

# Regina Silveira

## DESTRUCTURES FOR POWER



16.11.2024 – 30.03.2025

A multimedia artist and leading figure in Latin American and international Conceptual Art, Regina Silveira (Porto Alegre, 1939) was one of the first to experiment with new media in Brazil. This exhibition encompasses a large part of her oeuvre and includes a considerable body of works produced during the military dictatorship in Brazil which shed light on the present day.



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A multimedia artist and leading figure in Latin American and international Conceptual Art, Regina Silveira (Porto Alegre, 1939) was one of the first in Brazil to experiment with the new technologies for reproducing and circulating images. Over the course of more than six decades, her work has focused on analysing, critiquing and dismantling conventional systems of representation. Since the 1970s, Silveira has questioned and expanded the possibilities of visual perception and of perspective through aberrations, anamorphoses, simulacra and paradoxes. Full of irony and conceptual diversions, her graphic, audiovisual, performance and three-dimensional projects comment on the past, question the *status quo* and envisage other possible realities and futures.

This exhibition encompasses much of Silveira's artistic research, experimentation and production. It includes a large body of the work she made during the Brazilian civilian-military dictatorship (1964–85), a context of censorship, violence and repression. This is a little-known part of her output that engages in a dialogue with the present day. For a long time, her work was created and circulated in alternative and marginal contexts and systems far removed from the market. Artistic exchange networks and mail art were crucial to her career, as were teaching and academic research.

Using optical games, the distortion of shadows and interventions on images, most of them taken from the mass media and the history of art, Silveira draws attention to hierarchical structures and symbols of power, including the art system, institutions and monuments. At the same time, the artist invites us to take them apart. As early as the 1970s, she anticipated the debates on social and environmental issues, putting forward critical reflection on the exoticised colonial imaginary commonly associated with Brazil. In the 1990s, she expanded this political and social questioning to encompass the whole of Latin America.

Her work was initially two-dimensional but gradually began to respond to the white cube, to specific buildings and to public spaces in the form of expanded graphics that encourage participation and alter the perception and experience of places. In addition to Silveira's more iconic works and series, this exhibition includes sketches and maquettes of some of her

architectural and urban interventions on a large scale, with the search for a dialogue with the shared space and an endeavour to democratise the artistic experience being other central aspects of her career. The exhibition spills out of the rooms and addresses the public on Les Rambles with an augmented reality piece situated in the Palau de la Virreina courtyard.

### *Middle Class & Co.*

Regina Silveira trained as a painter in the 1960s in the conservative climate of southern Brazil before expanding her artistic education under the tutelage of the Expressionist painter Iberê Camargo. She soon incorporated drawing and printmaking into her practices. In 1967, she was awarded a grant by the Instituto de Cultura Hispánica that made it possible for her to study art history in Madrid. In Spain, she grew close to conceptual artists such as Julio Plaza and the poet and literary critic Ángel Crespo: a context of interdisciplinary experimentation that included geometric abstraction, concrete and visual poetry and making art with non-traditional media and new technologies. At the invitation of Crespo, Silveira taught between 1969 and 1973 at the art school on the Mayagüez campus of the University of Puerto Rico, where artists from various parts of the world contributed to the sharing atmosphere.

Silveira's experience outside Brazil marked a turning point in her career and resulted in a radical change in her vocabulary and ways of doing. She began to experiment with industrial printing techniques – such as silk-screen and offset printing – that had hitherto been outside the realm of art, and she appropriated photographic images from the media that she altered to suggest new readings. Using these approaches, Silveira created graphic works of a more conceptual bent unlike her immediately preceding output, which was more constructive and formal. It was during these years that she produced her suites *15 laberintos* (15 Labyrinths, 1971) and *Middle Class & Co.* (1971). Both can be read as critical commentaries on a claustrophobic and oppressive reality like

that of Brazil, Spain and other countries governed by dictators and totalitarian states.

On my first trip to Europe, I was utterly overwhelmed by the new possibilities for making images. I had no idea how to attain those results, which I instantly admired and recognised as images actually contemporary with that time in my life, making representation completely meaningless, and even more so the old dispute between figuration and abstraction. That was when my faith in painting died. Irrevocably.

Interview to Regina Silveira (2004)

In the seventies, the use of a wide range of media linked to fast, cheap and mass forms from the commercial universe of image production meant I was seen as a multimedia artist. In those years, this seemed much more modern than being considered a printmaking artist, a risk of specialisation that I always wanted to avoid, even though almost all my work was graphic. My chosen approach was to 'de-artistify'.

Regina Silveira interviewed by *Revista E* (2004)

### *Contra monumento*

In the 1990s, Silveira anticipated the current debate on the demolition or resignification of public monuments – those that glorify supposed national heroes – with a view to exposing the stories of violence and domination they conceal. In *The Saint's Paradox*, the artist plays with the contradictions of a dual presence (or dual absence): firstly, the popular small wooden sculpture made in Guatemala of James the Apostle, the patron saint of Spanish soldiers, in which guise he is known as Santiago Matamoros, St. James the Moor-slayer, in reference to the expulsion of the Arabs from the Iberian Peninsula, as well as the colonial wars that decimated Indigenous peoples and their cultures. And secondly, the long

shadow of an equestrian monument to the Duke of Caxias, which still stands in the old quarter of the city of São Paulo. Caxias was the commander-in-chief of the Triple Alliance, which, in the nineteenth century, pitted the united forces of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay against Paraguay, giving rise to one of the bloodiest armed conflicts in the history of Latin America, the lasting traces of which are still to be found in Paraguayan territory.

