

Hélio Oiticica: Propositions

Information, ideas and resources to explore works
from the exhibition

Prepared by artist Christine Mackey



Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé, P4 Cape 1*, 1964, Photo: Sergio Zalis

Introduction

These responses have been developed by artist **Christine Mackey** in collaboration with IMMA's Education and Community Department.

They are intended for individuals, groups, adults and children of all ages for use before, during or after a visit to the exhibition.

Lisa Moran

Curator: Education and Community Programmes

Christine Mackey

Christine Mackey is an artist and independent researcher who employs diverse disciplines, subject matter and tactics in devising works that can generate different kinds of knowledge of place - their hidden histories and ecological formations. Using diverse graphic sources and quasi-scientific methods, her work explores the interactive potential of art as a research and pedagogical tool; its capacity for social and environmental change and as a way of organising diverse knowledge systems for a 'social' model of practice coupled with diverse publics.

<http://christinemackey.com>

www.leitrimsculpturecentre.ie

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Hélio Oiticica

Propositions



Hélio Oiticica, Penetrável Macaléia 'Homenagem a Jards Macalé', 1978/2013

Hélio Oiticica: Propositions, IMMA

19 July – 5 October 2014

IMMA presents a major exhibition of the work of Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica (1937–1980). Propositions includes a selection of works by Oiticica, including examples from his prolific career with a view to illuminating his art historical importance and relevance to contemporary practice.

The exhibition is co-curated by César Oiticica Filho, nephew of the artist, and Rachael Thomas, Head of Exhibitions, IMMA.

Hélio Oiticica

(pronounced eh-lee-o o-ta-see-ka)

Hélio Oiticica was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1937 and died there in 1980. Together with his brother, César Oiticica, he began studying painting and drawing with Ivan Serpa at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro in 1954.

In the same year, he wrote his first text on the visual arts, after which, his recording in writing of reflections on art and his output became integral to his practice.

In 1955, he became a member of the **AVANT-GARDE** Frente Group, in Rio de Janeiro, which he left in 1959 to join the **NEOCONCRETE** group, which included artists Lygia Clark and Lygia Pape amongst others.

From 1968, he became a leading member of the counterculture movement - TROPICÁLIA. At the end of the 1960s, Oiticica spent a year in London, exhibiting at the White Chapel Art Gallery in 1969 in the exhibition *Whitechapel Experience*, organised by art critic and historian Guy Brett. It is considered one of the most important exhibitions during the artist's life. From the 1970s, he lived and worked in New York as a Guggenheim Foundation scholar.

After his untimely death in 1980, Hélio's two brothers, César and Cláudio Oiticica, and a number of the artist's friends established 'Project HO' Projeto Hélio Oiticica for the preservation and promotion of Oiticica's entire OEUVRE made between 1955 and 1980.

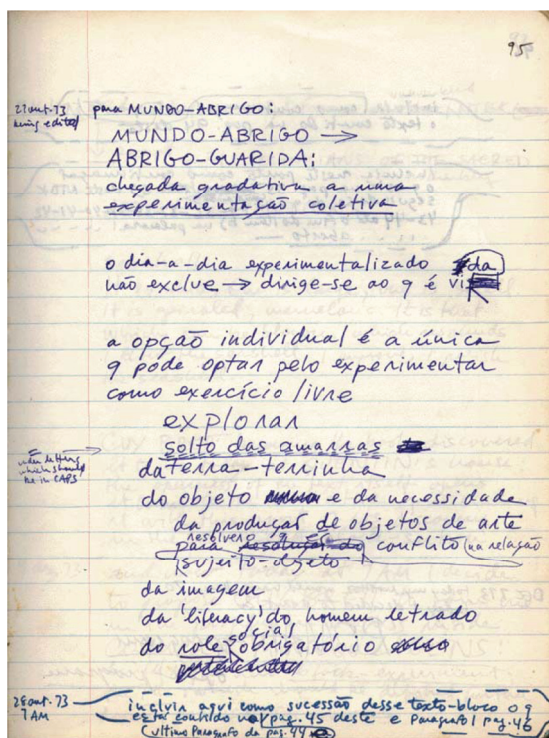
Hélio Oiticica process and methods

Informed by **GEOMETRY** and colour-oriented European avant-garde movements, his key influences included Kazimir Malevich, Paul Klee and Piet Mondrian. With time, he developed his own unique palette, based on hues of orange, yellow and brown.

Colour gradually became detached from image in his work, moving on to more spatial forms, reliefs and installations known as the **PENTRÁVELS**, which the viewer can step into and interact with.

He also made a series of innovative mobile sculptures called **PARANGOLÉS**. These works were originally intended as costumes for the dancers of samba. Oiticica was a leading dancer in the Mangueira Samba School in Rio.

A meticulous record keeper, he left behind a vast amount of writings, plans, sketches, notebooks, photographs and original pieces, which for the most part, Oiticica never made public (during his life-time).



sample page from Oiticica's notebooks

categories / series / collectives

Oiticica's **MULTI-DISCIPLINARY** practice assumed a range of forms from paintings to writings from sculptures to appropriated objects to immersive installations and live actions.

Oiticica created a 'chain of concepts' to theorise different though inter-related stages of his artistic practice. A selection of these currently exhibited at IMMA include the following:

Metaesquema (1957-1958)

Grupo Frente (1955-56)

Bilaterais (1959-1960)

Relevo Espacial (1959-1960)

Desenho Pre-Neoconcreti (1959-1961)

Bolides (1963-1969)

Parangolé (1964-1979)

Penetráveis/Nuclei (1960-1979)

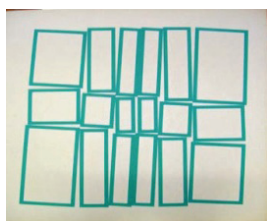
Tropicália/Suprasensorial (1966-1967)

We will trace the genealogy of Oiticica's work and how his invention of new forms and categories led to new ideas in relation to the 'art-object' and its engagement with the public, recast as active participants.

