paper, 15 1/8 × 5 7/8" (38.4 × 15 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

work alongside his. Of the three works shown, one—*Moça costurando* [Young woman sewing]—was acquired by its current owner at a cost of 400,000 réis.⁶ At last, master decorator Volpi was also recognized as a painter. He was then twenty-eight. From that day on, his life began to divide itself into two parts: on one hand, the professional master-muralist; on the other, the individual artist, the easel painter.

The master artificer became aware that he was also an “artist.” But he realized, perhaps with melancholy, that artificer and artist could no longer cohabit within him as they had until now, because the different types of public each of them served were incompatible. The muralist worked for simple men. However rich or comfortably off, many were former artisans or small businessmen themselves, most of them immigrants; whereas the “new” easel painter had to please a completely different, peevish clientele—some of modest means, others who were rich snobs, intellectuals or demanding amateurs with refined, individualistic tastes. In these, “isms” prevailed; in the others, tradition.

The artist that Volpi is today was forged and developed within the world of São Paulo artisans of the beginning of the century. When, for this very reason, he was hailed as a master, he had truly mastered all the techniques of wall and easel painting without having attended a single school, much less any “fine arts” academy. He trained as an artist in the civil construction industry, and then he evolved from the pure manual craftsmanship

of stonemasons and foremen to the level of modern architecture in which those who deal with painter-artists are architects (that is to say, artists as well).

Volpi’s art bears all the marks of this evolution. Throughout the long years of honest, efficient work in the profession, he passed quite naturally (without knowing it) through all the phases of modern painting, from Impressionism to Expressionism, from Fauvism to Cubism, all the way to Abstractionism. If, in his current period—which retains a love of the old materials and, perhaps, a final preference for tempera (not to mention a fondness for the wall itself)—he no longer adapts his art to the artisanal styles of the civil construction of his youth, it nonetheless proves that a painter’s true school need not be the fine arts academy or the specialized school (distant as they are from the world of work and production), but the appropriate industrial apprenticeship of the day. In his development as a painter, Volpi re-created the evolution of the artist, who, upon leaving the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the age of guilds, moved on to the modern age of free trade in which guilds were dissolved and the separation between “fine” and “industrial” arts became definitive.

Nevertheless, having started from the trade of mural decoration, he succeeded in arriving at the apex of modern evolution. Hence, perhaps, his gift for the purity, the

artistic ingenuity, the dramatically precarious and rich manual crafting of his material, even in the most abstract or “concrete” compositions of his latest period.

His working tools and materials, however, are the same as in artisanal production. With them, he was able to see his experiment through to the end. The young men who follow him today must begin at another, far more complicated level: that of modern industry with its mechanical instruments, its new synthetic or plastic materials, so that, with these, they may attain a visuality beyond that of the pure Volpian surfaces with their burning checkerboards or the fascinating diagonals of his *sui generis* “Concretism.”

The current show seeks to impart a sense of the complete works in order to highlight his various periods. It begins with a sort of naive Impressionism and is followed by a Post-Impressionist modality in which the representation of things begins to be subordinated to a need to structure the composition; yet another experience is defined by a certain preference for social themes. The figures are then heavily laid on à la Cézanne, and the almost predominant chiaroscuro disappears little by little to make way for a play of chromatic shades that begin to construct the composition. Impressionist—or atmospheric—landscapes and thematic figures lose their modeling to make way for a painting of colored planes. Finally rid of modeling, color becomes the protagonist of his canvases. Yet here and there somber, mysterious hues and the charged atmosphere of certain old landscapes recall the [Oswaldo] Goeldi of haunted houses and ravens. It is curious, this atmospheric affinity Volpi displays at times with our printmaking grandson of [Edvard] Munch.

Little by little, after the quick experiment with painting still based on volume, the artist banishes every hint of three-dimensionality after realizing that “volume destroys color.” In his artisan’s overalls, the colorist emerges ever more demanding. His planes free themselves from illusionistic convention and become truly concrete on surface planes. The series begins and leads him to the total abandonment of any figurative suggestion. In his seascapes, sea and sky disappear in colored strips, the roofs of houses become triangles, slopes and streets are transformed into rectangles and windows into squares. Lines that previously served as contours of an apparently sloppy and simple though feigned elegance, areas of color or now-autonomous figures, all tend toward linearity, and a delectable graphism appears—ingenuously primitive in flavor yet, at the same time, extremely refined—as if in a calligraphy of “badly drawn lines.”

Volpi disguises his extreme artisanal refinement—and no master of Brazilian painting surpasses him in technical mastery; he is able to paint in all genres and styles, and the old resources of academic painting are familiar to him. He is as capable of giving us a perfectly academic nude as he is of surprising us with an admirably made and technically precise Madonna in the pure flavor of the Italian pre-Renaissance. This outlier from Cambuci is also a creator of the mythical Brazilian mulatto woman, which [Emiliano] Di Cavalcanti inaugurated in our painting. In an evocative suggestion, the children of the owner of *Figura entre cortinas* [Figure among the curtains] baptized it “Nêga Fulô.”

Many still refer to him as a “primitive.” If by this they mean that his affinities lean toward the Italian “primitives,” I agree. But the same is true of the whole of contemporary sensibility, which prefers Giotto to Raphael and the mosaics of Ravenna to the Sistine Chapel.

Neither a “naive” nor a “primitive” painter, what characterizes him is the artisanal humility—the fruit of a profound pictorial knowledge. Nonetheless, he is as pure and simple as a true man of the people. Thus, even as he constructs a fantastic city

with the evocative power of metaphysical painting, he charms us with the childlike flavor of weather vanes, dolls, and puppets. Let it not be said, however, that his painting contains only gay and jovial, ingenuous or popular tones; in certain canvases, such as *Barco* [Boat] (see plate on p. 82) and *Cadeirinha* [Little chair], that magical ability of isolating the object renders an atmosphere as dense as any in a canvas by Van Gogh. There is no point in highlighting this or that quality or surprise in the painter's work, for it is as varied and intense as a river.

In 1950 Volpi, in the company of two painter friends, went to Italy, practically for the first time. He was fifty-four: a fully formed artist who knew what he wanted. There he found confirmation for what he was attempting to do in his own country. He spent thirty-five days in Venice. Yet while his companions remained there doing outdoor paintings of famous landmarks such as the Rialto bridge, Volpi went on fifteen or sixteen private excursions to Padua to contemplate the Giotto in the Scrovegno Chapel. In Arezzo, he discovered Piero della Francesca. But to this day, he confesses with astonishment that, in an exhibition of religious art he attended there, four or five canvases by Magaritoni led him to forget Piero himself! Thus, the "primitive" or popular Volpi is less partial to Piero—the patriarch of the Renaissance—than to an artist of much less renown, and a Byzantine one, at that; one who is even less condescending with regard to the pleasures of sensory matter and pays less attention to detail and realism in his exteriors than the formidable creator of the frescoes in Arezzo's Basilica of San Francesco.

Before going to Italy, his painting was already changing to a rigorous bidimensionality—that is, a painting without pure tonal modeling. On his return, his muralist inclinations were reinforced. Yet, with the exception of the brief but convincing experiment of the little chapel of "the Worker Christ" on the Estrada do Vergueiro [Vergueiro Road] in São Paulo—the result of an initiative by a Dominican friar—our modern architects have not taken advantage of them to this day. However, this is not the painter's loss: posterity can hold them accountable for this scandalous omission.

My *carrioca* brothers, here is Volpi. Thanks to the Museu de Arte Moderna for presenting him. Posterity shall remember his name. He is the master of his age.

—Originally published as "Volpi, 1924–1957," in *Volpi, 1924–1957*, exh. cat. (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, June 1957).

Notes

1. In the early nineteenth century, São Paulo's Cambuci neighborhood was home to immigrants—especially Italians—who labored in the region's factories, where the ideals of anarchism were disseminated.
2. City located on the coast of the state of São Paulo, 90 kilometers from the capital.
3. See Pedrosa's "Modern Art Week," in this volume.
4. Volume of poems by Mário de Andrade published in 1922.
5. A reference to the character Monsieur Jourdain in Molière's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* discovering he had been speaking in "prose" all his life.
6. *Réis* was the name of the Brazilian currency of the period, etymologically similar to the modern-day *real* (pl. *reais*).
7. "Nêga Fuló" refers to a character in the eponymous poem by Jorge de Lima, a slave who seduces her master.

Lygia Clark, or the Fascination of Space

Today, let us speak of other Brazilian painters at the [São Paulo] Bienal. Let us begin with Lygia Clark.¹ First of all, let us emphasize her courage, her audacity, or her “suicidal tendency,” as she calls her wish to signify fidelity to the idea and the artist’s indifference to immediate success.

Some years ago, Lygia discovered a thing she called the “organic line.”² Weary of art as a function of taste or temperament, she became obsessed with the so-called problems of “integrating” the arts. So she became interested in architecture and enchanted by the revelation that, in it, everything has—or should have—its reason for being. There is no architecture in which an idea of entirety—an idea of form finally realized—does not leap out from itself to move us. However, as a painter, she could not accept the role of assistant or complement assigned to her by the architect, when he decides to call a painter or a sculptor to decorate a wall or fill an empty corner space. To her, the painter or sculptor should be called upon to collaborate with the architect on an equal footing, from the floor plan onward. The mural is an unjustifiable survival, and should be replaced by planimetric modulation. This modulation should be achieved through a combination of line and color, and the wall taken not in isolation but as a function of space, of spans, of ceiling, of floor, of the material from which it is made.

Since no concept springs from her brain that is not at least partly a product of the hand and has, above all else, a passion for coherence, Lygia did not rest until she herself learned how to build models to show by example the function of her famous line and of what she understood by integration of the arts. She then came to detest easel painting and, especially, the symbol of its anachronistic privilege—the frame. She took to working with moldable materials and plywood. She sent brushes and oils to blazes, exchanging them for industrial paint, gun, and gas mask. The quadrilateral surface upon which she works must be only one part of the wall, integrated into it by the “organic” line, which delimits the planes, projecting across the divisions of doors and windows, moldings and bars, etc. The “painting” (if it can be called that) is now an organized whole, with parts glued to one another according to a previous drawing and wood that has been sawed, sanded, spackled and pistol-glued onto a base. The grooved line separates large, identically colored planes, or simply separates areas of contrasting colors or values graphically.

At that point in her idea, Lygia had a revelation about [Josef] Albers’s “constellations.”³ She was then making a kind of “painting” that somewhat resembled the relief surfaces of [Hans] Arp, Sofia Teuber-Arp, [Ben] Nicholson, and others. However, her line is no longer content to progress in the center of the modulated surface; instead, cutting it to the edge, it appears to want to project itself outside the limits of the frame and go around it. Her aim was to make even the external space a spatial element of the constructed work. Albers led her back to the concept of the painting—the flat object of an organization that is malleable in itself, and disinterested. Its purpose once more became the picture itself, understood in another way—no longer the famous “integration” of the arts.

The Bienal submission was the ultimate realization of her idea. Some even joked—whether innocently or maliciously—that it was Albers.

Not true; it is pure Lygia Clark, who encountered Albers in the midst of her arduous research. And he, by shortening her path, restored her painter’s consciousness, helping her to better concretize her thankless, difficult, heroic search (despite the skepticism of the majority) of many, many years, during the course of which she had no great success and won no prizes.

When she denied painting and did everything she could to destroy it—or, at least, to confuse it with what is beyond its conventional limits and contours—what Lygia was actually looking for was this new, terribly modern fascination that is space.

Albers's drawings gave her the final revelation of this new (and how old!) formal protagonist. However, despite being fascinated, like all of us, by the beauty of those drawings, the painter immediately distinguished the difference between her idea and that of the old Bauhaus master. For him, everything still takes place within the painting: the dynamic planes, spatial tensions, and strong lines act and balance themselves within a privileged central area, in the traditional manner. For Lygia, this means that the frame around it is preserved in its isolating function. Now, the painting is no longer the so-called neutral setting or circus ring within which the artistic event takes place. This is why even its external borders participate in the event, and thus are sometimes hollowed out and at other times full, so that nothing in it is isolated and everything lives as a single whole. The line both marks the outer margins—in which it digs grooves—and crosses the flat surface from side to side in the subtlest spatial modulations.

The limpid flat edges increase or decrease, advance or retreat, curve slowly or violently like great dynamic shapes. Although they are always orthogonal or angular, these plane-shapes often appear to become curvilinear in a rotary motion.

That is to say, they turn in space. Albers is something else: his movement is always internal—into the painting—and does not give the impression of distorting or disintegrating it. Endowed with strong formal qualities, Lygia's work is personal, although it belongs to Albers's spiritual family, and breathes a monumentality that is rare in these parts. Like a toy to a child or a mirror to a savage, space has the ability to entertain her and arouse her rich, spirited imagination, attuned to modern sensibility. Her submission to the Bienal was the first successful expression of her prolonged creative effort. It is a pity that two of her paintings were cut from the show.

In 1914, the late eminent architecture critic G. [Geoffrey] Scott⁴ complained about the then-generalized lack of sensitivity to new spatial values. "One only notices," he verified with extreme penetration, "what causes sensory reaction."⁵

"Space," he said, is "nothing"—the pure negation of what is solid—and that is why we do not perceive it. But although we cannot perceive or observe it, "space affects us and can control our spirit."⁶ At this stage of the century, with remote-controlled rockets and Sputniks, and after the tremendous visual experiments of aviation during the last war, what dominates our age is vision in motion, and that is why space itself penetrates our senses. In contrast with pure sensory optics, Lygia's current painting reveals space to us as composed of vectors that allow us to have a phenomenologically affective rather than a purely sensorial awareness of it. Hence the interest of her current effort and her contribution to the formulation in our milieu of a new sensibility.

—Originally published as "Lygia Clark, ou o fascínio do espaço," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), November 26, 1957.

Notes

1. At the fourth edition of the São Paulo Bienal (1957), Lygia Clark participated with three works from her 1956 series *Planos em superfície modulada* (Planes on modulated surface), described in a 1958 text by the artist available at: www.lygiaclark.org.br.
2. Clark describes the intention of the organic line as "to deny the painting's relationship within the frame, integrating it within the frame through color." Lygia Clark, "Descoberta da linha orgânica" (Discovery of the organic line), 1954. Available at: www.lygiaclark.org.br. This text was published in *Livro Obra* (1983), an artist's book with an edition of twenty-four copies.

3. Lygia Clark, "Influência de Albers," 1957. Available at: www.lygiaclark.org.br.
4. Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (London: Constable and Company, 1914).
5. Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (Gloucester, Mass: P. Smith, 1965), p. 168. Pedrosa's "quote" is actually a loose paraphrase.
6. Ibid.

After Tachism

Not long ago we visited the fourth edition of the [São Paulo] Bienal. Steeped in a sea of *tachisme*, we were able to confirm our impression while in Europe that, in the romantic manner of the "stains" that developed in chance clusters of the most diverse—or even repugnant—materials, something appeared to be blossoming amid the chaos. And that something was *a will to meaning*.

As we know, Tachism is, essentially, the assumption that within an impulse of the artist's self expression—the more instinctive and uncontrolled the better—a meaning lies hidden. Let us set aside the core of this purely romantic idea and attempt to see how this concealed "meaning" might open itself to our understanding.

The conceit that painting is no longer anything to "see" is somehow predominant in painters of this movement. Details of beautiful matter are right there on the canvas, though not to capture our attention with regard to the whole, the purely subjective experience, or the "message" expressed therein. But if not to "see" the beautiful pieces of painting that may be found in a so-called Tachist canvas, then what purpose does it serve? It is meant to be understood through means other than sight (which many of them hold to be a very "hedonistic" sense!), by abstracting itself (still for the same reason) from the senses of touch and smell, through understanding. So the purpose of painting was to be *read*.

They would have us read the painting they make as one might read a Rorschach test. It has been a long time now since so-called abstract art—the art of [Vasily] Kandinsky, of [Paul] Klee, or of [František] Kupka—revealed a world of as yet unfamiliar images and signs when it presented itself to European eyes for the first time. In its finest moments, Klee's art is an art of signs. Such signs took years—dozens of years—to be deciphered in the West. And once the deciphering began in a given place of our cultural world, it continued successively, in country after country, in one city after another, until it ended up in Paris, the last metropolis to read the signs, understand them, and acclaim them.

But an art of signs is not an art of stains or blots, mere temperamental explosions (in the best of cases), or automatic agglomerations of things, running paint, loose fibers, wire, and what have you mixed upon a canvas. The art of signs is a sort of calligraphy. The successor of Tachism may well be a form of graphism that has become somewhat ubiquitous. Among the finest artists that may be included in this latest movement or trend, it seems that what tends to stand out in those stains—in that tangle of lines or masses—is an order of signs, not yet clearly explained or defined.

However, it was in the Japanese pavilion at the latest Bienal in Ibirapuera that one most clearly sensed where the Tachist wave will break when its last foams of impotence crash upon the beach of experimental saturation. It was there that we came upon a painting of signs that is of the utmost interest to us here in the West. And in no one, in no other artist, is this expression as brilliant and without subterfuge as in the painting of Téchima (Yukei). In him the traditions of Asian—and especially Chinese—

graphism are brought to a refined modern transformation. His *Hókai* (Collapse) is a magnificent sign—its rhythmic/formal impact, linear structure, and cadenced spatial intervals have only been paralleled in the West by [Jackson] Pollock's *The Deep* [1953], an impressive sign that powerfully affects us.¹ Here the formidable American artist, who would be seen as the father of Tachism, elevates himself to a truly significant art for, even without any rhythmic or formal impact, it may be convincingly, though convulsively, read.

—Originally published as “Depois do tachismo,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), January 17, 1958.

Note

1. See Mário Pedrosa, “Calligraphic Abstraction,” pp. 193–94 in the present volume.

Iberê Camargo

An exhibition of Iberê Camargo at the Gea gallery is an event in our artistic circles. Iberê is now showing surprising work in which the explosion of temperament prevails over abundant and eclectically employed pictorial media and resources. The personal experience evinced there is of profound human and artistic interest.

Iberê's personality is one, and whole. His life and character compel respect from those who like his painting, as well as those who do not. Two things stand out in these new canvases: a temperament that asserts itself and a type of painting that disaggregates itself.

To say that his painting disaggregates itself is not to condemn it a priori. One first verifies the phenomenon and immediately one understands that there may well be a beginning in disaggregation. The Salon prize-winning painter Iberê Camargo is an experienced artist, master of an already considerable pictorial oeuvre, profoundly knowledgeable about his métier, and also, with the Gea show, a painter who is just getting started (if nothing else, in an adventure that breaks with everything he has done in the past). In this sense, he is a young painter.

What he shows us with so much eloquence is an initial stage of destruction. Indeed, he is there to quixotically destroy the “old painting,” in the words of [the French painter Auguste] Herbin. And this may be seen in the artist's deliberate will, in his vibrant, intensified desire to make use of the traditional media of painting, or even of academic painting, in the most arbitrary and individualistic manner. Prey to deeply self-destructive and anarchic impulses, Iberê's powerful individuality struggles against established prejudices, against the order of things, and, above all, against the timeless tyranny of objective reality. He no longer believes the natural or compositional order of objects to be necessary, inexorable, or untouchable.

That is why wholeness of personality is not transferred to the pictorial work. On the contrary: it autocratically interferes with it. How to classify his current painting? As a sort of final stage of so-called figurative painting. That is why he insists on choosing the most ordinary, insignificant objects as subject matter—bottles, pitchers, spools (see plate on p. 86). By the quantity and immense size of the bottles, he puts them in a new perspective. However, as this is not given through properly pictorial means—that is, neither geometric nor aerial, but simply quantitatively dimensional—we may then say that it is a matter of a hierarchical scale representing moral, or at least psychological, values. In his canvases, Iberê asserts that nowadays, in his artistic

world, any stroke is as worthy of consideration as—or even more worthy than—the image of a king, the solemnity of a historical act, or any other thing of equal importance.

Nor does the order of presenting things matter to him because, in any case, it suffices that objects be placed in front of him so that he may paint them. Note here the anticompositional desire for rebellion. He also strives to give colors a personal treatment of their own, freeing them from continued naturalist enslavement to local color. And he assigns purples, blues, greens, reds, or yellows to objects or things that are never naturally seen in these hues. He escapes from local color; but how? By changing it from one “local” to another. And so, sometimes, the tone lies not on an atmospheric plane but on a real plane; at other times it is farther in front or farther behind, not according to the greater or lesser distance of certain pictorial spaces, but according to the greater or lesser frequency of the chromatic wave as it reaches the visual organ. Color displaces itself regardless of the painter’s whims, to show him that it, too, will not mold itself to his subjective will.