Through the distortion of a huge cast shadow, a device that appears from time to time in Silveira's work, *The Saint's Paradox* evokes the dark side of the seemingly ingenuous. At the same time, the paradox of the shadow that does not match the object producing it makes it possible to unite different times and places and to comment on the recurrent and persistent connections between power, militarism and religion in the shared history of Latin America, Spain and Portugal.

*The Saint's Paradox* was produced in 1994 for an exhibition at El Museo del Barrio in New York and is based on a polychrome carving of James the Apostle in the museum's collection. The following year, Silveira proposed to adapt the project to the theatre in the Memorial da América Latina in São Paulo, an architectural complex designed by Oscar Niemeyer as a monument to the cultural, political, economic and social integration of Latin America. However, Silveira's suggestion was rejected by the architect, who argued that her work would damage the building's cladding.

The magic of shadows comes from the considerable power they have to evoke their source. Of all the indications, shadows are the signs that refer most strongly to the phenomenon that has given rise to them, even when that source is outside the field of vision. Both the silhouette of the shadow and the datum of absence are already in the fabulatory genesis of images and painting (Pliny the Elder's account of the outlined shadow of the lover who will leave). The intrinsic ambiguity of shadows can without question transform perceptions and open up a universe of suggestions to the imagination.

Regina Silveira interviewed by Sergio Laia (2009)

### *Destructures for Power*

During the years of the Brazilian civilian-military dictatorship (1964–85), which coincided with other totalitarian regimes and wars such as the one in Vietnam, Silveira used various graphic devices and visual metaphors to slip in ironic comments on a range of forms of power, surveillance, censorship and violence. At the same time, many of her works from this period analyse and comment on technological advances and on new systems for recording, processing and disseminating information which, in turn, became fundamental working tools for her.

The term 'destructures', coined by the poet Augusto de Campos and used in the title of this exhibition and a series of works from this period, refers to geometric structures such as grids, mazes and perspective axes that Silveira superimposes on images of politicians, company directors, landscapes and cities taken from magazines, newspapers and postcards. The overlaid geometric elements refer to organisational systems and flows of information which, even as they connect, can serve to confine and control. In addition, these structures reveal corporate, hierarchical and neutering logics, as well as social configurations based on classist, heteropatriarchal and extractivist dynamics. From another perspective, it is also possible to read these lines and geometric shapes as invitations to subvert logics and situations of control and oppression.

As part of her experimentation with new means of reproduction and dissemination, in 1976 Silveira produced a series of videos made using the Sony Portapak camera the Museu de Arte Contemporânea of the São Paulo University (MAC-USP) had acquired early on. In these works, she performs simple actions that comment, with irony, on the technology used to broadcast them (the monitors), while at the same time denouncing the suffocating atmosphere of those years.

## *Brazil Today*

Beginning in the 1970s, Silveira produced a series of works in unconventional formats and media intended to circulate in international networks of artistic and institutional exchange. This room features a number of the collective publications, artist's books, postcards and microfiches that derived from this practice. These exchanges – many of them by post – took place in alternative and marginal circuits far removed from the dominant channels. In this way, artists were able to experiment and take poetic and political risks, evade censorship and condemn events taking place in a number of countries in Latin America, as well as in Portugal, Spain and the Soviet Bloc.

In postcard series such as *Brazil Today* (1977), Silveira draws attention to the neglect of natural and built heritage, and comments ironically on the exoticised reading of Brazil spread by the media and the tourism. She superimposes grids and photographs of scrap metal, crowds of people and dumps onto images of landscapes, cities, monuments and Indigenous communities. During this time, she also made a series of works in which she repeated the motif of the vulture in flight, a threatening bird – a metaphor of decomposition, plundering and death – that appears trapped in labyrinthine and even suicidal situations.

In 1972, Silveira took part in *Creación, Creation, Criação*, one of the first exhibitions of mail art, organised by Julio Plaza at the University of Puerto Rico. Her close collaboration with concrete poets and the rising generations of visual poets was fundamental to the development and dissemination of Silveira's conceptual work, as were the activities promoted by MAC-USP in the 1970s under the direction of Walter Zanini. During those years, Silveira participated in a number of self-organised exhibitions and contributed to independent publications such as those issued by Other Books and So, the publishing exchange centre run by Ulises Carrión in Amsterdam. In Brazil, Silveira contributed to alternative magazines, among them *Arteria* and *Qorpo Estranho*.

In 1982, in collaboration with the artist Rafael França, Silveira organised *Artemicro*, a group exhibition of microfiches

that toured Brazil, the USA and Portugal. The thirty-two artists featured in the show each presented a series of ten images that could be enlarged and examined using a microfiche reader.

The universe of language was open and did not have well-defined boundaries. Cohabitation with visual poets and other areas of knowledge was normal, but also crucial in a scene whose most defining terms all began with 'inter': interdisciplinarity, intersemiotics and intermedia.