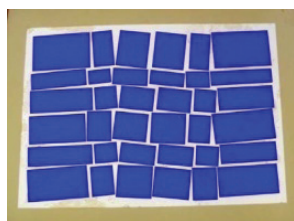
This will lead to a close exploration of the methods implicit in his work and how these operational strategies challenged the established division between painting and sculpture and between art and the lived environment.

Introduction Gallery Works

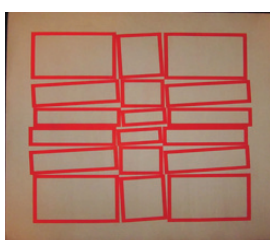
Metaesquema (1950-1958)



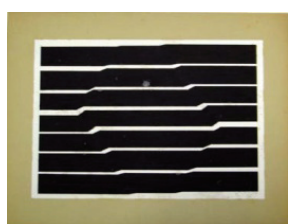
Metaesquema (MET 103), 1958



Metaesquema (MET 109), 1958



Metaesquema (MET 252), 1958

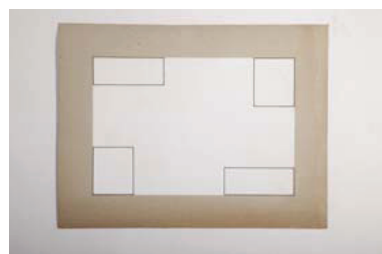


Metaesquema (MET 239), 1958

The Metaesquema (meta-schemes) series include over 350 small-scale paintings on card, of which over 40 are included in the exhibition at IMMA. The title combines the Portuguese words 'meta' (beyond vision) and 'esquema' (structure).

This series of grid-based compositions of **MONOCHROMATIC** rectangles and squares are painted mainly in **PRIMARY COLOURS**. They explore the infinite variation of a single colour ranging from the schematic models of MET103-MET106 to the solid geometric blocks of MET109-MET081.

Desenho Pre-Neoconcreti (1959-1961)



Desenho Pré-Neoconcreto (PNC 004), 1959

By the end of 1958, this series evolved into black/white, blue/white, red/white, and white/white compositions in which squares, rectangles and even the grid have been eliminated. The series of white-on-white paintings represents both the end of one stage of chromatic investigations and a new beginning for the artist.

Introduction Gallery Works

Oiticica was interested in exploring the **MATERIALITY** of colour on a two-dimensional plane by restricting his pictorial language to its most basic elements of lines, primary colours and neutrals of black, grey and white.

Oiticica concentrated his colour studies on the infinite variations and very subtle characteristics of a single colour. He later developed these colour studies into a series of suspended colour-planes as illustrated in the **Bilaterais series**, followed by the structural spatial forms of **Relevo Espacial**. These works sought to open painting to its surrounding space, inviting the viewer to explore the work from both sides.

On a technical note, colour embodies three major qualities: **HUE, VALUE** and **CHROMA**.

HUE is the name of the colour and it is how we distinguish one colour from the other – red from blue for example.

VALUE is the quality by which we distinguish a light colour from a dark colour. Colour values are loosely called tints and shades. A tint should be light, a shade should be darker.

CHROMA is the strength of the colour. Chroma is the quality by which we distinguish a strong colour from a weak colour.

PIGMENTS are the practical agents of colour work (oil, acrylic, watercolour, etc.).

ABSTRACTION and COLOUR Journey 1: For discussion

Trigger questions

- Look around the gallery space. What are your first impressions? Describe how you feel standing in this space.
- Now glance around the whole room again. What do these works have in common?
- Find a work that catches your eye – look closely. Why do you think you noticed it more than the others?
- Concentrate on the brush-strokes of the work. Are they running in the same or alternate directions?
- Is the work textured? If so, what words would you use to describe the texture – smooth, striated, squiggly or stippled perhaps?
- Why do you think Oiticica concentrated on the use of one colour?

Introduction Gallery Works

Grupo Frente (1955-1956)



Grupo Frente (GRF51), 1955-56



Grupo Frente (GRF85), 1955-56

Oiticica's exploration of colour began with the early paintings and gouaches he created as a member of the Grupo Frente - established by Ivan Serpa (1923-1973). Serpa ran an influential art course at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, on which Oiticica had enrolled in 1954.

Members of the group explored a wide range of approaches to making art, with the emphasis on abstract, geometric forms and a shared concern for colour to activate a flat surface.

These paintings by Oiticica also reveal the influence of modernist artists such as Paul Klee (1879-1940), Piet Mondrian (1906-1944) and Kasimir Malevich (1879-1935).

ABSTRACTION and COLOUR Journey 1: For discussion

Grupo Frente (1955-1956)

“The experience of color, the exclusive elements of painting, became for me the very axis of what I do, the way I begin a work. [...] Color is one of the work’s dimensions. It is inseparable from the phenomenon as a whole, from structure, from space and from time but, like those three, it is a distinct, dialectic element, one of the dimensions. It therefore possesses its own elementary progression, for it is the very nucleus of painting, its reason for being. However, when color is no longer submitted to the rectangle, nor to any representation of this rectangle, it tends to “embody” itself; it becomes temporal, it creates its own structure, and the work then becomes the “body of color”.

[Hélio Oiticica. *Aspiro ao grande labirinto*, Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986, p. 23. Excerpt of the text written on October 5 1960.]

Read the quote above.

It is sourced from Oiticica’s theoretical writings on the development of colour in his work.

- Are there unusual words to describe the phenomenon of colour?
- Can you determine the main questions raised in this text?
- How does Oiticica view colour in relation to space, time and structure?
- Does it confuse or provide support for you the viewer/reader in engaging with an alternative view of colour?
- Are there clues in the descriptive language Oiticica writes with?

