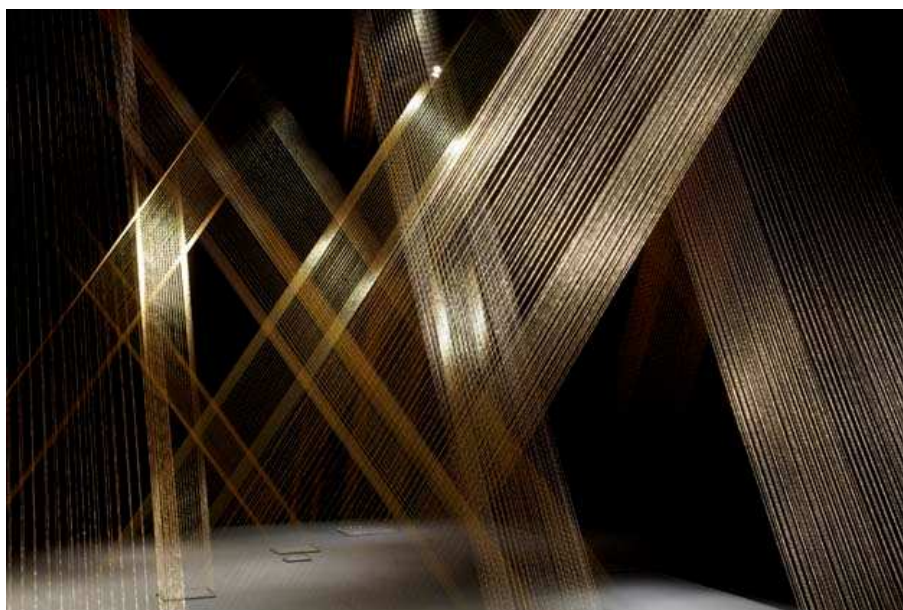


Lygia Pape Magnetic Space



Ttéia cuadrada (1976-2002/2009). Proyecto Lygia Pape

DATES: 24 May – 3 October 2011

PLACE: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía
Sabatini Building, 4rd Floor

ORGANISED BY: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía en colaboración con
Proyecto Lygia Pape

CURATED BY: Manuel Borja-Villel y Teresa Velázquez

COORDINATED BY: Rafael García

Museo Reina Sofía organises, in collaboration with Projeto Lygia Pape, the first monographic exhibition in Europe dedicated to the Brazilian artist (Nova Frigurgo, 1927 – Rio de Janeiro, 2004). This retrospective aims to contribute decisively to widen the knowledge, study and divulgation of Lygia Pape's body of work, as she is one of the main names in Brazil's contemporary art scene, along with others like Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, with whom she had a close relationship.

The show will gather two hundred and fifty works approximately, including paintings, engravings, xylography, performance actions —displayed through objects, videos and photographs—, films, film posters, poems, *collages* and documents. Some of her best known pieces will also be on display, such as the *Tecelares* and *Livros*, but also some less disseminated ones, like *Ballets Neoconcretos* and her films. The selection of experimental film pieces that has been chosen especially for the occasion is a main highlight of the show. Also, there will be collective experience works that have survived through visual documents and the *Teias*, colossal installations made with silver, golden or transparent filaments, which act as the nexus of the exhibition and will plunge the visitor into a space dominated by light and poetic abstraction.

To understand Lygia Pape's career one needs to be introduced to the artistic and political context of Brazil's second half of the 20th century. During the 50s, the country experienced a modernisation process that ranged through new initiatives in literature, urbanism and architecture. In art it implied the opening of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro's Museums of Modern Art and the beginning of the São Paulo Biennale, amongst other events. The route of the exhibition will allow visitors to revisit the main role that Lygia Pape had in this modernisation, while participating in two non figurative tendencies. First, the carioca faction of concretism, as a member of the Grupo Frente, for whom the geometrical language was an open field of experimentation; and undertaking neoconcretism afterwards, which would favour an increasingly active participation by the spectator in the piece, stepping decisively towards the integration of art in life.

From the early days to maturity. Concretism and Grupo Frente

The beginnings of Lygia Pape will be rescued for this exhibition through four abstract-lined canvases with an organic tendency, stepping afterwards into geometrical abstraction in a series of paintings and engravings that the artist made already as a member of Grupo Frente. Done between 1953 and 1955, and rarely displayed at that time, these paintings are called **Jogos Vectorais** ("Vectorial Games") and they are canvases with a dynamic game of lines and squares, and the engravings or **Jogos Matemáticos** ("Mathematical Games"), based in the repetition of regular shapes and playing with positive and negative, colour and profundity.

