

Antonio Dias, Brazilian Artist Who Poked the Ruling Junta, Is Dead at 74



By JASON FARAGO
Antonio Dias, a Brazilian artist whose early, hot-colored paintings needled his country's military dictatorship, and who later turned to subtly political conceptual art while in self-imposed European exile, died on Aug. 1 in Rio de Janeiro. He was 74.

The cause was a brain tumor, said Galeria Nara Roesler in São Paulo, which represents Mr. Dias. He was also being treated for lung cancer at the Clínica São Vicente, a hospital in Rio.

In the mid-1960s Mr. Dias emerged as the leading figure of Nova Figuração (New Figuration), a movement in Brazilian painting that used bold, graphic imagery to contest Brazil's junta, which took power in 1964.

Within thickly outlined frames of black, he painted comic-like tableaux of soldiers scuffling with bearded hippies, of looming mushroom clouds, and of a skeleton wearing a military uniform and beating a cartoonish red heart with a truncheon.

In many of his canvases, Mr. Dias principally made use of red, white and black, which gave them a violent graphic immediacy. Others mocked the United States' backing of Brazil's military regime. Soft protuberances affixed to the surfaces, shaped like bones or phalluses, gave his early paintings an erotic dimension.

In recent years, curators working on a more global history of art of the 1960s have placed these early works by Mr. Dias in a world-spanning network of Pop Art. In 2015, his art appeared in "International Pop," a substantial exhibition that opened at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and later traveled to Philadelphia and Dallas, as well as in "The World Goes Pop," at Tate Modern in London.

Yet Mr. Dias's hard-hitting, world-weary, often savage art of the 1960s sat uneasily alongside Andy Warhol's soup cans or Roy Lichtenstein's comic-book recapitulations, and he never embraced the American term as his own.

"I always protest when I'm accused of being Pop — it's not my party," Mr. Dias told The New York Times in 2015, on the occasion of "International Pop." He acceded to the curators' invitations, he said, only because the shows promised to look again at the early 1960s, "when the way you could use images started to come from totally outside the fine-art world."

He and the others artists grouped under the umbrella of Nova Figuração, among them the husband and wife Rubens Gerchman and Anna Maria Maiolino, had none of American Pop's cool detachment. Mr. Dias's art drew more on the examples of an earlier generation of engaged Brazilian abstract painters in Rio and São Paulo, of the Narrative Figuration movement then favored in left-wing Paris, and of the political and psychedelic inflections of tropicalia, Brazil's musical avant-garde.

Antonio Dias was born on Feb. 22, 1944, in Campina Grande, a city in the northeastern Brazilian state of Paraíba. He moved to Rio

in 1958, when Brazil was rocketing into a new future, encapsulated by President Juscelino Kubitschek's ambition to accomplish "50 years in five," as the slogan went, and symbolized by the construction of Brasília, the new capital in the country's interior.

In Rio, the teenage Mr. Dias en-

Trenchant works of bright colors and bold, graphic imagery.

countered avant-garde art that was in tune with this movement to modernize, including Hélio Oiticica's colorful hanging constructions and the geometric abstractions of the Grupo Frente.

Mr. Dias exhibited his pugna-cious paintings in such Brazilian exhibitions as "Opinião 65," a landmark show at Rio's Museu de

Arte Moderna, and in international shows like the 1965 Biennale de Paris, where he won a prize for painting. He stayed in Europe after that exhibition, one of many Brazilian artists to leave the country as the military dictatorship hardened its stance on free expression.

In Paris, Mr. Dias participated in the student protests of May 1968. Soon after that he moved to Milan, where he abandoned his graphic and immediate paintings for an art of cool conceptualism, though his political engagement never wavered.

He befriended Luciano Fabro, Giulio Paolini and other leading figures of Italy's vanguard Arte Povera movement, and he began to make Super 8 films, like "The Illustration of Art I" (1971), in which two bandages crisscross a model's skin, uniting geometric abstraction and body art.

In "The Invented Country (God-Will-Give-Days)," a 1976 work now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, a red flag with one corner



VIA GALERIA NARA ROESLER



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Antonio Dias, seen in 2005, left Brazil for good in 1965. Early works include "Nota Sobre a Morte Imprevista" ("Note on the Unforeseen Death"), top, from 1965, and, above, "Heads," from 1968.

shorn off dangles from a brass fishing rod. It was a mournful, ironic exercise in flag-planting from a Brazilian in self-imposed exile.

Yet the drooping of the flag also cast doubt on the left-wing ideology that he and his colleagues believed in so thoroughly in the 1960s — as if to imply that any solid commitment to a political cause could only be a museum piece.

Travels to Nepal and India in 1977 inspired more delicate works on paper, while in the 1980s and 1990s, when he taught at art schools in Germany and Austria, Mr. Dias painted more abstract compositions that made use of gold, copper and other metallic pigments.

Mr. Dias's survivors include his wife, Paola Chieregato; two daughters from two previous marriages, Nina Dias and Rara Dias; and a grandchild.

A retrospective of his work will open on Nov. 3 at the Sharjah Art Foundation, a museum in the United Arab Emirates.

Robert Silman, 83, Savior Of a Faltering Fallingwater

By DAVID W. DUNLAP
Robert Silman, a structural engineer who rescued Frank Lloyd Wright's cantilevered Fallingwater in Pennsylvania from the edge of collapse, and preserved dozens of other landmarks besides, died on July 31 at his home in Great Barrington, Mass. He was 83.

He had multiple myeloma, a form of cancer, his wife, Roberta Silman, said.

Mr. Silman was the president emeritus of the engineering firm Silman, headquartered in Manhattan, which he founded in 1966.