For example ‘nucleus’ is a scientific word to describe a biological cell, whose function is to maintain control and regulate gene expression. Oiticica equates the materiality of colour to a nucleus. Both are independent forms with their own complex set of activities. Both embrace notions of time, movement, control and adaptation. Both depend on the process of renewal to expand and propagate in diverse and dynamic ways. The nucleus, like colour, has a unique personality.

- Through this process of ANALOGY do you think Oiticica challenges our perception of colour as an independent autonomous system?
- Do you agree or disagree?

Trigger questions

- Are these works painted in single and/or in multiple layers of the same colour?
- What do the shapes and colours suggest to you?
- Do you notice anything about the patterns in these works – between the left and right side of each work and/or the top/bottom of each work?
- Are the patterns repeated, inverted and/or different?
- If the patterns are repeatable on both sides of the same work – how would you describe this kind of effect?
- Do you notice the differences between the geometric shapes and the background - that is the in-between areas of these shapes?
- In what way does Oiticica explore the physical properties of paint through these works?
- Is it important for artists to provide verbal descriptions of their own work instead of relying on a critic/historian to do so?

Introduction Gallery Works

Bilaterais (1959-1960)



Bilateral, 1959

The Bilaterais are a series of irregular geometric double-faced panels painted in a range of whites, suspended by nylon thread. Because these works are hung at different heights they can be seen from various positions. Unlike painting, they have a front and a back.

Bilaterais (Bilateral) was a term Oiticica invented to designate these works. His purpose was to challenge two-dimensional easel painting ('painting-picture'), with what he called 'non-objects' – spatial objects that freed themselves from any pictorial support.

Relevo Espacial (1959-1960)



Relevo Espacial (REL 034), 1960

Relevo Espacial (Spatial Reliefs) are a series of three-dimensional hanging constructions. Coloured red and yellow using a spray gun, they are often constructed from sheets of plywood. These planar forms, intersect, overlap, or fold over one another at oblique angles, leaving gaps (negative spaces) through which light can pass.

The Spatial Reliefs rely on the viewer's participation. That is by walking around them can you grasp the differences in form and colour on each side.

Oiticica designed many maquettes for these complex forms, though few were built in full scale. They were produced at the height of the **NEO-CONCRETE** movement in the late 1950s.

The **Neo-Concrete** movement was a splinter group of the 1950s Brazilian **CONCRETE ART** movement influenced by the European Concrete Art group. Theo van Doesburg introduced the term Concrete Art in his 1930 'Manifesto of Concrete Art.' This art-movement called for art to become more expressive and engaging, which challenged the geometric, purist aesthetic of Concrete Art.

ABSTRACTION and COLOUR Journey 1: Trigger Questions

Bilaterais (1959-1960)

Relevo Espacial (1959-1960)

- How do the Bilaterais and Relevo Espacial works engage the participation of the viewer?
- Do you think that the external appearance of the works are more important than the 'meaning' of the works?
- Describe the figures/lines of which the Relevo Espacial series are composed.
- How do these works disrupt our perception of painting from a unilateral (one-sided/flat) surface?
- The classical ideal of a painting is expressed through its formal elements. This partly includes composition, space and colour on a two-dimensional unifying plane. In what way does Oiticica dispense with the formal elements of painting through the Bilaterais and Relevo Espacial series?
- How does he manipulate his materials to challenge our traditional perception of 'painting'?
- Why is the process of the 'fold' an important strategy in these works?
- What does the 'fold' reveal?
- Are there architectural elements embedded/reflected in these works?
- As you walk around these works, in what way does the light and the movements of your body impact on how you engage with the work?
- Does the activity of walking change your experience in terms of exploring these installations?
- In your mind, how would you classify these works - as paintings and/or sculptures and/or installations or perhaps you can invent an alternative word to describe these works?
- Is it important for artists to provide verbal descriptions of their own work instead of relying on a critic/historian to do so?

Introduction Gallery Works

Bólides (1963-1969)



B34 Bólido Bacia 1, 1965/66

The Bólides (Fireball, nucleus, glowing meteor) are a series of at least 61 known structures including a small number of bag forms. They vary in scale, form, medium and function.

They were created in two ways:

- constructed from raw material such as wood
- appropriated from existing objects (**READY-MADE**).

Some include words or images, some contain smells, others are homages to people, and some are large structures to be entered and inhabited by the spectator. They incorporate inexpensive, everyday or organic materials such as raw earth or pigment in powdered form, plastic, sand or crushed seashells.

Oiticia designated the term **TRANS-OBJECTS** for these works. This term alludes to their creative dynamism, which was for you the 'participator' to manipulate and explore its physical structure and the materials contained in these objects.

CONTAINERS Journey 2:

For discussion

Oiticica reshapes the idea of opening a drawer and the plunging of hands and arms into various sorts of containers. Daily activities that we carry out throughout our daily lives brought to a new significance within the context of contemporary art.

The opening of a drawer becomes an act of discovery; in-turn the act of discovery becomes performative. Our general experience of art works is usually led by our sense of vision. This is challenged by Oiticica through the notion of **HAPTIC** space. Based neither purely on touch alone, nor on the duality between toucher and touched, it is an orientation that excites all of the senses - sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch.



B31 Bólido Vidro 14 – “Estar”, 1965/66

Trigger Questions

- How did Oiticica introduce the everyday activity of play into his work?
- Why did Oiticica use household materials in his work?
- How does he make us look at familiar things in new ways?
- By making ordinary materials extraordinary, was Oiticica challenging ideas on the tradition of sculpture limited to hard materials – marble to bronze or softer ones - wood?
- How does handling these art-works change/transform our engagement with the work?

For Discussion

Oiticica was fastidious about categorizing his work. This process of categorization is a branch of science known as **TAXONOMY**. In fact if we were to read the titles of his work – knowing beforehand the works in question we would know the exact series of works that he was referring to.