In 1955 Pape begins to experiment with xylography, a technique that suits her as a means of exploring, thus achieving the most advanced postulates of the time. The result were the **Tecelares**, an exceptional group that inaugurates her maturity work, when she evolved in both spatial and technical complexity, and formed a solid corpus that will be object of constant re-elaboration throughout her career. The *Tecelares* were presented in the four exhibitions made by Grupo Frente in 1954 and 1956, and in the emblematic show /

Exposicion de Arte Concreto Nacional (I National Concrete Art Exhibition), that took place in the Museum of Modern Art São Paulo in 1956 and in the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro in 1957.

At an early stage, Pape's bright, light *Tecelares*, made with the incision of subtle lines in the wood, show themselves more dominating. With time, though, she darkens them with a wider use of black surfaces that begin to show the features and characteristics of the material. This series is the first satisfactory attempt of identifying background and form, a determining aspect in the creation of a space that Pape qualified as "split, inverted, ambivalent".

The space as a visual and semantic element has its prolongation in the **Desenhos** ("Designs", 1957–1959), where the weave is occasionally interrupted in order to project slightly displaced or negative geometries. The material mainly used by Pape in this series is ink on Japanese paper, to achieve a lightness that evokes those Far East engravings.

Neoconcretism. Ballets, Poemas and Livros

In 1959, along with artists such as Hèlio Oiticica or Lygia Clark, Pape abandons Grupo Frente and initiates one of the most significant movements in Brazilian art, the *neoconcrete*, with which they begin to develop pieces of art that aim to be included in real, everyday life. In this context **Ballets Neoconcretos I y II** made an appearance. Both pieces will be shown in the exhibition through a recreation of the *Ballet I* and videos of both. The first traduced visually and musically a poem with the movement of geometric shapes propelled by dancers who were hidden in its interior. The second traced the frontal route of two planes that approach and distance each other in the dark until reaching a maximum ambivalence between background and figure. Resulting from the collaboration of Lygia Pape with the poet Reinaldo Jardim and the dancer Gilberto Motta, the *Ballets* incorporated subjective time to the work of art, a key aspect of neoconcretism that preludes the participation of the spectator while reducing the distance between life and the piece of art.

Pape shares many procedures with main poets and theorists of the time, but in several cases she was incomparable: she was the first of the neoconcrete to apply the same artistic principle previously mentioned, her poetic creation: the participation of the reader in the construction of the book. In one of her last statements she summed up her whole praxis: "I want to work intensely in a poetic status. I am in a quest for the poem". The starting point for this attitude can be found in her **Poemas de luz** ("Light Poems") and her **Poemas Objeto** ("Object Poems"), made between 1956 and 1957. These are the direct precedents of **Livro da criação** ("Book of Creation", 1959–1960), a poetic *origami* in which she doesn't use the work but builds a narration through the image. In its 14 pages or "unidades", the artist handles cuts and colours, forming three-dimensional mountable and dismountable shapes that can be split by the spectator and *narrate* the creation of the world.

Livro da Arquitectura ("Architecture Book", 1959–60) falls into performance once more. In this case it explores the creation of spaces to inhabit the world and the meaning of architectural forms. Unlike the previous, the spectator can read this piece the other way round, dismantling the form and returning to the flat status of the object, if that is to be his will. Finally, **Livro do Tempo** ("Book of Time", 1961–1965) is a great geometric canvas constituted by 365 units made of painted wood, equivalent to the days of the year.

Film activity. Cinema Novo

The dissolution of the neoconcrete group in 1963 marks a turning point in Lygia Pape's career, which will burst in the field of cinema to start working as a filmmaker and collaborating with *Cinema Novo*. This facet is a key chapter of the exhibition, as it gathers almost ten films made between 1967 and 1976. Her first film, ***La Nouvelle Creation*** ("The New Creation", 1967) was shot in 35mm. In it, Pape handles NASA images to suggest the birth of a new man. This procedure will be retaken by Pape in ***Our Parents "Fossilis"*** (1974), a *collage* made out of portraits of natives that she took from several postcards.

These themes, as well as popular culture, were very appealing to Pape, who traduces this attraction into her films ***A mão do Povo*** ("The Hands of the People") and ***Carnival in Rio*** (1974), more related to documentary, while the spirit of *Cinema Novo* is very apparent in ***Wampirou*** (1974), ***Catiti Catiti*** (1978) and ***Arenas Calientes*** ("Hot Sands", 1974). Another recurring aspect in her filmography is its strong erotic dimension. ***O homem e sua bahinha*** (1968) evokes space as a continuous interior-exterior ambiguity, while ***Eat me*** (1976) will be the germ of a piece on the exploitation of the image of women in consumer products.

On the other hand, the visitor will also be able to see the **posters and title credits** that Pape made for the films of other members of this experimental movement in Brazil, such as Carlos Diegues, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade or Walter Lima Jr. Also on display there will be Pape's designs for posters and titles of films such as Glauber Rocha's *Deus o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (1964) or Nelson Pereira's *Vidas Secas* ("Dried Lives", 1963).

