

Sensitive Geometries. Brazil 1950s – 1980s

12 September – 26 October 2013, Hauser & Wirth New York, 69th Street

Including works by:

Lothar Charoux

Waldemar Cordeiro

Joao Jose Costa

Geraldo De Barros

Hermelindo Fiaminghi

Paulo Roberto Leal

Rubem Ludolf

Anna Maria Maiolino

Mira Schendel

Ivan Serpa

Franz Weissmann

Paulo Wernck

Opening: Thursday 12 September 6 – 8 pm

New York, NY... In the years after World War II, Brazil found itself in a state of dramatic change. Economic prosperity, political democratization, and social reorganization marked the decade of the 1950s as one of the most expansive in Brazilian history. In the cultural realm, urban renewal propelled the construction of Brasília and witnessed the creation of modern art museums in both Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. The first São Paulo Biennale was held in 1951, signaling the advent of an artistic revolution that would capture the attention of both the Brazilian public and wider circles of artists, intellectuals, and critics abroad. Brazil in the mid-20th century was emerging as a dynamic cultural center of international significance.

Beginning 12 September 2013, Hauser & Wirth New York will present ‘Sensitive Geometries. Brazil 1950s – 1980s’, a landmark historical exhibition that explores this pivotal moment and reveals the evolution of a distinct visual vocabulary in Brazil through the work of twelve artists of different generations: Lothar Charoux, Waldemar Cordeiro, João José Costa, Geraldo De Barros, Hermelindo Fiaminghi, Paulo Roberto Leal, Rubem Ludolf, Anna Maria Maiolino, Mira Schendel, Ivan Serpa, Franz Weissmann, and Paulo Werneck. Inspired by an infectious spirit of postwar renewal and creativity, ‘Sensitive Geometries’ traces a shift in attitude towards artistic approaches in non-figurative art and the tenets of a period in which artists experimented with the expressive possibilities of a geometric language.

Conceived and organized with Olivier Renaud-Clément, ‘Sensitive Geometries’ will remain on view at Hauser & Wirth’s East 69th Street townhouse through 26 October.

‘Sensitive Geometries’ will be accompanied by a new publication, produced in concept and design as a facsimile of an exhibition catalogue published in 1959 for the first Neo-Concrete exhibition, held at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro.

Movements and their Muses

Concrete Art developed in Brazil in the early 1950s as a result of a renewed cultural exchange with Europe following World War II. During this period, internationally recognized artists like Alexander Calder and Max Bill participated in important exhibitions in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and introduced a new abstract aesthetic to Latin American art. Concrete Art traces its influence to the movements of modern abstraction, rooted in the Constructivist language developed in Europe and exemplified by De Stijl, Neoplasticism, and the Ulm School. For the first time, artists began to gather together in groups, associations, and collectives. Brazil sought to break from its provincial past by rejecting traditions of figurative painting and adopting an abstract geometric vocabulary. Thus the

Concrete movement grew in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and it played a critical role in the development of the Brazilian avant-garde. Concretist groups were formed in each city: Grupo Ruptura was established in São Paulo in 1952, and in Rio de Janeiro the Grupo Frente was founded in 1954.

Ivan Serpa, who was awarded the Young Painter's Prize at the first São Paulo International Biennial and whose compact gouache of delicate black lines and boxes 'Untitled' (1958) is included in 'Sensitive Geometries', became one of the precursors of Concrete Art in Brazil. He soon began teaching open studio courses at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro and influenced a generation of artists, encouraging his students to experiment with geometric language and to find their own individual means of artistic expression.

In São Paulo, Lothar Charoux worked as a founding member of Grupo Ruptura. His art, represented in 'Sensitive Geometries' by the oil on wood composition 'Horizontals' (1960), offers forms that optically challenge a viewer's fixed gaze. Creating visual rhythms through elaborate symmetries and arrangements, Charoux frames three-dimensional space with a geometric vocabulary that plays with color, line, and plane.