Regina Silveira interviewed by *Revista E* (2004)

The new media are only of interest to me if I can produce meaning with them. An interest in using them cannot be sustained without a pre-existing sphere of ideas. Ideas and media arrive practically together when I imagine something. I am also keen to find the leanest solution, which is almost always low-tech.

Interview to Regina Silveira (2004)

## *Dilatáveis*

Created as part of Silveira's research for her PhD, *Dilatáveis* (Dilatables, 1981/2020) marked the start of a methodology that went on to become a constant in her career. This series, one of her most politically incisive works, is based on the appropriation of photographs published in the print media with large readerships, and the subsequent reproduction of these images in high contrast using the blueprint technique. In the images of politicians, executives, soldiers and footballers, the artist adds shadows cast in an enlarged, exaggerated and aberrant manner. The original work, dating from the 1980s, was recently reissued for the 34th São Paulo Biennial (2021). Even though *Dilatáveis* was originally designed to disappear due to the ephemeral nature of heliographs, its reproduction using a printing technique that enabled it to last reinforces the idea that those figures in Brazil's past – linked to power and its abuses, violence and corruption – are not confined to the

past but are still engaged in a dialogue with the present and perhaps with the future of the country.

### *Anamorfás*

Teaching at university level has played a fundamental part in Silveira's career, as she has trained an entire generation of artists with whom she continues to engage in dialogue. Academic research has been equally crucial in her artistic experimentation. While teaching her master's degree in the Communication and Arts School of São Paulo University, she developed her first reflections on the conventionality of representation in geometric perspective. Against this background, she made a series of works that culminated in her album *Anamorfás* (*Anamorphics*, 1980), in which she distorted the photographic outlines of everyday objects and household utensils such as scissors, combs and sunglasses. Her intention was to question perspective as a scientific system of representation capable of producing 'faithful' and 'correct' images of visual reality. Subjected to metamorphosis, many of these objects become enigmatic, almost unrecognisable and, in some cases, threatening.

During this period, Silveira also reflected on artistic work itself and on the dominant historiography of art. In series such as *A arte de desenhar* (*The Art of Drawing*, 1980), she treated markedly academic drawing lessons in an ironic manner. Depicting weapons in silhouette and a range of insults and obscenities codified in visual language – easily identifiable, by Brazilians at least – she defied the censorship still in force and questioned the violence of the artistic system and of society in general.

In 1978, Silveira, together with Julio Plaza, Walter Zanini and the artist Donato Ferrari, founded the Centro de Estudios ASTER (1978–81), a hybrid space that combined the functions of a studio and school with the goal of training visual artists. In this context, she returned to her work on video and produced pieces in colour that include editing and sound. These works are integrated into large series on diverse

supports, such as *A arte de desenhar* and *Anamorfás*. In *Morfás* (*Morphs*, 1981), Silveira captures everyday objects in the foreground and, by using tracking shots, transforms them into aberrant and monstrous creatures.

### *In Absentia*

In *In Absentia* (*Masterpieces*) (1983–98), Silveira humorously and ironically evokes the intangible influence of artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Meret Oppenheim by introducing empty pedestals from which exaggerated shadows corresponding to absent works are cast. The installation was first presented in 1983 at the 17th International São Paulo Biennial, at which the 'absent objects' included Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) and *Bottle Rack* (1914), as well as their shadows painted directly on the wall.

Through this series, Silveira not only pays tribute to some of her principal referents – notably, Duchamp – but also establishes a critical dialogue with the history of the white cube and the legitimising role of the institutional space. The tangible absence of works invites the spectator to reflect on the nature of art, the ownership of artworks and the construction of collective memory in the context of contemporary art.

The removal of the referent was, at one and the same time, a visual paradox and a question aimed at the viewer's repertory.

Regina Silveira interviewed by Kevin Power (2005)

### *Jogos de arte*

The history and system of art are subjects analysed in a number of Silveira's works. In *Jogos de arte* (*Games of Art*, 1977), she appropriates puzzles in print media such as crosswords and mazes as a way to offer new readings of easily recognisable

works. The series comments ironically on the legitimising power of the history of art and restores works now part of the canon to the playful and popular realm, to which they also belong. For example, Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) is turned into a jigsaw, while *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) serves as the basis for a dot-to-dot puzzle.

One of Silveira's *Jogos de arte* series, *Pudim arte brasileira* (Brazilian Art Pudding, 1977) is a parody of the political and engaged art of the time. The work takes the form of a coconut pudding recipe based on one in the popular recipe book by Dona Mimi, but instead of culinary ingredients, Silveira formulates a recipe for a pudding made of Brazilian art. The piece, distributed anonymously at a metro station in São Paulo, questions in an amusing manner an art that proclaimed itself to be revolutionary, underscoring its digestibility and limited impact.

*Biscoito arte* (Art Biscuit, 1976) is another of Silveira's performative works. With this edible piece, the artist challenges traditional notions and invites spectators to interact in a playful and short-lived way. The biscuit questions permanence in the realm of art and celebrates fusion with the everyday. In addition, the act of consuming the work suggests an appropriation of art, while also evoking its relationship with the market. At the same time, the possibility of devouring it points to the idea of anthropophagy, a key concept in the history of Modernism in Brazil, which advocates the digestion and reinterpretation of external cultural influences on the basis of local referents.