Consider the following:

B31 Bólidos Vidro – “Estar” 1965/66

B = Bólidos

31 = Sequential number

1965/66 = Year(s) of production

The Bólidos are containers mainly formed of glass or wood. How do we know this? Vidro (glass) or Madeira (wood) is stated in the title of each work.

Trigger Questions

- Why do you think titles are important to Oiticica?
- What other information can we learn from paying close attention to the titles of artworks?
- In a sense what Oiticica had done through the process of serialism was to create an **ARCHIVE** or build each stage of his work. What additional information can be gleaned from studying archival material related to the research, design and development of an artwork?
- Are Oiticica’s archive [notes, descriptions, photographs, slides, letters, etc.] more significant than the facsimile copies of his work?
- Would you consider archival material to be a primary or secondary source of knowledge?

Introduction Gallery Works

Parangolé (1963-1969)



Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé, P4 Cape 1*, 1964

The **favela** is a term for a slum in Brazil, most often within urban areas. For Oiticica, it was a place of extreme beauty, poverty and danger. It had an incredible cultural mix of music and samba, and street culture. The diversity of its people also reflects within its unique social and physical environments. Living in this place resulted in Oiticica's first wearable sculptures, which he called Parangolés. He discovered this word on one of the structures in the favelas.

Parangolé is a slang word used to describe 'a situation of sudden confusion or excitement among people'. The Parangolés - vary in form to include capes, flags, banners and tents. Made from layers of painted fabric, plastics, mats, screens, ropes and other materials.

Described as habitable paintings, they were worn or carried while dancing to the rhythm of samba. In the early 1960s, Oiticica lived for a time in the favela and was a regular participant in Mangueira's famous Samba School, befriending many local dancers. The discovery of Mangueira, emphasised the importance for Oiticica of the lived experiences (*vivências*) of everyday life.

This idea – merging the everyday with art became an integral creative and pedagogical tool for the development of subsequent works. As the artist explained in a 1965 text, 'It is not the object in itself which is important, but the way that it is lived by the spectator.'

One could see the phenomenon of 'parangolé' as an art form related to **BODY ART, HAPPENING** or **PERFORMANCE ART**.

The Parangolés on display at IMMA have two dates. The first date indicates Oiticica's original conception/production time, the second date represents when a copy/facsimile of the original was made.

Kinetic forms Journey 3: For discussion

The question of 'replication', 'reproduction' and 're-creation' is of particular importance in relation to Oiticica's work. The art critic and historian Guy Brett, who had been in regular contact with Oiticica since his time in London, writes that Oiticica made particular demands with regards to what works could be recreated and how. For example *The Counter-Bólide*, could be repeated whenever circumstances demanded it, whereas the *Whitechapel Experiment*, at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1969, was not to be repeated. He wrote: 'It would be a mystification to "repeat" through Europe the same show, unless those works or propositions could take a new sense, which I doubt. The London show is a unique experience as such.'

In a practical sense, Oiticica did allow for the reconstruction of certain works during his lifetime. For example, in 1968, Brett accidentally broke *Glass Bólide 14 'Estar' (To Be)*. Oiticica sent detailed instructions on how this work was to be re-made from the type of glass, size and shape of the flask, how it was to be cut and finished and how the shells were layered/placed into the container. Brett did have this work re-made for an exhibition to be held in Rotterdam in 1992; however as he states it was never quite the 'same' as the original.

The Parangolés - in particular the 'cape' textiles were developed as wearable/habitable forms. However, since Oiticica's death the demands for these works to be exhibited have initiated 'copies' of the original works.

Another important consideration is that, in 2009, a catastrophic fire in a private home in Rio de Janeiro destroyed a significant portion of the archives and original works held by the Projeto Hélio Oiticica, as well as the negatives of his father, the important Brazilian photographer José Oiticica Filho (1906-1964).

Finally, many of Oiticica's works were made with low quality and often EPHEMERAL materials or indeed some works were conceptualized to be one-off events and/or environments, suggesting that the 'original' works were perhaps never meant to be 'conserved' as unique art objects contained in a museum for permanent display?

Kinetic forms Journey 3

Trigger Questions

- Is it possible to experience Oiticica's work through archival material consisting of drawings, photographs and texts?
- If the raw materials (i.e. plastics, canvases, sponges, straw, charcoal, nylon mesh and bags) that Oiticica used to make his work are no longer available then is it possible to remake a genuine copy of the original work?
- Discuss the legacy of Oiticica's work in terms of authorship and ownership of his work.
- Should his work be replicated? If so, who has the authority to do so?
- If the conceptual intention, or indeed how a work is to be activated by the public, as defined by the artist, is not adhered to - does the work lose meaning?

To Dress/To Perform, To Act, To Be

- There is an opportunity to wear some of the Parangoles (capes) in this exhibition.
- When you put them on, think about the effects the cape will have on your body?
 - Consider the material weight and how the folds of the material move in response to your somatic or bodily movements.
 - Think about the effects of light on the material and how the colour of the cape changes?
 - Do you dance, walk or stay still?
 - Do you feel privileged to wear this artwork? Is it similar to dressing up?
 - Are/will you perform some kind of role?
 - Describe your experience.
 - What does it mean for you to be given an opportunity to interact with an artwork?
 - Do you imagine the artist - Oiticica to be here with you?

Kinetic forms Journey 3

View to discuss



Bandeira Seja Marginal Seja Herói, 1968

As a group, locate the banner titled: *Bandeira Seja Marginal Seja Herói*, (1968). The image of the man on this banner was a friend of Oiticica - Cara de Cavalo - shot dead during a public march. He was demonstrating against an increase in the repressive measures led by the government during that time. The photograph was printed in a local newspaper.

