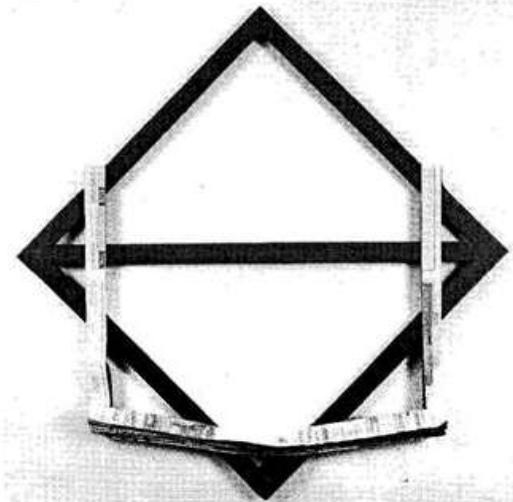


BRAZIL
FOCUS

THE IMAGINARY NEWSPAPER

Chris Dercon, current Director of the Haus der Kunst, Munich, and future Director of Tate Modern, London, on the art of Luciano Figueiredo.

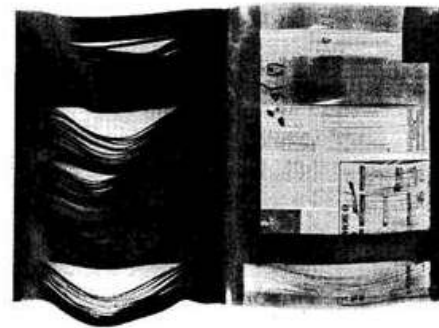


Relief (1998). Acrylic on paper. 78cm x 78cm. Private collection.

Throughout their history, newspapers as a powerful expression and ubiquitous instrument of modern urban life, have inspired many artists, including modern masters like Hogarth, Ingres, Monet, Van Gogh, Brecht, Picasso, Braque and Schwitters, but also more recent artists such as Jacques Tati, Andy Warhol, Yoko Ono,

the end of the 1950s and the late 1970s. The Brazilian *journal* in that period in general was no less than an icon of and a platform for radical cultural change. It was operating like a glue between many different creative individuals and artistic disciplines. The newspaper page both as a cultural tool and an aesthetic format, wanted a

newspaper endeavors were optimally described in the comments of critic Mario Pedrosa in 1970 as "an experimental exercise in truth. He is only proposing authenticity". His is first and foremost an individual strategy and a hand made tactic, providing an individual perspective, which is able to hold out to the critical mass of a massed out



Relief (1986) from the 'Imaginary Newspaper' series. Acrylic on newspaper and canvas. 75cm x 56 cm. Private collection.

cultural supplements began to serve literally as working-platforms for critics, poets, visual artists, musicians and designers alike. The cultural supplements of the *journal* served as a metaphor par excellence for the culture of fusion which started to characterize the arts of Brazil in the middle of the 1960s. A fusion not only between the different disciplines of the arts but also between the arts and daily life in the big city, promoting collective artistic creation.

Indeed the *journal* was considered worthwhile by many artists to be exploited radically and transformed poetically. On July 18 1973 Manuel published a work as a six page journal

lessons of the Neoconcretists.

But Figueiredo was at that time, as so many other artists of his generation, especially fond of the manifold experiments of Hélio Oiticica. [Figueiredo would later coordinate the Projeto Hélio Oiticica from 1981-1996, and help found the Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, serving as its Director from 2003-2008.] The 'infinitely big and the infinitely small' of the *Bolides* of Oiticica, Figueiredo liked the most. He stated later that the *Bolide* 'Homage to Cara de Cavalo' (1966), was "an art work that taught me the difference between the merely political and the poetically political". In 1970 Figueiredo met with



