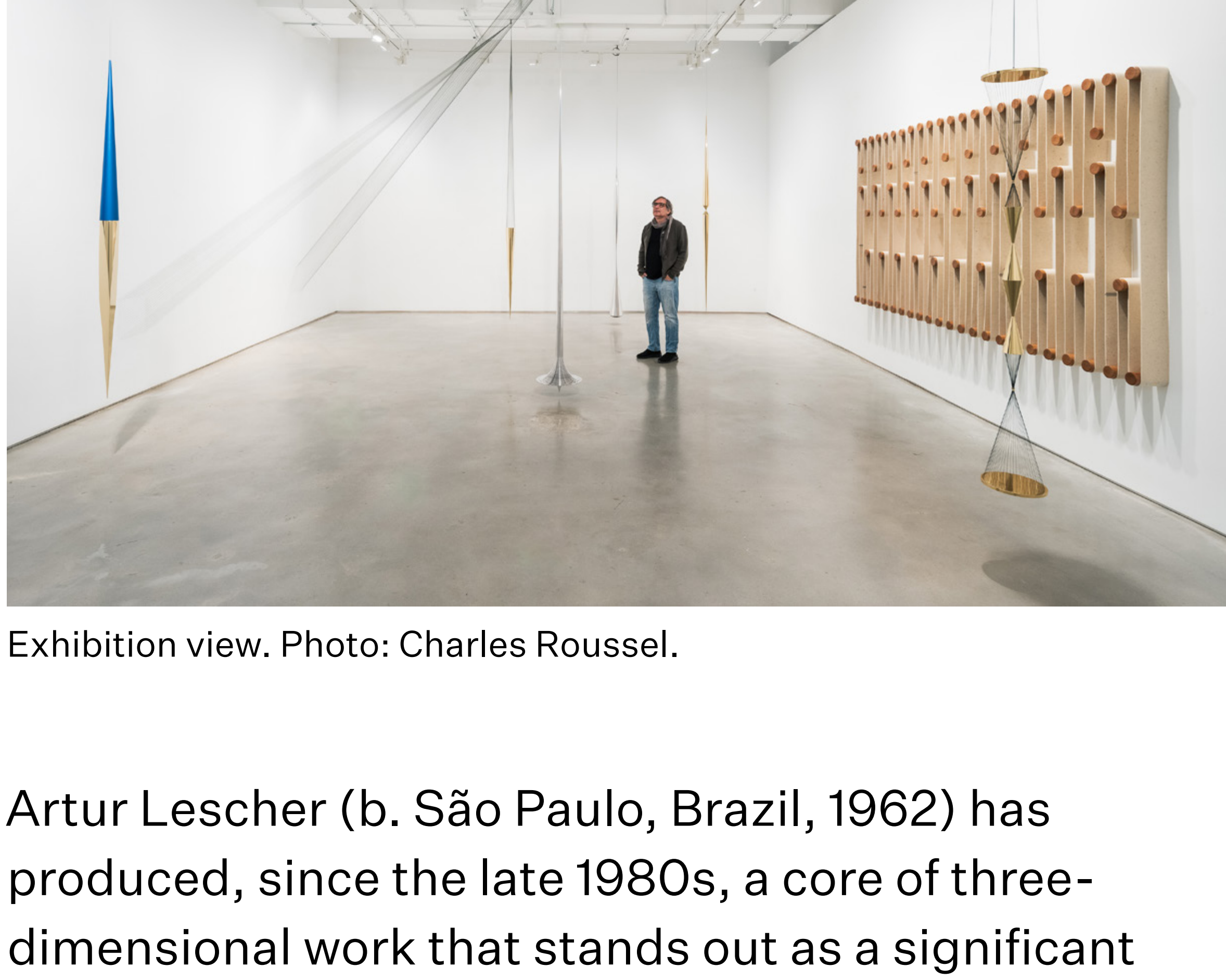


Artur Lescher: Orbital Tango

Luis Pérez-Oramas



Exhibition view. Photo: Charles Roussel.

Artur Lescher (b. São Paulo, Brazil, 1962) has produced, since the late 1980s, a core of three-dimensional work that stands out as a significant contribution to the legacy of abstraction in the Americas. In a sudden return of poetics disguised as engineering, his production can be labeled as constructive. It is also an abstraction drawn from a prodigious geometric whirl of things finding their site, their final stasis. Lescher's art is a poetics of space, and it implies, always, the practice of place as a field of movement and balance, tension and equilibrium: an orbital tango.

Lescher's attention to the architecture of forms drives his work to a degree of ideal glare. Known for his impeccable pendular sculptures, his oeuvre also addresses metaphors of labor through useless machines, it challenges physical laws through radical solutions of balance and equilibrium and it evokes images of conceptual landscape through his sculptures made with straps of felt or steel, titled *Rivers*. Potential representations of spatial situations, between *perpetuum mobile* and perpetual stillness, Lescher's works manifest themselves as constant fluxing and as a ceaseless return of sources.

Very few artists today embrace with such a formal brilliance the articulation between cosmic reflection and poetic philosophy: Lescher builds sculptural deictics that point out towards what has no yet a name, the blinding resonance of cosmological darkness, the unknown, the night *incognita* where our earthly life floats as a miracle of ages and stars.

Artur Lescher's sculptures, while keeping in their formal radiance something like the epidermis of a lost function, also look like engrams for an ideal industrial pre-history, as if the material tools of functionalist production would have become a post-utopian and dazzling ensemble of precious objectual constellations, where universal lightness manifests in balance while presence triumphs as theatrical grace.

