

Press Release

LYGIA CLARK: STUDIO ORIGINS

20 September – 26 October 2024



Lygia Clark, 'Bicho - Versão única / Critter - Version 1', 1960
© Associação Cultural O Mundo de Lygia Clark, Rio de Janeiro

Alison Jacques presents *Studio Origins*, a solo exhibition dedicated to seminal Brazilian artist Lygia Clark (b.1920, Belo Horizonte – d.1988, Rio de Janeiro). This exhibition runs concurrently to Clark's first UK museum solo exhibition *The I and the You*, at Whitechapel Gallery, London (2 October 2024 – 12 January 2025).

Clark is regarded as a radical innovator who pushed the boundaries of what is considered art, fundamentally redefining the relationship between artist and viewer. As a leading figure of the Neo-Concrete movement, initiated in Rio de Janeiro in 1959, Clark understood art as an organic phenomenon. She demanded a subjective, body-related and sensual experience which encouraged viewer interaction.

Studio Origins comprises early works, often smaller scale, which function as studies and proposals for larger paintings and sculptures; many never exhibited before. All of these works were kept in Clark's studio throughout her life, and this exhibition thereby acts as a comprehensive encyclopaedia of her thoughts and ideas, forming the foundations for all that she went on to create over her 40-year career.

The starting point for visitors to *Studio Origins* is a large-scale reproduction of an image, taken in 1958, of Lygia Clark seated in front of her installation of *7 Unit*

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(*Unidade*) paintings, made during the first exhibition of Brazilian Neo-Concretism at the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro. Further into the exhibition, the viewer discovers the same wall installation made with seven smaller versions of *7 Units*. Clark kept her smaller versions of each *Unit* painting in her studio for 30 years, and these have been reinstalled, in this exhibition, for the first time since her passing in 1988.

Bichos (Animals), or *Critters*, as they are often referred to, were Clark's pioneering protean sculptures. These aluminium works, which were made during the 1960s, and later revisited in stainless steel in the 1980s, were constructed with hinges alluding to vertebrae which allowed the viewer to manipulate and move the sculptures to assume different forms. The first *Bicho* Clark made was *Bicho (Caranguejo / Crab, 1959)*, the only *Bicho* sculpture conceived of in the 1950s. It represents a crucial turning point; the kernel of Clark's move from 'breaking the frame' towards the organic line, three-dimensional works and a focus on participatory art.

Clark's starting point for a *Bicho* was a balsa wood maquette. Some of these studies were freestanding, others were laid flat on a surface. Clark chose balsa wood, from trees native to the rainforests in South America, for its softness, extraordinary lightness and simplicity of cutting. The exhibition includes an extensive survey of the *Bicho* studies beginning with *Crab*, the point of departure from which all other series of *Bichos* made in the 1960s originated. These include key works such as *Planet*, *Metamorphosis*, *Bird in Space* and *Pocket Bicho*.

Once these wooden studies were complete, Clark would make a *Bicho* maquette in aluminium. These maquettes are the only *Bichos* Clark made herself in the studio, and are unique sculptures. All other *Bichos* were fabricated outside of the studio using the maquettes as models, and were editioned and in different scales. Clark kept the *Bicho* maquettes in her studio throughout her life; they are less polished and have a more intimate and hands-on feel. A rare large-scale gold *Bicho* titled *Project for a Planet (1963)* is exhibited alongside the balsa wood studies and aluminium maquettes. Together, they allow us to experience the complete evolution of Clark's *Bicho* series.

Other works within the exhibition include the *Trepante (Climber)* and *Casulo (Cocoon)* series, alongside paintings and collages. Clark would invite collectors to her studio to select a painting from collages laid out on a table, the chosen collage would then be translated into the finished painting on wood. The collages form an important survey of Clark's wall based works, some as works in their own right, whilst others acted as precursors for realised paintings.

A key part of the exhibition comprises a previously unexhibited series of gouaches from 1955 entitled *Geometria Amorosa (Loving Geometry)* which were painted proposals Clark made for ceiling murals. Only one, included in the exhibition, was actually realised, but this series indicates Clark's strong interest in architecture. This is also illustrated in the modular matchbox constructions, made in 1964 in Paris, which the viewer could manipulate by pushing and pulling the drawers of the painted boxes. Other architecture projects, including maquettes for interiors and a photo collage for Clark's monumental outdoor *Bicho*, are on view in the concurrent exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery.

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Lygia Clark was the subject of a major USA retrospective at MoMA, New York (2014). In 2025, the first major European retrospective of Clark in over 30 years will open at the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (May 23 – 12 October 2025) touring to the Kunsthaus Zürich, where the show will be on view from autumn 2025 to spring 2026. Clark is represented in museum collections worldwide including Tate, London; MOMA, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; MFA, Houston and The Art Institute of Chicago.

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