While a group of his principal characters remain in shadow (like the bottles), others—like the vases, glasses, or oranges—present themselves in light. There is a hierarchy here, based on chiaroscuro contrasts and pure illuminism, that nonetheless conforms to the rules of academic painting. Occasionally a surprising regularity of light sources that comes from traditional apprenticeship can be discerned. What is the reason for such an anachronism in these paintings that aspire to pure expressivity?

Formal values are subordinated here to moral values, and although the artist disproportionately enlarges objects in order to place them before other, smaller ones, and zones of modeling oppose zones of almost flat color, nevertheless their contrasts of shadow and light remain within, let us say, classical or scholastic precepts. What remains of reality, or of reality apprehended—that is, of its aesthetic-pictorial culture—is a radical antithesis between light-dark, shadow-light, life-death. Formerly seductive blends of color spring from there, but only very rarely does the line flow in free arabesques, and the strokes are heavy—sometimes dark, sometimes bright, sometimes simple touches of light—in the academic manner, as contours or planes that are still representational in a somewhat Cubist mode.

Therefore, the artist’s choice is even more of a choice than purity of expression; and for this reason, it is still largely defined by the tricks or resources of traditional painting, in spite of the truculent informality with which he disrespects them or employs them outside of their customary functions. In this dramatic violation of the natural, no integrative vision emerges yet from the chaos, although here and there the pieces of an as yet unborn formal world appear, still undecided as to the internal law according to which it will be ruled, whether it be that of pure form or of rhythm. Indeed, what is lacking amid the tumult is that vital law of rhythm according to which the expressionist or visionary artist, in breaking with the structures of the objective, re-creates the world he destroyed.

Where is Iberê Camargo headed? Toward a type of painting that is entirely deobjectified, as in the case of Tachism? Be that as it may, we must keep a close eye—half hopeful and half apprehensive—on the artist’s development, in which a noble personality clashes with the order of things as well as with the limitations of technique and aesthetics in his own painting.

—Originally published as “Iberê Camargo,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), June 7, 1958.

Milton Dacosta: Twenty Years of Painting

In these twenty years of painting by Milton Dacosta now on view at the MAM [Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro]¹ one may find the entire evolution of modern painting in Brazil. However, it does not contain all of this artist's painting: I refer not to his own past, but to his future.

Dacosta still has a great deal to say to us—much more than he has already said to us, and in such an exquisite way. He advances slowly, not by leaps. On the contrary, he sometimes appears to be backtracking.

However, the logic of his art's internal evolution does not coincide with the logic of external attitudes. And so it is that we may see a “period” of pure abstraction—which we saw on his return to Brazil after his second European sojourn and which earned him the painting prize at the third edition of the São Paulo Bienal²—followed by an entire series of paintings with “figures”: *Cabeça com chapéu* [Head with hat]. Incoherence? Eclecticism? No such thing.

Let us leaf through his albums or portfolios of sketches and drawings. They are freehand exercises almost exclusively devoted to a single theme, resembling those by traditional Chinese and Japanese painters who train their wrists, hands, and brushes indefinitely upon a single subject: birds, clouds, mountains, waves, etc. Dacosta's exercises focus on the figure, specifically the torso or the head. One discovers in them an unimaginable will to discover and exhaust all the most imaginative and absurd variants of contours of what are called “heads” or “faces.” And it is curious to note that even the lines of volutes and arabesques eventually move toward the line that closes the contours, while the line that simultaneously guides and marks the fundamental axes strays from them to finish outlining a profile. Only the pure line, when it very infrequently appears here and there, interrupts the master line, temporarily breaking the contour. However, from it comes the thin shading that appears there.

The virtuoso presents his concert to the great audiences without showing the difficulties, stumbling blocks, and hesitations he has had to overcome; because of this he receives their rapturous and astonished applause, for they have neither seen nor imagined the prodigious manual exercises to which he committed himself until he could appear before the public. It is in these exercises that the virtuoso triumphs over his own nerves and shyness. There is something of the virtuoso in Dacosta. The painter does not appear in this state of preparation; only the draftsman does—the virtuoso of the line.

In his current figurative sketches, the artist, like a classical painter, starts from the model of the human body's articulation with geometry, with the geometric symbol. However, in his early work the process was exactly the opposite. Before the perceptive visual image, his mind was populated by a disciplined geometry. This is why it may be said that the painter's initial attempts are ultimately like a tuning of strings before a recital. Despite the fine pictorial qualities in many of his works of that period, his personality was still barely budding.

Those albums are highly revealing of Milton Dacosta's creative process. In them, we note the constancy with which the artist includes or inscribes his faces or heads, even the ones with unusual and whimsical forms and regularly orthogonal structures or parabolic curves. Yet one cannot help but admire the arabesques that the line makes in these improvisations, or its free progress, independent of the artist's will. However, it is not interrupted because the arm is tired or because it has exhausted itself by the end of the unraveling, when the figure is concluded. It is broken several

times before this, especially in the functional connections of corporeal articulation, thus denoting that their movements are, ultimately, controlled by the draftsman.

A question arises when one has finished leafing through the albums: when is it the turn of color—that is, painting? Probably when the draftsman has been sated. Linear exuberance is then contained and color has permission to appear. Indeed, it appears only when the artist's exhausted hand has paused or his satiated spirit has made it stop. One might say that there is a preliminary spiritual settling down, like calm returning to a nervous man, and conditions of serenity then favor the artist's putting aside the pencil used in meticulous linear notes and picking up the paintbrush. The process of pictorial elaboration is made up of slow, sure, patient drawing—labor not unlike that of a mason who lays brick upon brick until he has finished building a wall.

To Dacosta, drawing is one thing; painting is another. With drawing, he asserts himself; with painting, he hides. He speaks through the line with extraordinary stylistic precision, virtuosity, and boldness, and at times he achieves a mundane elegance; through color, he retracts and grows silent. Let us examine the painter's work of the period following that of the *cafés* and the early groups (*Ciclistas* [Cyclists], *Piscina* [Swimming pool]) (see plate on p. 87). We are referring to the period of self-portraits for which, as a matter of fact, he was awarded the foreign travel prize by the modern art Salon.

It is the earliest and already most forthright—albeit still naïve—manifestation of the artist's personality, with painstaking, flat draftsmanship, although he is still using modeling and substantial materials. The painter presents himself with petulant, almost exhibitionistic, elegance.

The now acclaimed Milton Dacosta was the first artist in Brazil to have started with Cubism or, rather, with the Cubist revolution's repercussions on our provincial shores. He was also the first to be innocently—that is, inevitably—educated in the atmosphere of the fashionable “school of Paris,” despite his having only left this country much later. In fact, some of our modernist elders had left Brazil, already aware that they needed “modernizing” in Paris, in the ateliers—as well as the *cafés*—of Montparnasse and Montmartre.

As a much younger man, Dacosta “went” to the “school of Paris” . . . by frequenting the environs of the Escola de Belas Artes [School of fine arts] and the few remaining *cafés* on the Avenida Rio Branco.³

From this period of 1939 to 1940, he bequeathed to us some canvases that are still interesting to this day for their essentializing of formal values, their contempt for anecdotal detail so that only what defines the environment is retained, and, above all, for the way they indicate the atmosphere—their principal subject matter. There is a remarkable workmanship that already knows how to mark the composition's important points, neglecting other parts with only a few small touches on a grisaille background. The schematization of form—especially the absence of physiognomic detail in the ovoid heads—is reminiscent of [Amedeo] Modigliani. Truly, these canvases exude a “school of Paris” air.

One of the painter's most typical features is that he was never fond of naturalistic outpourings. Even his initial subjects were never related to ecology, to compelling sentimental environments, or to the nostalgia for childhood that is so visible, for example, in [Candido] Portinari, who clearly influenced him for a while (from 1942 to 1943): details of clouds and hills in the background, landforms, tricks of linear perspective, as in *Roda* [Wheel] or in *Composição* [Composition]. The latter signals a new moment in the artist's evolution. Here Milton discovers the poetry of metaphysical painting, although he really did not know where to find it yet and, for this reason, looked for it only externally in the perspectival spaces of [Giorgio] de Chirico, with

their strangely isolated objects, upon a sort of platform that seems even bigger and more filled with suggestions because of the artificially projected shadows; with their living mannequins, etc. At any rate, Dacosta was eventually infused with the spirit of metaphysical poetry, which may be listed among the contributions that have weighed most heavily in his visual imagination.

Folklore is never to be found in him (past or future). As far as we know, he never painted popular scenes of either the country or the city, with, for example, soccer matches (which he nevertheless greatly appreciates). Even his cyclists or, especially, the swimming pool denizens that are the subject of one his most ambitious canvases of the period, are reduced to isolated coloristic planes in which what is perceived above all else is the artist's effort to draw formally daring positions for his figures. There are no "naturalisms" or "realisms," even when the painting depicts an anecdotal subject of sorts. The only naturalist touches that are openly found in his work translate as certain elements of a sentimental order: in his preoccupation with the sad black eyes of some of the small figures in his post-café period, or much later on, in the famous *Alexandre*, during the period of the paired heads, the polyhedric heads, the rugby-ball heads.

And, indeed, although he was born in Niterói—where, at the age of fourteen, he studied drawing with a German who was teaching how to draw grid-method portraits of the movie stars of the day (he won his earliest forums as an "artist" by successfully making portraits of Gloria Swanson and Buster Keaton using that ingenious process)—he brought nothing with him from there. He was never suburban⁴ or regional, like [Alfredo] Volpi, Portinari, or Tarsila [do Amaral]. Early on—very early on—he crossed the bay and came to the capital.⁵ And on the fringes of the Escola de Belas Artes, where he had just enrolled as a student, he served his apprenticeship in the many courses and subcourses that flourished in those parts. The subjects he finds arresting are modern, "academic" (because of his irrepressible classical vocation), or Impressionist, a thousand leagues from social or regional sentimentalisms, from the emerging forms of anecdotal Brazilianness, or the suburban picturesque. Thus his education was that of a true city boy—sensitive, smart, clever, a voracious assimilator of the "civilization" of streets and cafés, that veritable natural incubator of every artist, "school of Paris," the effluvia of which he absorbed there.

It might be said that Milton began to favor the assimilation of Cubism to a greater or lesser degree. If Cubism can actually be defined (and it can be, in certain aspects) as the employment of a simulacrum of objects that lack three-dimensionality and yet are connected to surrounding space within an integral unity, the young Milton's paintings of group figures are merely a sort of para-Cubism. For the isolated figures, the meager space, and the neutral ground (*Ciclista* [Cyclist]), a clumsy representation of the earthy plane—they contain no integral unity of compositional parts. In fact, though, this entire period ultimately did not come directly from Cubism but, instead, from an indirect source—much more literary than visual—to which we have already referred: that is, from the metaphysical painting of De Chirico, who enjoyed such a great vogue in Brazil among such modernist intellectuals and painters as Portinari, [Alberto da Veiga] Guignard, Tarsila, and others who were linked to them.

Among the younger painters, Milton was the one upon whom metaphysical suggestion exercised the greatest seduction. Only much later would he be able to unite—to connect—object and space to one another, fusing them in a single visual event.

In the preceding period, figures were ambiguously situated within strong, sharp contours and accents of light, with a timid chiaroscuro process unfolding in the internal areas. In his canvases, object and space openly antagonize one another.

This antagonism is clear in the compositions of the period. They lack the contiguity needed for the entire unique, formal arrangement. But he would find for himself the truly assimilated Cubist solution. This can be seen in the so-called “sweethearts” period or the *Alexandre* period that is so important to his work, for within it nearly all the important elements in his painting would develop or germinate. He conquers the space-object antagonism, projecting the limits of the latter into the surrounding space. Indeed, in this period, the wet outlines of his figures—usually so sharp and continuous—either exude shadows or occasionally break open like ripe pomegranates (*Alexandre*, 1949; *Mulher de verde* [Woman in green], 1951; *Natureza morta* [Still life], 1949) so as to make way for a few timid stains (or, with time, evenly colored planes).

During the period of his admiration for Modigliani, one already felt that, to Milton, perceptual awareness is dependent or secondary. That is to say, a geometric formalization inserted itself between it and external reality. This geometric model appears to have been indispensable in his early group compositions or scenes. It gave his compositions structure, chiefly by fixing the figures in their initial isolation, balancing them, marking local space for them, and creating backgrounds that would be covered in color, usually flat tints, sometimes singing out, sometimes receding between bright yellows and sentimental blues. In time, the painter slowly abandons the geometric a priori, and as mastery of the line is refined, he surrenders to his own inventions of schemes for articulating the human body. At this moment, the lesson of Cubism and of Picasso’s distortion is very precious to him. Starting from these arbitrary corporeal schemes, without resorting to the a priori modules of classical geometry, he concludes his figurative compositions in geometric syntheses or suggestions with a powerful generalizing potential. Looking back, we can now see the figurative aspect of his work—if one may say so, it was always a prefiguration; that is, a judgment of reflexive life. Armed with his freely diagrammed bodies, he gave us a whole rich series of human figures, isolated or in pairs—above all, young women and the mysterious (and prophetic) boy Alexandre (whose picture he found in the street one day, and which remained fixed in his mind like an obsession). By virtue of its assured planar composition, its aristocratic beauty of line, and the extreme lyricism and refinement of the color scheme, this was the period that definitively established his fame as a painter.

In setting aside the initial preperceptive geometric scheme (his “academic” apprenticeship) in order to adopt the human corporeal articulation that is the fruit of the line’s virtuoso findings, what he was seeking in aesthetic terms was to endow his figurative storytelling with abstract—that is, universal—value. But although it is free and, so to speak, spontaneous, the second schematization is soon saturated as well. Then comes the period of pure abstraction, which is no longer conditioned to previous strategies, but perhaps to the artist’s soliloquy with himself or, rather, a dialogue between him and his double, the other (who may be an imaginary spectator), in a state of nonsensorial plenitude. As a variation on the human body scheme, the artist—while intensifying the experience of Cubism—deconstructs the objects into purely formal parts, arranging them upon the pictorial plane so that they may achieve a rhythmic succession. He then goes on to construct the purest still lifes in Brazilian painting. His bottles, vases, pots, and cups are flattened upon the surface of the canvas, and what remains of them are wonderfully outlined and intertwined planes; more than that, dimensional relationships of fascinating proportions, purely formal speculations that achieve their zenith in the brown and cream-colored *Natureza morta sobre trilhos* [Still life on tracks; 1954]—a masterwork of our painting.

In a—so to speak—inevitable succession, he moves from these still lifes to another successful series that won him the grand prize for Brazilian painting at the third [São

Paulo] Bional. This is the period of castles and cities, in which the planes of the still lifes are reduced, brought closer to one another, transformed into squares and rectangles piled up in the center of the canvas, within a vivid chromatic variation. In these paintings a new element emerges in Dacosta's work: an optical game, produced here by the small rectangular planes that advance and recede before the spectator even as the uniquely colored background remains serenely enchanted. In some of these canvases these contradictory elements rend the unity of the surface or threaten to collapse it. As an interesting contradiction to the painter's procedure, the "crescent" gouaches should be characterized as a decorative intermezzo in the painter's march toward his later severe purifications. However, their existence is worth recording, for they show a Dacostian painting made with something akin to the freedom of his drawings.

Ultimately, the painter's point of departure was always abstraction. In this sense, he is really a son of Cubism. His eye does not fall upon a perception that drives him toward the easel. When he paints, it is as if he were positioning himself in front of some distant panorama bathed in real clarity.

His motionless gaze upon an equally motionless object. If the gaze then functions, it does so in the sense not of perceiving but, perhaps, of evoking; evoking (who knows?) something akin to a timid—or, rather, tacit—invitation of extreme subtlety, to a phenomenon on this or that side of vision, a tactile phenomenon. There are no objects in front of the artist. Thus there is no visual perception as such. But did not [Kazimir] Malevich discover "sensibility" in the "absence" of the object? However, where could this sensibility be other than in space? Thus, it is space that, in the last analysis, brushes up against the artist's existential consciousness—if not his sensitive soul—with an imperceptible hand. It is in this instant that he becomes aware of a need to mark that ideal space with an equally ideal line: the basic, vaguely present abstract horizon line, upon which the artist supports himself in order not to stumble. At this level, a horizontal ideal takes on the existence of a phenomenon.

However, one such planimetric event takes place inside the empty space (or the homogeneous panorama) where perception becomes increasingly rarefied, like the atmosphere in interplanetary travel—for which Dacosta is, in fact, imagining the beings that will inhabit his latest pictures. (Although among these, figural ambivalence also interferes, transforming some of the parabolic heads into chalices, crosses, or religious ritual objects.) Once the basic horizontal line has been found again, it is almost inevitable that the faraway spirit of Mondrian would emerge in the sky to contradict it, fixing it vertically. Dacosta then cuts it, creating irregularities in it—small, subtly modulated vertical bars: time has descended upon space.

It is the period of the great monochromatic rectangles upon which the spirit of Renaissance proportion blows with innocent purity (see plate on p. 87). However, the sensorial stimuli did not disappear from these vast spaces: painting, not geometry, keeps watch over them. Are they planes of color? No, they are planes of *matter*. But—and here, I believe, lies another one of the painter's most characteristic features, the one that makes him modern rather than "modernist"—he never made the Cubist transition from the material to the textural. For in this regard, instead of clinging to the lesson of Cubism, he fixes upon the example set by Morandi, and the material that he puts into his great planes with the patience of a monk and the passion of a loner is nothing but shadows, footsteps, and moisture. This is why color is a substance as well as an adjunct to form, which imbues it with meaningful silence and an invitation to contemplation. Above all, what Dacosta wants is that the "other" for whom he makes the painting will gaze at it with the contemplative persistence with which one gazes at the distant reaches of the incommunicable horizon.

—Originally published as “Milton Dacosta—Vinte anos de pintura,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), June 27, 1959.

Notes

1. Milton Dacosta, *Pintura e desenho: 1939–1959*, exh. cat. (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, July 1959).
2. Pedrosa was part of the jury of the third edition of the São Paulo Bienal (1955).
3. Construction of the Avenida Rio Branco (formerly the Avenida Central) was the principal accomplishment of the urban reform carried out by Francisco Pereira Passos during his term as mayor of Rio de Janeiro (1902–06). The Biblioteca Nacional (National Library), the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes (National Museum of Fine Arts), and the Teatro Municipal (Municipal Theater) buildings are all located on this avenue.
4. Pedrosa’s use of the adjective *suburban* in Brazilian Portuguese should not be read as synonymous in any way with the American sense of the suburb as a place of wealth, privileged housing, well-manicured lawns, etc. Instead, it describes the suburb as the countryside of the poor and has connotations of idyllic simplicity.
5. Guanabara Bay separates the cities of Niterói and Rio de Janeiro.

Advantage of the Primitives

The other day we noticed how there was a growing predominance of subjects that are not organic or human; that is, they involve scenes and actions—with their inevitable literary or theatrical associations—that are unnatural, fabricated, artificial, or constructed. Such scenes still abound and, once again, demonstrate how an academic mentality permeates or clouds the environment in which a more contemporary art of general sensibility develops. However, let us compare the respective scenes of set designers and scenarists such as Mr. Malagoli¹ or the Messrs. José Morais,² Fernando R., and Rescala,³ with their washerwomen, to Djanira [da Motta e Silva] and even Elisa Martins [da Silveira] (see plates on pp. 88 and 89), and we shall see the distance that intercedes between an authentic visual sensibility and pastiche, blot, or mere technique.

In its purity and its freshness, the art that is now called “primitive” retains the primal sensibility as a driving force. Two factors are inherent to this authentic, untainted sensibility: the freshness of the sensorial reactions, which translates into joy or astonishment before images of the world of perception, and the ingenuous desire for an ideal order that rules the world, which translates as a generalized love of symmetry and the need for a utopian concept of the universe. The naive artist would have the world be pure, colorful, beautiful, or tragic, albeit according to his orders or his image. However, in Djanira the sense of order already transcends the ingenuousness of primal perception in order to become increasingly more malleable. Djanira is not a primitive painter, because even now, her work is the result of a meeting point between her naive view of things and a visual awareness that is even austere.

In Elisa, visual organization is less pronounced than in Djanira, for her pictorial structures are constructed through beautiful color contrasts (the visual element) and meaningful details filled with humor. In *Irene no céu* [Irene in heaven], she begins to change her process, and color here tends to aerate itself, to fill spaces, to model, to the detriment of clearly outlined areas, of contrasting color planes and linear and parageometric construction.