Though he came of age when engineers were expected to perform feats of awe-inducing bravura, Mr. Silman largely contented himself with the invisible, ingenious stitchery that protected the

An engineer who took on seemingly impossible projects.

work of other engineers and architects.

"Any time we faced any intractable problem in trying to save a building, we called Bob," Peg Breen, the president of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, said on Friday.

Among the best-known projects he helped engineer were the creation of the Ellis Island Museum of Immigration, the restoration and expansion of Carnegie Hall and the preservation of the Survivors' Stairs from the World Trade Center.

But it was in rural Pennsylvania, southeast of Pittsburgh, that Mr. Silman earned a national reputation. There, Wright designed Fallingwater, one of the most breathtaking houses of the 20th century, for the Pittsburgh merchant Edgar J. Kaufmann and his wife, Liliane.

Fallingwater seems to erupt from the forest around it, with terraced slabs jutting up to 14½ feet — seemingly without support — over a waterfall in the Bear Run

creek. The daring cantilevered design conferred celebrity status on Wright after its completion in 1937.

Even before that, however, Kaufmann wondered whether Wright had specified enough steel reinforcing bars in the concrete beams of the main cantilever. Wright resented the questioning, but Kaufmann saw to it that extra reinforcing bars were installed anyway.

Ultimately, that precaution was not enough. "In the mid-1990s we heard from an engineering student that his research showed Fallingwater might be in structural trouble," Lynda S. Waggoner, the director emerita of Fallingwater, said in an email on Monday.

"According to his calculations, the cantilevers were under-engineered and in danger of failure," she continued. Ms. Waggoner telephoned Mr. Silman. "After what seemed like minutes but was likely seconds, he responded, 'I will have someone down there this week.'"

By then, one cantilevered slab was tilting about seven inches downward from its original position, a condition known as deflection. Mr. Silman persuaded Fallingwater's owner, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, to erect temporary steel shoring under the slab. In 2001, flagstone flooring and built-in furniture was removed from the slab to expose the concrete beams and perpendicular joists below.

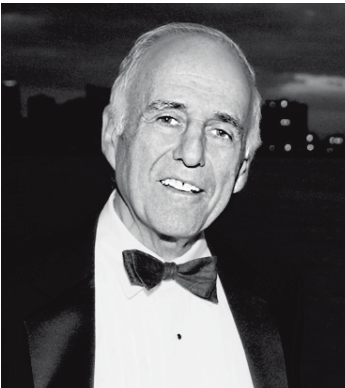
Five cables — made of as many as 13 half-inch-diameter steel strands — were placed alongside three major beams, like tendons and bone, with six smaller cables placed alongside the joists. This steel network was anchored to the existing concrete piers under the house, then tautened to restore structural integrity to the cracked beams. (The operation has been likened to orthodontics.)

"Bob's solution to the faltering cantilevers was elegant," Ms. Waggoner said. "It preserved the material integrity of the building and minimized any incidental damage while preventing future deflections."

The project, lasting six months, "ensured Fallingwater's ability to



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continue to amaze visitors from the world over for generations to come," she said.

Robert Silman was born May 19, 1935, in Rockville Centre, N.Y. His father, David, was in the textile and plastics manufacturing business. His mother, Dorothy, was an interior decorator.

He graduated from Cornell University with a bachelor of arts degree in 1956, the year he married Roberta Karpel, a fiction writer and critic, whom he had met there.



NANCY HUDSON/SILMAN

She survives him, as do their children, Miriam, Joshua and Ruth Silman; five grandchildren; and a sister, Judith Schmertz.

At New York University, Mr. Silman received a bachelor's degree in civil engineering in 1960 and a master's degree in 1963. From

1960 to 1965, he worked at three important firms: Severud Associates, Ove Arup & Partners and Ammann & Whitney.

His one-man shop became a partnership, Zoldos/Silman, in 1970. The name was changed to Robert Silman Associates in 1974

Robert Silman restored structural integrity to Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, left, in Pennsylvania, in 2001. His firm also saved the Survivors' Stairs, bottom, at the World Trade Center in 2008.

and to Silman in 2015. There are now 160 employees in New York, Washington and Boston. Preservation accounts for about one-fifth of the firm's work.

"Bob Silman will be remembered as one of the great New York engineers, one that kept the 'civic' alive in civil engineering," Guy Nordenson, who heads a structural engineering firm bearing his name, said by email.

"He led the restoration of the structure and fabric of the Guggenheim Museum," he said, "and worked closely with Renzo Piano to reinvent the Morgan Library campus, renewing these and other key New York institutions."

Mr. Silman taught at Columbia, Yale and the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in New York. At the Harvard Graduate School of Design, he was known for his "Philosophy of Technology" seminar.

"We will trace what has happened from the time of the ancient Greeks, when 'good judgment' prevailed in society, to the 21st century, when technology has gained ascendancy," Mr. Silman said in describing the course, which he taught through the spring semester, despite the debilitating effects of myelodysplastic syndrome, which was brought on by treatment for multiple myeloma.

Doing the impossible was something of a specialty for Mr. Silman. Preservationists who wanted to save the staircase at the World Trade Center, down which hundreds of survivors fled to safety on Sept. 11, 2001, faced a seemingly insurmountable hurdle. The staircase — 22 feet high, weighing 175 tons — had to be lowered from street level into the underground National September 11 Memorial Museum.

"No government agency wanted to try," Ms. Breen said. "Bob figured out how to safely remove the stairs and treads, designed a 'cradle' to hold them and then worked with the Port Authority on safely lifting them into place. Never would have happened without Bob."