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Throughout their history, newspapers as a powerful expression and ubiquitous instrument of modern urban life, have inspired many artists, including modern masters like Hogarth, Ingres, Monet, Van Gogh, Renoir, Picasso, Braque and Schwitters, but also more recent artists such as Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol, Yves Klein and Gerard Richter. Conceptual artists like Michelangelo Pistoletto, On Kawara, Yoko Ono or Paul Thek, used the newspaper page as a vehicle to carry out their ideas about the embodiment of time. Others like Adrian Piper appropriated newspaper-print to express their concerns about gender and race. And artists like Hans-Peter Feldmann or Christian Boltanski inserted work into newspapers in order to circulate on a large scale their individual interpretations of historical crises. The exceptional print-run and print-size of newspapers continue to fascinate and to inspire artists like Robert Gober, Karin Sander or Leni Hoffmann as well as recently fueling curatorial endeavors such as the Museum in Progress in Vienna.

In comparison with the regular, but admittedly normative appearances of newspapers within the European and North American art avant-gardes, the newspaper page was a crucial instrument and support within the visual arts in Brazil between

the end of the 1950s and the late 1970s. The Brazilian journal in that period in general was no less than an icon of and a platform for radical cultural change. It was operating like a glue between many different creative individuals and artistic disciplines. The newspaper page, both as a cultural tool and an aesthetic format, exerted a formidable appeal upon many Brazilians and continues to do so. The great number of works executed with or inspired by newsprint, produced since 1975 until today, by Brazilian artist and graphic designer Luciano Figueiredo are a perfect example of this. Figueiredo appropriates, transforms and mutates the newspaper page into the realm of collage, relief and painting, while applying both diverse and sophisticated printing, binding, as well as painterly techniques. His body of work with the newspaper page, and the specific influences as well as significant changes it underwent, also illustrates well what I would like to characterize as the modern Brazilian aspect of those works. Antonio Manuel's

When taking a closer look at the works done with newspapers by Antonio Manuel and Luciano Figueiredo one easily detects different but also complementary strategies, which throw an interesting light as well on the 'modern Brazilian' aspect of those works. Antonio Manuel's

newspaper endeavors were optimally described in the comments of critic Mario Pedrosa in 1970 as "an experimental exercise in truth. He is only proposing authenticity". His is first and foremost an individual strategy and a hand made tactic, providing an individual perspective, which is able to hold out in the critical mass of a messed up society.

Luciano Figueiredo, however, dreams about a kind of 'imaginary newspaper'. He wishes to offer the reader-spectator an optical and lyrical counter reading of the physical appearance of the newspaper page. His newspaper works - utilizing 'yesterday's newspapers' occupying space in the form of layered and colored material - are an expression of time and function as a symbol and witness to a route throughout the world. They are to trigger off an optimism, creating an image for a better world.

Where does all this exaltation for 'ordinary' newsprint come from? For Brazilian artists and others coming of age in the Brazil of the 1960s, it was difficult to accept that the press in general, and their beloved journal, was gradually coming under influence of the regime after the military coup of 1964.

Before the journal had taken on mythical dimensions in post-war Brazilian urban life, it became an icon of a modern Brazil. Their

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cultural supplements began to serve literally as working-platforms for critics, poets, visual artists, musicians and designers alike. The cultural supplements of the journal served as a metaphor par excellence for the culture of fusion which started to characterize the arts of Brazil in the middle of the 1960s. A fusion not only between the different disciplines of the arts but also between the arts and daily life in the big city, promoting collective artistic creation.

Indeed the journal was considered worthwhile by many artists to be exploited radically and transformed poetically. On July 15 1973 Manuel published a work as a six-page supplement of the daily *O Jornal*, containing the visual material of a cancelled exhibition that was to have taken place at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio. 60,000 copies were printed and sold at newsstands. The strength of Brazilian contemporary art was indeed unthinkable without the newspaper.