Milton Ribeiro⁴ bases himself on a detail of Elisa and on the contrast of small color planes, but without her sense of fantasy, whose origin might lie in the genial [Alfredo] Volpi-like creation of facades and houses.

Marques de Sá⁵ may be more primary than primitive, and his painting is bad, but his bad taste is splendid. Here is yet another soul seduced by the order of symmetry and by clear surfaces that flaunt themselves in the sun, casting no shadows. Everything about him is decorative, really printlike, including his graphic sense and use of color. And yet he is someone—a popular artist.

Whereas painters who attend schools—erudite ones (as they were called in the old days) as opposed to popular ones—lose a sense of form and a sense of color in exchange for procedures of pictorial technique, brushwork, modeling, chiaroscuro, material, tonality, etc., the so-called primitives preserve both a sense of form, which may be poor but is always present, and a sense of color, which may even be in bad taste but is rich and pure. This is why painting is a vital experience to them, and a scholastic thing or exercise to most others.

—Originally published as “Vantagem dos primitivos,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), July 27, 1959.

Notes

1. Ado Malagoli was part of the Núcleo Bernardelli.
2. José Machado de Morais was an assistant to artist Candido Portinari.
3. João José Rescala was part of the Núcleo Bernardelli.
4. Milton Ribeiro was a member of the Guignard Group and taught at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro's Escola de Belas Artes (School of Fine Arts).
5. Marques de Sá was awarded the Travel Prize at the fifteenth edition of the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna (1966).

The Two Positions; or, Pollock and Vedova

Throughout the world, international exhibitions continue to be held and prizes awarded, especially to young artists and painters. At this very moment, news comes to us of Italy's Lissone prize. Brazil once took part in this show, and it was only by a hair that Milton Dacosta missed taking the grand prize, for the entirely foreign (and, of course, predominantly Italian) jury hesitated between him and [Renato] Birilli.

Now Emilio Vedova, currently the subject of a large exhibition at the São Paulo Bienal,¹ has won the grand prize (see plate on p. 90). He is the new Italian artist who does not interrupt the continuum that extends from Futurism to the current abstract, though tempestuous, idiom. For a long time now I have considered him to be one of the most representative names in contemporary Italian painting. On February 11, 1958, in an article titled “O signo no ocidente” [The sign in the west],² following another one in January of the same year that we reprinted last week under the title “After Tachism,”³ we wrote: “These days, in spite of the decadent intermezzo of *tachisme*, the inspiration behind the most significant current in contemporary painting is predominantly graphic.” And we quoted [German-French painter Hans] Hartung, “who gave us signs that were magnificent by virtue of their depth of evocation and their expressive strength,” but today, we added, “appear to have reached a stalemate, floundering between the ancestral purity of the sign and the so-called cultural or social need to overcome it.” We also quoted [French artist Pierre] Soulages, because “he came from Hartung” and because “at least he bases his painting on a ritual that contains elements of the creative process of the sign.” However, by virtue “of his deep concern with problems of a visual order and of pictorial technique proper,” etc., we recognized that he was not a true graphic artist and much less a *tachiste*, for “he does

not surrender with abandon to the arm's first movement or to loose physical gesture. He corrects his initial impulse, the rhythm of his own arm . . . since he no longer recognizes any creative work that results from the mere product of chance . . ."

And, finally, we quoted Vedova, whose painting, I said at the time, "is so signographic that it nearly eliminates color." The validity of such painting lies in its signification, in its power to foreshadow, especially when we locate it within the curve that begins at the still figurative and anecdotal dynamism of Italian Futurism—in all of its naive progressive optimism—and moves through the Russian Rayonnism of [Mikhail] Larionov and [Natalia] Goncharova (of whose work F.G. [Ferreira Gullar] published excellent reproductions in this paper's Saturday supplement)⁴ and, one step ahead of Futurism, abandons the puerile anecdote to achieve an abstract dynamic essentialism, arriving at today's dynamic spatial sign impregnated by a tragic world view.

It is a large step from the provincial, "modernist" optimism of the Italian Futurists to the revolutionary, nonrepresentative spatial dynamism of the Russians. But one generation later, what appears to be most analogical to those movements is [Jackson] Pollock's⁵ no longer social—albeit dissociated from individualist despair—gesture, or the celebratory gesture of Vedova. Pollock becomes hopelessly entangled in gesture itself like a soldier of war in the barbed wire of trenches, while Vedova—still constrained to a certain typically Italian sense of monumentality—manages, for this very reason, to detach himself from the situation in order to transfigure it into a picture of universal destruction. Devoid of perspective, the American artist does not succeed in creating a distance between his ego and reality, between the world and his vision and his work: hence his entanglement in it, *unwillingly transformed into an actor*. Consequently—and logically—he ends up destroyed within his own story, within his own machinery. However, the Italian painter manages to preserve the distance between his art and the world, and is never an actor, in order to be only a witness—a sharp, conscious, pathetic witness.

Western artists who consciously surrender to the experimental extremes of our time are situated between these two positions. That is because they all express this "unhappy consciousness" of which Hegel speaks, and which so clearly characterizes the minds of our age. Aside from these, any other attitude is inauthentic, promotional, hedonistic, and, if it's a game, it's truly a game—or a pure adventure with no strings attached.

—Originally published as "As duas posições, ou Pollock e Vedova," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), November, 1959.

Notes

1. Emilio Vedova participated in the first, second, and fifth editions of the São Paulo Bienal (1951, 1953, and 1959).
2. *Jornal do Brasil*, February 11, 1958.
3. See "After Tachisme," pp. 288–89 in the present volume.
4. Ferreira Gullar, "Etapas da arte contemporânea XX," *Jornal do Brasil, Suplemento Dominical* (Rio de Janeiro), November 7, 1959. The images published in the article and mentioned by Pedrosa are Larionov's *Portrait of Tatlin* and *Rayonnism* (both 1911) and Goncharova's *Electricity* (1910–11).
5. At the fourth edition of the São Paulo Bienal (1957), the special Jackson Pollock room presented some twenty-nine drawings and thirty-four paintings, including *The Flame* (1934–38); *The She-Wolf* (1943); *Guardians of the Secret* (1943); *Pasiphaë* (1943); *Gothic* (1944); *Shimmering Substance* (1946); *Cathedral* (1947); *The Deep* (1953); *Easter and the Totem* (1953); and *Search* (1955), among others.

The Significance of Lygia Clark

The remarks one hears most clearly nowadays while strolling through exhibitions and shows in the most diverse European countries—starting with the principal show, the Venice Biennale—concern the decadence of sculpture. Given that the arts are currently suffering from a generalized exhaustion, the phenomenon appears all the more emphatic in sculpture, and I believe that the most important reason for this phenomenon is its total loss of autonomy. If Cubist sculpture proved unable to hoist itself in creative power to the height of painting, it was because it generally sought to follow closely upon the discoveries—and above all, the inventions—of painting. The proof is that since [Constantin] Brancusi, the greatest sculptors of the first half of the twentieth century did not originate with Cubism. Look at [Naum] Gabo or, especially, [Antoine] Pevsner and [Hans] Arp, who from the beginning were the initiators of Constructivism or of Dadaism, respectively. They had little or nothing to do with Cubism.

Today they are unanimously considered by European critics to be the master sculptors of the century. And already we see that sculpture has begun to decline ever since it veered off course (or off the course set by those trailblazers) and returned to following the tracks of painting—a painting reduced, moreover, to self-expression, extreme subjectivism, and capitulation or total submission to the material. Sculpture once again has come to imitate painting in this anxious search for material and for expressive subjectivity. Today, the result is imprinted upon the Venice Biennale where, with the exception of [Pietro] Consagra in Italy, or of others here and there, what presents itself as sculpture is deplorable. (The Biennale jury itself confirmed this by refusing to award the grand prize for sculpture, only making things worse by transferring the prize in question to a painter such as Mr. [Jean] Fautrier.)

Everything that may be deemed new or worthy of consideration in the sculpture currently being made in Europe is inscribed either as a return to Constructivism, along the lines of a Pevsner, or as an effort of invention, along the lines of motion inaugurated by the Calderian revolution. Among those who work with pure expressivity there is tremendous weariness because, as they slowly return to figuration, they limit themselves to highlighting details of conventional expression, of purely representational allusion. Not to mention the English post-[Henry] Moore group that seemed so promising some years ago and currently appears to have exhausted itself in the work of [Eduardo] Paolozzi—the youngest among them, who has a large show at the Biennale. In France there is the case of César, who, despite his physical strength, surrendered the power to shape his work to the machine: he currently resorts to a hydraulic crushing machine in order to gather or join together old auto bodies, bits and pieces, scrap iron, tubes, cans, wires—all of it in a powerful polychromatic amalgamation of apparent structures that he calls *balles* or sacks of compressed cotton. These blocks of compressed scrap metal are a complete novelty in French sculpture: this is impressive stuff. But to what degree is the artist the creator of the work in these cases?

Lygia Clark's discovery is a profound one, and, because it is a discovery, it is the result of a lengthy period of research by the artist herself. We will not trace her evolution here, from when she broke the picture frame, went on to integrate it into the rectangle, and later, with the *Superfícies moduladas* [Modulated surfaces], broke with the very notion of the painting and began to construct juxtaposed or overlaid planes, until she arrived at the *Constelações* [Constellations] suspended on the wall; the *Contra relevos* [Counter-reliefs]; and the current *Casulos* [Cocoons], in which a basically

planar surface allows planimetric developments to be erected upon it along with spatial variations that, in turn, seem to evolve within an ideal spatial interior delimited by the same basic surface. She usually says that her current Bichos [Critters] fell—as do real cocoons—from the wall onto the floor. By 1957, Lygia was rebelling against the serial form of Concretism in her notebooks, calling it “the false way of dominating space,” because it prevented the painter from “doing so in a single stroke.” And she wrote, with astonishing clarity and foresight: “The work (of art) must demand immediate spectator participation and he, the spectator, must be thrown into it.” She is a visionary of space, like all true modern artists (in their Constructivist Manifesto, during the century’s second decade, Gabo-Pevsner had already declared “the unshakable conviction that only spatial constructions would touch the heart of the future human masses”);¹ refuting a purely optical vision, she longed for the spectator to be “thrown into the work” that he might feel all the spatial possibilities suggested by the work acting upon him. “I am seeking,” she said, in a profound intuition of future work, “to compose a space.”

Thus even then, she posited a sculptural problem. Like the concept of reality, the concept of space has undergone a profound change in our time. These are no longer static or passive concepts, in either the literal or even the kinetic sense, or in the subjective sense. It is not a matter of a contemplative space, but of surrounding space. As far back as 1922, in the footsteps of Gabo and Pevsner, [László] Moholy-Nagy and Alfréd Kemény² launched a manifesto about the system of dynamic-constructive forces that involve “the activation of space” so that man, “hitherto merely receptive in his observation of works of art, experiences a heightening of his own faculties, and becomes himself an active partner with the forces unfolding themselves.” And, with the integrity and modesty of his inventive genius, Moholy recognized that the first projects were only “experimental demonstration devices for testing the connections between man, material forces and space.” Next, or further on, he added, “comes the use of experimental results for the creation of freely moving” (free from mechanical and technical movement) works of art.³

We now see that Clark’s current works insert themselves perfectly within that potential perspective outlined nearly forty years ago by one of the century’s great masters of experimental art. And everything indicates that these works by the Brazilian artist, like those by artists from the United States, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Japan, etc., who follow in a parallel direction, are opening up a new path that will most likely be the one the development of art follows to the end of this century.

Lygia’s spatio-temporal constructions—like, for example, the works of a José Rivera (although on another level)—are an art not only of expression, but also of rigor. Actually, César’s *balles* belong more to the hydraulic crushing machine than to the artist, whose behavior is akin to that of a stoker fueling a boiler. He selects whatever materials and throws them into the machine for compression and amalgamation.

Powerful as the result may be, it was molded by a machine. Only the idea remains the artist’s. With Lygia, the idea was not born suddenly, but over many years of patience and tenacity that occasionally seemed to be suicidal. And when the idea came to light, crystallized, it seemed so natural it was like a discovery. Her point of departure is always a preexisting structure, and the first of her Bichos emerged directly from the lozenge-shaped *Contra relevo*. But that first work does not lie flat on the floor, on the plane, like the very image of all virtualities, and still has a privileged initial form. For this reason it possesses certain classical features of sculpture, in spite of a hinge (a revolutionary invention) that joins two planes, and two folding, clinched parts that do not move. A central axis presides over the movement of the



Mário Pedrosa looking at one of Lygia Clark's *Bichos* in the 1961 São Paulo Bienal. Photograph by Thomaz Farkas. Instituto Moreira Salles Collection

planes. Soon afterward, Lygia approached the circle as a natural evolutionary step—a central axis and a circular plane that revolves around the vertical axis. This work has the mythical dignity of a sundial—a marker of time.

From there, evolution occurs in the sense of an increasing structural complexity in which squares are linked to triangles, squares to squares, squares to circles, etc. Within this complexity the works become progressively individualized as movements and counter-movements, tending to expand here toward their extremities or there inward, in search of a central cell resembling that of the convergent or back/front symmetry of living organisms. This is not the place for an analysis or detailed examination of these movements and the predicted spaces they create, the shadows they cast, the reflections they create, the luminous irisations that appear as opened invaginations, the anticipated spatial visualizations, the time-space virtualities they suggest. Whereas the earliest works still contained a certain predominance of sculptural space, others already possess spatial, architectural value combined with sculptural space.

It is worth recalling that the now famous Gabo-Pevsner Constructivist Manifesto, in its consideration of kinetic motion in its relations with the spectator, recognized that time, a factor of emotion, transformed itself into the very substance of the constructions as a figurative element of the sculptural material. And, as a result of the forms' evolutions in space, "it only took the spectator's simple movement around the work for apparently elliptical forms to become circles, for squares to become cubes, etc." Now, in Lygia, it is the work that moves—no longer exclusively the spectator moving around it. And this is where a considerably significant spatial difference imposes itself, for when it is the spectator who moves, space is undoubtedly more architectural; but when the work moves, space is intensified with the notion of time, creating a new relationship that goes beyond mere sculptural space. (As in [Georges] Vantongerloo, who sought to capture motion within the sphere; or [Alexander] Archipenko in some of his movable paintings and sculptures; or Brancusi, creating rotating bases for his *Leda* and his *Fish*; Joost Schmidt, with his lines⁴ in search of the space-time potential of torsions; and even in [Alberto] Giacometti, not to mention [Alexander] Calder.) But what is specifically architectural about Lygia's *Bichos* that move, or—more precisely—stir when provoked by the spectator? The planes? The spaces that open themselves up or are projected, the polyhedric angles that are articulated? No; above all, it is the spaces that are created and imagined, although they are beyond the reach of our direct vision. Thus, these works participate in all spaces—from the sculptural to the architectural, from the architectural to the strictly kinetic.

To many, however, these Bichos (what a vulgar name!)⁵ are not sculptures; they may not even be works of art (this doubt had already been raised following the appearance of Calder's mobiles). In our time, such an objection has become increasingly academic or anachronistic, because in light of the ever more pronounced crisis of the traditional arts of painting and sculpture, genres no longer present the old delimitations (painting tending toward sculpture, sculpture imitating painting) and things are born at each new moment; hybrid objects are invented which appear to indicate that art, as we have known it until now, is in a transitional state, like a chrysalis. Be that as it may, the objection is a superficial one. There are also insinuations to the effect that it is a game in which the creator-artist has only the smallest participation, since it is up to the spectator to intervene in order for the work to undergo new transformations, so to speak, by chance. In fact, this insinuation is false. Lygia's Bichos live precisely because they join together an occasionally organic expressive power and a mathematical spatial dynamism. The severe structures that serve as their starting points predetermine the spatial variations, distortions, and transformations that take place as a result of the spectator's gesture. It is not only the metamorphoses that are predetermined, but also the characteristics of each group. This art is actually ruled by certain mathematical laws perfectly inserted within group theory.

Let this frighten no one. As we know, mathematics has never been separate from the arts. And many of today's so-called informal [Art Informel] artists are not ashamed to claim mathematical contributions for their art, especially when they appeal to its authority in order to paint what they call discontinuous structures.

It has not been too long since, at a symposium in honor of [art historian Heinrich] Wölfflin's eightieth birthday, Andreas Speiser—one of the eminent collaborators at the tribute ([and a scholar] who dedicates special attention to group theory in the artwork of the past)—offered considerations of great interest regarding the problem. What is particularly remarkable when one studies groups is that, among other possibilities, theory is able to deduce the symmetry of planes and space a priori. "The artist," says Speiser, "is not the creator of the work; like mathematicians, he discovers it in an ideal inner world."⁶ In the same study he analyzed the ornamental art of the Arabs from the perspective of group theory. He tells us that, whereas in other arts the effects of symmetry appear unconsciously (or remain unperceived), this is not so in Arabic art. There one must follow a line that extends itself, contracts, conceals itself within multiple tangles, plays, unravels, and displaces itself according to the prescriptions of a group—hence the origin of figures of many kinds that change in accordance with the observer's stance. Everything comes alive: threads and lines connect and interlace in remarkable constellations and separate themselves again, only to come together once more and separate afresh, in the course of which other figures and constellations emerge. Nor does it contain any object in front of a background, for foreground and background are equivalent; they may be confused and the ornament is transmuted into a fine new picture. The eminent master tells us that this is how the Egyptian spirals were born, as were the Cretan leaves, through which foreground, background, and complement form new figurations. The same principle, applied to music, explains the origin of the canon: a melody interfering with itself. At times (four, at most) the accents are always on multiple numbers, and the voices are also repeated and exchanged. The formidable discoveries of a Bach, of a Mozart or Beethoven in this domain would appear to indicate that therein lies "the true invention or artistic discovery of music." Thus, art is a permanent discovery; for Speiser, the artist discovers rather than creates. "Pure fantasy only keeps us in constantly circular thought if comprehension does not fix discoveries in calculation, which thus allows the new

path to extend farther.” Speiser’s thought is rich in suggestions and warnings. Above all, it proves the fecundity of studying ancient and modern works in light of group theory. His comparison of an apparently dry and purely ornamental art—such as that of the Arabs—with canons in contrapuntal music is full of convincing intuitions.

One could certainly use his considerations as a starting point from which to develop an analogy with Lygia Clark’s discovery. The preliminary structures of her *Bichos* possess a spatial development of their own. At the technical-artistic level, the big difference is that here it is no longer the line but, rather, the plane that develops in space. Her *Bichos* are beings subordinated to or guided by given structural laws, but from whose evolutions no continuation is predictable to the eye. The secret of these structures is that they are ruled by symmetries, of which only the effects are seen—and unexpectedly so. But, as in Arabic art, they possess an internal continuity: the planes displace themselves, raise or lower themselves, distance themselves or approach one another, drive the dislocation of one axis or another, and then a sort of chain reaction of displacements unfolds, compelling the whole into new positions. New formal groups or new constellations are always emerging in space, in accordance with the observer’s point of view and also according to the dynamic and interior deductions of the basic structural symmetry. All these movements, displacements, contractions and expansions, games, generators of planes in space around one or more axes, become like the evolution of the line in the schemes of Arabic art, according to the prescriptions of a group.

The most astonishing visual and sculptural formations appear as a consequence of the observer’s gesture, eventually depleting the spectator’s curiosity—even before the virtualities of the basic structures are exhausted, all of them based on the principle of symmetry. These structures are like a magical tree that bears sculptures just as a jackfruit tree bears jackfruit or a cashew tree bears cashews.

Another point of contact between the canon and the art of the arabesque is that in these groups, there are no foregrounds or backgrounds. In general, there is not even an opposite or reverse side in any of these spatial beings. Here foreground and background are also equivalent and may be mistaken for one another. No whole here is definitive, for it transmutes itself easily into another beautiful form.

However, Clark’s sculptural series contains not only a canonic or fleeting succession from music to continuous melodic voices that intersect and separate, but also a simultaneous, vertical occurrence of harmonic music. It has a musical series of dramatic orchestrations through chords in the play of shadow and light of its emptinesses and fullnesses, of its open spaces and its closed spaces, of the luminous reflections on the surfaces of its parts, of the focal points of light that occasionally set fire to the contours of certain triangles, squares, or circles, or that cut them in halves, thirds, fourths, into tiny particles or corners. It is a constant weaving of new interior figurations; only this time they are fantastic visual impressions, sonorous echoes, rare interferences populating the architectural block in the space with myriad tiny touches, a full flowering of unexpected life. This is an inherently pictorial element that plays upon the surfaces like pulsating light across cathedral facades à la Monet. One might speak here of a reflexive quality of bilateral symmetry.