Two decades later, Silveira proposes a new game in *To Be Continued... (Latin American Puzzle)* (1997–), which addresses the stereotypical image of Latin America. Conceived as a vast jigsaw, this work features pieces that are parts of recognisable Latin icons. Even though the pieces fit together perfectly, they never form a coherent image given that the joining lines are also separating lines, just as borders are. Silveira reflects on the social, political, and cultural differences among the nations that make up the region: she creates a parody of the knowledge about Latin America and exposes the limited and prejudiced understanding of the foreign 'other', as well as Latin Americans' own views of their neighbours.

I even converted a bland recipe for coconut pudding into an ironic comment about the most politically committed Brazilian painting of that period, which never aspired to anything more than adorning the walls behind the bourgeoisie's most expensive sofas.

Regina Silveira interviewed by Kevin Power (2005)

### *Gráficas errantes*

In the late eighties, Silveira began to work with large installations, many of them ephemeral: she intervenes in architectural and urban spaces by means of disruptive gestures, using expanded graphics that are a response to the characteristics of the location. Her strategy often includes the repetition and transformation of elements in these environments, generating dislocations and fragmentations. In other cases, she incorporates projections of superheroes or insects, as well as animal paw prints and tyre tracks, which create fictional narratives and function as parodies. These poetic operations enable Silveira to generate an altered perception of reality, while at the same time demonstrating her social commitment.

Her preliminary studies are fundamental to the construction of these large-scale works, which transcend the white cube and the institutional realm and establish a direct dialogue with the public sphere. Silveira employs tools such as drawing, photography, maquettes and virtual simulations to study relations of scale and visual interaction between the space, the work and the spectator. These 'working documents', together with the audiovisual recordings of her interventions, reveal her creative process and, in some instances, have become art objects in their own right.

In *Pronto para morar* (Ready to Live, 1994–98), Silveira, together with twenty or so young artists and art students, distributed over 4,000 leaflets with architectural labyrinths at one of the busiest crossroads in São Paulo. This action parodies the real estate leaflets handed out at traffic lights. By transforming the public space into a stage for reflection, the artist invites the spectator to question the living conditions in major urban

centres, as well as property speculation and the growing precarity of homes, issues that have only grown worse since then.

I had teachers, not mentors. Teachers show possible paths, and the greater the freedom they give in the choice of these paths, preferably different to their own, the better they are. Mentors protect and project expectations. For the artists who embarked on their professional careers in the early seventies, and especially for women artists, independence and control of their own path were and still are very important, as is retaining the wish to be daring, in language as well.

Regina Silveira interviewed by Marc Pottier (2012)

Isabella Lenzi

#### Pudim Arte Brasileira

2 xícaras de olhar retrospectivo  
3 xícaras de ideologia  
1 colher, de sopa, de École de Paris  
1 lata de definição temática, gelada e sem soro  
1 pitada de exacerbação da cor  
1 índio, pequeno, ralado

Com o olhar retrospectivo e a ideologia prepare uma calda e quando grossa junte-lhe a École de Paris, sem mexer. Deixe amornar, bata um pouco a definição temática, junte os demais ingredientes e leve ao fogo em banho-maria em forma acaramelada.

#### Cobertura para Pudim Arte Brasileira

Misture 1 1/2 xícara de função social com 5 colheres, de sopa, de vitalidade formal e leve ao fogo até dourar; retire do fogo, junte mais duas colheres, de sopa, de joçada mercadológica e sacuda um pouco a frigideira para misturar tudo bem; não se deve mexer com a colher. Deixe esfriar, cubra o pudim e sirva gelado.

