

CILDO MEIRELES: PATH AND PRESENCE

"Drawing is the first visual perception. In a second stage, it is necessary to return to the drawing, to go into detail. It follows this process of detailing an idea. But its function is to capture that thing that passed like a flash of lightning, that still has no shape, color, or size."

Cildo Meireles³

Anita Schwartz Gallery of Art presents **Cildo Meireles: Path and Presence**, a tribute to the iconic artist and a key figure in Brazilian conceptual art. The exhibition brings together a selection of drawings created in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, as well as prints produced in 2009 that were inspired by drawings from the 1960s. In doing so, it highlights a lesser-known yet highly significant aspect of the artist's creative process: his drawings. In addition to the graphic works, the exhibition also includes a number of small-scale objects, elements from symbolic installations within his three-dimensional production.

The practice of drawing has been a constant presence in Cildo Meireles's artistic production since childhood and has played an important role throughout his career. Drawing became both a form of expression and reflection, a means for developing ideas in detail, and also his main source of income until nearly 1990. Selling drawings to friends and collectors enabled him to dedicate himself fully to his artistic career and to carry out more complex projects, works through which Cildo Meireles would become internationally renowned. In an interview with Frederico Morais⁴, he recalls that at just nine years old, while living in Belém do Pará, he earned a few coins at school by selling his drawings. After moving to Brasília and entering secondary school, he continued drawing. It was his way of staying close to reality and showing his classmates his way of thinking. In 1963, at the age of 15, he began attending the *Ateliê Livre* of the Cultural Foundation of the Federal District, led by the Peruvian artist Felix Alejandro Barrenechea. There, he practiced observational drawing and life drawing with live models. Around the same time, he enrolled in the film course at CIEM, an experimental school affiliated with the University of Brasília. During that period, an exhibition of African art from the University of Dakar in Senegal passed through the city, featuring sculptures and masks. The show had a strong impact on the young artist, encouraging him to confront any surface with the challenge of representation, the figure transported to another plane. In 1964, at a moment of great political adversity with the beginning of the military dictatorship in Brazil, the art course at the Cultural Foundation was shut down. Still, Cildo continued attending Barrenechea's studio. Since then, drawing has remained a part of his life, and it's now been more than six decades.

Among the works selected for the exhibition are freehand drawings encompassing a variety of themes and formats: some inspired by the African masks previously mentioned; others following a narrative language, with panels reminiscent of comic strips, though featuring situations that unfold in an arbitrary manner. There are also abstract compositions with a strong emphasis on color; drawings that blend rounded brushstrokes with jagged lines, evoking scenes of pain and violence; and still others that depict specific moments preserved in the artist's memory.

³⁻⁴ Interview published in the exhibition catalog "Algun desenho 1963–2005," edited by Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, in 2005.

In print form, the exhibition features the emblematic series *Virtual Spaces: Corners*, which began as a drawing in 1967. In this series, the artist explores the phenomenon of perspective and virtuality through the Euclidean module of space (three planes of projection: frontal, lateral, and horizontal). Its developments, *Virtual Volumes* and *Occupations*, are also included; these works are composed of lines and two or three support planes that, extending from the wall, create spatial ambiguities.

In addition to the drawings and prints, the exhibition also presents collectible multiples, many of which reference his large-scale installations.

Camelô refers to the artist's childhood memories of visiting the city center, in Rio de Janeiro, with his father. On those occasions, he would observe the street vendors selling very simple items such as pins, shirt collar stays, and puppets made of cardboard and plastic. He was intrigued by the situation; how could those people survive by selling such seemingly insignificant objects? Years later, this memory would give rise to the multiple *Camelô*, or street vendor, featuring one table selling collar stays and another displaying pin marked with the artist's initials.

Dados is the first work in the series *Semantic Objects*, created in 1970, in which the artist presents pieces where object and title establish a relationship of meanings and reinterpretations, playing with paradoxes, irony, and contradictions. The different meanings of the word in Portuguese (data and dice) confront the object itself, creating tension between what is assumed to be understood and what is actually presented.

Esfera Invisível (Invisible Sphere) addresses a kind of existence made up of absences, suggesting the presence of a form that is defined by the absence of matter. Inside what appears to be a solid aluminum cube, two concave hemispheres of equal dimensions meet, forming an empty space in the shape of a sphere. Thus, the idea of a sphere that exists only in the viewer's imagination is created. These carved-out surfaces can only be seen when the cube is opened. At that moment, the two parts separate, and the invisible sphere ceases to exist.

Fiat Lux references the installation *O Sermão da Montanha: Fiat Lux*, presented by Cildo Meireles only once in 1979 for just 24 hours at the Candido Mendes Gallery in Rio de Janeiro. The work, which evoked the atmosphere of fear and violence during the military dictatorship, consisted of a large block made up of 126,000 Fiat Lux matchboxes, placed at the center of the room, and surrounded by eight mirrors inscribed with phrases from the biblical text *Sermon on the Mount*, Chapter 5 of the Gospel of St. Matthew, verses 3 to 12. Around the central block, actors hired to simulate plainclothes police officers walked through the space, monitoring the work. The floor of the room was covered with black sandpaper, amplifying the sound of footsteps, which contributed to the tense atmosphere generated by the potential for the installation to explode.

The multiple *Glove Trotter*, a digital print on a stainless steel plate, is a record of the original work of the same name: the installation *Glove Trotter* (1991), in which spheres of different sizes, colors, and materials collected by the artist over the years are arranged on a platform and covered by a metal mesh, similar to the protective gear used in medieval combat. This unites the pieces into a lunar-like landscape. The title plays on the words "globe trotter" and "glove," referencing the material that covers the spheres and prevents their movement. The conceptualization of the work addresses classical sculpture concerns, such as volume, weight, and gravity, while also incorporating references from other fields, such as geography and astronomy.

OVOS – versão I – 1ª edição (1970-2018) is a multiple produced to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo. Since the late 1970s, Cildo Meireles has been appropriating measurement systems to subvert them. The artist realized that measurement systems create a sense of identity among members of large collectives, as they use them as common standards. By subverting these systems and standards, he provokes reflection on the conventions that unite us as a community. In *OVOS*, six objects that resemble eggs have different weights, creating a sense of unease for anyone who handles them, as one would expect similar eggs to have similar weights. This same sense of disorientation is evoked in the large installation *Eureka/Blindhotland* (1970-75), where Cildo plays with issues such as the weight and volume of objects, distorting the senses of the observer.

Finally, a clock and a set of four wooden measuring tapes, components of the grand installation *Fontes* (1989-1992), are displayed. *Fontes* subverts human conventions of measuring time and space. In the complete work, wooden measuring tapes with different units of measurement are juxtaposed in the center of the room, some following the metric system and others the imperial system, while clocks of the same size but with irregular positioning and intervals on the algorithms indicating hours occupy the walls. The numbers from the clocks fall to the floor, creating a paradoxical grouping of objects that are the same size and shape but present different measurements.