Nova Objetividade Brasileira ("New Brazilian Objectivity")

1964 saw the emerging of the military dictatorship in Brazil, but that didn't cease the renovating hunger that bloomed in every field of culture. Tropicalism was hatched in this context, its name being a derivation of Helio Oiticica's installation *Tropicalia* (1967), made for the *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* exhibition.

Nova Objetividade was a turning point in Lygia Pape's plastic activity. Her ***Caixa de baratas*** ("Cockroach Box", 1967) and ***Caixa de formigas*** ("Ant Box", 1967) were made as an explicit form of severe criticism not only to museum's "mummified" art, but also to the marginal conditions of Brazil's population and the voracity with which the dictatorial regime delighted in tormenting its victims. On the one hand, *Caixa de baratas* is a well-chosen, perfectly aligned collection of dead cockroaches. On the other, *Caixa de formigas* consists of the coming and going of ants over a slice of raw meat, with a legend that reads "a gula ou a luxuria" ("gluttony or lust") written on the bottom of the box.

During 1968 Lygia's activity was intense, showing a turn into sensorial and participative experimentation, in line with the work of other artists of the time. Under the *Apocalipopótese* demonstration, the artist presents the action ***O ovo*** ("The egg", 1968). In it, three individuals emerge from of three cubical shapes after tearing the shell in a transgressor, rather liberating gesture. That same year she made ***Divisor***, her first collective experience, and one of the most important pieces of the time due to its choral and poetic dimension. In *Divisor*, participants stick their heads out of a holey cloth that unites them yet separates them from their bodies. The ludicrous character of this experience transforms individual impulse in a

pretext to collective mobilisation. **Roda dos Prazeres** ("Wheel of Pleasures", 1968) shows, like the experiences just mentioned, Lygia's particular interest in carrying out an authorless piece that could be repeated without the artist being present, as proves this exhibition. Thus, this experience grows awareness of the senses, inciting the public into helping themselves to some drops of water with colorant of different flavours to dye their tongues in different colours. Last, **Espacios imantados** ("Magnetised spaces", 1968) includes a wide photographic archive of actions that work as magnetic fields to achieve spontaneous social interaction.

Ttéias.

The works known as **Ttéia** adopt different formalisations from 1977 until autumn 2000. The first **Ttéia** appeared with the project **Ttéias-Redes** ("Ttéias-Nets"), made in Park Lage with her students in 1977. This series of pieces made with distinctive filament admit several variations depending on space (corner / exempt), light (natural / artificial) and string material (copper / silver / transparent), as well as the structure chosen among the several that were projected by the artist.

The key to understanding the gradual progression of Lygia Pape towards total abstraction of the poetic space resides in these works. In her words, it is all about "a net in which spiders weave plans of life and death".

The artist.

Lygia Pape (Nova Frigurgo, 1927 – Rio de Janeiro, 2004) is considered one of the most prominent Brazilian artists, thanks to the grade of experimentation she reached in her rather singular production and constant mutation of her works. She began her career integrated in Grupo Frente's Brazilian *concretism*. Along with artists such as Hèlio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, Pape abandoned this group in 1959, inaugurating the *neoconcrete* art, whose manifesto is considered to be the beginning of Brazilian contemporary art. All three artists developed works that aimed to their inclusion in real life.

The main feature of Pape's work is the integration of the aesthetical, ethical and political spheres. During the neoconcrete era she developed an investigation about the dualism between matter and shape, with works like *Ballet Neoconcreto* and *Tecelares*. Little by little the approximation of her work to life took her to inserting temporality and a constant transformation of the media in her praxis.

An important value of Brazilian artists such as Pape is the fact of having taken European abstraction as a starting point, avoiding the elaboration of mere copies and versions of it. On the contrary, they faced it with a rebellious and respectful attitude, and made use of the local situation to develop an international discourse. After the reflection on form, Pape started working in her *Livros* ("Books"), keenly taking into consideration light and visual effects on the observer. This interest in perception of the piece flowed naturally into the performance actions that took place in the sixties, occasionally based in participation by another individual, or videos on the different visions of the same space, or its influence in the piece itself. Late

that decade, when political repression in Brazil got stronger, Pape makes her *caixas* as an acid form of criticizing the values and repertoires of elites and cultural institutions.

In her late works she worked again with object and installation, which she understood as a depiction of feelings, the attempt of creating an eventual sign whose character is not permanent and containing an underlying narration. Like Hélio Oiticica described them, the works of Lygia Pape are a *permanently open seed*.

Catalogue.

On the occasion of the exhibition, Museo Reina Sofía will publish a catalogue in Spanish and in English with a selection of texts by the own artist and her close historic circle, an introduction by the curators, Manuel Borja-Villel and Teresa Velázquez, and essays by Paulo Herkenhoff, Lauro Cavalcanti, Ivana Bentes, Paulo Venancio Filho and Guy Brett.

FTP to download information and images of the exhibition:

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