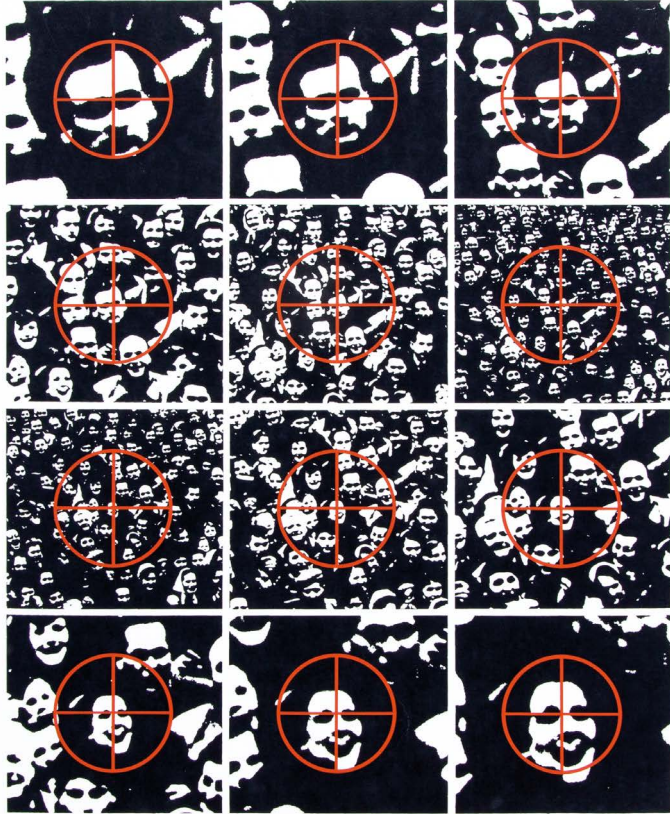
Regina Silveira 77

*Pudim arte brasileira, 1977*

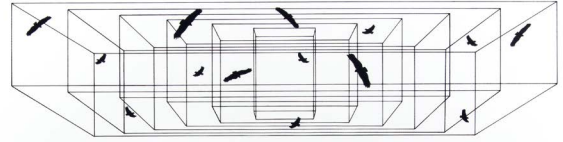


*São Paulo turístico, 1973*

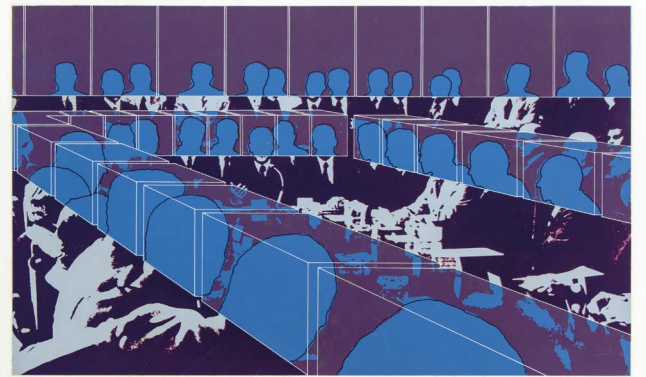




*Middle Class & Co. Series, 1972*



*Destrutura para abutres, 1975*



*Mesa executiva 1, 1975*



*The Saint's Paradox, 1994*



*To Be Continued... (Latin American Puzzle), 1997*

INTERVIEW WITH REGINA SILVEIRA,  
BY KEVIN POWER (2005)

**Kevin Power:** I'd like you to tell me about your early work and the artistic climate of the 1970s, particularly about the appearance of works that addressed conceptual interests and issues related to the political events of that period. What were the main concerns, the most important exhibitions and your own role?

**Regina Silveira:** My first foray into conceptual art was closely linked to my use of photos that I took from printed media in the early 1970s to make montages and drawing-photography combinations. I was working at that time at the University of Puerto Rico where I had gone with Julio Plaza to teach art at Ángel Crespo's suggestion. Crespo, the Spanish critic, poet and translator, had been commissioned to organise the art curriculum of the Mayagüez *campus* and was also in charge of an art review and a gallery for international exchanges. I began to work with photos I had appropriated and photomechanical resources in conjunction with printshop tools such as silk-screen and offset printing.

I used them to create graphic works with a more conceptual slant within a semantic universe far removed from my more constructive and formal works I had produced immediately before. That was when I began to get involved with the international Mail Art networks in contact with conceptual manifestations of all kinds arriving by mail. I also began to take part in independent publications and exhibitions such as those by Other Books and So that was run by Ulises Carrión, books, things being done by the International Artists' Cooperation, or in Klaus Groh's newsletter.

Working on my own in Puerto Rico, however, I occasionally felt the need to escape. On trips to New York and Spain I visited conceptual orientated events such as the radically interdisciplinary symposia held in Pamplona in 1972, and the *Information* exhibition at MoMA in 1971, with its really over-the-top works.

When I came back to Brazil in mid-1973, to live in São Paulo and teach at the FAAP (Armando Álvares Penteado

Foundation) and the ECA (Communication and Arts School of São Paulo University), I found conceptual approaches already well established in curricula that were excluding the traditional media. There wasn't an easel to be seen in the entire school.

I think that my best conceptual type of production was done inside two well-defined frameworks: the activities promoted by the São Paulo MAC in the 1970s, directed by Walter Zanini, and the close collaboration with concrete poets and the new generations of visual poets. Thinking about the MAC-USP activities, I particularly recall the museum's support for multimedia poetics and the organisation of the first video-art productions. My most radical works in the 1970s were in response to the fields opened up by these lines of research.

There was an intense interchange with the poets Augusto de Campos, Decio Pignatari and Haroldo de Campos. Of the three, I was in closest contact with Augusto de Campos who produced a large number of works in conjunction with Julio Plaza in that period. Together with Haroldo de Campos, produced an issue of the review *Tau/Ma 3*, by the poet Claudio Parmeggiani, in Bologna (1977), featuring alongside his poem 'IL MAGO DELL'OMEGA' (1955-1956) a sequence of graphic mazes from a series of silk-screen prints published in Puerto Rico in 1971. I made my first forays into hybrid languages alongside the youngest poets working in the realm of visual poetry, exploring a variety of strategies with them in order to produce countless alternative publications.