Oiticica used this photography as source material to make a screen print. Printed on the image, he coined the phrase '**seja marginal seja herói**'. This translates roughly from Portuguese into English as 'be marginal, be a hero' or 'be an outlaw, be a hero'.

Political context in relation to this work.

From 1964-1985, Brazil was governed by a military dictatorship. This banner has a production date - 1968. This was the same time that the government introduced the act: The Ato Institucional Número Cinco AI-5 ('The decreeing of Institutional Act). This act restricted the movement of people. It also introduced censorship of music, films, theatre and television and, in particular, works that may have questioned the prevailing 'state' order. Political marches and social gatherings were also banned.

Trigger questions

When words and images are extracted from their original context such as the newspaper image of Cara de Cavalo, do these images and words take on a different meaning or significance when they are reframed in the context of an artwork?

- Do you think this work draws attention to the 'event' manifested as an artwork or to the 'death' of an individual or both, in new ways?
- Why are words and the act of naming so important to Oiticica?
- How did he use words in his work? Discuss 'Bandeira Seja Marginal Seja Herói'. Source other examples in this exhibition.
- Discuss further, the ways Oiticica integrates words into his work.
- Pay close attention to the material quality of these works and how words are creatively articulated?
- As you walk through the exhibition make a list of the slogans that you find in his works and translate into English?
- Do the slogans lose meaning through the process of translation?
- Is it important for artists to be responsive to the environment that they live in? To integrate local dialects/phrases/slang works such as Oiticica has done into their practice?
- Should artworks be a vehicle for political issues?

Arguably, the 'banner' and 'flag' are considered contested political forms. In their traditional use, they show a nationality or allegiance to a party. They are 'symbolic' forms used for public events and/or demonstrations. In what way has Oiticica used these symbolic forms?

- Why did he use cheap/found materials to create these works?
- Can utilizing/adapting 'symbolic' forms as art-works create new meanings/concepts or social-political situations for us to think and engage with?

Introduction Gallery Work

Penetráveis (1960-1979)



Tropicália, 1967

Penetráveis from the Portuguese 'penetrar' - penetrate suggesting one can enter into them. These large labyrinths or painted 'environments' include the well-known **Magic Square series**.

They reflect characteristics of architectural space comprising door edges, sliding panels, curtains, cavities and stairs.

Their physical manifestation of interconnecting pathways and hidden spaces are designed to activate the somatic or bodily experience of the public.

Oiticica used a variety of materials such as wood, jute, rocks, sand, thread, plants and metal grids - materials associated with the building trade.

Drawn from family stories, Oiticica built his first labyrinth for ants as a child. His father Jose Oiticica Filho was an entomologist [scientific study of insects].

Other possible influences may have been the often-chaotic structures of the favela environment.

These temporary houses were usually built from found materials, which ignored state building regulations.

Introduction Gallery Work

'Tropicalia' (1969/2014)

Tropicália is a walk-in 'constructed environment' composed of two wooden constructions - *Penetrável PN2 and PN3*. These Penetráveis were originally built in 1966/1967.

Here at IMMA the **Penetráveis** are reconstructions of the originals adapted to this exhibition space. There is a range of material used such as sand, plants, live parrots and tent-like dwellings. There are texts and poems written on cardboard, metal sheets or bricks. The poems are by the poet **Robert Salgado**. There is a television permanently switched on at the end of a dark, labyrinthine passageway. It is the only source of light. In the smaller of the two huts, the sentence 'A pureza é um mito' (Purity is a myth) is written on the upper corner of a monochrome surface.

This installation gave its name to an important cultural movement in twentieth-century Brazil - **Tropicália**, also known as **Tropicalismo**. **Tropicália** emerged in response to the repressive phase of military rule that dominated Brazil in the 1960s. Censorship laws imposed by the government policed the creative arts. The **Tropicália** movement included film, theatre, visual arts, and literature. But it was through popular music that this movement received most attention. This was led by **Caetano Veloso** and **Gilberto Gil**, two young singer-songwriters from Salvador, Bahia.

The dominant principle of Tropicália was an **Antropofagia** – a type of cultural cannibalism that fused different cultural, social and political influences to create something unique. The framework for 'cultural cannibalism' was inspired by the poet **Oswald de Andrade** who, in 1928, published his **Manifesto Antropofagia** (Cannibalism Manifesto) which was considered a seminal text of Brazilian modernism.

Discussed are issues of **colonialism/anti-colonialism; modernism/nationalism and tribalistic/primitivism and native/modern materials**.

Oiticica's Tropicália environment expresses cultural **HYBRIDITY** by creating an interactive space that encourages the 'participator' to walk, read, rest, see, hear and taste.

Immersive environments

Journey 4: Trigger questions

- What do the **Penetráveis** installations/environments have in common?
- How do the **Penetráveis** stand out amongst Oiticica's body of work that you have experienced so far in this exhibition?
- Describe Oiticica's methods to involve the viewer as participant in these works? For example does he lay down particular materials that may provide clues as how the public interact/move through these environments?
- Many of these installations are dominated by one particular colour - painted or constructed of material such as the blue plastic thread in *Penetrável Gal*, (1970). Walking through these environments do you get a sense of the physicalisation of colour?
- How does our sensory perception of colour differ when we experience colour in an interactive 'open' environment, in contrast to experiencing colour as a visual phenomenon on paper or canvas for example?
- Do you feel that your presence as an active agent is integral for these installations to work as devised conceptually by Oiticica?
- Many of these works were inspired by the structural forms of various labyrinths found in nature as with the ants and the built environment and also in terms of the favelas. Are these labyrinth environments as much to do with physical structures as they are to do with the idea of becoming 'lost' - a journey, not just experienced as a physical event but more importantly they encourage us through the process of walking to shake off everyday reality?