In 1956, Grupo Ruptura and the Concretists exhibited together for the first time at the inaugural National Exhibition of Concrete Art at the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo. Differences in their approach became evident quickly and stirred conflict between the São Paulo- and Rio-based artists. In 1959, the Rio artists actively rejected the theories of Concrete Art and established a new movement: The Neo-Concrete movement was comprised of Brazilian artists, poets, and intellectuals who advocated for a more free form of artistic experimentation, reacting against the principles of Concrete Art.

Franz Weissmann was one of the new movement's founding members; his 'Amassados (Dents)' works evidence his efforts to push the existing boundaries of artmaking and the logic of geometry. Using sheets of aluminum and zinc, Weissmann hammered away at the surfaces of his 'paintings', creating a series of lyrically expressive cavities and impressions. On view in 'Sensitive Geometries', his 'Untitled' (1966) is an aluminum plane that appears to have buckled, bubbled, and ruptured through a near-mystical force.

Beginning in the 1960s, the Neo-Concretists established new paradigms for contemporary art that in turn influenced the work of Paulo Roberto Leal and Anna Maria Maiolino. Included in 'Sensitive Geometries' are key works by Leal, who used cutting, folding, sewing, and even conventional brush painting to examine and intensify relationships between plane, texture, and color. In Leal's series of the 1970s called 'Entretel' (literally translated from Portuguese as 'between canvases') the artist introduces everyday materials to his compositions, constructing works from cotton, denim, paper, thread, and other items. By stitching these works together to produce such pieces as 'Armagem' (c. 1970), Leal adds, separates, and overlaps his materials to develop an original and singular artistic language that expands the field of painting into countless possibilities.

Among the figures represented in 'Sensitive Geometries', Mira Schendel is perhaps one of the most important and influential Brazilian female artists of the post-war period. On view in the exhibition is an exceptional early work on paper from 1955 that explores geometric forms in space. Rendered in black and blue-grey tempera, Schendel's 'Untitled' plays with mathematical proportions to produce complex subdivisions of interchangeable shapes. Astonishing in their confident spareness, her drawings on Japanese rice paper and inked sheets of glass are characterized by heartbreaking delicacy. Schendel once remarked, 'I would say the line, often, just stimulated the void. I doubt whether the word stimulate is right. At any rate what matters in my work is the void, actively the void'.

'Sensitive Geometries' expands to present São Paulo-based Anna Maria Maiolino's prized early experimentations and drawings from the 1970s. In the work of this artist, now represented internationally by Hauser & Wirth, viewers feel the force of the many Brazilian movements merging. Her 'Mapas Mentales (Mental Maps)', 'Constructed Projects', and 'Drawing Objects' series suggest formal and conceptual parallels between generations and movements, from the Concrete and Neo-

Concrete to contemporary art. 'I am not an artist who makes a clean copy. I am a completely contaminated artist', Maiolino has said. Negotiating a practice that evolves from a culmination of Brazilian traditions, her work demonstrates the growing importance of Brazilian art in the trajectory of contemporary practice around the world.

The post-war period defined Brazil as an emerging nation of progressive change, enraptured by a modern utopian spirit. The legacy of artistic movements in Brazil can be traced back as early as the 1940s, influenced by architect Oscar Niemeyer's lyrical curvilinear architecture and Brazilian muralist Paulo Werneck's pictorial abstract murals for public spaces. Included in 'Sensitive Geometries' are Paulo Werneck's meticulously rendered gouache paintings and drawings, which reflect a perfect understanding of proportion and scale for mural designs in his nation's capital.

Largely unknown at an international level, the artists included in 'Sensitive Geometries' developed a language that still resonates vividly today. All were considered by Brazilian academics, critics, collectors, and museums to be critical to their nation's artistic development and are recognized today as the authors of breakthroughs that paved the way for Brazilian art to emerge on the international contemporary art scene.