**KP: Could you give me more details about the political and social events and their relationship with the art context in Brazil?**

**RS:** Officially, the dictatorship lasted twenty years (1964-1985), so the recollections and experience of that period are quite long too. This period affected me in many different ways. The witch hunt that took place on the cultural scene and at universities led to the resignation or forced retirement of many close friends and intellectuals. My artwork at the beginning of that period wasn't about political or social topics. I was in fact

more interested in other types of research at that time. I had just emerged from an expressionist, figurative phase in which I produced mainly paintings and engravings. One particular experience influenced me greatly. From 1962 to 1964 I worked every day with mentally-ill patients in the art and therapy departments of the São Pedro Psychiatric Hospital in Porto Alegre, a public hospital with more than five thousand patients that no longer exists. All the consequences and impact that this experience had on my imagination dissipated when I returned to teaching at the University Arts Institute in 1964 at the request of Ado Malagoli, the senior lecturer in painting. That was the moment in my career when I embraced painting most forcefully. I remained highly subjective but things were now expressed in more abstract terms of gesture and matter, encouraged by the teacher I was closest to in that period, the painter Iberê Camargo.

It was during a short period in Brazil in 1968 after returning from an extended study period in Spain that began in early 1967 and before leaving for Puerto Rico in 1969 that my work changed completely as a result of having been exposed to new aesthetic ideologies and poetics inherited from the concrete movement, and to contemporary creations associated with non-traditional media and new technologies. In this phase, which I still consider to be a training period because of all the changes and transitions, the political content of my work shifted from representations and themes towards artistic attitudes and aesthetic stances of a more radical nature. I think that the possibilities offered through the inclusion of photographic images in my silk-screen printing and the increasing closeness to conceptual artistic expressions made me stray from the more formal path, with its geometric rigidity, and the exploration of industrial materials. Photography was a sort of semantic trampoline towards political realms for me. The data and images flooding the media became my favourite source for appropriations and high critical visual commentaries.

When I returned to Brazil in 1973, constitutional rights were still suspended and denunciations, arrests, torture and a general sense of vulnerability continued to corrupt the realms of public and private life and work. Popular music, the theatre

and the visual arts constantly responded to this situation with politically-charged messages although their content could not manifest itself freely but only in the form of subtle or highly poetic metaphors that often managed to avoid being censored.

I think that the first pieces of mine to be really influenced by the political and social events of that period were the series of works made with the new graphic media of the 1970s. The images they feature were almost always critical representations, some focusing on political power and others on the media and urban deterioration. Even so, there is virtually nothing overtly political in these series because I always preferred to filter my images with irony. Once, I even converted a bland recipe for coconut pudding into an ironic comment about the most politically committed Brazilian painting of that period, which never aspired to anything more than adorning the walls behind the bourgeoisie's most expensive sofas.

I do believe that the non-conformist intent running through my ideas and images also affected my *modus operandi* and use of the media.

It was against this backdrop that I produced works such as *Brazil Today*, *Corredores para Abutres* (a sequence of microfilm images, 1982, Corridors for Vultures) and *Dilatáveis*, the most patently political series, which I made originally for ephemeral blueprints.

**KP:** The extent of your social commitment is clear, but what are its cornerstones? It is clear that not only the political arena but also the political dimensions of much of the conceptual work produced in that period left their mark upon your work, albeit highly tinged with irony.

**RS:** I think that the political orientation of my work has manifested itself in different ways in my career. On the one hand, there are representations obviously steeped in social criticism; these are visual commentaries of a political nature, such as the graphic and silk-screen items of the 1970s focusing on images of executives. The images of executives and cityscapes, in the series entitled *Destruturas Executivas* (1977, Executive Destructures), are practically imprisoned in boxes and mazes drawn in perspective.

The images I made in the early 1980s, in the *Dilatáveis* series, in 1981 to be precise, in which I enlarged tiny figures of politicians, military men and tanks by using their enormous, distorted shadows, were also explicitly political. There are, on the other hand, urban interventions based on operations more charged with irony and parody, with which I sought to convey critical meanings intimately linked to the places where they were made. I think that one essential work of this type of intervention was the shadow and laser projection used in *Super-Herói (Night and Day)*, originally designed as a sort of 'apparition' on the emblematic Avenida Paulista in São Paulo which is absolutely packed full of major corporations and banks. I followed this hybrid hero, who may be our saviour or simply an accomplice to that kind of power, with a trash version, the illuminated fly in *Transit* (2001) projected from a van whilst driving around streets in the city centre and suburbs for five nights.

Social commitment is obvious in urban activities such as *Pronto para Morar* in which, with the help of some twenty students from the USP art programme, I spent two hours distributing more than four thousand small, printed folders featuring maze-like architectural plans. This activity took place at one of the busiest cross-roads in São Paulo (the intersection of Avenida Brasil and Avenida Rebouças) in a parody of the real-estate pamphlets handed out at traffic lights.

My most openly political works in recent years have been *The Saint's Paradox*, dated 1994, and *To Be Continued... (Latin American Puzzle)*, dated 1997, with different approaches to what they depict and discuss, and also as a result of the community actions they have given rise to. *To Be Continued* was conceived as a giant jigsaw whose pieces are fragments of icons that can be recognised as Latin American stereotypes. Although they fit together perfectly, they never form a coherent image. Putting the jigsaw together invariably involves chaotic, open-ended narratives combining different regions, epochs and cultures. It's a piece that I would almost call 'touristy', revealing the precarious gaze of that foreign 'other' person who, at the very most, is only familiar with the stereotypes of our culture and 'landscapes'.