ABSTRACTION and COLOUR

STEP 1

Metaesquema (1950-1958)



Metaesquema (261), 1958

Collect a range of textured paper, card, plastic, wood and fabric of any quality (recycled material is perfectly fine).

Choose at least six different varieties.

Roughly cut this material to 11x11 inches.

What type of paint will you use - water-based, oil and/or acrylic [you could also consider using household paints etc.]?

Choose a single colour.

Consider how you apply the paint and whether it covers the entire surface of the material or do you play with abstract geometric forms such as the circle, triangle, square and rectangle? Or perhaps you apply the paint as schematic lines? How many layers of paint will you use? Consider the type of paintbrush and size? Will the visibility of the brush strokes be a consideration? Consistency of the paint - thin, rough, smooth etc., may also be a factor.

Once you have decided on your methods apply the same procedure to all material samples used.

Allow to dry.

Hang or pin the works to a wall.

Stand back. Review. [Group discussion]

- Can you tell if, for example, the colour green appears the same on each of these materials?

- How does the quality/texture of the material affect the colour?

- Does the light affect the work - be it artificial or natural?

- From your experiments, can you tell if some materials are more suited for paint than others?

- Can you describe/name the single colour/hue you used, for example - green could be described as pea green, sea green, olive green, grass green, sage green and evergreen.

Make a group list of all the colours used.

ABSTRACTION and COLOUR STEP 2

Bilaterais (1959-1960)

Relevo Espacial (1959-1960)



Relevo Espacial (REL 040), 1960

Use completed materials from step 1. to create a series of hanging sculptural forms based on Oiticica's **Relevo Espacial** and **Bilaterais** series.

Following the same steps that you applied to paint the surface of each material in step 1. paint the other side of the same material.

Colour choice is your decision.

Allow materials to dry.

How will these materials be manipulated - cut, folded, torn, stretched or layered?

How will you begin - with one painted sheet and add to the next?

If you add materials to another material, how will it be attached - glued, sewed and/or folded?

Will the work be hung, stand freely on the ground, be placed against a wall or placed outdoors?

Using a camera take a 360-degree photograph of the finished work.

Print.

Pin to the wall.

Discuss results.

CONTAINERS

STEP 1

BÓLIDES (1963-1969)



B32 Bólido Vidro 15, 1965 / 1966

“One could call my most recent works, the Bólides,” transobjetos” (English translation, transobjects, neologism). Actually, the necessity to give a new structure to color, to give it a “body,” led me to the most unexpected consequences, just as the development of the opaque to transparent Bolides, where color is not only presented in the techniques of oil and glue, but in their pigment state, contained in the actual Bólido structure. There, the glass cube that contains color could be called a pre-moulded object, since it is made ready beforehand. What I do as I transform it into a work is not a simple “poeticizing” of the object or situating it outside of the daily routine, but to incorporate it into an aesthetic idea, to make it part of the genesis of the work, so that it takes on a transcendental character, seen as participating in a universal idea without losing its previous structure.”

Helio Oiticica , 1963

(A transição da cor do quadro para o espaço e o sentido de construtividade”, in *Aspiro ao grande labirinto*. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986, p. 63. Excerpt of the text written on October 29, 1963.)

Read this quote from Oiticica, which describes in detail how he made and/or approached the making of this series of works.

Make your Bólides by following similar instructions.

Things to consider:

- The type of container.
- Found/readymade or constructed from materials?
- If constructed, what kind of materials will you use?
- Application of colour.
- Will words be applied?
- What scale will this container take - human and/or micro size like a matchbox?
- How will the work be interactive?
- Will you incorporate smells?
- Will the work be a combination of different materials?
- How will the viewer handle the works?
- Will the work come with instructions?
- How will you display the finished work?

KINETIC FORMS

Parangolé (1964-1979)



Parangolé Noblau, 1979 / 2011

STEP 1

Read Oiticica's instructions on how to make a Parangolé cape.

Find a group of people to make a cape and/or a number of capes.

Think about the material choice – paper, cloth, canvas, cardboard, etc.

Consider the quality, texture, and colour of the material used.

Some materials create different sounds when worn!

Should the material be found, bought or recycled from existing material?

How are you going to attach the materials – sewed, glued, pinned, tacked, etc?

Are the capes joined or made as individual works?

Will there be words printed, written, painted, scribbled on these wearable capes?

If you decide on using words - where will these words be sourced/created from?

Will the capes be worn? If so, where?

Will your group consider documenting the making of the capes and the wearing/performing of capes?

What tools will the group use to document the work - i.e. digital still, video, sound recorder, drawings, etc?

What happens to the material after your group have completed all of the above steps?

STEP 2

Hand out a copy of Oiticica's theoretical text 'Position and Program' or 'General Scheme of the New Objectivity'.

Read through.

If there is reference to particular art-works in the text source images either from the exhibition at IMMA and/or on-line.

Discuss the relationship between the text and the artwork.

STEP 3

In Oiticica's writings he states that a museum "is the world" - a site for questions to be asked not in terms of 'what is art?' but 'why it is art?' and 'what can it do?'

Perhaps we could also add - when is it art?

Apply these questions in relation to the work that was made in step 1.

Write down and/or discuss using the following statements:

"When is Art?"

"Why is art?"

"What can it do?"

ARCHIVAL HOMMAGE TO OITICICA

Investigate key words and people

As you have read through this document you will have noticed key words associated closely with Oiticica and his practice are highlighted in bold. A condensed list is provided below.