The structures possess features of their own that sometimes give them a strange organic sense brought about by the interrelationship of their occasionally vaginal or uterine internal organs (as in a sculpture by Pevsner) or by their formal concreteness à la Arp. Without anyone realizing it, the name “*Bichos*” was probably born from such impressions and analogies. By virtue of their complexity and superimposed structure, many of them contain a sort of internal machinery that leads the generation

of a plane in space—or its mere displacement—to have an immediate repercussion for the whole, leading all the parts to begin to move—seemingly of their own accord—in search of a new position. At times the work moves like an insect or suggests the idea of a strange space-constructing machine. These fabulous architectural units are designed in air.

From one angle of vision or another, the extremely rich spatial articulation allows us to make out spatial projections that are impenetrable to the unobstructed view from the other side of the polyhedral planes. Many of Lygia's latest Bichos are characterized by this Constructivist quality that highlights formal, architectural, or sculptural values rather than the organicist values of other works.

Undoubtedly, we stand before a revolutionary artistic experiment, although—for this very reason—one that is profoundly representative of the modern sensibility. The Lygian Bichos revolutionize the ancient concept of sculpture; they add a new, highly transcendent element to the previous accomplishments in the realm of the kinetic movements' constructions and creations. Now Lygia invites the spectator to participate—if not in the creation, then in the blossoming and experiencing of the work of art. The spectator is no longer a passive and purely contemplative subject before an object, nor even an egocentric subject who, in order to impose himself, negates the work—the object—as in the currently fashionable romantic and low naturalistic painting and sculpture that flees from exterior reality, cowering before the hardships and complexities of the contemporary world in an entirely solipsistic position. Clark's new art invites the subject-spectator to enter into a new relationship with the work, or object, so that the subject participates in the creation of the object that, transcending itself, connects him to the plenitude of being.

Modern art once again begins to break with Romantic obscurantism and, reclaiming an optimistic stance, proposes to solve the enigma of the world with man and for man, and to recondition his fate. Lygia Clark's current works perform this role.

—Originally published as "Significação de Lygia Clark," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), October 23, 1960.

Notes

1. The Constructivist Manifesto is also known as the "Realistic Manifesto." Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, "The Realistic Manifesto" (1920) in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), pp. 396–400. The text quoted by Pedrosa does not appear in the published manifesto, and is most likely from Lygia Clark's notebook.
2. László Moholy-Nagy and Alfréd Kemény, "Dinamisch-konstruktives Kraftsystem," *Der Sturm* 13 (December 1922).
3. László Moholy-Nagy and Alfréd Kemény, "Dynamic-Constructive System of Forces" (1922), in László Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy*, ed. Krisztina Passuth (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), p. 290.
4. Pedrosa's word *fios* could also mean "threads" or "wires." We have not located any images by Schmidt, a Bauhaus graphic designer, to indicate which is correct.
5. According to Clark, "this is the name I gave to my works of that period because its features are fundamentally organic. Besides, the hinge that joins the planes reminded me of a spinal cord." Lygia Clark, "Bichos," 1960. Available at: www.lygiaclark.org.br.
6. Andreas Speiser, *Die Theorie der Gruppen von endlicher Ordnung* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1923). Pedrosa quotes (in Portuguese) from Speiser's German text, of which we could locate no English edition.

Aluísio Carvão

In 1947 [Swiss artist] Max Bill was attempting to elucidate an old misunderstanding—the absolute identification of Concrete Art and Constructivism. In his essay (*Worte rund um Malerei und Plastik*),¹ he sought to demonstrate that Constructivism—or any other constructive or mathematical artistic manifestation—is but one of the possible different expressions of Concrete Art, which can also express itself perfectly in fully a-geometric or amorphous forms (note that at that time, language possessed greater rigor than it does nowadays).

This elucidation might well serve Aluísio Carvão in explaining his current phase, if an artist needed any other explanation beyond the work itself. However, in view of so many misunderstandings flying about, it may not be excessive to resort to authoritative explanations such as the one we have just given. At any rate, the superficial, the ill-tempered, and the hasty are warned not to brand the painter as inconsequential or incoherent just because his current painting does not emphasize any external rigor of patterns or purely geometric Constructivist concerns.

However, it is important to note that the Carvão of today is exactly the same as the Carvão of yesterday, just as, most probably, he will be the one of tomorrow, given that coherence has always stood out among his qualities as an artist. At no point in his career did he cease to be faithful to himself; he is a painter who never frivolously adopted a new set of problems, only to drop them off at the first street corner or discard them without first having explored them in all of their possibilities. Such problems are always, so to speak, unlimited, to those who know how to sound them out; they transmute themselves dialectically, so that the more an artist analyzes, experiments, explores, or penetrates them, the more they necessarily open themselves up to new modalities, new combinations, or perennial metamorphosis. And in this process, they eventually begin anew from other starting points, negating themselves at their sources, just as the numerically limited simple bodies of ancient chemistry ended up multiplying themselves in an unlimited chain of new bodies that are added, from day to day, going from one kind of matter to another (which allows the wise chemist of today to return to the magical dream of medieval alchemists searching for the philosopher's stone).

For this very reason, no aesthetic doctrine, no matter how rigorous, can limit investigations, or prevent the artist from being led to the contradictory infinity of the philosopher's stone, in which everything is transformed into everything. For this very reason, Picasso the magician, barely having completed his Cubist investigations, said, with profound intuition: "I do not seek, I find."²

In his current show, Carvão does not change course, orientation, or school—his *démarche* is perfectly Neo-Concrete, but denotes an arch-prepared transition from one period to another, successively interior one, analogous to that of the craftsman at his craft, who, with the passing years, moves from student to follower and, occasionally, from follower to master.

And let it not be said that Carvão is a versatile artist who changes at every moment, or is pretentious. From his early Amazonian Impressionism all impregnated with a flaming Van Goghism—seen almost by hearsay in precarious reproductions—to his abstract attempts that resulted, with total naturalness, in an increasingly rigorous Concretism, Carvão is the same painter, slow at what he does, who at every moment inquires, simplifies, analyzes, intensifies with Oriental patience but hidden ardor.

In fact, the present show includes the coronation of an ultimately rather slow evolution that began with certain works of 1958, when the painter achieved an

almost perfect rigor with regard to the clarity of the set of problems and the optical/Concretist result intended with his *Núcleo-tensivo* [Tensive nucleus]. He arrives, with *Ritmo centrípeto-centrifugal* [Centripetal-centrifugal rhythm], at a conclusion that is no longer one of scholastic rigor but, rather, an already creative or gifted state beyond technical formal perfection, of indubitable expressive power, with its play of forms that are posed and counterposed simply in black and in lilac-gray.

From this point, in which the mastery of form is adroit and lucid, his sensitive geometry progressively transforms itself, abandoning the subject matter of figures in different positions for another that is increasingly less quantifiable because it is essentially of a qualitative order, of energetic intensification—that is to say, of luminosity and color.

In capturing light that is not necessarily white—the nirvana of colors—but refers particularly to the scale of saturation, he has given us a series of canvases (note that everything is amalgamated into a single word: *Clarovermelho* [Light red] (see plate on p. 91), *Vermelho-cinza* [Red-gray], etc.), from which light bursts forth in a vectorial direction or thrust toward clean color, pure luminosity. It is the hour of the *Cromáticas* [Chromatics]. Inspired in 1959, they expand themselves in the works shown at the Salão of 1960.³

His constructions now contain a *program*—of color. This program is already visible in the titles of his paintings: *Vermelho-vermelho* [Red-red], *Amarelo-amarelo* [Yellow-yellow], *Rosa-amarelo-amarelo* [Pink-yellow-yellow]. The remnants of geometry of position that are still present are merely a conventional limit that comes from the earlier period, because in fact, it is now color and color alone that, in its intensity and saturation, weighs upon the surface, imposing even form itself upon it. As I write these lines, I am reminded of a short essay I wrote in 1951 in which I quoted a penetrating yet simple observation by A. [Adolf] Behne (*Von Kunst zur Gestaltung*, 1925) on the problem of color in contemporary painting—one that might define Carvão's current position: "Only those who control its laws can control color," but "only those who control themselves can work with those laws."⁴ Behne also famously compared colors, in their infinite relationships, to "a coherent social organism, in which separate or isolated beings do not exist." That is the point reached by Aluísio Carvão in his evolution as a painter.

Color requires of painting an internal order that must be found and, when found, obeyed. This knowledge was transmitted to us by the great creative generation of the beginning of the century, which, having abandoned figurative painting's earlier, traditional procedures of grisaille and chiaroscuro, moved on to Kandinskyan improvisations, to [Henri] Matisse's scandalously perverted flat areas, and to the geometric abstraction of [Robert] Delaunay, [Vassily] Kandinsky, [Piet] Mondrian, and others. When its reign arrived, pure color left in its wake the last barriers of Figurativism. Nowadays, Carvão stands before a world so detached from any objective material allusion that his painting is reduced to pure chromatic relationships. On one hand, this may be an ascetic act; on the other hand, however, it may be an orgy. He is forever moving back and forth between these two extremes.

His aesthetic is Neo-Concrete because it exists within the eternal ambiguity of its original cells—Neoplasticism, Neoromanticism, Neonaturalism, and Neoconstructivism—given that he already calculates positions according to planes, through increasingly more intense and subtle, more measured, and more passionate approximations. Such is his construction according to quality rather than quantity.

A small ocher-pink painting might be singled out as a delicate moment in the transition from the geometry of position—of areas defined by clear linear boundar-

ies—to that of qualitative approximations and vicinities. Here, a rather dark hue of ocher advances in a triangular point upon the contiguous pink area, where the ocher becomes the shadow of the pink or the pink the negative of the ocher. From then on, the areas are no longer delimited according to geometric rigor but through the meeting of chromatic strips whose extremities dwindle away as if drained of energy. In the important *Cromática 17* [Chromatic 17], in orange, earth-colored, and ocher strips whose hesitantly contiguous edges are taken by strange green hues, imprecise boundary zones are established—nonlimits that are emphasized but do not, in fact, interrupt, not reaching the notations of a scale because they remain as a flickering modulation in green.

The formality of contrasts has ceased, for inner law is now stronger than the law of complementarity or simultaneity, etc. It is now a matter of an insistent, monotonous assertion that would universalize itself, moving outside itself only to return to itself; one that does not demonstrate, but only exposes itself as an argument in circular logic. The qualitative subjectivity of color wants to exist existentially, rather than in the abstract, in the laboratory, in number and frequency, or in external nature as a simple prop for defining objects, or as mere subjectivity in the abstract symbolism of a [Paul] Gauguin or [Vincent] van Gogh, or concretely upon the plane, in ethical-decorative effects.

It needs to be born, generated at the bottom of crucibles, to decant slowly until the moment of birth. It is not just childbirth; above all, it is ceremonial, whence comes its magical element and, therefore, the artist's familiarity. With whom or with what? With the idea? With manual work or craft? Not with . . . nature.

Carvão does, indeed, create color: his color? Yes, if one thinks of the relationship between father and son, but the created being derives from and drifts toward other mysteries. Thus when, in the course of his craft, the painter abandons the limitation by external means (color), he does not do so through conscious deliberation, merely to *change*, to move away from the *formal* to the *informal*, or other vulgarities of the so-called militant criticism of our time. The thing goes deeper, like the transition from one climate to another, or the passage of the meridian—not in the geographical sense of one hue, from the height of the chromatic circle, to another on the antipodes, but rather, more modestly (?) from one hue . . . to the same hue, from a green to a green (*Madrugada* [Dawn]), from a red to a red, from a yellow to a chrome yellow, from a pink that, for example, visitors to the recent Neo-Concrete Exhibition dubbed the Sun, just because one of them had crystallized in a circular form, very easily analogous to that of the star.

There is no horrified rejection on Carvão's part of such designative commentary made with regard to his paintings because—both skeptical and serious—he is always alert to the game of a posteriori designations and analogies that, ultimately, betrays the vague but generalized collective desire that afflicts all of us these days—that of discovering the secret of contemporary abstract art's meaning. By the way, the Sun, after having recovered its larger dimensions, eventually lost its circular analogy to the square, by virtue of the direction of the brushstrokes alone. (Coincidentally, in the Chinese ideogram, the sun eventually took the form of a square.)

Hidden within this obsessive insistence on the single hue is the belief that multiplicity lies within unity itself. Within these *Verde-verde* [Green-green], *Azul-azul* [Blue-blue], will there be no magical atavistic belief in the power of the word, or . . . in the preverbal perceptive observation that is the unconscious cell of reality itself? At any rate, the need for repetition that absorbs the painter's mind recalls the designative process through repetition of doubled sounds in popular music or popular

mythology in taxonomy, such as the *Quero-quero* [Lapwing], the *Tico-tico* [Sparrow] etc.⁵ The enigma remains. What, after all, does this color signify if it is not a specific place (despite the a posteriori invocations of locatable atmospheres, such as the *Verde-verde* I called *Madrugada*, for Carvão indeed painted that picture at daybreak after a sleepless night), and if it is not symbolic or denotatively abstract, or even fluidic or deep or illuminated, but pigmentary color in itself—like clay or earth which, the more one digs or scrapes, the more it is earth or clay, and surely possesses a concrete, physical reality.

But of what does this sure—though *sui generis*—materiality of his consist? It is made of light and chemistry in the painter's alchemical crucibles.

—Originally published as "Aluísio Carvão," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), January 15, 1961.

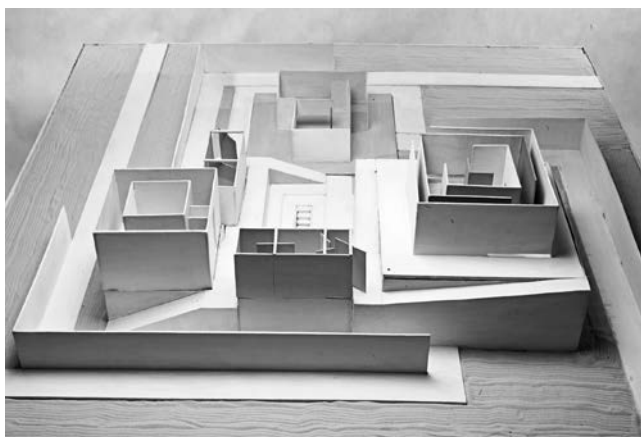
Notes

1. Max Bill, *Worte rund um Malerei und Plastik* (Zurich: Allianz, Vereinigung moderner Schweizer Künstler, Katalog Kunsthau Zürich, 1947).
2. Pablo Picasso, quoted in Graham Sutherland, "A Trend in English Draughtsmanship," *Signature*, no. 3 (July 1936): 7–13.
3. At the ninth edition of the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna, for which Pedrosa was part of the jury, Aluísio Carvão received the foreign travel award. In November of that same year, Carvão also took part in the second National Exhibition of Concrete Art, at the Ministry of Education and Culture, Rio de Janeiro, alongside Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, and Ferreira Gullar, among other artists.
4. *Von Kunst zur Gestaltung. Einführung in die moderne Malerei* (Berlin: Arbeiterjugend-Verlag, 1925).
5. Birds of great significance in Brazilian popular culture, often mentioned in folklore and in music.

Hélio Oiticica's Projects

The Rio de Janeiro MAM [Museu de Arte Moderna] is to be warmly congratulated for housing an experiment such as this one by the talented young artist Hélio Oiticica.¹ "Museums" of contemporary art—or those dedicated to the myth of so-called modern art—cannot be confined to the traditional activities of storing and exhibiting masterpieces. Their functions are much more complex. Intrinsically, they are houses, laboratories for cultural experiments—instantly unbiased laboratories of an aesthetic order, for the purpose of allowing experiments and experiences to be made and realized under the circumstances most conducive to creative stimulus. Thus conceived, the museum is the elastic glove into which the free creator may fit his hand. Hélio Oiticica, a young and austere artist (as befits the grandson of an illustrious anarchist), brings to the museum one of his latest ideas, the personal fruit of the collective break of the Rio "Concretists" with the official branch of Concretism when they organized the Neo-Concrete group under the leadership of Ferreira Gullar and Lygia Clark.

Ever since [his participation in] the Grupo Frente, Hélio (who was a student of Ivan Serpa's) has forged his own path within the aesthetic concepts of Neo-Concretism. In his search for real space, he broke away from the picture frame, freed himself from the traditional rectangle, attempted to suppress the last vestiges of any type of support for the work of art, and created suspended plates of color in an attempt to arrive at the absolute ideal described by Ferreira Gullar as a "nonobject." The model currently on view at the Rio MAM adds a new idea to the preceding experiments: that of time experienced, in the form of spectator participation in the creator's experiment. This idea is a natural consequence of the poetic discovery of the notion of time made by "Neo-Concretist" artists and poets, when they distanced themselves from the seri-



Hélio Oiticica. Model for *Projeto cães de caça* (Hunting dogs project). 1961.
21' 11 3/4" × 31' 11 7/8" (670 × 975 cm). Courtesy Projeto Hélio Oiticica

al-spatial orthodoxy of Concretism. From this discovery arose Reynaldo Jardim's *Livro-poema* [Book-poem],² [Ferreira] Gullar's *Poema-ação* [Action-poem], Lygia Clark's *Bicho* [Critter], Lygia Pape's *Book of Creation* (see plate on p. 96), and finally, the privileged place into which Hélio invites passersby to leave behind everyday life. In order to emphasize the unusual nature of the site, the artist names it after constellations and nebulas, and calls the project on exhibition *Cães de caça* (Hunting Dogs), like one of those Kandinskyan beings of the Milky Way.³ It is, shall we say, an abstract garden reminiscent of the sand and stone Ryōan-ji in Kyoto, Japan. Here the painter has brought together Ferreira Gullar's *Poema enterrado* [Buried poem] and Reynaldo Jardim's *Teatro integral* [Whole theater], interspersed with his own *Penetráveis* (Penetrables), "works" to be entered by pushing against walls or making them revolve, climbing stairs, or by circling plates and panels, walking as if in a labyrinth until . . . one comes face to face with colors, feels the reflection of colors, steps on colors, lives colors. Some of these *Penetráveis* are labyrinths, others are corners and recesses of movable colored walls (see, for example, plate on p. 93). And yet, enveloping all of these individual sanctuaries for soliloquies is a larger labyrinth that can shelter more than one person within its perimeter—a space for group initiation in the experiential soliloquy of the works within. A curious, attractive, and very modern feature of Oiticica's concept is a certain collectivist character contained in his creation even as it ceases to be something purely individualistic and egocentric. Indeed, it requires the collaboration of individual works by other artists: these projects engender a spatial and spiritual atmosphere that favors the realization of other bold projects by other creators such as (in this case) Gullar's *Poema enterrado* or Jardim's *Teatro integral*. In these instances, spectator participation in the work is more complex: it is no longer a matter of simple participation in the created work by completing or being integrated into it, but of an observer engaging with a poetic or magical world that is given to him, with its creator absent from the enclosure. Freed from everyday life, the participant becomes integrated into himself; that is, he becomes part of the original lived experience of the first experiment. Some element of those *invitations au voyage* of the Romantic period is present here; the difference is that the Romantic nostalgia for escape is impregnated—by the consciousness of the times—with a pathetic ethical resonance. As for an artistic appreciation of the experiment, each spectator must judge for himself.

—Originally published as "Os projetos de Hélio Oiticica," in *Catálogo exposição Projetos cães de caça* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, August 1961).

Notes

1. On Oiticica, see also Mário Pedrosa, "Environmental Art, Postmodern Art, Hélio Oiticica," in this volume.
2. Along with Ferreira Gullar and Amílcar de Castro, journalist and poet Reynaldo Jardim was responsible for the layout of the revolutionary graphic design project of the *Suplemento Dominical* (Sunday supplement) of the *Jornal do Brasil*. One of the signatories of the Neo-Concrete Manifesto, he created the *Neo-Concrete Ballet* with artist Lygia Pape (1958–59).
3. Oiticica explains his title: "The denomination of 'Hunting Dogs,' for the project comes from the criterion I established for the nomenclature of these projects, that is, names borrowed from constellations and nebulas, as is the practice with atomic projects; 'Hunting Dogs' is the name of a spiral-shaped nebula." From "Projeto de cães de caça e a pintura nuclear," typescript of an interview with Oiticica about the MAM-RJ exhibition (November 1961) *Projetos cães de caça*, <http://www.itaucultural.org.br/programaho/>.

