

*Portal*, for example, is the door of a small rectangular airplane painted with geometric shapes, similar to a feathered ceremonial poncho. The floor is of the same yellow color, and the linear details are in the same place and painted with the same colors of the poncho. The main detail is that while the sea waves that decorate the lower part of the poncho are wavy, in Ballardo's piece they are actually linear, in zigzag. The artist does not repeat the form identically, he changes it.

All the works by Ballardo consist of many parts, with the exception of some sculptures made with parts from small airplanes. The piece titled *Expedición* (Expedition) consists of twenty-eight stainless steel paintings on plexiglass, becoming a sculpture rendered like a painting. In Ballardo's work, the duality of form, color and media is paramount. According to Ballardo, his work represents a "chromatic study of feather textiles that I have found in archeology museums during trips in Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Brazil, and Colombia."<sup>2</sup>

In a piece consisting of two paintings, the small painting titled *Plumario Varanja y Azul* (Orange and Blue Feather Mosaic) was, as its name indicates, inspired by a ceremonial feather poncho. It has three colors: yellow, which is semicircular and gives the poncho its shape. Yellow represents the Sun god. Then there is orange, which represents dusk, and blue, a small stripe, which represents the hole on which the head is placed. The larger painting is titled *Horizontes Paralelos Chancay* (Parallel Horizons Chancay). Once again, as its name indicates, it depicts the horizon of a seascape sunset. Chancay is a city by the ocean that has a lot of Pre-Columbian art. This work only has two colors: a blue stripe and an orange one. In the bottom section there is a thicker stripe in blue, which represents the ocean. The other orange stripes represent a sunset by the ocean.

With this exhibition, Ballardo opens new criteria for the analysis of Pre-Columbian art. His art surprises us for the use of geometry and colors.

#### NOTES

1. Interview with the artist. January, 2017.

2. Interview with the artist. January, 2017.

#### AUGUSTO CHIMPÉN

**Willys de Castro.** *From Paintings to Objects*, 1950 - 1965. Installation view. Variable dimensions. Courtesy: Cecilia Brunson Projects.



#### LONDON / ENGLAND

## Willys de Castro Cecilia Brunson Projects

One of the most important representatives of Neo-Concrete art in Brazil, Willys de Castro (Minas Gerais, 1926–Sao Paulo, 1988) showed his work for the first time in the United Kingdom in 1965, as part of the exhibition titled "Brazilian Art Today," at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Forty-nine years later, his work was once again shown in the UK as part of the 2014 exhibition titled "Radical Geometry: Modern Art of South America from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection" presented, once again, at the Royal Academy of Arts. After that second appearance, the Cecilia Brunson Projects gallery organized the first solo show by De Castro in that part of the world. The exhibition was based on the retrospective exhibition by the artist at the Instituto de Arte Contemporânea in São Paulo, inaugurated in early 2016 and curated by Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro.

Titled "Willys de Castro, From Painting to Objects 1950-1965," the exhibition included a selection of pieces produced during the first fifteen years of his artistic production. It consisted of drawings, paintings, and objects. It could be said that the works selected represented three chapters (displayed across three walls) that delved into different periods of De Castro's professional career and three different types of works: beginning with his preparatory sketches or drawings, samples of his geometric abstractions (paintings) and neo-concrete poetry; and, lastly, his well-known *Active Objects*.

Willys de Castro was a painter, writer, designer, costume designer, graphic artist, and poet. After switching the course of his professional career from chemistry to the visual arts and relocating—from Minas Gerais, his hometown, to São Paulo where he would study drawing with André Fort—he created his first series of painting during the 1940-1950 period. Later on, in 1954, De Castro founded a graphic design studio, with artist Hércules Barsotti, in which he worked until 1964. It is possible to recognize in this exhibition at Cecilia Brunson Projects some pieces that belong to that early period of his artistic education. Oils, paintings and drawings composed with pure colors and geometric figures that suggest movement and equilibrium. Here it is possible to identify the great influence that architecture (in the incorporation of architectural forms in his drawings and paintings) and graphic design (because of the formal similarities) had on this artist.

Nonetheless, it was not until 1959 when De Castro produced his most celebrated works: the so-called *Active Objects*. Which could be placed somewhere between the definitions of sculpture and painting. These objects are fashioned with narrow strips of wood covered with canvas, painted with often monochromatic geometric abstract forms and hung on the wall. During the second phase of his career, De Castro entered into contact with the Neo-Concrete Movement (the Grupo Frente), which was formed by Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, among others. This movement was formed in response to concrete art. While both movements shared an interest for abstraction and the use of color to convey scientific principles, the Neo-Concrete artists wanted a more poetic aesthetic with deeper content and a greater sense of freedom.

The *Active Objects* included in the exhibition turn painting into a three-dimensional object. The viewer's figure and his/her movement across the gallery space play a central role: it allows viewers to observe the work from different perspectives, perceiving in this manner the different angles and the multiplicity of forms that the works can acquire. In this manner, the aesthetic experience is centered, not around the objects per se, but on the

viewer's subjective perception. In this work De Castro questions the possibilities of painting, going beyond the two-dimensional surface and space.