Notes on Artur Lescher's Orbital Tango

Luis Pérez-Oramas

On October 4th 2022, the Nobel Prize of Physics was awarded to Alain Aspect, John F. Clauser and Anton Zeilinger. Over the course of the past 40 years, at different times, these physicists were able to demonstrate one of the most striking and mind-blowing features of Quantum Mechanics: the fact that atomic particles exist in mutual relationships even if they are thousands of light-years away from each other.

It was in the summer of 1925 that this story began, at a deserted island on the North Sea called Helgoland.¹ I was there where the young physicist Werner Heisenberg, suffering from excruciating allergies, retired for a summer, carrying with him a bunch of formulas given by his colleague and mentor Niels Bohr. Bohr's equations implied, with no further rationale, that electrons on specific orbits, at specific distances from the atomic nucleus, with specific and precise energies would unpredictably leap from orbit to orbit. As much as the formulas seemed incomplete, they have allowed Bohr to make correct predictions on the properties of these particles, even before actually measuring them.

By following his intuition as well as an advice from Einstein (only grounding research on what can be seen, not on what can be assumed to exist), the young Heisenberg produced a mind breaking *tabulae* of numbers, setting all orbits of departure and arrival for particles, and describing the entire set of possible leaps happening between them.

Heisenberg's Tabula changed the history of Physics, and probably the entire understanding of reality that humans were able to produce since the beginning of time. 'I was deeply alarmed—Heisenberg wrote. I had the feeling that I had gone beyond the surface of things and was beginning to see a strangely beautiful interior, and felt dizzy at the thought that now I had to investigate this wealth of mathematical structures that Nature had so generously spread out before me.' By setting the possibility of substituting classical variables in equations for, instead of single numbers, a complete set of numbers, meaning *tabulae* of matrices, therefore being able to define all the quantities describing an electron's movement—all the possible leaps from orbit to orbit—Heisenberg established the formal foundations of a new mechanics.

Heisenberg's Tabula is a blueprint for the orbital tango that constitutes the Universe.

On June 9 1925 he wrote to his friend Wolfgang Pauli: "Everything is still very vague and unclear to me, but it seems that electrons no longer move in orbits."

They, instead, dance a cosmic tango of leaps.

Around those very same years, Federico García Lorca, ignoring all about Physics, built a cascade of similes and metaphors around the very idea of leaps, in his famous lecture *Theory and Play of the Duende*. He stated an equivalent of quantum leaps for art: "This 'mysterious force that everyone feels and no philosopher has explained' is, in sum, the spirit of the earth, the same *duende* that scorched Nietzsche's heart as he searched for its outer form on the Rialto Bridge and in Bizet's music, without finding it, and without seeing that the *duende* he pursued had leapt from the Greek mysteries to the dancers of Cadiz and the headless Dionysiac scream of Silverio's *siguiriya*."

That leap *from the Greek mysteries to the dancers of Cadiz* is not far from what Aby Warburg called, during those very same years, a 'nachleben' (the manifestation of posthume life in forms) while trying to figuring out, through the setting of a different kind of tabulae, as an Atlas of Memory, the cartography for an iconology of intervals, for the unexplainable resurgence of forms, for the survival of Antiquity in the arts and popular culture of Renaissance Florence, among other leaps.

Considering possible titles for his Atlas Mnemosyne, Warburg even thought of this one: *Transformatio Energetica, the Symbol as Quintessentially Catalytic*.

Quantum mechanics, and notably the phenomena of particle entanglement observed by the recent physicists awarded with the Nobel Prize, reveals that the universe and reality are fundamentally relational structures: there is no possibility to determine the properties of an object without considering its interaction with other objects. "Interaction is an inseparable part of phenomena", as Bohr later wrote.

The same way that Lucretius' magnificent poem *De Rerum Natura* poetically intuited the world as a swarm of dynamic particles, anticipating the understanding of atomic realities, Quantum Mechanics confirms Edouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relations*: the uncertain, the inextricable, reality as archipelago, thinking as tremor, *la matière du monde échevelée*.

Quantum mechanics should be the ground for a new organicist imagination in art history. For centuries representation was driven around the centrality of human bodies' exemplar morphology, projecting the temporality of life as a model to understand art and forms through their hypothetical inception, growing, declination and death. This organicist imaginary suffered a serious crisis as Constructive Abstraction rejected mimesis and the human body's paradigm by stressing machines and industrial engineering as aesthetic models for art. Typologies such as the *Objet Trouvé* or *Ready Made*, neither mimetic nor abstract, brought with them even more radical questioning and dismantling effects over genealogical organicism, suggesting the necessity of a new imaginary for art history, one that could welcome chance and accident to the understanding of the unpredictable, the sudden leap of forms, their un-theoretical wandering through time, their orbital historical tango.

Artur Lescher's art does not carry thesis or theory, it does not pretend to suggest a revolution of ideas nor beauty. It has ceaselessly been truthful to beauty as a manifestation of the glaring equation between form and content. Its principle is a mechanics of orbital sequence and pendular balance and everytime it shows a web of mutual objects interaction, entanglement, relative information and ideal figurability. Maybe as the abyssal perspectives in Renaissance Annunciations anticipated the nameless reality of the infinite, centuries before geometry could define or name it, Lescher's Orbital Tango offers us an image, a symbolic form, contained but resonant for the duende that lives in that dizzying, *strangely beautiful interior* of reality, which the new Physics seems to be singing, in strange languages, the initiatic lullaby.

¹ For further, accessible information on this matter I suggest the enlightening reading of Carlo Rovelli: Helgoland. Making Sense of the Quantum Revolution [New York: Riverhead Books, 2021]. Most of the information in this text was drawn from my readings of Rovelli.