Klee and the Present

In these times of artistic confusion—with the cheaply informal aesthetic of *art autre*¹—it is comforting to receive a book such as this latest one, *Paul Klee: Handzeichnungen*, by Will Grohmann, the grand veteran of German criticism.² Once again, he puts us in touch with the perennial deep waters of creation.

Klee is one of the great estuaries of so-called modern art. Many currents flowed from him and many others converged toward him. In a dense chapter on the artist in his slender volume on contemporary painting, Romero Brest³ observed that "everyone lays claim to him": Dadaists and Surrealists, Abstractionists related to German Expressionism and Cubists, Futurists and the family of Kandinskyans. And now even the *tachistes*. Expanding his field of assimilation and radiation, we still need to acknowledge him as one of the links between East and West. Persian miniatures and even Chinese calligraphy have worked their fascination on the art of the wise, quiet master from Bern. All that scholars of calligraphy in Japan talked about was Klee and Miró, as Western artists with calligraphic qualities.⁴

Be that as it may, Klee increasingly appears to be the first modern creator who, being of pure Germanic ancestry, was essentially a spiritual emigrant from the East—or, better yet, from the Middle East: a Levantine or, even more precisely, a Mediterranean from those shores. His signs do not look for roots in the characters of Chinese phonetic-semantic, synthetic writing, but in the analytic characters of Persian miniatures and the Arabic alphabet. Klee's signs function as a team, dancing about like elements of a ballet; they advance in one direction, but may be detached from that procession to make up another group, given that they are more precisely letters or silhouettes that evoke or suggest, without the expressive, nondiscontinuous, subjective weight of Sino-Japanese calligraphy.

In underscoring the fact that nearly five thousand of the nine thousand works the master bequeathed to us were drawings, Grohmann informs us that for a long time Klee believed himself to be no more than a draftsman, resigned to earning "his bread" as an "illustrator."⁵ Indeed, until 1914, when the defining journey to Kairouan took place,⁶ all his work (with very few exceptions) was in black and white. That year, for the first time, the watercolors outnumber the black-and-white drawings. It was then that he wrote in his diary, "Color possesses me. I don't have to pursue it. It will possess me always, I know it. That is the meaning of this happy hour: color and I are one. I am a painter."⁷

He was thirty-five. It was a new beginning in his artistic life, now as a painter. Besides, he was forever starting over. At the beginning of the war, at age twenty-three,

he wrote the famous words that would become so characteristic of the general frame of mind of artists of his generation: “I want to be as though new-born, knowing nothing, absolutely nothing about Europe.” Hence his sense that it was necessary “to start with the smallest.”⁸ To “know nothing . . . to be completely without sophistication, virtually at the origin.”⁹ This stance defines not only his art, but also the position of every true artist of our time. What he evinced was the artist’s absolute need never to leave the plane of the “first experience.” His starting point is equivalent to the “radical starting point” of [Edmund] Husserl, the master of modern phenomenology. It must not be mistaken for a Cartesian, rationalist “starting point,” which proclaims that before an authentic analytic, scientific *démarche* one ought to doubt what one already knows about matter. With Husserl, it is not a matter of “doubting” what one already knows, but of divesting oneself of all the weapons of knowledge in order to start from the beginning. Like Paul Klee; yet so unlike the inventive artists who are the makers of today’s real, pictorial cocktails.

—Originally published as “Klee e a atualidade,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), March 5, 1961.

Notes

1. Mid-twentieth-century abstract art movement also known as Art Informel.
2. Will Grohmann, *Paul Klee: Handzeichnungen* (Berlin: Müller & I. Kiepenheuer, 1934), 2 vols.
3. Jorge Romero Brest, *La pintura europea contemporánea (1900–1950)* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1952).
4. See Mário Pedrosa, “Calligraphic Abstraction,” pp. 193–94 in the present volume.
5. Grohmann, *Paul Klee: Handzeichnungen*.
6. It was during Klee’s 1914 visit to Tunisia that, inspired by the quality of the light, he decided to become a painter. That year he painted the famous *In the Style of Kairouan*, his first pure abstract painting.
7. Paul Klee, diary entry no. 926 0, in *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), p. 297.
8. Paul Klee, diary entry dated June 1902, quoted in Leopold Zahn, *Paul Klee: Leben—Werk—Geist* (Potsdam: G. Kiepenheuer, 1920), p. 26. English translation is from: Paul Klee, diary entry dated June 22, 1902, quoted in Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, eds., *Artists on Art: From the 14th to the 20th Century* (London: J. Murray, 1976), p. 442.
9. See: Graham Birtwistle, “Child’s Play,” *Artway*, accessed April 25, 2014, <http://www.artway.eu/content.php?id=1117&action=show&lang=en>.

Mira Schendel

Mira Schendel is a painter who resists fashion. However, we should not look to her for any special attachment to this or that school, style, or manner. But let us not think that she has no interest in research or even in experimentation. As for her pictorial means of expression, she is a curious painter, concerned with problems of her *métier*. I am unacquainted with her early work, although I am familiar enough with the period preceding the one in this exhibition to know two things: her painting remains the same, even as it is not the same. It is the same because abstract geometric subjects are present in one and in the other. There is a compositional constant, a division of the canvas that is somehow repeated. But it is no longer the same in the sense that, above all, the artist’s vision is more particular, more self-assured.

Previously, the line that divided her rectangles into many regular or successive forms, in repetition, also divided them into figure and background. Here and there her rectangular forms stood out, apart, so that the rest of the painting could be an accompaniment. The form ceased to be a form—a living, malleable form—in order to become a compositional form. Now, in turn, color (which was still isolated then) can

no longer be distinguished, and material even less than tone (see, for example, plate on p. 91). Material now exercises its action of presence not only through extension—its most evident and quantifiable property—but through the particularly sensitive quality of intensity. Concretism becomes denser and takes on another dimension, that of a subjective expressiveness with real emotional impact.

Richer pictorial mediums now really help the artist to reveal herself, to express herself, to compose her own personality, rather than provide her with the possibility of exhibiting virtuoso compositions. The paper upon which she presents some of her works in oil and tempera served her as a sort of intermediate material so that she might end her transition from color-tone to material, which externalizes itself from the inside out—alternating between light and shadows—through successive layers of tempera and oil applied with brush and spatula. In her current canvases, the process of fusion of color and tone in the material ends, and the surfaces of her paintings take on a density rich in suggestions of nature and of things, cemented by a prolonged and dramatic human experience. Her register is always low, for earth colors predominate. No high notes; the song or melody is always grave.

The result of all this is a characteristic I deem to be an achievement in all these paintings: the *return*—even in geometric abstraction—of the theme to the motif. Here, abstraction is an inner need; it is the language of a dialogue between the artist and the world that can only be subjective. An interminable dialogue.

—Originally published as “Mira Schendel,” in *Mira Schendel: Pinturas*, exh. cat. (São Paulo: Galeria São Luiz, 1963).

Franz Weissmann (Special Room)

Franz Weissmann is presenting himself to the eighth edition of the São Paulo Bienal after having been absent from competition since 1957, when he won the prize for best national sculptor. He is back in the country after a long absence abroad.

When he left Brazil he was a “Concretist” or rather, a “Constructivist.” One might have said he had become an “Informalist.” (How faded that designation already sounds!) Why? Because now he brings us flattened, crumpled, bruised metal plates in relief. And portfolios and more portfolios of drawings in which the line literally leads him over the smooth or rough surface of the paper, in whirls, in arabesques, in uninterrupted circumvolutions, in infinite crisscrossing. It is a journey through space, a long journey of which traces of light remain, revealing unsuspected structures. Between these emerge living yet uninhabited, dynamic but untraveled spaces—intervals that lie not between things, phenomena, or events, but between intervals of intervals, indefinitely.

In these drawings there is a duel between line and light, fought until the bodily free-for-all when, despite everything, the light reemerges from the infinite interweaving of desperate, frenzied lines. These frequently admirable drawings are a dialogue between Franz Weissmann and himself.

In his transition to real space, Weissmann once more settles his accounts with his material. As a sculptor, this is his task, his toll. In his previous spatial constructions his problem was exactly the same, only then he wanted to construct in space, regardless of his material. Essentially, he denied its existence; he availed himself of

it only inasmuch as might be minimally necessary to his pierced planes that articulated themselves in a calculated rhythm. Within this rhythm something remained undecided, unfinished, retaining an undefined power of attraction. This poetic indecision outlined in space fascinated two great Brazilian poets—Murilo Mendes and João Cabral de Melo Neto; the latter speaks nostalgically “of the aerial columns of yesteryear”; the former, with regard to the sculptor’s work, “of a time that accelerates the conflict between two cultures.” In the existential and more pessimistic European

environment, Weissmann was defeated by *material*. He stopped constructing in space in order to operate with it, although not in order to surrender to the material; rather, he engaged with it in a duel that still persists.

Whereas for him the drawings are a dialogue between line and light, the plates in relief are a dialogue between the line and the blow—the light. Indeed, he has armed himself for this struggle with a hammer, boxing gloves, and mallet, and gone after the pieces of zinc, to wrest from them a colloquy. He hammered at them until they opened up and blossomed like sensitive beings. With a certain light flickering among clouds, it is a landscaped sky that would evoke the atmospheric space of the late-eighteenth-century Venetians—of, say, a Tiepolo. It is a curious approximation that I cannot explain. Beneath his blows zinc becomes sky and, once again, one realizes that the creases hammered into the material allow light to pass through it, and in its pursuit, an architecture of planes and lines succeed one another and are armed with the whim of passing clouds. Franz Weissmann made a discovery; that is, he did not deliberately seek it out. For he repeatedly attempted some magical operation in his long, solitary, daily artisanal dealings with his material.



Franz Weissmann. *Coluna neoconcreta* (Neo-Concrete column). 1957. Painted iron, 77 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (197.6 × 77.4 × 47 cm). Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

With the move to aluminum, the tools for the artist’s attack—the mallet and the powerfully protected hands—knead more and incise less. The aluminum blades bring an untouchable, translucent, virginal clarity. A desire to defile that pure clarity seizes the sculptor. And what he does is a rape. He crumples it like a piece of paper with his calloused boxer’s hands. He advances his attack, the mallet, and gathers it all; the metal shrinks and folds and its creases make it look old, but it is ultimately transmuted into a squandering of chiseled silver, of shiny flashes. Aluminum has truly been made into something else. It possesses grooves, sparks, pleats, wrinkles, cuts, and layers, but ascends to a higher category, becoming an almost noble, precious metal. It is a Weissmann with different insignia, with a different work, but it is the same uncertain and profound, violent and lyrical artist who proceeds as if to avenge himself for his human, earthly condition—while he awaits transubstantiation. And the latter is his daily bread.

—Originally published as “Franz Weissmann (Sala Especial),” in *Catálogo da VIII Bienal Internacional de São Paulo* (São Paulo, September/November, 1965).

Environmental Art, Postmodern Art, Hélio Oiticica

Now that we have arrived at the end of what has been called “modern art,” inaugurated by [Pablo Picasso’s] *Les Femmes d’Alger*, and inspired by the (then) recent discovery of African art, criteria for appreciation are no longer the same as the ones established since then, based as they were on the Cubist experiment. By now, we have entered another cycle, one that is no longer purely artistic, but cultural, radically different from the preceding one and begun (shall we say?) by Pop art. I would call this new cycle of antiart “postmodern art.”

(In passing, let us say that, this time around, Brazil participates not as a modest follower, but as a leader. In many regards, the young exponents of the old Concretism and especially of Neo-Concretism (as led by Lygia Clark) have foreshadowed the Op and even Pop art movements. Hélio Oiticica was the youngest of the group.)

In the apprenticeship phase and in the exercise of “modern art,” the natural virtuality, the extreme plasticity of perception of the new being explored by the artists was subordinated, disciplined, and contained by the exaltation and the hegemony of intrinsically formal values. Nowadays, in this phase of art in the situation of antiart, of “postmodern art,” the reverse takes place: formal values per se tend to be absorbed by the malleability of perceptive and situational structures. As a psychological phenomenon, it is perfectly clear that the malleability of perception increases under the influence of emotion and affective states. Like the classical modernists, today’s avant-garde artists do not avoid this influence and certainly do not seek it out deliberately, as did the romantic subjectivists of “abstract” or “lyrical” Expressionism. Expressiveness in itself is of no interest to the contemporary avant-garde. On the contrary, it fears hermetic individual subjectivism most of all—hence the inherent objectivity of Pop and Op art (in the United States). Even the “new figuration” (in which the remains of subjectivism have aligned themselves) aspires above all else to narrate or to spread a collective message about myth and, when the message is an individual one, to use humor.

As early as 1959, when throughout the world the romantic vogue for Art Informel and Tachism predominated, the young Oiticica, indifferent to fashion, had given up painting in order to forge his first unusual, violently and frankly monochromatic object—or relief—in space. Having naturally broken away from the gratuitousness of formal values that are rare among today’s avant-garde artists, he remains faithful to those values in the structural rigor of his objects, the discipline of his forms, the sumptuousness of his color and material combinations—in short, for the purity of his creations. He wants everything to be beautiful, impeccably pure, and intractably precious, like a Matisse in the splendor of his art of “richness, quiet and pleasure.” The Baudelaire of *Flowers of Evil* may be the distant godfather of this aristocratic adolescent who is a *passista*¹ for the Mangueira² [samba school]—albeit without the *poète maudit*’s Christian sense of sin. His Concretist apprenticeship almost prevented him from reaching the vernal, ingenuous stage of the first experiment. His expression takes on an extremely individualist character and, at the same time, goes all the way to pure sensorial exaltation without, however, achieving the psychological threshold itself, where the transition to the image, to the sign, to emotion and to consciousness takes place. He cut this transition short. But his behavior suddenly changed: one day, he left his ivory tower—his studio—to become part of the Estação Primeira, where his painful and serious popular initiation took place at the foot of Mangueira Hill, a *carioca* myth. Even as he surrendered to a veritable rite of initiation, he nonetheless carried his

unrepentant aesthetic nonconformity with him to the samba in the eternally hard-core spaces of Mangueira and environs.

He left at home the spatial reliefs and Núcleos [Nuclei], the continuation of an experiment with color he called Penetráveis [Penetrables]—constructions in wood with sliding doors in which the subject might seclude himself inside color.

Color invaded him. He made physical contact with color; he pondered, touched, walked on, breathed color. As in Clark's Bichos [Critters] experience, the spectator ceased to be a passive contemplator in order to become attracted to an action that lay within the artist's cogitations rather than within the scope of his own conventional, everyday considerations, and participated in them, communicating through gesture and action. This is what the avant-garde artists of the world want nowadays and it is really the secret driving force behind "happenings." The Núcleos are pierced structures, suspended panels of colored wood that trace a path beneath a quadrilateral, canopy-like ceiling. Color is no longer locked away; the surrounding space is aflame with violent yellow or orange color-substances that have been unloosed, seizing the environment and responding to one another in space, as flesh, too, is colored, and dresses and cloth are inflamed, and their reverberations touch things. The incandescent environment burns, the atmosphere is one of decorative over-refinement that is simultaneously aristocratic, slightly plebeian, and perverse. The violent color and light occasionally evoke [Vincent] van Gogh's nocturnal billiards room, in which those colors that symbolized the "terrible passions of humanity"³ reverberated for him.

Oiticica called his art environmental. Indeed, that is what it is. Nothing about it is isolated. There is no single artwork that can be appreciated in itself, like a picture.

The sensorial perceptual whole dominates. Within it, the artist has created a "hierarchy of orders"—Relevos [Reliefs], Núcleos, Bóides⁴ (boxes), and capes, banners, tents (Parangolés)⁵—"all directed toward the creation of an environmental world." It was during his initiation in samba that the artist moved from the purity of visual experience to an experiment in touch, in movement, in the sensual fruition of materials in which the entire body—previously reduced in the distant aristocracy of visuality—makes its entrance as a total source of sensoriality. In the wooden boxes that open like pigeon-holes from which an inner light hints at other impressions, opening up perspectives through movable panels, drawers that open to reveal earth or colored powder, etc., the transition from predominantly visual impressions to the domain of haptic or tactile ones becomes evident. The simultaneous contrast of colors moves on to successive contrasts of contact, of friction between solids and liquids, hot and cold, smooth and creased, rough and soft, porous and dense. Wrinkled



Hélio Oiticica with his *B33 Bóide caixa 18* "Homenagem a Cara de Cavalo" (B33 box bolide 18 "Homage to Horse Face"). 1955–66. Courtesy Projeto Hélio Oiticica

colored mesh springs from within the boxes like entrails, drawers are filled with powders and then glass containers, the earliest of which contain reductions of color to pure pigment. A variety of materials succeed one another: crushed brick, red lead oxide, earth, pigments, plastic, mesh, coal, water, aniline, crushed seashells. Mirrors serve as bases for Nucléos or create further spatial dimensions within the boxes. Like artificial flowers, absurdly precious and lush yellow and green porous meshes emerge from the neck of a whimsically shaped bottle (of the type that belongs to a liqueur service) filled with transparent green liquid. It is an unconscious challenge to the refined taste of aesthetes. He has called this unusual decorative vase *Homenagem a Mondrian* [Tribute to Mondrian] (one of his idols). A flask sits upon a table amid boxes, glass containers, nuclei, and capes—a Louis XV-like pretense of luxury within a suburban interior. One of the most beautiful and astonishing boxes, its interior filled with variegated circumvolutions (meshes), is illuminated by neon light. There is enormous variety in these box and glass Bólides. No longer part of the macrocosm, everything now takes place inside these objects; it is as if they had been touched by some strange experience.

One might say that the artist transmits the message of rigor, luxury, and exaltation that vision once gave us into the occasionally gloved hands that grope and plunge into powder, into coal, into shells. Thus he has come full circle around the entire sensorial–tactile–motile spectrum. The ambiance is one of virtual, sensory saturation.

For the first time, the artist finds himself face to face with another reality—the world of awareness, of states of mind, the world of values. All things must now accommodate meaningful behavior. Indeed, the pure, raw sensorial totality so deliberately sought after and so decisively important to Oiticica’s art is finally exuded through transcendence into another environment. In it the artist—sensorial machine absolute—stumbles, vanquished by man, convulsively confined by the soiled passions of ego and the tragic dialectic of social encounter. The symbiosis of this extreme, radical aesthetic refinement therefore takes place with an extreme psychological radicalism that involves the entire personality. The Luciferian sin of aesthetic nonconformity and the individual sin of psychological nonconformity are fused. The mediator of this symbiosis of two Manichaeian nonconformisms was the Mangueira samba school.

The expression of this absolute nonconformity is his *“Homenagem a Cara de Cavalo”* [“Tribute to “Horse Face”], a veritable monument of authentically pathetic beauty in which formal values are finally not supreme. An open box without a lid, modestly covered by mesh that must be lifted to reveal the bottom, its inner walls are lined with reproductions of a photograph that appeared in the newspapers of the day; in them, [the outlaw] “Cara de Cavalo”⁶ appears lying on the ground, his face riddled with bullets, his arms open, as if crucified. What absorbs the artist here is emotional content, now unequivocally worded. In an earlier Bólide, thought and emotion had overflowed its (always-magnificent) decorative and sensorial carapace to become an explicit love poem hidden inside it upon a blue cushion. Beauty, sin, outrage, and love give this young man’s art an emphasis that is new to Brazilian art. There is no point in moral reprimands. If you are looking for a precedent, perhaps it is this: Hélio is the grandson of an anarchist.⁷

—Originally published as “Arte ambiental, arte pós-moderna, Hélio Oiticica,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), June 26, 1966.

Notes

1. A samba school dancer; from the Portuguese word for “passos,” meaning “steps.”
2. Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Estação Primeira de Mangueira, founded in 1928 on Mangueira Hill in Rio de Janeiro.
3. Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, September 3, 1888, in *Van Gogh: A Self-Portrait, Letters Revealing His Life as a Painter*, ed. W. H. Auden (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1963), p. 319.