With respect to the historic content of the period, the military regime in Brazil headed by Humberto Castelo-Branco seized power by force in 1964. It is important to take into account that geometric art did not offer overt political connotations. De Castro remained silent during the repression perpetrated by that military government. It was not until 1970 that he once again adopted an active posture and resumed his artistic trajectory. Despite the lack of overt political references in his work, it is possible to interpret his presence, or lack thereof, in the public and exhibition spaces during the different sociopolitical contexts (dictatorship vs democracy) in Brazil as a sort of artistic posture.

The exhibition also included three types of aesthetic explorations that De Castro delved in before the period of the military regime. There are: geometric abstractions, preparatory sketches, and Active Objects. The exhibition offers rhythm and balance, tension and instability, spaces full of color and empty ones. There is also poetry, sculpture and painting, colors and writings, paper, wood, and canvas; objects and subjects, proximity and distance.

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## Aimée Zito Lema

### The Goma

The small gesture as form of resistance is the core of the exhibition titled "Some Forms of Friendship," a proposal by Aimée Zito-Lema (Amsterdam, 1982) at The Goma gallery, curated by Violeta Janeiro.

History, with capital "H," uses ellipsis to suppress affections, emotional articulation of events and small biographical details. Through a syntax that gathers fragments and enlarges them, Aimée Zito-Lema suggests a rereading of some events that took place in The Netherlands and Argentina (Zito-Lema was born in Amsterdam and grew in Buenos Aires). In this manner, the exhibition display perfectly accompanies the vindication that pulsates in all the works: small subversive acts as the first steps of a greater political movement.

**Aimée Zito Lema.** *Several Forms of Friendship*, 2016. Ceramic, projector and digital video monochannel 3'17". Variable dimensions.



The exhibition presents three groups of works based on this type of collaborative processes. *De la Serie de Gestos – El Cuerpo Suversivo* (From the Series of Gestures – The Subversive Body) is one of the most striking pieces of the show, and the first one welcoming visitors upon entering the gallery. It consists of an installation with archival images of manifestation from the 1960s and 1970s. The largest photograph is a life size image resting on a pine wood pedestal as if it were an actual person. We observe the image of a girl's body. The references to a coffin and the physical presence are set in contrast against the proposal's documentary and conceptual content.

Right next to it, the 2016 piece *Sin Título (Maximiliano Kosteki y Darío Santillán, Asesinados por la Policía en la Estación de Trenes de Avellaneda, Provincia de Buenos Aires, 26 de junio de 2002)* [Untitled (Maximiliano Kosteki and Darío Santillán, Murdered by the Police at the Avellaneda Train Station, Province of Buenos Aires, June 26 of 2002)] consists of an image of the feet of Maximiliano Kosteki, a fallen victim of police brutality during the repression of a march demanding greater social support for the most disadvantaged classes. The work is an interesting reflection on the role of visual culture as instrument for denunciation but also as generator of a specific ionosphere.

Equal parts performance and archival photography, the piece titled *Rond de Jambe* included photograph of acts of protest that took place in Amsterdam between 1979 and 1986 in response to the construction of the Stopera building, today destined to the performing arts. In addition to this graphic testimonial, there are the photographs of a dancer accompanied by a group of participants who perform a choreography based on those protests. In this manner, a line is drawn between demonstrations as a collective dance and dance as an act of physical resistance.

One of the most compelling pieces - because of its fragility - is *De la Serie de Gestos - Categorías* (From the Series of Gestures – Categories) It consists of small photographs focusing on details: interlocking hands in a maternal manner and resting and moving feet. It is an iconographic repertoire of gestures that articulate any movement, any union, and, consequently, any revolution. Here is the driving force in Zito-Lema's work: the enormous strength of the body in everyday situations and its relationship with other bodies as principle for a history-altering political movement.

The piece titled *Algunas Formas de Amistad* (Some Forms of Friendship) - which the exhibition is named after - combines several ceramic pieces with a video projection. Here, we once again find the idea that articulates the entire curatorial discourse: affection as the basis for form idea and movement. Zito-Lema's families and friends have modelled the pieces. Clay fragments have been added to the pieces by the artist's own daughter. On the wall in the background, we observe the initial drafts for a Greek sculpture that alludes to the classical canon. In this manner, two visions, one alluding to the history of art and the other to the history of Western beauty, are contrasted. At play are the great stories, mimesis and the traditional aesthetic canon (constructed with an external, bifocal and anatomically idealized view), along with a more postmodern gaze in which the canon is interrupted with autobiographical elements, small gestures anecdotes and contingencies. The very manner of exhibiting the piece is very eloquent in this respect: several objects contrapose the "phantasmagoric" aspect of the black and white projection on the aseptic wall. These objects have been disorganized, mixed, and stained (by the hands of several people) as result of the force of work and of an intimate biography.

It is not easy to write in current times about a late postmodernity (if we can at all refer to our historic movement in that manner). It is not because it would appear at times as if excessive reflection on narrative artistic, and metalinguistic mechanisms hides the aesthetic experience or the development of the artistic occurrence. Likewise, it is difficult to