WORDS

FRENTE GROUP
 NEO-CONCRETE
 CONCRETE ART
 TROPICÁLIA MOVEMENT
 GEOMETRY IN ART
 FAVELA [BRAZIL]
 THE MAGIC-SQUARES SERIES
 PRIMARY COLOURS
 AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENTS:
 ANTI-ART,
 NEOPLASTICISM
 CONSTRUCTIVISM
 SUPERMATISM
 WHITE CHAPEL EXPERIENCE
 GUY BRETT
 GEOMETRY
 CÉSAR OITICICA
 IVAN SERPA
 KAZIMIR MALEVICH
 PAUL KLEE
 PIET MONDRIAN
 THEO VAN DOESBURG
 MANGUEIRA SAMBA SCHOOL
 NUCLEUS
 READYMADE
 JACKSON RIBERIO
 JOSE OITICICA FILHO
 1968 POLITICAL MARCHES
 ANT HIVES
 ANTI-AESTHETICS
 LYGIA CLARK
 LYGIA PAPE
 MANIFESTO AITROPOFAGO

1. Each person is given a word from the list. The fairest allocation of word to person is to write or cut these words out. Fold up each word strip. Place in a bag. Each person picks a word from said bag.

2. There is a limit of a 500-word description per word.

3. Research should also include sourcing visual and aural material related to specific words.

3. On completion of research and write up - each person presents a 'tell and show' of their research material and write up.

4. All material should be collated by the group into one document.

5. The form of this document is up for discussion amongst the group - whether it takes the form of an actual scrapbook, digital edition/print form, or the material is presented in a box type folder or even an on-line archive?

6. Where will the archive be housed?

Key words

CONCEPTUAL ART

Originating in the 1960s in reaction to the commercialisation and commodification of the art object, conceptual art placed an emphasis on the idea or concept rather than the production of a tangible work.

CONCRETE ART

A form of abstract art that emerged in the 1930s, influenced by De Stijl, which emphasised the formal or concrete properties of an art work and rejected any symbolic association with reality.

CONSTRUCTIVISM

An abstract art movement founded by Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko in Russia around 1915, which embraced developments in modern technology and industrialisation.

FAVELA

A Portuguese term meaning 'slum', it refers to the dense, temporary housing in many Brazilian cities where people with little or no income live.

GEOMETRY

A branch of mathematics concerned with form and shape.

HAPPENINGS

Associated with US artist Allan Kaprow, the term Happenings emerged in the 1950s to describe time-based performances, events or situations which rely on artistic chance and improvisation to provoke the interaction of the audience.

IDIOM

A combination of words whose literal meaning is different from their figurative meaning, i.e. 'break a leg.'

INSTALLATION

A form of presentation of an artwork which involves the installation or configuration of objects in a space, where the totality of the objects and the space comprise the artwork.

LANGUAGE

The use of verbal and written text as a medium in art.

LINGUISTICS

The scientific study of language methodologies, such as grammatical structure, perception, meaning, the action and sound of speech, and how these methods are acquired.

MEDIUM

In general usage, media refers to forms of communication, such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio and the Internet. In the arts media — the plural of medium — refers to the materials, methodologies, mechanisms, technologies or devices by which an artwork is realised. Traditional media include painting, sculpture and drawing and the specific materials used, such as paint, charcoal or marble, can also be referred to as media. In Contemporary Art practice media artists use a wide range of media, such as technology, found materials, the body, sound, etc.

NEOCONCRETISM

An influential art movement in Brazil from 1959 and 1961 which rejected the emphasis on formal elements associated with concrete art (non-figurative, abstract art) in favour of a more expressive and participative arts practice.

NEOPLASTICISM

A form of abstract painting associated with Dutch artist Piet Mondrian and the De Stijl movement in the 1930s, characterised by the use of vertical and horizontal lines and primary colours.

PERFORMANCE ART

Involves an artist undertaking an action or actions where the artist's body is the medium. The practice may also incorporate other bodies, performers and audience members. Performance art is a time-based practice and durational performance takes place over an extended period of time and involves elements of endurance. Performance art evolved in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the context of a period of social, cultural and political upheaval. It is closely associated with Video Art which was the primary means of recording this ephemeral art form.

PRIMARY COLOURS

The primary colours - red, blue and yellow - are the core colours which when mixed in various combinations make secondary colours - orange, purple, green.

READYMADE

A term used in manufacturing to distinguish between handmade and manufactured goods, appropriated by French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) to describe the selection and modification of a manufactured object by an artist to create an artwork.

SCALE

The relationship in terms of size and proportion between one object and another. The scale of an art work is often measured in relation to the size of the human figure.

SUPREMATISM

Russian abstract art movement founded by Kasimir Malevich and Alexander Rodchenko around 1915 which emphasised the supremacy of form expressed through the use of a limited range of colours and geometric shapes.

TEXT-BASED

Artwork created using written or printed words as the material and/or subject matter.

TROPICÁLIA

Predominantly associated with music, Tropicália, also known as Tropicálismo, was an innovative, hybrid art movement in Brazil in the 1960s encompassing visual arts, poetry, music and theatre. In the visual arts it was associated with the work of Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica. It was informed by the civil rights movement and political and social injustices in Brazil.