A 21-year-old Luciano Figueiredo arrived directly from Bahia in Rio de Janeiro in 1969 in the midst of it all. He was of course aware of the visual experiments by Amílcar de Castro in newspapers like *Jornal do Brasil* and the importance of the Neoconcretists. Although different in origin and nature, the early neoconcrete works of Lygia Pape and Ferreira Gullar do remind us of Luciano Figueiredo's later work with the colored, folded, bookish style newspaper-reliefs - especially his 1988 'newspaper-maquettes'. A young artist such as Figueiredo, precisely because of their choice of artistic subject and treatment, could not get around the visual impact and the

lessons of the Neoconcretists.

But Figueiredo was at that time, as so many other artists of his generation, especially fond of the manifold experiments of Hélio Oiticica. [Figueiredo would later coordinate the Projeto Hélio Oiticica from 1981-1996, and help found the Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, serving as its Director from 2003-2008.] The 'infinitely big and the infinitely small' of the *Bolides* of Oiticica, Figueiredo liked the most. He stated later that the *Bolide* 'Homage to Cara de Cavalo' (1966), was "an artwork that taught me the difference between the merely political and the poetically political". In 1970 Figueiredo met with Torquato Neto, Oiticica and the graphic designer Rogerio Duarte - already by then legendary figures of the 'tropicalist' movement, and their virulent propaganda for a lyrical 'subjective marginality' in between different art disciplines, inspired the young artist. Figueiredo benefited directly from their overwhelming energy and extended artistic networks. Together, with his closest Rio-based friends, poet Waly Salomão and artist Oscar Ramos, he took on several projects in the field of graphic design, including record-sleeves for Gal Costa, Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso and the styling of the influential underground magazine *Navilouca* in 1971-1972.

According to Figueiredo, Oscar Ramos, probably more than any other artist, had the strongest influence on his work with newspapers. Ramos and Figueiredo were not only steady working partners but a couple as well, a relationship which lasted eleven years. When Figueiredo met Oscar Ramos in

1971 in Rio, Ramos was appropriating, enlarging and abstracting newspaper photographs of famous Brazilian soccer players. Ramos was altering their body features, undressing them as it were to the point of being naked. Because of the ongoing censorship, Oscar Ramos never exhibited these works.

In 1972 Figueiredo and Oscar Ramos left Brazil and departed for London where they stayed until 1978. London was a safe-heaven for many cultured Brazilians at that time. In 1973 Figueiredo starts a long-lasting friendship with critic and exhibition-organizer Guy Brett. Brett was not only crucial in helping to discover and promote the art of Oiticica, but was also propagating a different as well as precise vision, free from old or new stereotypes, on Latin American modern and contemporary art. Brett's deep interest in conceptually orientated artists such as Li Yuan-chia, which offer a glimpse into the cosmic and the universal, made a strong impact on the art of Figueiredo. Figueiredo considered his London years as optimal "educational" years. The acquaintance with Guy Brett later led

to many fruitful exchanges and collaborations in relation to the activities and initiatives of the Projeto Hélio Oiticica.

Luciano Figueiredo and Oscar Ramos returned to Brazil in 1978. Figueiredo was introduced to the writer Sonia Lins, sister of the genial artist Lygia Clark, another legendary cultural figure of Rio de Janeiro and a very close friend of Oiticica. Figueiredo admired the sharpness and the magical openings in Clark's self-declared 'non-art' objects. For Clark the cutting stood for nothing less than the exploration of the void, which in modern art in general and in Brazilian modern art specifically is so much sought after. But in Brazilian modern art it stands more than elsewhere for an intuitive, not pre-conceived way of making art. Because everything is there, the Brazilian artist is just 'transforming the condition'. As such art and life can be easily brought back together again. It is precisely in this way that resides the importance of the artistic trajectory and the beauty of the work of Luciano Figueiredo with the newspaper: a route throughout the world. □

Edited by Colin Munn



The nine issues of 28 newspaper. Courtesy Ana Paula Cohen. Photo: Latitudes.