My intention with *The Saint's Paradox* installation was to create a totally impossible cause-effect situation between a lesser, popular saint and his ghostly shadow. The small, hand-crafted, wooden saint, popular in the Dominican Republic in the nineteenth-century, represents St. James the Apostle («el Matamoros», the Moor-slayer) upon his white horse, who was also the commander-in-chief of Spanish America at the time of the Discovery. The distorted shadow of the figure on horseback brandishing a sword stems from the silhouette of the equestrian monument by the Brazilian modernist Victor Brecheret, now situated on Princess Isabel square in São Paulo. The monument is of the Duke of Caxias, the head of the Brazilian army and commander-in-chief of the Triple Alliance that brought together Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina against Paraguay in the mid-nineteenth century. He led them into a bloody war that virtually destroyed Paraguay, traces of which can still be seen today. The paradox of a shadow that is different from the shape casting it and that also links the figures of two military chiefs with debatable historical merits enabled me to unite different eras and regions and to comment upon the secular power relationships that militarism and the church have maintained on this continent.

**KP:** You have always been concerned about the problems of perspective and illusion arising in visual images. Can you talk to me about them? Where do they come from and what are the theoretical approaches that concern you most?

**RS:** Ever since it first appeared in my work, my interest in perspective has always fallen within the framework of wider research into representation itself, the codified nature of visual images and the constituents of illusion. 'What is representation?' and 'how are things represented?' are two recurring thoughts in my work, albeit with different approaches. I have tackled the traditional resources of perspective and shadows in an ironic manner too, particularly when dealing with subjects such as the art of drawing, which I have addressed in different versions since the 1970s, focusing on patently academic drawing lessons.

My specific interest in perspective as a means of transforming visual aspects arose beforehand from my understanding of their role in the composition of photographic space when I was working on the silk-screen prints for the *Destruturas Urbanas* series (Urban Destructures, 1976-1977). I drew graphic grids in perspective upon these images, most of which were photos taken from postcards, and tried to make them compatible with the space and vanishing points of the photographic representation. At first, what I enjoyed most about combining perspective and photography was speculating about the artificiality and intense codification of both systems, particularly as regards the lateral distortions caused by the unsuitable use of norms that those systems proposed for the construction of images.

For a long time, I was more or less obsessed with the exploration of 'marginal aberrations', the oblique stretching of images that enigmatically catch the eye. This was when I did *Anamorfás*, graphic works in which I explored transformations of the photographic contours of commonplace, everyday objects (including a coffee cup, a hammer, a comb and a corkscrew) through the use of perspective distortions applied to the geometric grids that contained the figures.

More than anything, I wanted perspective to act like a sort of philosophical look at the world of appearances, delving into our recognition of the things in our surroundings. In *Anamorfás* I realised that viewpoints were much more doubtful and preferred to use their contingencies rather than their ability to provide visual 'corrections'.

I related all this to other questions stemming from the relationships between perspective and our perception and knowledge of the visual world.

Although, on the one hand, my thoughts on perspective sought theoretical support in authors who associated aesthetics and the history of art with geometry, optics and visual perception (including E. Panofsky, H. Damish, H. Pirenne, J. Baltrusaitis, S. Gideon, J. Derogowsky and J. White), my poetic exercises to dismantle the system did, in fact, seek similarities with the contemporary, paradoxical perspective of modern artists such as De Chirico, Magritte and particularly Duchamp, finding affinities in his ironic and

pseudo-scientific use of perspective when constructing the allegories in the *Large Glass*.

When I began to use perspective in ambient installations based on distorted spaces and cast shadows (like all those in the *In Absentia* series, which started out from the shadow of a painter's easel in anamorphic perspective, in the MAM in São Paulo, 1982), I was trying to construct representations heavily reliant on viewpoints. In this series, the ability of shadows to point at their origin enabled me to imbue the silhouettes drawn in perspective with meanings of absence. The removal of the referent was, at one and the same time, a visual paradox and a question aimed at the viewer's repertory.

Other possibilities explored in works from the 1990s were the tensions between geometrically-built virtual spaces and the real spaces into which they were inserted. When the spaces were large enough for viewers to walk about in them, the essential thing was to perceive the difference between them and the more fluid spaces of perception, and their ability to produce the dizzying effects of 'mise en abyme' perspectives.

This is where I would situate my exploration of spaces that are suggested as being beneath the floor, like those in the *Graphos* series, in *Apartamento* and the other stairways I have produced in recent years, including *Escada inexplicável* (Unexplained Staircase), the first work in which the solutions are due partly to digital media through drawings using distorted perspective. This is an increasingly consistent *modus operandi* in my recent works.

**KP: Which theoretical approaches were of use to you most in this respect? Deleuze, for example, sees perspective as being 'like a pluralism', i.e. it all depends on one's viewpoint. How should we interpret the term 'pluralism'? You said that you create situations with debatable optics. What do you mean? From your standpoint, is it an artificial code? And does it link to Mannerism? I read your interview with Angélica de Moraes and your remarks about the impact of what Jean Clair called *opticerie*. What are the implications of this?**

**RS: My imagination was fired by a series of theoretical fields which, over time, also displaced each other to different degrees**

and at different levels, according to the poetic directions taken by my works. My interest in theory has always responded to aspects and investigations related to the work itself and, in this respect, the alterations and shifts of theoretical supports were associated with the specific characteristics or complexities of the respective poetic universe.