Gallery Layout

Location of key art works

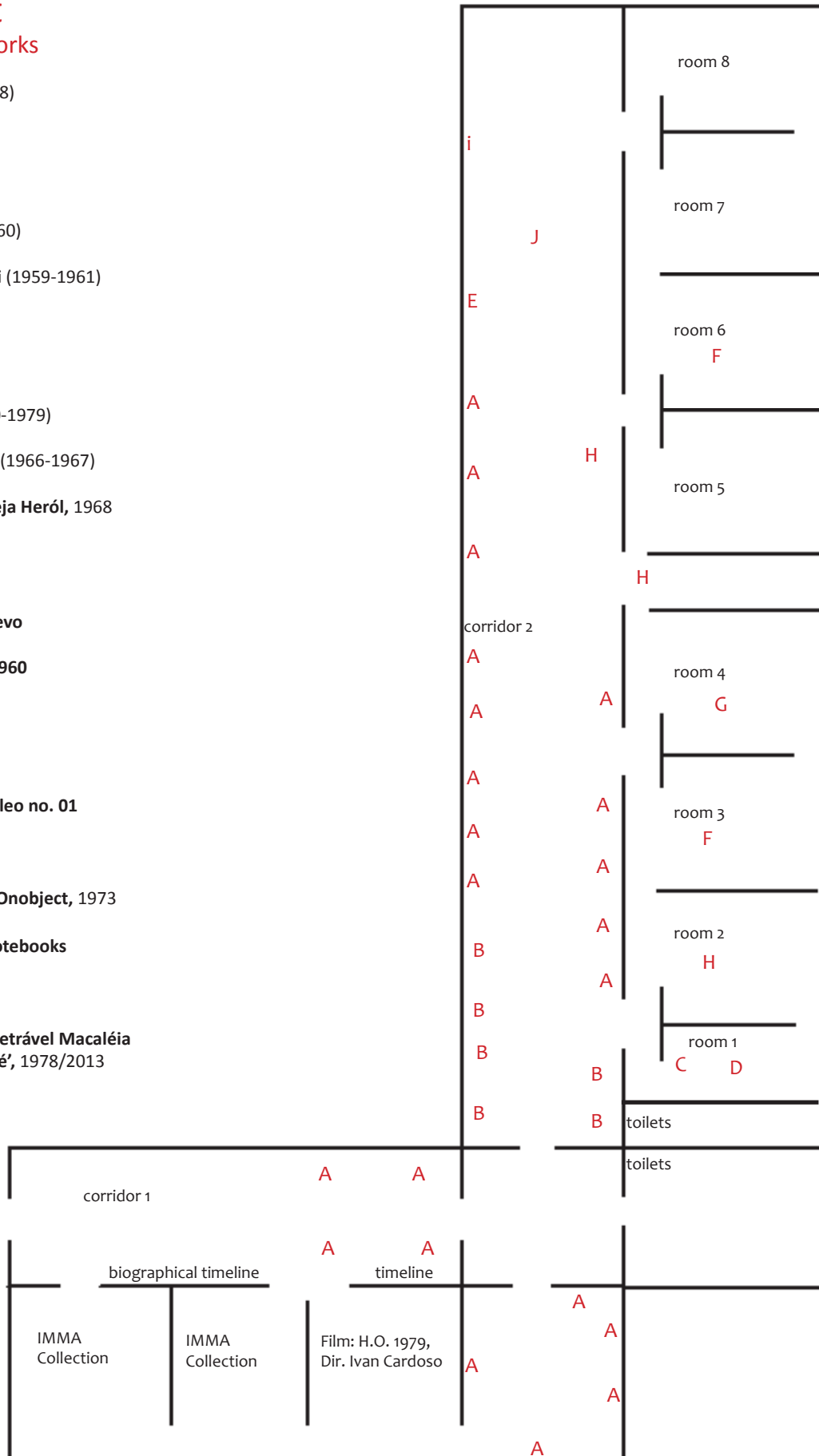
- A. **Metaesquema** (1957-1958)
- B. **Grupo Frente** (1955-56)
- C. **Bilaterais** (1959-1960)
- D. **Relevo Espacial** (1959-1960)
- E. **Desenho Pre-Neoconcreti** (1959-1961)
- F. **Bólides** (1963-1969)
- G. **Parangolé** (1964-1979)
- H. **Penetráveis/Nuclei** (1960-1979)
- I. **Tropicália/Suprasensorial** (1966-1967)
- J. **Bandeira Seja Marginal Seja Herói**, 1968

Rooms

- Room 1 **Bilaterals and Relevo**
- Room 2 **Penetrável BN1, 1960**
- Room 3 **Bólides**
- Room 4 **Parangolé**
- Room 5 **NC1 Pequeno Nucleo no. 01**
- Room 6 **Bólides**
- Room 7 **Cosmococa CC2 - Onobject, 1973**
- Room 8 **Propositions in Notebooks**

IMMA Formal Gardens **Penetrável Macaléia**
 'Homenagem a Jards Macalé', 1978/2013

< To Reception



Further reading

Selected Publications

Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour, ed. Mari Carmen Ramírez, Luciano Figueiredo, Wynne Phelan Author, Tate Publishing, 2007.

Helio Oiticica: The Great Labrynth, MMK Museum, Hatje Cantz; Bilingual edition, 2013.

Helio Oiticica and Neville D'Almeida: Block-Experiments in *Cosmococa Program in Progress - Afterall*, 2013.

Oiticica in London, eds. Guy Brett, Luciano Figueiredo, Tate Publishing, 2007.

Websites

www.imma.ie

www.heliooitica.org.br/english/home/home.php - Project Hélio Oiticica:

www.heliooiticaofilme.com.br

www.heliooiticaofilme.com.br/english/extras.htm

<http://tropicalia.com.br/en>

www.corpse.org/archives/issue_11/manifestos/deandrade.html

www.itaucultural.org.br/aplicexternas/enciclopedia/ho/home/index.cfm

www.moma.org/collection/artist.php?artist_id=7715

www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/helio-oiticica-body-colour

www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7331

www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/living-colour

www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/helio-and-i

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www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/h%C3%A9lio-oiticica-the-body-of-colour-symposium-video-recordings

Film Websites

www.youtube.com/watch?v=opsXcl...

Brazilian Tropicalism movement documentary:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUPxYB...

www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGYHJaGXHOU

www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyEH58BhxAA

www.heliooitica.org.br/english/home/home.php

Hélio Oiticica Guy Brett Tate Papers on-line.

www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/2-000-works-by-H-lío-Oiticica-destroyed-in-fire%20/19623

<https://ia601006.us.archive.org/17/items/HelioWitt/helio-witt.pdf>

Research, content and layout: Christine Mackey

Production and layout: Lisa Moran, Curator: Education and Community Programmes

Images: Poi Marr, Assistant Curator: Exhibitions Department.