4. According to Oiticica, “BÓLIDES were not actually an inaugurated art form: they are the seed or, better yet, the egg of all future environmental projects.” Hélio Oiticica, *O objeto na arte brasileira nos anos 60*. Written in New York, December 5, 1977, for the catalogue *O objeto na arte brasil nos anos 60* (São Paulo: Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado, 1978).
5. According to Hélio Oiticica, “The discovery of what I call ‘parangolé’ signals a crucial point and defines a specific position within the theoretical progression of all my experiments with color-structure in space, especially insofar as it refers to a new definition of what the ‘plastic object’ (or, in other words, the work) may be within this same experience. . . . The word here serves the same purpose it did for Schwitters, for example, who invented ‘Merz’ and its derivatives (‘Merzbau’, etc.) to define a specifically experimental position [that is] basic to any theoretical or experiential comprehension of his entire work.” Hélio Oiticica, “Bases fundamentais para uma definição do ‘Parangolé,’” *Opinião 65* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1965).
6. “I knew Cara de Cavalo personally and I can say he was my friend although—to society—he was public enemy number one, wanted for bold crimes and robberies—what perplexed me then was the contrast between what I knew of him as a friend, someone to whom I talked within the context of everyday life, as one might to anyone else, and the image created by society, or the way he behaved in society and any other place. This tribute is an anarchic attitude toward all kinds of armed forces: police, army, etc. I make protest poems (in capes and boxes) that have more of a social meaning, but this one (for Cara de Cavalo) reflects an important ethical moment that was decisive for me, because it reflects an individual outrage against every type of social conditioning. In other words: violence is justified as a means for revolt but never as a means of oppression.” In: Hélio Oiticica, “Material para catálogo” [Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1969], typescript, partially published in the exhibition catalogue for the artist’s show at London’s Whitechapel Gallery from February 25 to April 6, 1969. See also, by the author, *O herói anti-herói e o anti-herói anônimo*, March 25, 1968.
7. Hélio Oiticica’s grandfather, José Rodrigues Leite Oiticica was a philologist, poet, translator, and editor of the anarchist newspaper *Ação direta*. He lectured on Portuguese philology at the University of Hamburg in 1929. Hélio’s father, José Oiticica Filho, an engineer, professor, and photographer, received a Guggenheim Foundation grant in 1947, and worked at the United States National Museum–Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., in 1948.

From the Dissolution of the Object to the Brazilian Avant-Garde

After the process of the dissolution of naturalism had reached a greater degree of depth, and representation became excluded from artistic meditations, and after Cubism had been digested by Mondrian and Objectivism swallowed up by Surrealism, a type of art emerged that was based upon the “interior model” whence Tachism or Art Informel had sprung, and the notion of space became a residue of that downfall; the most abstract (or at least most representative) possible residue—like an unsupported plane, or one supported by itself.

Lygia Clark was the first in Brazil to draw implications from this by attempting to unframe the painting, so that as it floated in real space, it would identify with that space—the ultimate reduction of all representational concepts in the visual world. From this step she moved on to others that led her to make the transition from flat pictorial surface to real space, where, by articulating hinged planes, she arrived at motion with her *Bichos* [Critters]. By doing away with the pictorial space of the plane, one created a thing, an “object” or “neo-object,” or an “artificial object” (in the domain of structural theorizations) or a “nonobject,” if we stick to the homegrown theories then expounded with great intelligence by Ferreira Gullar, or the fundamental Neo-Concretist intuition of the discovery of time, in Concretism’s formidable effort to define space or the simultaneous spatial concept of our age.¹

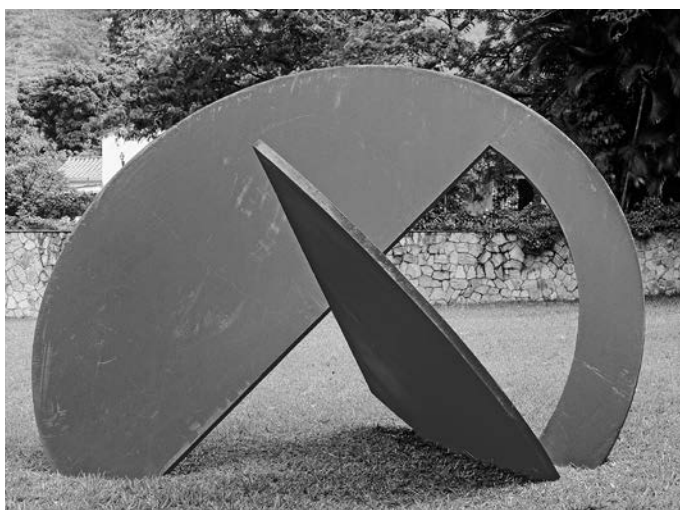
The great importance today of Neo-Concretism consists in aggregating time to highlight a foreign element in Concretism’s verbal, vocal, and visual *démarche*—an element charged with a certain dose of subjectivity. The most “concrete” expression of this movement was the Neo-Concrete ballet performed in Rio by Lygia Pape and others. Another one of its transcendental derivations was introduced by Clark and

her Bichos when she pointed out the need to reestablish a relationship with the other that had been lost ever since the work of art—within the domain of pure plasticism or neoplasticism—presented itself as unique in its solemn isolation. Herein lies the origin of the famous participation of the spectator in the work of art. If I single out Clark and the rest of her Neo-Concretist colleagues as the initiators of this participation, it is not to claim absolute priority in this movement for her and her comrades, but to note the absolute inner coherence of her investigations and thinking by the time she had arrived at the notion or need of a new relationship between artist and subject. In today's modern global culture or civilization the priorities for this or that are puerile pretensions. Everything that is born here or in Belo Horizonte or in São Paulo can be born in Japan or in France or in the United States. In fact, here as elsewhere there emerged within the intuitive domain of the arts a new primitive, primary conceptualization of reality that was defined by the brand new science of cybernetics, when it replaced the former relationship between subject and object with the object-organism complex. The object is re-created as a result of the relationship between organism-machine-organism. Cybernetics discovered (Columbus's egg)² that, like the machine, all organisms are closed. The construction of the art-object is the expression of the artist's intuitive or unconscious need to complete or close the cycle within which his creativity moves.

But let us return for a while to the plane unsecured in virtual space when, in its evolution, the phenomenon of so-called modern art eliminated the last traces of naturalism and also dissolved the old representational object of all former arts. Other contemporary artists, such as the North American sculptor Louise Nevelson, destroyed not only the plane but the planes of sculpture in order to create a new spatial relationship in their stead—one that defines itself in accordance with the innate relationship between interior and exterior. Like closets, their sculptures are windows that open onto spaces, residual spaces that are not landscapes because they are the framings—or remains—of the thing-making man outside (which is also in here), where magical forms may be glimpsed like continents of human knowledge or evil preserved by the centuries.

Also in painting, an artist such as [Lucio] Fontana committed a magical act upon the pictorial plane when he not only perforated the canvas but also slashed it with spatial meaning, "integrat[ing] [...] the illusory space contained in the painting with the real space that surrounds and runs through it."³ For him, it was not a matter of making "spatial" paintings or "spatial" sculptures, but of approaching the "spatial concept" of art in itself. In this concept, inevitably, painting and sculpture became fused or lost their respective conventional specificities. He expressly said during a symposium in 1955 that, "as a painter [...] I don't want to make a picture. I want to open up space, to create a new dimension for art, to connect it up with the cosmos as it lies infinitely outstretched, beyond the flat surface or the image." Regarding his repeated cuts on the canvas he said, "I did not want to 'decorate' a surface—on the contrary, I tried to smash the dimensions that limit it. A long way beyond the perforations, a newly won freedom awaits us: but, just as obviously, the end of art awaits us too."⁴ Art dissolves all of its boundaries, although it risks its own annihilation in this rupture.

One of the greatest though least well-known Brazilian sculptors, now quite justly rewarded with a foreign travel grant⁵ by a clear-sighted jury in the latest Salão, Amílcar de Castro is a protagonist of this struggle with or against the plane, the only remaining survivor in the shipwreck of Naturalism and the dissolution of the object. Castro came from Belo Horizonte, where he attended Guignard's small school in the Parque⁶ and



Amílcar de Castro. Untitled. n.d. Steel, 8' 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ " \times 12' 1 $\frac{11}{16}$ " \times 11' 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (260 \times 370 \times 342 cm). Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

graduated alongside Mary Vieira, who emigrated to Zurich in the 1950s. There, as a solitary young Brazilian artist, she grew in wisdom and knowledge under the wing of Max Bill, whose *Tripartite Unity* had carried off the grand prize for sculpture at the first edition of the São Paulo Bienal. Vieira is currently an independent artist working in the vein of Concretist plasticism, to which—to her credit—she has remained faithful, presenting a series of pieces in which Constructivist technical perfection denotes the high quality of Swiss industrial finish and execution. Based on abstract formal schemes such as rectangles or circles, these pieces allow for the most astonishing formal variations, at the discretion of the hand that caresses or shapes it. She also invites the spectator to handle her idea (which remains faithful to its matrix form). Its movement is not—nor should it be—discontinuous, so that the surfaces upon which it unfolds are not broken or disarrayed. Whereas Franz Weissmann—who also had a studio in Guignard's little school, as a master—later decided to hammer the aluminum and corrugated iron surfaces of his breathtaking, luminous planes, Mary Vieira—who was initiated into sculpture with him—does not allow the metal to be violated; on the contrary, she wants it to be fondled and caressed. She starts off with separate stems that are strictly identical in thickness as well as equidistant, so that, in touching the stems, one arrives at surfaces united by sinuous or continuous outlines of extreme fineness. Vieira intends to industrialize her creations so as to divest them of the work of art's aristocratic unity, thus making them fit the average pocketbook as salable objects—a fine proposition.

Amílcar de Castro also comes from a Concretist background, but in Rio de Janeiro. In his dialogue or monologue with the plane, he broke the situational limits of sculpture and, in his timid, quiet way, transformed his works into self-directed objects free of pedestals or even bases—the fateful limitation of every representational sculpture. Whereas Clark freed her paintings from the frame, Castro (and Weissmann, during his Concretist period) freed their sculptures from any need for a base. Their pieces are valid from all sides, in all positions. They require no privileged angles or sites in order to appear.

He began with the material plane—with iron—for an apparently modest spatial adventure that was actually filled with metaphysical implications. Vieira gives us a

series of pieces that require bases upon which their forms may evolve. The relationships established between them and the subject are ludic—they enchant us like privileged toys. From this perspective, Vieira’s art bears a very close relationship to Op art. In turn, Amílcar’s works are invitations to meditation rather than to playfulness. What is specific to his operational *démarche* is that it is not based on anything a priori but on a vague drawing on paper that he only later opens up and develops into the flat square, circle, or rectangle; he does not construct violently; he does not construct in reality. He obeys a mysterious whole that does not reside in any a priori. Once the plane has been wounded or cut or opened up, it is the space created by this that leads him forward, as if heeding the call of a biological or organic destiny in search of three-dimensionality. In his rigorous art, this is not the result of a previously given constructive or geometric scheme; rather, it comes from a process of prospection and discovery. From an initial square or circle its march unfolds in an endless ideal spiral. Everything is right in there, including the keenest aspirations of the artist’s imagination or gut. As is the case with other like-minded artists who make up his contemporary family, Castro’s plane is thus a seed for the discovery of the new dimensions of man’s existence in this age of perennial boundlessness.

Originally published as “Da dissolução do objeto ao vanguardismo brasileiro,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), June 18, 1967.

Notes

1. Ferreira Gullar, “Teoria do não-objeto,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), November 21/December 20, 1960. Reprinted many times, see Glória Ferreira, ed., *Brasílian Contemporary Art: Documents and Critical Texts /Arte Contemporânea Brasileira: documentos y críticas* (Rio de Janeiro/Santiago de Compostela: MinC/Dardo, 2009).
2. “Columbus’s egg” refers to a significant achievement or idea (like Columbus’s voyages to the Americas) that seems easy after the fact. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egg_of_Columbus.
3. Lucio Fontana quoted in Damián Carlos Bayón, *Adventures in Modern Hispano-American Art: Painting, Kinetic and Action Arts*, vol. 1, trans. Galen Greaser (Austin: unknown publisher, 1973), p. 108.
4. Lucio Fontana quoted in Gilbert Brownstone and Enrico Crispolti, *Lucio Fontana* (Paris: Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1970), p. 8.
5. XVI Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna (1967).
6. Founded in the 1940s, the Escola de Belas Artes (School of fine arts) de Belo Horizonte, now known as the Escola Guignard in homage to its first director, the artist Alberto da Veiga Guignard. Amílcar de Castro directed the school from 1974 to 1977.

From American Pop to Dias, the *Sertanejo*¹

Today’s art, whether made here or elsewhere, in Paris, New York, or in Campina Grande (where we went to the opening of an “Art Museum”² that is yet another incentive courtesy of Assis Chateaubriand),³ is extroverted, impertinent, and unaesthetic. That is to say, it is apprehensive about accusations of being hermetic, aristocratic, noncommunicative, or alienated. Terrifically competitive with the mass communications media—among them film and its variant, television, which hold first place—poor painting and sculpture also wanted to reach the great public. And here they are, borrowing the techniques of mechanical reproduction wherever they can find them, so as not to be expelled from the circuit. For this very reason, the visual arts of today sacrifice the old abstract and formal values intrinsic to the mere desire to inform, to communicate.

The American artists at the very forefront of the avant garde, in the name of the vigorous savagery of an ultramodern mass civilization, were the first to abandon the

ancient, noble artisanal traditions of painting and sculpture in order to reach the level of comic strips, of the poster, and of other mass communication processes.

A [Tom] Wesselman and a [Roy] Lichtenstein, a [Claes] Oldenburg, an [Andy] Warhol and a [George] Segal, a [James] Rosenquist and a [Robert] Indiana are not frightened by banality, and accept the powerful competition of vulgarity and kitsch. For them, it is a matter of calmly and undramatically verifying what is available in order to produce for “normal” consumers rather than for aesthetes. When Wesselman, a powerful artist with an extremely natural sensibility, affixes a ready-made (not painted by him), half-open, pink, thick-lipped mouth-device onto the appropriate place in one of his “great American nudes,” showing off her gleaming white teeth, the nude is a joyous body on display at the market, and the whiteness of her teeth like advertisements for some brand new brand of toothpaste. The other presents a store window of sparkingly appetizing cakes, as mouth-watering as the ads for attractive salads and tidbits in *Life* or in the *Saturday Evening Post*. All these artists produce accessories for the positive hero; in the optimism that lulls them, above all else they highlight the positive virtues of the products, as does, incessantly and at every moment, the great advertising machine in a frantic and insatiable eagerness to intensify mass consumption.

But in countries like ours, Pop cannot have the same purpose, unless it is to artists who are attracted only to the novelty of the grand media to be deployed in a competition that has been won beforehand by the metropolitan protagonists. They learn to use such mediums just as well as the North American followers, within the limits of a lesser scale of available technical and mechanical resources. They become virtuosos, precious and perfectly up-to-date with fashionable procedures, but what they invent is detail, what they add is caprice. They wind up as lesser artists, ultimately producing art for art's sake, or antiart for antiart's sake. They are either mundane or, at best, archaizing Dadaists. However, not all of them are like this, for when the language or vehicles of Pop seize them, they possess a native ingenuity, an essential set of themes, an incoercible way of being that does not grant them the gratuitousness necessary to embrace any advertising cause with snap, sparkle, and naturalness. It is only that, for example, young artists like [Rubens] Gerchman—with his permanent indictment of the poverty of his home town [of Rio de Janeiro] and his extroverted love for neon-lit bars frequented by common people—or Antônio Dias do not do things with the advertising satisfaction of consumerism for the sake of consumerism in mind. The difference is that the “Popists” of underdevelopment choose for whom to produce their work; hence, for example, the passionate nature of the work of Antônio Dias (see, for example, plate on p. 95). For this very reason, he already occupies a place of his own in young Brazilian art and has his battle station set up along the international frontlines. His drawing narrates but, above all, it exposes. It has the concreteness of facts. Dias was never a member of any Abstractionist school; he came directly from the popular images that surrounded his childhood world. Yet it is also the case that his perception of the world is not as formal as it is particularly genetic and organic.

Within a concise comic strip structure—of a, shall we say, temporary nature—he proceeds as in a game, I know not whether liminal or unrestrained (unless it is unconsciously so), at any rate contradictory or dialogic, between the allusive (a piece of a headboard) and the frank (sex), between the partial and the whole. In his work, figuration is at once illustrative and plastic: not in vain are narrative, discourse, and word as indispensable to his painting as are its rigor and frontal formality.

He feels a disalienating need for the sentiments that drive him—the drama of life; ultimately the drama of contemporary man, whether brother or enemy—to

be surrounded and defined by symbols, yes, but translucent and deciphered ones, devoid of opalescent outer coverings, that is—of already conventionalized signs. (In this sense, there is something elementary about his writing, about the directness of Pop's mechanical, antistylistic writing.) This is why he makes abundant use of the clichés of popular rhetoric that compose the imagery of colored lithographs from Casa Sucena,⁴ of almanacs; for instance, the sign of the red heart, so prominent in religious iconography (saints, hearts of Jesus) or the ludic iconography of playing cards (the suit of hearts).

In scenes from his living theater there is always a sense of the suburban⁵ living room crammed full of furniture, of armchairs upholstered in red velvet and studded with yellow metal buttons, and an enthroned "Heart of Jesus" facing a television niche. Such environments are inevitably allusive to the radio or television soap operas whose atmosphere of banality the artist respects, although the narrative takes on a solemn rhythm within the quasi-hieratic structure that characterizes his drawing. (There is some unsuspected spiritual demand in this young *sertanejo* with the thin, sparse beard.)

Dias takes the signs where he finds them, whether in the color lithographs and prints available at all the Casas Sucenas out there, or in comic books but, especially, in the sensationalistic newspaper reporting of the mainstream press. His ideal is to achieve clarity without the subterfuge of information from photographs that run in the daily news. In order to explain his message he dismisses no medium; hence his recourse to words or sentences among the images in his drawings and the liturgical colors of his paintings. His painting might be a sort of antiphon, with vignettes (although of inverted proportions with regard to letters and images) that admit no mistakes; first and foremost, the message must be literally explained. To him, shadows were not meant to conceal or render contours indistinct, but to highlight things.

This young man knows only one form of purism—that of naked violence without subterfuge. To him, heraldry itself is reducible to the explicit information of a road sign that indicates the nearby topographical west (the "emblem for the assassin squad").

Instead of the myths of positive comic book heroes, Dias prefers the vulgarity of radio soap operas. Ultimately, the comic strip's linear narrative is vegetarian nourishment. For his thirst and his hunger, only the vulgarity of the lowest level of reality, or the substance of flesh, of blood, of this insurmountable visceral trinity—in man and in woman, the genital organ in one, the genital organ in the other, and the heart in between. He abhors (or despises—I never asked him) the Supermen and the Batmen—all the mythology of impotence sublimated in omnipotence that populates comic strips. In terrestrial, underdeveloped, peasant style, he sticks to the permanently living facts of the day in the crime pages.

Within his closed environment—a room in a cheap boardinghouse—the bed is always too big, with blood-stained, diagonally positioned pillows (rather than the immaculately clean new ones in Claes Oldenburg's made-for-advertising bedroom), disheveled bedcovers, violated women, revolvers on cushions in the half-open drawers of little bedside tables, and a profusion of icons—hearts, thick vaginal labia, mountainous buttocks with unexpected fissures, the virile muscle seemingly protected by cushioned sheaths, bloody daggers, and all the paraphernalia of crime and passion at the suburban cultural level of radio. This is truly no painter of fashions. With him, it is not a matter of the erotic *delicatessen* of the very latest model of [filmmaker Michelangelo] Antonioni's bored and refined society. With him, love, crime, passion, violence, rape, and sensuality are all taken from the front pages of the tabloids.

The slim, trim [Brazilian] northeastern that is Antônio Dias fears any decline of elevated meaning in worldly concessions. His artistic (and moral) thought eludes essence so as not to escape the substantial. The artist has modesties. He is not interested in scandal; however, he is interested in truth—the truth of substances. His art consists of trying to apprehend it unvarnished. He makes this art through Gestalt-like exertions (as open forms hungry for self-completion) and through thorough descriptions. He does not give us a journalistic commentary, as in American Pop but, rather, a raw slice of life.

In Dias's world, life requires its own space. He endows it with architecture of extreme rigor founded on symmetry, like the formalist, liturgical art of the Byzantine masters. In the abstract definition of an ideal space, he inserts another structure and, within it, other smaller structures—cubes, spheres, boxes, and sacks—in which the cauldron of substances bubbles. Therein burns the vital chemistry, with its odors and fats, its fermentations and greases, its gases and secretions. It might be said that all those structures, coverings, boxes, lids, are there to contain an infernal machine that is going to explode—life. And explode it shall, the more contained it is within the small anarchist's can in which the painter has crammed it.

