

The younger generation of artists continue to pursue the questions raised by artists in the 1950s and early 1960s, looking at the object in the world in different ways, while retaining a sense of intimate scale and transparency and using some of the same materials. Jac Leirner cuts out the inner section of an everyday object, a plastic bag, to render it useless as a bag and as an advertisement for a brand, and to repurpose it as a sculpture. Fernanda Gomes's works bring simple singular materials to the gallery space: in one, a small stack of half painted plank parts sit in a corner; in another, cotton tape tumbles to the floor. Ernesto Neto transforms lead shot and stockings into sensual, erotic forms. Most distant from the abstract geometry of the earlier decades is Tunga's use of the plait or braid, with its erotic and surrealist associations. In *Gaveta* (Drawer, 1986), he uses the form of the drawer to unveil its contents of magnets and copper wire, materials with energy and mystery.

The diversity of the works in this exhibition presents an insight into the past and present worlds of Brazilian sculpture, and its potential future. In 1956, Waldemar Cordeiro proposed that 'the universality of art is the universality of the object'; a decade later, Oiticica noted that the 'collective of works which we call the Brazilian avant-garde is a new phenomenon in the international arena'. Despite the consistency of its intimate scale and references to works made half a century ago, the object in Brazilian sculpture remains new, an ongoing endless experiment for artists and audiences now.

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Possibilities of the Object

Experiments in Modern and Contemporary Brazilian Art

Curated by Paulo Venancio Filho
Until 25 May 2015

The Fruitmarket Gallery

Artur Barrio
Waldécio Caldas
Sergio Camargo
Aluísio Carvão
Amílcar de Castro
Willys de Castro
Lygia Clark
Antonio Dias
Fernanda Gomes
Jac Leirner
Antonio Manuel
Cildo Meireles
Ernesto Neto
Hélio Oiticica
Lygia Pape
Mira Schendel
Tunga
Carlos Zilio

This exhibition explores artists' diverse and innovative approaches to the object in Brazilian sculpture from the 1950s to the present, over a period of radical political, social and economic change for the country. Curated by the eminent Brazilian curator Paulo Venancio Filho, his selection includes works from important public collections as well as works rarely seen outside of Brazil which present a focused view of the aesthetic and conceptual experiments that took place in sculpture over sixty years. Although the exhibition presents insights into the changing concerns of artists living under an oppressive military regime from 1964 to 1985, even the oldest works in the exhibition retain a surprising freshness and relevance today.

Some of the earliest works in the exhibition occupy a large table on the ground floor, and represent new thinking about possibilities for sculpture in the 1950s and 1960s. Works such as Aluísio Carvão's *Cubocor* (Cubecolour, 1960) and Sergio Camargo's *Cubo aberto* (Open Cube, 1958–59) point to the ways in which artists were breaking away from sculpture's conventional



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properties of mass, volume and an inner core, seeking instead an intimacy of scale and a kind of transparency or penetrability in its formal elements, animated by the viewer moving around it. Literal animation could be found in Lygia Clark's *Bicho* (Creature, 1960), one of a series of sculptures with moveable parts which were originally intended to be manipulated and handled by the viewer. The perception of colour as a substance in itself was also important in this period, as works such as Hélio Oiticica's *B1 Bólide caixa 1 'Cartesiano'* (B1 Box Bólide 1 'Cartesian', 1963) make clear.

Avant-garde art movements in Brazil shared some affinities with European and North American movements over the course of this period, but they were also distinctly different. From the late 1940s, closer cultural links with Europe meant that by the 1950s artists and architects were absorbing and responding to the forms of the Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier and the artists Kazimir Malevich (Russian) and Piet Mondrian (Dutch). With the advent of the first Bienal de São Paulo in 1951, interest in the geometric abstraction of constructivism, based on the rational thinking, abstract forms and order of European artists such as Max Bill (Swiss), led to the foundation of two groups: the Grupo Ruptura founded in São Paulo by Waldemar Cordeiro and the Grupo Frente, founded in Rio de Janeiro by Ivan Serpa, with members including Aluísio Carvão, Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Pape. By 1959, in an attempt to embrace tactility and the sensorial characteristics of forms, artists such as Sergio Camargo, Clark, Amílcar de Castro and Lygia Pape broke away from the constraints of the concrete art of the São Paulo artists by founding the neoconcrete movement, which Oiticica joined in 1961.

Over these two decades, artists and writers wrote manifestos to define this series of new movements, inventing different terms to describe their artworks, such as 'active-object', 'relational object', 'trans-object', 'non-object', 'poem object' and 'graphic object'. (Willys de Castro's *Objeto ativo* (Active Object, 1961) and *Pluriobjeto A-6* (Pluriobject A-6, 1988) refer to these terms.) By 1966, Oiticica called the kind of art he and the artists he was associated with were making 'neither painting nor sculpture – but environmental orders which could be called objects'. The centrality of the word 'object' referred to the release of the artwork from the constraints of the supporting structures of painting and sculpture, the frame and the plane (or plinth): without them, these forms

could become objects on a table, and objects in the world, a radical departure from the formal viewing practices of art at the time.

From the 1960s, the absence of frame and plane brought other freedoms and new directions for exploration. The geometric forms of Malevich and Mondrian gave way to the found objects of Marcel Duchamp and conceptual art. The range of materials expanded from steel, aluminium and painted wood to incorporate everyday objects, plastic, mastic, photographic images, letters and language, organic materials such as bread and leaves, and even hidden or unidentifiable objects. In *Sem título, Série rodos* (Untitled, Squeegee series, 1978), Meireles plays with the possibilities of the squeegee, an ordinary household object in Brazil, pursuing the possibilities of its deformation by elongating or extending the blade or handle. Mira Schendel's *Objeto Gráfico* (Graphic Object, 1967) brings together a letter, song lyrics, poetry and an essay on linguistics; suspended in acrylic, the words' ephemerality alludes to the invisibility of spoken words as sound waves. The largest of all of the works in the exhibition, Lygia Pape's *Escultura MCO* (Sculpture MCO, undated) is neither painting nor sculpture, but an object that resists immediate comprehension.

The 1964 military coup and the ensuing oppressive regime changed art making for many. A political activist who was shot and imprisoned by the regime, the artist Carlos Zilio invokes a call to arms from inside a worker's lunchbox in his work *Lute* (Fight, 1967) and alludes to the darker side of capitalism in his nail-filled briefcase, *Para um jovem de brilhante futuro* (For a man with brilliant prospects, 1974). Performance was important to artists such as Artur Barrio, who originally placed his *Trouxas* (Bloody Bundles, c.1969) in urban and rural areas unaccustomed to witnessing violence, so that their sudden appearance might allude to a sinister act. Works such as Antonio Dias's *Undercover* (1968) invite their use as weapons. Other works address questions of political life in more poignant ways. Dias uses the form of the ballot box in *Cabeças* (Heads, 1968) to speak of voting with the head – because under the military dictatorship, no one was able to vote. Manuel's work *Onde estão todos?* (Where is everybody?, 1979) asks about the whereabouts of the 'disappeared' behind a curtain of leaves, and his *Caixa poema* (Poem Box, 1973) references both the empowered and disempowered.