Logically enough, my first questions about reality and representations involved ideas about perception of the field of vision and the visual world. In this respect, reflections about the phenomenology of the visible world (M. Merleau-Ponty) have been as enlightening as the interpretations of the field of poetic meanings that adhere to perceived and inhabited spaces (G. Bachelard). Understanding the visible and the perceived implies a perceptual analysis, oriented to the abandonment of a single viewpoint in favour of infinite viewpoints arising from movement, adding a temporal and inseparable dimension of vision and spatial experience (J. Gibson). In the 'psychology of perception', I looked for more scientific evidence of the arbitrariness and the 'pluralism' of viewpoints.

Philosophical thought concerning the symbolic nature of representation and the role of similarity (E. Cassirer and S. Langer) helped me understand the difference between real, virtual and perceived space. Likewise, semiotic concepts (C. S. Peirce and H. de Campos) helped me understand the categories of signs and associations that are able to trigger creative insight. In addition, they enabled me to acquire a basic mastery of the increasingly implosive universe of images and, above all, to understand what type of sign a trace is. In other words, how it constitutes the very nature of these figures of absence and shadows so present throughout my work.

The search for theoretical arguments to help me evaluate the artificiality of the codes of spatial representation, the conventionalism of perspective and, consequently, of all illusionary representation (including photography) was an endless task that I worked on for several years. This was the moment when I took an interest in Mannerism, Zaccari's *disegno interno*, the lateral aberrations of perspective, the historic anamorphoses and the conventions of illusionism.

I found myself forced to wander through history in order to understand the secular evolution of perspective and

the transformations that change it from an instrument for rationalising sight into an instrument for producing optical fantasies and visual paradoxes, and finally the banalisation of academic text books. I researched many sources that explained it (critics and sociologists) or analysed it as a change in scientific paradigms (optics). My favourite place along this journey was the boundary line of the norms of the system of perspective where the marginal aberrations inherent in that system are situated, producing oblique, enigmatic and even hallucinatory visions like those exhibited in cabinets of optical curiosities.

As far as I am concerned, this entire process culminated in not only more technical speculations about curvilinear perspective schemes but also the salvaging of 'scientific' perspective as a parody. Duchamp uses a whole group of ironic works to refer to a very specific perspective and viewpoint, his 'precision optics', or what Jean Clair called *opticeries*, continues to be a living source of poetic revelation for my work.

I was interested for a while in anthropological studies concerning the close relationships between bodies and places (proxemics) depending on cultural variables, and also in philosophical stances related to the meaning and interpretation of photographic images (S. Sontag and V. Flusser). More recent anthropological reflections (Marc Augé) have given me a different insight into more fluid and depersonalised spaces and times, the non-places of our daily movement.

My recent interest in architectural design and architecture has coincided with my orientation towards theoretical approaches that contemplate the meanings of spaces and territories (M. Foucault), the meaning of architectures that are impossible to build (R. Harbison) and the relationship between architecture and contemporary culture and the media (Schwarzer). During my period as a resident artist in the Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada, in 1993, I spent all of my time working on the architectural design of flats and stairways in totally distorted parallel perspective. I delved into both the philosophical aspects of architecture and nomadic territories (G. Deleuze and F. Guattari) and the new; critical considerations of strange, anxiety-laden architectural spaces (A. Viedler) because of their close similarity to the poetics

of some of my installations. I am thinking, for example, of the ones I use to graft highly geometrised, vertiginous architectures onto spaces perceived 'normally'.

Seen in succession, theoretical approaches that have never revolved around a single axis are something of a rhizome pointing in different directions.

What would happen if I were to add to this network other aspects that clearly influence my work such as poetry and poetic reflections about creation (P. Valéry) and astronomy, that epidermal curiosity that leaves its marks upon works that translate or involve concepts of infinity, eclipses and black holes? The relationships between artworks and other fields of knowledge, and even with other types of artistic expression, are more like resonances that illuminate ideas and actions, but without ever knowing how they arise. Since there is no specific priority in my theoretical approaches, because art does not demonstrate theory but is simply another form of knowledge, their impact upon the work is, I feel, always unpredictable. Any type of association can contribute to creating a work: a philosophical text, a poem, a cosmic phenomenon, a scene from a film or any association of circumstances. Indeed, artists never know where the connections that suddenly produce a powerful image in their mind come from: that sort of configuration apparently situated 'behind the eyes' that they pursue obsessively until it actually comes to life. I feel that each work updates, in its own way, one or more nodes along this rhizome.

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Curator: Isabella Lenzi

## GUIDED TOURS

Saturday, 16 November, 12 am  
With Regina Silveira and Isabella Lenzi

Thursday, 30 January, 6 pm  
with Isabella Lenzi

Free entry until filled to capacity

Free guided tour at the weekend.  
Booking required in advance at [barcelona.cat/lavirreina](https://barcelona.cat/lavirreina).

La Virreina Centre de la Imatge  
Palau de la Virreina  
La Rambla, 99. 08002 Barcelona

Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday  
and public holidays, 11 am to 8 pm  
Closed holidays: December 25 and 26 and January 1  
Free entry



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