In his painting, the volume, the three-dimensionality is not fictitious, given by pictorial tricks and perspectives; it is real, in relief from whose borders flow every organic expedient and secretion—blood, excrement, sperm, orgasms, pus, and hormones, with their smells and their colors. In drawing solid frameworks of beams in red, black, and yellow bars and planes, something unusually immaterial bursts forth in whites and in spaces, crowded in by an excess of things—the sovereign idea. Between the sovereign idea and the irrepressible material, Dias's art or antiart is an intrinsically lacerated one, and the face it offers us is pathetic and frank, cynical and religious, permanently condemned to never finding peace. Dias and his images propose no solution other than to constantly revive in him, in us, and in others the perplexity of the world and the unruliness of life.

Originally published as "Do pop americano ao sertanejo Dias," *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), October 29, 1967.

Notes

1. A *sertanejo* is a small farmer or inhabitant of small towns that extend from the north of the state of Minas Gerais to the south of the state of Pará and encompassing the countryside of all the states in Northeastern Brazil and practically the whole of the state of Piauí.
2. Museu Assis Chateaubriand (MAC), Universidade Estadual da Paraíba (UEPB).
3. Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand Bandeira de Melo was the owner of the *Diários Associados* newspaper, radio, and television media conglomerate. In 1947 he founded the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) with the Italian journalist and art critic Pietro Maria Bardi, and was responsible for the emergence of television in Brazil with the inauguration of the TV Tupi television station in 1951.
4. A store specializing in religious articles.
5. Pedrosa's use of the adjective "suburban" in Brazilian Portuguese differs considerably from the American understanding of the word. See n. 4 on p. 296.

Anna Bella Geiger

Here is a printmaker who is almost dissatisfied—an unprecedented fact—with her most honorable *métier*. Initiated in metal and in etching like so many young Brazilians, Anna Bella found her artistic calling in printmaking (see, for example, plate on p. 94). Anna Bella truly discovered this vocation, for she did not make of printmaking, like so many people in Brazil, merely a fashionable activity. She started out as a printmaker in a time when the various modes of Abstractionism predominated—above all, what was called “lyrical abstraction.” Tachism seduced her and she surrendered—legitimately, in fact—to the search for stain effects, for textures that the metal plate, acids, powders, and chance so generously produce, instigate, or insinuate.

Such exercises—if one persists in them—grow dull. But when they are integrated into the artist-printmaker’s practice and experiments, they enrich them. After her experiment with abstraction she slowly and ingenuously realized that she, too, was “showing off in the kitchen” without knowing it, like Mr. Jourdain.¹ Today when she uses etching, she does so to attack in the metal some idea or sentiment afflicting her heart.

Anna Bella made a discovery on her own account: that the greater reality is that of the body (not in vain does she have a strong maternal sense). In spite of her evidently introspective nature, idealistic if not mystical, the flesh offers her a whole mystery to unravel; the living body is like the workings of a clock: made up of viscera that move inside it. Even now, they are her engrossing characters. In moving from abstraction to viscera, the artist moved from *tachiste* gratuitousness to the functionality of in-depth research into organic reality. From *tachiste* redundancies to the so to speak histological function of her research, many of Anna Bella’s current prints give us impressive images, whether, for example, of the insides of genital organs, or of the mystery of how embryos are formed. At this point, she is not interested in the formal unity of printmaking, or even its unified composition or the decorative aspects of color. To her, color is now an accessory between red, which is blood, and the grays and the browns, which are like the tissues of which embryos are made. The white field of the paper invades the field of the engraving itself, and the latter’s parts tend to separate themselves as if in an operation of reproduction by fission, to gain autonomy in real space and act within it like other living beings. In attempting to define the materiality of the human body’s viscera, Anna Bella essentially seeks to re-create them, to give them their own, autonomous experience, and to show that multifaceted life perpetuates itself in the dissociation from the body itself.

But does this not insinuate—with possibly Baudelairean inspiration—that creative vitality proceeds inexorably in organic decomposition as the only authentic or faithful image of perpetual motion?

—Originally published as “Anna Bella Geiger,” *Correio da manhã (Rio de Janeiro)*, February 6, 1968.

Notes

1. Pedrosa refers here to M. Jourdain, the foolish, social-climbing protagonist of Molière’s *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670).

Antonio Manuel. On Antonio Manuel's Presentation at the Opening of the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna, as a Work of Art¹

Mário Pedrosa— In doing what you did, your gesture of presenting yourself as a work of art, you dismantled—you showed that the exhibition regulations don't have the slightest importance. And as for the fact that you weren't accepted, that you didn't fit in with the rules—what exists is life. So life is greater than the rules.

Antonio Manuel— You also say that art concerns nature—that it preexists in nature. There's a sense of that, too.

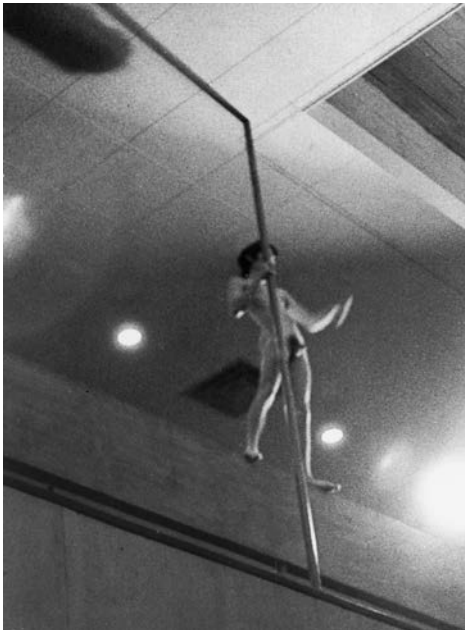
Mário Pedrosa— Exactly. Of course, the artist is always the one who's never out of touch with nature. The engineer—that is, the others—they lose touch. But the artist is the one who doesn't lose touch, not even at another level, within machines. He sees things as a direct relationship—between himself and the world, himself and reality, himself and nature.

Antonio Manuel— And Mário, this was also a personal attitude; I felt as if I'd killed off a thousand prejudices, a thousand academic things.

Mário Pedrosa— No doubt, sure. With this, you furthered the entire process of the art of stripping away that is done—antiacademic art, absolutely simple art—you brought the exhibition to a masterly conclusion that is typical of art itself: you dissolved the mystique, the myth of making art this way, without an artwork. Afterwards, you returned to the origins. When you put sperm in a woman's egg, it's not just the source of life. You returned to the origins, to the source of the ego's relationship to the world, to the source of wisdom, of consciousness, of creation. Yesterday they were saying you had put hay in the *salão da Bússola*.² Today that imparts consequence to everything you've done—including Arte Povera, art that dissolves itself in the moment. You set an example. Throughout this process, you've been extraordinarily exemplary. You made it to the end of this entire process, of a model for a type of art that dissolves in itself—in action: creative, and dissolving itself. The others always stay within a sort of representation—the representation of an idea. You were the very fulfillment of an idea—the conclusion of an idea. That's beautiful; it's enormously meaningful. It's brilliant. You presented a work—an act—that is at the same time irresistible and irrepressible. And no one can impose exclusion. No rule can prevent a work from being made, or an act from being performed. You tore down all the exhibition's rules, the whole bureaucracy of art.

"It's no use." "I won't allow it." "You can't present that." Well . . . you may not be allowed to show the work of art, but it's made! It's here! Regardless of whether it's hung in the exhibition. I feel this to be incredibly important, more important than anything else.

And it is this whole chapter of activity-creativity that is the fundamental thing in the world of today—a world of protest, of rejecting the society of mass consumption, massification, mass culture. By the way, for the last [São Paulo] Bienal I was going to propose modern art, then postmodern art, then environmental art. Two types of environmental art: existential—the type that is made in Brazil, because we do not have technology—and abstract environmental art, the art of technology. After that, in addition, comes activity-creativity. Take charge of the world. Create the world of the future. Create a new situation of men for men.



Antonio Manuel. *O corpo é a obra* (The body is the work). 1970. Performance at Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro

Beyond that, it is absolutely negative; all negativity is creative. It breaks all taboos, leads to the end of all taboos; it breaks with everything at the level of ethics, at the sexual and moral levels—at the creative level.

Hugo Denizart— Antonio, your attitude is so creative that it's as if the very discussion of the thing opens up perspectives . . . an opening . . .

Mário Pedrosa— That's right. It transcends the level of a purely aesthetic debate—based on a work. It is life itself. We are no longer discussing a work that is “made,” but a creative act. This is eminently avant-garde art. It's an aspect of the cultural revolution—one in which taboos are broken.

The fact that you did this today upsets all of art's perspectives: the aesthetic debate, the ethical debate, the

debate on art. It disputes everything, and with enormous authenticity. What Antonio is doing is the experimental exercise of freedom. He's not trying to dominate others. He's saying, “This is how it is.” Total authenticity, which is creative authenticity.

Antonio Manuel— And I felt a euphoria . . . a freedom.

Mário Pedrosa— That's true, euphoria when you create something. Freedom and creativity are two concepts that go hand in hand. Antonio creates and shows all the consequences of an artistic attitude, of an avant-garde attitude, of creative art, authentic art—what art is expected to be. He accomplished this in a very simple—yet at the same time, radical—way. There's no point in making garbage art, Arte Povera, conceptual art—all those art forms. It's fine to make them, but he went to the heart of these problems, showing how there's a fundamental incompatibility between man and ego, between human beings and the society of mass consumption—the oppressive society—that prevents art from being a legitimate activity. So this whole thing of Antonio's is just fabulous—the rest is kid stuff. Hence the importance of the fact. Creativity is the most revolutionary thing that exists. Creative activity tears man away from his everyday routine; it always posits a new dimension for man.

Alex Varela— I believe that everyone who was there at the exhibition felt as if they were doing it themselves. Everyone who applauded was taking off their own clothes.

Mário Pedrosa— Precisely, precisely, a power of communication above mass communication, above information theory. That is the only new thing opposing this consumer society. So the modern age is, precisely, an age in search of the final authenticity of things, of attitudes and such, in order to break away from the mystification of mass consumer society—and even from mass culture—because the cultural revolution is

the only thing that stands against mass culture today. The existence of mass culture is based on urban folklore. It's an average—the average for the average public of that time. No one exists individually. There is an average—an average of everything—that has a formidable power of communication. But it's not authentic. It's an intermediary, a mediation. It's only authentic as a function of an acceptance of the immediate, of everyday life. So art is the only way to break with this taboo, to present problems in their final authenticity.

So an act such as yours, Antonio, is an act in itself. Communication doesn't take place through media. Media doesn't communicate with others—the fact itself does—the irreducible, fundamental unit of man who communicates with the other. The relationship—the fundamental communication underlying all this—is part of the total cultural revolution against the status quo—against the establishment. Hence the enormous, transcendent importance of the fact. Art is the only thing that stands against the entropy of the world, fallen in the homogeneous state of death; that has always been art's way, but it needs to return to its roots, and to total divestment. You put everything else on an aesthetic level. The whole problem of Arte Povera, etc.—that, too, remains at the aesthetic level because it fails to bring together the ethical level and the creative level. You have posited the ethical problem quite splendidly. All of today's art—every activity, all creativity. The ethical problem emerges in the most astonishing way—because it only has meaning when you start out by tackling the ethical problem. All the art that doesn't really propose doing anything—that's just an attitude, an act; but what does the act mean? It is anti-everyday life. So what keeps it at the aesthetic level is exclusion. Whereas in your stance, Antonio, all of the elements are present, and the ethical aspect becomes crucial.

—Originally published as “Antonio Manuel. Sobre a apresentação de Antônio Manuel na abertura do Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna, como obra de arte. Conversa entre Mário Pedrosa, Antonio Manuel, Alex Varela e Hugo Denizart, 1970,” in *Exposição de Antonio Manuel. De 0 a 24h nas bancas de jornal. O jornal, Tema* supplement (Rio de Janeiro), July 15, 1973.

Notes

1. This conversation between Mário Pedrosa, Antonio Manuel, Alex Varela, and Hugo Denizart took place at the home of Mário Pedrosa two hours after Manuel presented his piece *O corpo é a obra* (The body is the work), in which he appeared in the nude, at Rio de Janeiro's Museu de Arte Moderna, at the opening of the 1970 edition of the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna. Transcribed and edited by the artist Lygia Pape, the conversation was published on July 15, 1973, in the *Tema* supplement of *O jornal*, as an integral part of the article *Exposição de Antonio Manuel. De 0 a 24h nas bancas de jornal* (Exhibition by Antonio Manuel. From 0 to 24 h at newspaper stands), which took up all of the supplement's pages with various texts and images of the works that would have been presented in his MAM/RJ exhibition, canceled by the museum's board of directors for fear of reprisals by the military regime then in power in Brazil.
2. Antonio Manuel participated in the Salão da Bússola (Bússola exhibition) (MAM-RJ, 1969) with an installation titled *Soy loco por ti* (I am crazy for you), made up of *Dieffenbachia seguine* plants (considered to be amulets of protection in Brazilian folk culture), country-style music, a bed of straw, and a procedure in which the spectator used a rope to activate a black panel that revealed another panel upon which was a red map of Latin America.

Camargo's Sculpture

The art of Sérgio Camargo, the young Brazilian artist who has already made an international name for himself, is hard to classify regarding its genre. He is undoubtedly a sculptor, but where is the volume, the three-dimensionality of his sculpture? Of what are its dimensions made? Where is the modeling of his material to be found?

Why or where is space defined—his enveloping or surrounding space? In general, its destination is the wall, as a relief. With what function? It is more of an interval, like a measure of time, than a component spatial measurement. As we know, it captures light—and therefore, shadow—like a cathedral facade, à la Monet.

Might it then be somewhat akin to a painting? But in order to be that (we are moving increasingly farther away from sculpture) it would have to present something like a wall, a facade. It is not a proud structure in itself: the difficulty with Camargo's work is that it is never abstract. It is always concrete, though far from the strict canons of "Concrete art."

It is always structure, although the force or forces that define it are deliberately connotative rather than significant. There is a relationship between relief and surface (or field) that ties Camargo's work to a structure that does not tolerate surrounding spaces or external ambiances. This intolerance is what makes it enchanting and invites us to discover the spring or mystery of such enchantment. It is like a toy whose internal mechanism the child hopes to discover. Woe to him if he does.

The Camarguan structures are not a sum of forms, nor are they a theory of figures and images that move or, rather, pullulate arrhythmically. Signification and contours are denied them by limits that are (strictly speaking) indefinite. The discontinuous surfaces tend to dematerialize so that real matter itself—what they are made of—may expand and fill these structures with something immaterial like gas or air—that is, light. It is the white in which the reliefs are painted that captures, captivates, and

apprehends matter. The latter is given a sort of patina but, paradoxically, does not allow itself to be defined by extension or outline, and the totality becomes mere memory—an aesthetic connotation. The shadows come with the light, reliefs that are nothing exchange the visual for the tactile, and the work regains its permanently ambivalent status as game and structure, touchable and untouchable, limit and unlimit, light and shadow. These visual structures by Camargo are a negation of form. Their parts do not actually make up the whole. Contrary to what one might think, matter is more present than contour, although the element that produces it—that fills it with substance—is light, rather than the solids conjoined by parameters that determine the field. It is idea—not form—that conducts the formal structures of Camargo's art. Hence its permanent openness and its enigmatic power of communication.



Sérgio Camargo. *Edge*. 1962. Painted wood on carved wood, 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ × 10 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 4" (42.5 × 27 × 10.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

—Originally published as "A escultura de Camargo," in *Catálogo exposição relevos e esculturas (1963–1975)* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1975).

Miró Among Poets

If, among poets, Miró was always one of them, it was not because he dedicated himself to poetry or even to literature. He must have been the least lettered of painters, with no love for ideas, and even less for theory. Indeed, it may be said that in his work as well as intellectually, Miró nourished himself on chance encounters—on life's crumbs, like the birds—and that he always kept his feet firmly planted on the ground, treading with the heavy, tranquil steps of the Catalan peasant.

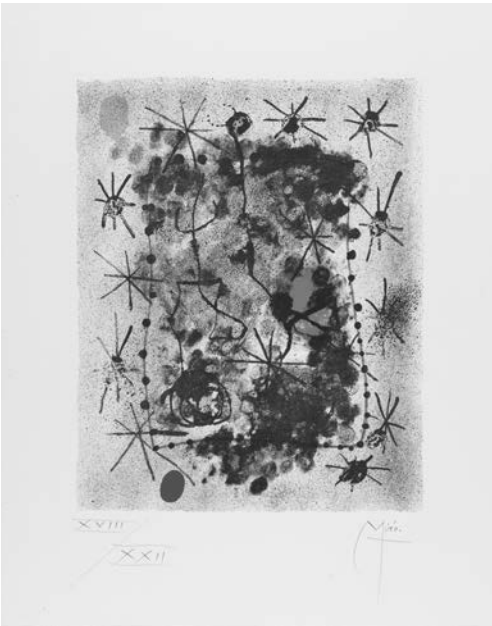
And yet, from the moment he arrived in Paris, he joined the poets of the Cubist generation and sat down with other, younger ones at the table of Surrealism. He signed manifestos, frequented cafés, listened to discussions, and went to bed at night on an empty stomach. Hunger tormented him, but so did creative work. “The automatic writing” in his canvases of the period—with “an innocence and a freedom which have not been surpassed”¹—is at least partly the effect of “hallucinations from hunger,”² as well as of the superb theorizing of the Surrealist Manifesto.

In any event, historical coincidence eventually launched Miró as a new and instinctive force that collided with Cubism and Neoplasticism and inoculated them with poetry. On the other side of the Atlantic, André Breton received Miró's *Constellations* series in installments, between January 21, 1940, and September 12, 1941. “It would seem that an absolutely pure and impervious tensile reflex impelled Miró, at this hour of extreme anguish which encompassed the whole period of production of his ‘Constellations,’ to unfurl the full range of his voice. So his voice rang out in every direction, not only outside this world but outside time as well, in any direction where it might echo most resoundingly and most enduringly, thus joining the loud chorus of the most inspired voices of all time.”³

Can it be that it was only at this point that everyone became aware of what history had made of the Catalan painter? Indeed, at the moment “of extreme anguish,” André Breton (who would be saluted in death by [French writer and critic] Jean Paulhan “as a hero of the Western world”),⁴ elevates his tone to designate Miró, with his “innocence and a freedom which have not been surpassed,” as “the most ‘surrealist’ of us all.”⁵ But the poet did not feel this was enough, for what he discerned from afar was, first and foremost, that “his voice rang out . . . joining the loud chorus of the most inspired voices of all time.” The problems of that time have been largely overcome, yet in speaking of Joan Miró, Breton is perfectly attuned to history.

Miró recognizes the importance of his Surrealist education, as well as the need to “go beyond the visual object and achieve poetry.”⁶ Yet there was never a question of cozying up to ideologies, even when the Surrealist poets, or others, pressured him to do so. Miró followed his own path and never strayed from it. Poetry is not an accomplishment—it inhabits him. And nature is openly there to teach him something every day. He wholly surrenders to this apprenticeship, his body sensitive to all provocations. In his youth he surely learned something in villages and in schools from teachers and friends, but apart from this, what does he know? Almost nothing, or very little. In fact, it is to the physical and sensory shelter of his entire being that one must connect the knowledge he acquires—especially what he learned through life itself, rather than in books. At first, he persisted in the tricks of his painter's trade; and not only as a painter for, since his early days, he has aspired to do everything, to know everything about the visual arts. And he works not only with his brush but with his arms, his hands, his fingers, his whole body stretched out on the ground.

Reserved for “great art,” oil painting is usually separated from other, “lesser” artistic activities. In Miró's case, this is impossible, for he practices all the arts—ceramics



Joan Miró. Untitled from Constellation of André Breton. 1958. Lithograph, comp.: 11 13/16 × 9 7/16" (30 × 24 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Pierre Matisse

and sculpture, which, as was previously the custom, he combines with several modalities of the graphic arts: engraving, "biting in" with delicate or nearly bloody teeth; woodcuts; deep black lithographs with pallid transparencies. These cannot be treated as a minor mode of his work—it may well constitute the revolution Miró made in the static conventions of old academicism. There are no genre differences for him; he is painter and printmaker at once: "I am always working on a hundred different things at the same time. And this holds good even for different branches of art: painting, engraving, lithography, sculpture, ceramics."⁷

Everything depends upon the act in which he finds himself engaged, whether it be the gesture of the paintbrush sliding across the

canvas or that of a point, a chisel, a burin that lacerates and grooves the resistant surface. In this sense, his case is surely not unique; look at Picasso, who ran the gamut of all the experiments of his century in time and space.

