



A Kreuzberger from Rio

Her work is mostly exhibited in Brazil, but Berlin's where **Cristina Canale** prefers to paint, in the "serenity" of her Oranienstraße studio.

By Francesca Elsey

Over 20 years in Berlin, Cristina Canale has watched the city change from her peaceful one-room studio on Oranienstraße. The flat, like Canale herself, oozes warmth, with large colourful canvasses stacked against the walls and afternoon sunlight filtered through the fourth-floor windows. Canale's colourful figurative paintings, which she produces in groups of 10 or 11 at a time, seem filled with summer; very different from the stark conceptual art currently en vogue in Berlin. As a young artist studying at Rio's Parque Laie art school in the 1980s, Canale's paintings were already bucking art world trends. She and a group of fellow painters at Parque Laie developed a practice that was "different to the mainstream geometric style, very important for the resurgence of free painting in Brazil". Even so, Canale found herself longing for a change of scenery. "I'd done a couple of solo shows and was in a good position as an artist, but somehow it was getting boring."

Escape came in the form of a scholarship from DAAD (the German Academic Exchange Service) in 1993. Shortly before receiving her acceptance letter, she took part in an artists' workshop in Maceio where she met Rolf Behm, a Berlin-based painter who is now her husband. DAAD would've sent her to Mannheim, but "this love story" brought her to the capital.

Canale's first taste of the city was of a divided Berlin in 1987. "My first impression was that Berlin wasn't as beautiful as Rome or Paris, but so very exciting – we had these two Berlins, and that made things a lot more crazy!" When she came back in 1993, she felt the same appeal for the reunified city "It was supposed to be unified, but it was obvious that it was not. Things were still really crazy, and I loved it!"

Within a year, she'd found both a studio and a flat on Kreuzberg's Oranienstraße, where she and her family lived until 2012 despite gentrification working its soul-gutting way through the neighbourhood. "At first we were glad to see more international people

moving here, but soon investors came and bought the buildings and in no time, the small stores were gone. It changed so fast! It was like: where's my beautiful fruit *Laden* gone? And it's getting worse; I think [gentrification] is a global plague. Berlin only managed to resist it a little longer..."

Now Canale, her husband and 19-year-old daughter live in Graefekiez, but her studio remains the same. "On the way from my apartment to my studio, there are two stores that sell materials – so usually I pick a few things up, then make a tea when I get here, and start my workday. I'm very concentrated here." It's this routine and rhythm, as opposed to the chaos of her native Rio, that Canale thinks allows her to develop as an artist. "When I think of Rio, I immediately see the window of my studio there, where everything is green and hot and noisy. Kreuzberg feels like serenity."

But Canale is still strongly connected to her home country through her gallery, Nara Roesler, which is based in São Paulo with two further showrooms in Rio and New York. Of course, she has had shows here in Berlin (most recently at Charlottenburg's Schmal-fuss gallery last October, where she was described as "one of the most important Brazilian artists"), but her work is mostly exhibited back home. Her paintings can be found in Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, the oldest art museum in the city, as well as a few other Brazilian institutions, and she makes frequent trips over. "Maybe now that my daughter's finished her *Abitur*, I can start going to Brazil for longer..." But after over 20 years in the city, Canale says she feels first and foremost a Berliner. "I'm a Kreuzberger who comes from Rio. That's my identity." ■

German Palomeque



Canale has worked on Oranienstraße for over 20 years.

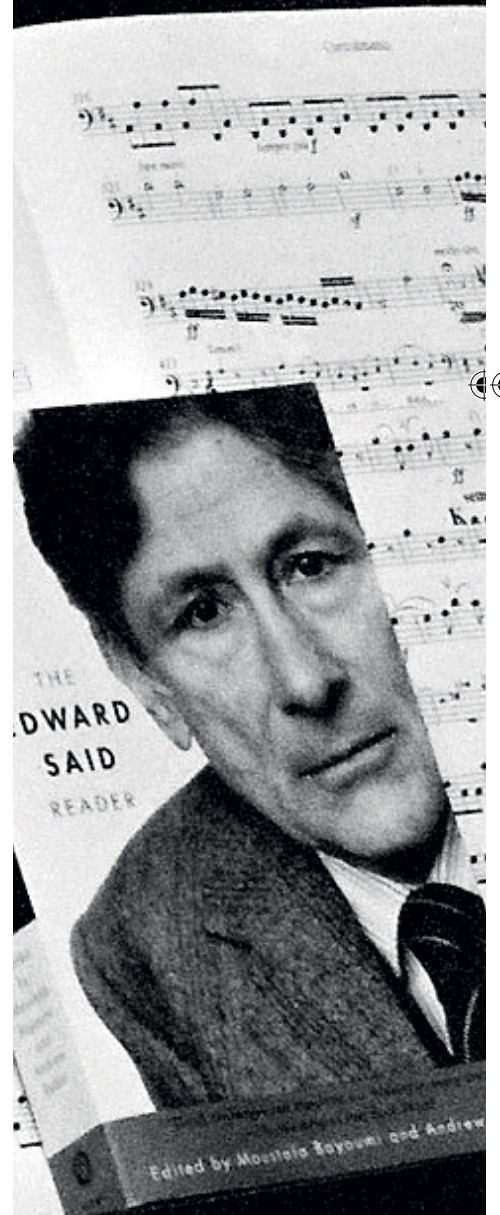


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