Miró represents another viewpoint. If none of the arts he practices dominates the others—and not only because their qualities are of equal value—it is also, and above all, because Miró ascribes the same importance to them. From this perspective, the subjects of his painting and prints do not count. In other artists, subjects change or disappear incessantly, at the discretion of taste, period, fashion, or new materials, but for Miró, what matters is situating himself at another, deeper level—that of the fundamental need to communicate. From his earliest canvases—*Potager à l'âne* [Vegetable garden with donkey] (1918), for example—Miró is interested in all types of two-dimensional representation. "As I work on a canvas I fall in love with it, love that is born of slow understanding." Why this "slow understanding"? Because, Miró tells us, "of the nuances—concentrated—which the sun gives." And so it is that the need for a "slow understanding" appears to us, in the countless collected details, in this "concentrated," great wealth of nuances. There is "joy at learning to understand a tiny blade of grass in a landscape." Having convinced himself that this tiny blade of grass is as beautiful as a tree or a mountain, he also recognizes that "apart from the primitives and the Japanese, almost everyone overlooks this which is so divine."⁸ Thus, for twenty-five years now, affinities that cannot be just a matter of chance have been signaled.

This brings to mind primitive peoples and the Japanese, within a culture that is totally other, inside a vastly different sensibility. By virtue of his great visionary power—his imagination—in the course of a lengthy process, the young Catalan artist reduces everything in nature and the cosmos to *signs*. His art eventually transforms itself into a preverbal caricature, for it is situated within that indefinable zone in which signifiers are unable to keep up with meanings. In statements collected by

[writer] Pierre Volboudt, Miró says: “The reality of a universe of signs and symbols in which figures pass from one realm to another . . . is like a secret language made up of magic phrases, a language that comes *before words themselves*, from a time when the things men imagined and intuited were more real and true than what they saw, when this was the only reality.”⁹ One might thus believe that, to Miró, these signs, far from being the pure products of his imagination, belong instead to a sort of “secret language,” to “magic phrases that come before words”—a concept that equally presupposes the religious and aesthetic traditions of Chinese and Japanese calligraphers. Few European artists reveal such an affinity with the East in the relations between line and sign, space and motion, or the physical and spiritual appropriateness of creative work.

Many poets became friends with Miró and grew knowledgeable about his work and his technical procedures. Let us not forget their shared initiation into Surrealism, into the mysteries of the unconscious and automatic writing. As early as 1924, the painters in the group adopted the habit of presenting their “ramblings” to their poet, writer, and intellectual friends. They set about discovering—or better yet, deciphering—in canvases and drawings the acts and demons of the unconscious, just like the characters who appear or disappear in the painted scene, according to the obscure laws of Freudian cosmology. From Breton to the youngest of the poets, all the Surrealists participated in these labors of decodification.

Raymond Queneau, during a period in which he had broken with Breton, wrote a book about Miró in 1949 that still reflects the atmosphere of the early days [*Joan Miró; ou, le poète préhistorique*]. Here the relationship is inverted: Queneau is the critic and Miró the poet. This allowed the author to raise the very important question of a reading of the set of Mironian signs. For the first time, he speaks of a “miro-glyphics” and “mihieroglyphics” dictionary, beyond a repertory of signs, defining all of Miró’s art as writing—that of the “Prehistoric Poet.”¹⁰

Starting with the Mironian signs of the early periods, Queneau dedicates himself to a detailed refutation of Surrealism in Miró’s painting. Queneau notes that one does not find in it “clocks made of flesh” or “sewing machines bicycling down the Avenue de l’Opéra,” but instead pictures that “represent” (the author’s quotation marks) “a dog that barks at the moon, a hand catching a bird, a seated woman,” etc.¹¹ Therefore, Miró merely used “certain Surrealist methods.” Even if all this is debatable, though amusing (as when Queneau argues with Breton about whether a tiny object in the *Paysage Catalan* [Catalan landscape] represents “mud” or “color spilled from the tube”), the author is undertaking a serious labor of discovering the real enough relationships between Chinese ideograms and Miró’s painting, another kind of “writing one must know how to decipher.” In this regard, he seeks to allay his readers’ fears by specifying that “Miró’s graphic originality is in no way diminished by this comparison (regarding how he treats script) with the evolution of Chinese ideograms.”¹² Why, then, speak of “diminishment” in these comparisons between the treatment of script and ideograms? As a painter, Miró establishes a very specific and very profound relationship with nature, or, if we prefer, with the nature of reality. The secret of Sino-Japanese calligraphy results from the sign’s predominance over nature. There has always been ideographic writing, before the eyes of the calligraphers, and even (I dare say) before noncalligraphic artists. To them, nature is not an infinite and unfinished book of new images but, rather, an inexhaustible album of signs. Chinese and Japanese children *know* before they see; they learn their “life science” from the time they receive the little wooden sticks with which they will eat or write; probably also before they really see through direct perception. Even before they have the

perceptive experience, let us say, of the mountain, the rice paddy, or the rickshaw, they are already familiar with the ideograms for water, star, or house. One may safely say that from time immemorial, the Japanese calligraphic artist (and even today's abstract calligrapher) encounters an ideogram. I don't know if the same thing occurs with European artists; although they also live in very old countries, their stocks of sensory images and knowledge cannot help but be archaeological, in a way. We are far—very far—from true reality. In our Western world, even the most modern painting becomes necessarily conceptual and, if it wishes to achieve maximum freedom, it must free itself from the data of perception and the influence of nature. To the author of *Prehistoric Poet*, the true meaning of painting is freedom from “a subjective world communicable by a ‘sort’ of colored writing laid out on a flat and generally rectangular surface.”¹³ But is it still justifiable today to keep Miró's multiform work within these boundaries?

Miró himself does not readily admit these limitations. Around 1961, he confessed to his friend Rosamond Bernier that he felt “a very great inner tension to reach the emptiness I wanted.” He was then at work on his three great blue canvases. His language and his attitude bore considerable resemblance to those of the calligrapher at the moment of the irrecoverable gesture. “It was like preparing the celebration of a religious rite or entering a monastery.” This “entering a monastery” may surprise Westerners, who will be even more surprised to know that this is no matter of mystical practices, and that Miró is referring to Japanese archers “getting themselves into the right state” to prepare for competitions: exhaling, inhaling, exhaling: “It was the same thing for me. I knew that I had everything to lose. One weakness, one mistake, and everything would collapse.”¹⁴ Here we recognize the calligrapher's intense physical and psychological concentration at the very moment of executing his work. Tension and symbiosis of body and soul—that is the secret of those who dedicate themselves to the “great art” of calligraphy or the “small art” of the bow and arrow. In this case, bodily discipline is an essential condition: we ask ourselves whether Miró also practices it.

Let us recall the indispensable testimony of J. [Jacques] Dupin regarding one of the crucial moments in the making of the triptych *L'espoir du condamné à mort* [The hope of a condemned man; 1974]. The critic—or, more precisely, the poet—tells us: “The work was born in his studio's garret—severe, dark, and suffocating, like a cell. The blinds closed, only the rays from a projector lit the three canvases hanging on three walls. In each painting, everything rests on the adventure of a single line. . . . They are three silent stages in the inscription of agony, anxious expectation, and imaginary evasion. The essential thing about the painting is the slow elaboration of the line. . . . Miró pursued this line with a sense of physical malaise bordering on asphyxia. He was only able to breathe freely when he finished the painting.”

One cannot speak of Miró's illustrations without taking into account the following statement: “I see no difference between painting and poetry. I sometimes illustrate my canvases with poetic sentences, and vice versa. Did not the Chinese, those masters of the intellect, proceed in precisely the same way?”¹⁵ He has handfuls of such phrases, of beautiful words that intervene in the pictorial or graphic work. Each time, a verse defines the pictorial subject, and one cannot gaze at the painting without taking the title into account—like this one, among twenty others: *Femmes aux cheveux défaits saluant le croissant de la lune* [Women with disheveled hair welcoming the crescent moon]. Among Miró's masterpieces there are a few small compositions in which he shows himself to be painter and poet at the same time. Such is the case with *L'Hirondelle joue de la harpe à l'ombre des pissenlits* [The swallow plays the harp

in the shadows of dandelions] (1955). The phrase continues across the work's four pages. The letters begin with thin crisscrossing lines that suddenly form the word *hirondelle*. Other, thicker lines move on to the next page to write *joue de la harpe*. The letters are lines of varying thickness that are transformed into signs so that the entire plot may be read from one page to the next, with a brief epilogue that sums up the scene: a figure holding a harp plays by the light of a streetlamp, or what stands for it in the artist's repertory. Here, the synchronization of letters and figures is perfect. One no longer knows whether one is "reading" or "seeing."

Upon his return to Japan, Miró worked in a genre that was new to him—the haiku. An entire book is dedicated to these minipoems translated by [the Swiss poet] Philippe Jaccottet, and Miró illustrated it with seven lithographs. Thus he completed the other dimension of the poem, somehow producing its shadow or its complement (which the Japanese call *haiga*). In haiku, the relationship between poem and painting is not the same as in poems illustrated by correlation. Here, the contents of the two interpenetrate as in a fugue, giving the poem a certain vague, impersonal tone. In Japanese poetry, the cosmos remains impregnated by the ego; the "self" participates in the cosmos without being massacred by it. Hence the infinite or incomplete states that are so frequent in haiku.

Many of Miró's fellow travelers bypassed Surrealism. Others—like Benjamin Peret, whose *Et les seins mouraient* [And the breasts were dying] (published by Cahiers du Sud in 1928) was one of the most fluidly automatic texts illustrated by Miró—remained in it for life. Ten years later, another text by Peret (*Au paradis des fantômes*) [In the paradise of ghosts] infused Miró with its heat, and the poet made inscriptions in it with a fiery drypoint needle.

There is also René Char, who discovered in himself common roots with Miró's imaginary population. His short *Homo poeticus* is the fruit of their poetic collaboration—a model dialogue between words and signs. As for *A la santé du serpent* [Here's to the snake] (1954), it is the exceptional conversation between two minds. The book opens with a masterly page of calligraphy in which the poet "sing[s] of heat with the face of a newborn, desperate heat."¹⁶ Following this, inscriptions, signs, and thoughts of great beauty alternate and complete one another. The Mironian signs stand out from the texts like engraved stele, commenting on the poem's sentences and intensifying its gravity: "The one who relies on the sunflower won't meditate in the house. All the thoughts of love will be his thoughts."¹⁷

At a given moment, as if it were a matter of rhythmically marking the distances along the lines, the poet tells us: "There remains a calculable depth where sand subjugates fate. . . . Poetry is of all the clear waters the one which lingers least in the reflection of its bridges."¹⁸ Here, Miró's signs are, again, veritable ideograms.

Having arrived from Zurich after the First World War, [Tristan] Tzara brought Dada with him in his baggage, and soon had to accommodate it (almost by force, under pressure from Breton, [Paul] Éluard, and [Louis] Aragon) within the boundaries of the Surrealist movement. Tzara was a kind of meteor. None could resist his charm. Miró inseminated his *Parler seul* [Speaking alone] (1950), a song that evokes the acrobat's absence of boundaries in a series of mischievous lithographs. Tzara writes: "A stranger in the sunshine of the bells, I saw her fleetingly on the arm of dead leaves." Or also: "Green shadow met you by the water's broken arm." Or then: "And death bites our buttocks / What do you know about that, barking at black laughter / Delivered from return / There you are on the right path." Here, Miró's hand points to "the right path." With the "laughter of water" [*rire de l'eau*], in a chain of metaphors, Tzara refers us "to all the directions of white hair" [*aux quatre coins des cheveux blancs*] and Miró flings a

brilliant series of lithographs upon these inspired pages. “Still steeped in parentheses / Waxed twisted whitened / Open in the water, rare laughter / Fallen lower than a begging hand.” And farther on: “What to say of the empty closet / In a great shout of milky laughter.” Next comes *Paroles des vieux et des jeunes* [Words of the old and the young] and *Mots de paille* [Words of straw]. With this type of final ballad: “The knife in the wound / Whistle blow ended departure / Another train tells us what it tells us / It says poor folk from here and there / And freedom spreads / Like blood-colored milk.”¹⁹

In Paul Éluard, Miró finds a pure, serene, calm, and violent voice he does not find in his Surrealist colleagues. *A toute épreuve* [Foolproof] (1958) is, above all, a poem of meditation, of love, of solitude—a poem in which psychic automatism moves in a dialectical game of concepts that oppose one another but are also occasionally conciliatory. For this book Miró executed prints on colored wood. The image of solitude is black and, within this context, the relationships between solitude and the universe are of proximity and lack of communication. The treatment of the wood does not overburden the poetry and, in a way, protects it.

It would be a long walk to follow Miró all the way to his most recent work, page by page, through the poems of his friends. But how to leave out, for example, Alice Paalen’s *Sablier couché* [Recumbent hourglass] (1938), or [the magazine] *La Carotide* and *Le Visage s’invente* [The face invents itself] by P. A. [Pierre-André] Benoit, one of Miró’s frequent interlocutors? Or Lise Deharme in the small poems of her *Le tablier blanc* [The white apron] (1958), *Lorsque l’oiseau perdit ses plumes . . .* [When the bird lost its feathers]. Or even René Crevel, the spell of whose *Bague d’aurore* [Ring of dawn] (1957) evokes [Comte de] Lautréamont? Miró paid tribute to him in etchings whose language allows us to detect signs of love and friendship. There is also *Fissures* by Michel Leiris, whose wise authority kept watch over poetry and art with wisdom, love, and disenchantment. With his etchings, Miró responds to the disillusioned words of the strophes *Rouge ou noir, Lumière est ombre* [Red or black, Light is shadow]. “Must one suddenly risk all / If nothing exists that doesn’t hang by a thread?”²⁰

Jacques Prévert, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes²¹—how can one fail to mention them? Or the great Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo Neto who, in Barcelona, in 1950, discussed Miró’s art from the perspective of his own personal experience?²² Or Jacques Dupin, whose dialogue with Miró we never tire of listening to in *Les brisants* [The breakers] (1958) and *Saccades* [Fits and starts]?

The list goes on and on, because in leaving the circle of his friends, Miró reached out to masters from other periods and other climates, such as W. B. [William Butler] Yeats, with André Pieyre de Mandiargues’s French translation of *The Wind among the Reeds* [*Le Vent parmi les roseaux*], and in a completely different vein, [Alfred] Jarry’s *Ubu Roi*.

Finally, let us recall an event that took place in 1974—the publication of R. [Robert] Desnos’s poems *Les Pénalités de l’enfer ou les Nouvelles Hébrides* [The Penalties of Hell or the New Hebrides]. The work is the fruit of a pact of friendship pledged in 1925, interrupted by the war in Spain and then by the World War, an exile from which Desnos never returned. Thirty years later, the pact unites the voice of purest youth with illustrations by a master in all the richness of his advanced age. And it is marvelous to confront the poet’s verve (as inspired by the ego’s revolt against the superego) with the vigor of Miró, who unveils a vast panorama in which greens whirling above foamy whites buttress the apparition in red of a sort of horseshoe launched into the cosmos like some premonitory sign.

—Originally published as “Miró parmi les poètes” (translation by Iná Camargo Costa of “Miró entre poetas”), *Opus international* (Paris), no. 58 (1976).

Notes

1. André Breton, quoted in Jacques Dupin, *Joan Miró: Life and Work* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1962), p. 153.
2. Joan Miró quoted in Lluís Permanyer, "Revelations by Joan Miró about His Work," *Gaceta ilustrada* (April 1978), in *Joan Miró, Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell (New York: Da Capo, 1992), p. 290.
3. André Breton, "Joan Miró 'Constellations,'" in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 263.
4. Jean Paulhan, "Un héros du monde occidental," *La nouvelle revue française: André Breton et le mouvement surréaliste* 15, no. 172 (1967): 589–91. Pedrosa misquotes the title as "an intellectual hero of the Western world."
5. Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 36.
6. Joan Miró, quoted in Rowell, *Miró, Selected Writings and Interviews*, p. 114.
7. Joan Miró, quoted in Juan Perucho, *Joan Miró and Catalonia* (New York: Tudor, 1968), p. 222.
8. Joan Miró to J. F. Ràfols, August 11, 1918, in Rowell, *Miró, Selected Writings and Interviews*, p. 57.
9. Joan Miró, "Statement," in *XXE Siècle* (June 1957), in Rowell, *Miró, Selected Writings and Interviews*, p. 240. Italics are Pedrosa's.
10. Raymond Queneau, "Miró, or the Prehistoric Poet" (1949), in *Letters, Numbers, Forms: Essays 1928–70*, trans. Jordan Stump (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), pp. 166, 162.
11. These quotations may be paraphrases relating to text found in *ibid.*, p. 167.
12. Pedrosa's word *lama* (mud) is given as "an animal's dropping" in *ibid.*, p. 166.
13. *Ibid.*; italics are Pedrosa's.
14. Joan Miró interview with Rosamond Bernier, *L'Œil* (1961), in Rowell, *Miró, Selected Writings and Interviews*, pp. 258–59.
15. Joan Miró quoted in Queneau, "Miró, or the Prehistoric Poet," p. 167.
16. "Chante la chaleur à visage de nouveau-né, la chaleur désespérée." René Char, "Here's to the Snake!" trans. Mary Ann Caws, *The Brooklyn Rail* (December 2007–January 2008). Accessed April 25, 2014, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2007/12/poetry/heres-to-the-snake>.
17. *Ibid.* Pedrosa gives the Portuguese translation of the French original, "Celui qui se fie au tournesol ne méditera pas dans la maison. Toutes les pensées de l'amour deviendront ses pensées."
18. *Ibid.* "Il reste une profondeur mesurable là où le sable subjuge la destinée. . . . La poésie est de toutes les eaux claires celle qui s'attarde le moins au reflet de ses ponts."
19. Translations by Steve Berg of the following: "Etrangère dans le soleil des cloches, je l'ai vue fugitive au bras des feuilles mortes"; "Verte l'ombre t'a rejoint sur le bras cassé de l'eau"; "Et la mort nous mord les fesses / Qu'en savez-vous aboyant au rire noir / Délivrée du retour / Vous voilà sur la bonne route"; "Encore imbu de parenthèses / Parafiné tordu blanchi / Ouvert dans l'eau, des rires rares / Tombé plus bas que main d'aumône"; "Que dire de l'armoire vide / Dans un grand éclat de rire de lait"; "Le couteau dans la plaie / Coup de sifflet fini départ / Un autre train nous dit que dit-il / Il dit pauvres gens deci de-là / Et la liberté se répand / Comme du lait couleur de sang."
20. "Faudra-t-il tout à coup, jouer le tout pour le tout / Si rien n'existe qui ne tienne à un fil?"
21. Jacques Prévert, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, *Joan Miró* (Paris: Maeght, 1956).
22. Miró commissioned his friend, the Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo Neto (who lived in Catalonia), to write an essay for his book of prints. See João Cabral de Melo Neto, *Miró* (Barcelona: Ed. de L'Œc, 1950).

Lygia Pape

Among the artists in circulation around here, none is richer in ideas than Lygia Pape. Ideas are not concepts or prejudices but, rather, fragments of sensations that lead Pape from one space to another event, and from there to a state in which flickering colors and spaces devour one another between the inside and the outside. Cubes and eggs delimit their areas and create states of perspective that intersect to join this plane and that one, empty and full, while the spaces or instants of space appear on the street corner through the street vendor who has the gift of calling with his whistle to the otherwise-beings who suddenly gather around him. Walls are erected from the wind eggs that eventually evoke a trench of Sandinista guerillas in action, bestowing a touch of contemporaneity to the structure-state in which everything returns to being what it never was, and post- and pre-images recommence the cycle of creativity, from the *Livro da criação* [*Book of Creation*] to the *Balé neoconcreto* [Neo-Concrete ballet], from the small bags of the *Objetos de sedução* [Objects of seduction]



Lygia Pape. *Book of Creation* (installation). 1959–60. Gouache on cardboard, each 12 × 12" (30.5 × 30.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

to *Eat me*, from the *Roda dos prazeres* [Wheel of pleasures] to the *Espaços imantados* [Magnetized spaces] that warm themselves in improvisations of chance and poetry. Deep within the entire scheme that represents the driving artist lies the tiny particle, the breath of life that unites everything, art and nonart, form and part, color and space, in a circuit that begins here and does not end there, but always keeps open the breach through which the idea once more shoots forth, and makes everything begin again, from lushness to sensations, heat to form and vitality to where life adorns itself, and the continuation of things indicates that art and idea never stop, shot through by the sinewy inspiration of Lygia Pape.

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