



EXIT ONLY

galeria

hélío oitica

nara roesler

Installation view, "Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium" at Carnegie Museum of Art, Photo: Bryan Conley



#### about hélio oiticica

Hélio Oiticica (Rio de Janeiro, 1937–1980) was one of the most creative and innovative artists of the 20th century and played a key role in the development of Latin American art and culture. He helped define experimental trends that were manifest in art circles all over the West at the time, sometimes anticipating their appearance in Europe and the United States. Since his premature death at the age of 42, his influence and importance have continued to grow. A key figure in the Tropicália movement in Brazil, which revolutionized popular music and the arts in the 1970s, Oiticica had to escape the military regime and was forced into exile in London and New York, where he forged new alliances and was a key influence on a wide range of artists. Among his most original achievements was the innovative and uncompromising use of color that became a feature of his entire career. He is currently the subject of a major US retrospective, *Helio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* curated by Lynn Zelevansky, Elisabeth Sussman and James Rondeau showing at the Carnegie Museum of Art, The Art Institute of Chicago and the Whitney Museum of Art (October, 2016- October, 2017).

## Hélio Oiticica

Nicholas Serota - 2007

Hélio Oiticica (1937-80) has gradually come to be recognized as one of the most innovative and influential artists of the later twentieth century. He occupies a central position in the Latin American avant-garde of the postwar era, as one of an exceptional generation of Brazilian artists, including another great innovator Lygia Clark, who came to prominence during the 1950s and 1960s.

He emerged from the context to Rio-based Neo-Concretism, a movement that adopted and transformed the previously European-dominated tradition of geometric abstraction by introducing subjective, organic and consciously destabilizing elements. Oiticica's series of gouache *Metaesquemas* 1957-9 responded on their own highly original terms to the challenges laid down by Malevich and Mondrian; these early works are poised between order and volatility, precision and chaos. Oiticica continued to pursue a highly independent and idiosyncratic path, contributing decisively to the avant-garde revision of Modernism in the post-war era, leading one to draw comparisons with other similarly nonconformist artists including Joseph Beuys, Eva Hesse, Ana Mendieta and Robert Rauschenberg. Through his work he sought to reclassify and challenge the traditional boundaries of art, and its relationship with life, thereby undermining the separation of the art-object from the viewer, whom he recast in the role of active participant.

Oiticica challenged the established division between painting and sculpture, and between art and the lived environment, by inventing new forms and categories in his world – and coining new terms to describe them. Working in series, he moved from two-dimensional works to painted reliefs, suspended paintings and sculptural objects, and then to performative works and early manifestations of environmental installation art. He took successive steps towards the spatial deployment of colour, employing colour as surface, as reflection and as pure pigment, translating the geometric language of abstraction into one that addressed the body and senses. He also employed appropriation as a key technique, particularly in his sculptural works called *Bolides* (Fireballs). Oiticica's project combined an intellectual rigour with a progressive attitude that was aimed towards developing a philosophy of living, embodying his belief in the 'experimental exercise of liberty' as much as, or more than, a straightforwardly aesthetic programme. Recalling 1920s Brazilian Anthropologist

movement, his works aimed to show that aesthetically, chromatically, and in terms of lived-experience, 'purity is a myth'. Despite his early death at the age of forty-three, his career spans three decades, the earliest mature works dating from his late teens. It was apparent that Oiticica possessed a unique and remarkable talent from the outset; it is the measure of his prolific output and his extraordinary capacity for innovation that he accomplished so much in his career. However, while he has been well-known and appreciated in his own country for many years, his international reputation has been slower to develop and it has only been in the last two decades that Oiticica has begun to gain the recognition he deserves as one of the great innovators of modern and contemporary art.

One period Oiticica's career which has not previously been examined in sufficient depth is the time he spent in London towards the very end of the 1960s. He exhibited at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1969, due in large part to the advocacy of British critic and curator Guy Brett who, with artist David Medalla, was one of the earliest supporters of Oiticica's work and became the curator of the exhibition. Oiticica had originally been invited to exhibit at London's Signals Gallery (1964-9), directed by Paul Keeler, which had shown a number of Latin American artists in London for the first time, but the premature demise of Signals meant that his advocates sought a venue for his work elsewhere in London. Due to a variety of factors, including the restrictions on artistic expression under the dictatorship in Brazil and the relationships Oiticica developed with a number of key individuals in Britain during his stay, what had been planned as a relatively modest one man show at Signals became a major undertaking and is now recognized as the most important solo exhibition of Oiticica's career. As Guy Brett has commented, it was also 'one of the most audacious visual arts events of the sixties in London.' Oiticica named this show the Whitechapel Experiment, deliberately avoiding calling it an 'exhibition' and conceiving of it rather as an all-encompassing manifestation in which works from across his career could be seen in relation to one another and as part of a totality that embraced the visitor as one of its central components. This publication explores the context for that exhibition, its genesis and its significance, and has been prompted by the acquisition of a number of key works by the artist for Tate's collection. In compiling it a great deal of new and unpublished material has been brought to light, new first-hand accounts have been given by those who knew Oiticica closely in particular during his time in London, and new interpretations proposed on what is an extremely important and rich episode in the life of this seminal figure. This volume is published to coincide with

a contextual display Oiticica in London at Tate Modern, running in parallel with the exhibition Hélio Oiticica:

The Body of Colour, initiated by MFA Houston and curated by Mari Carmen Ramírez, and Mentor Foundation, Lucerne.

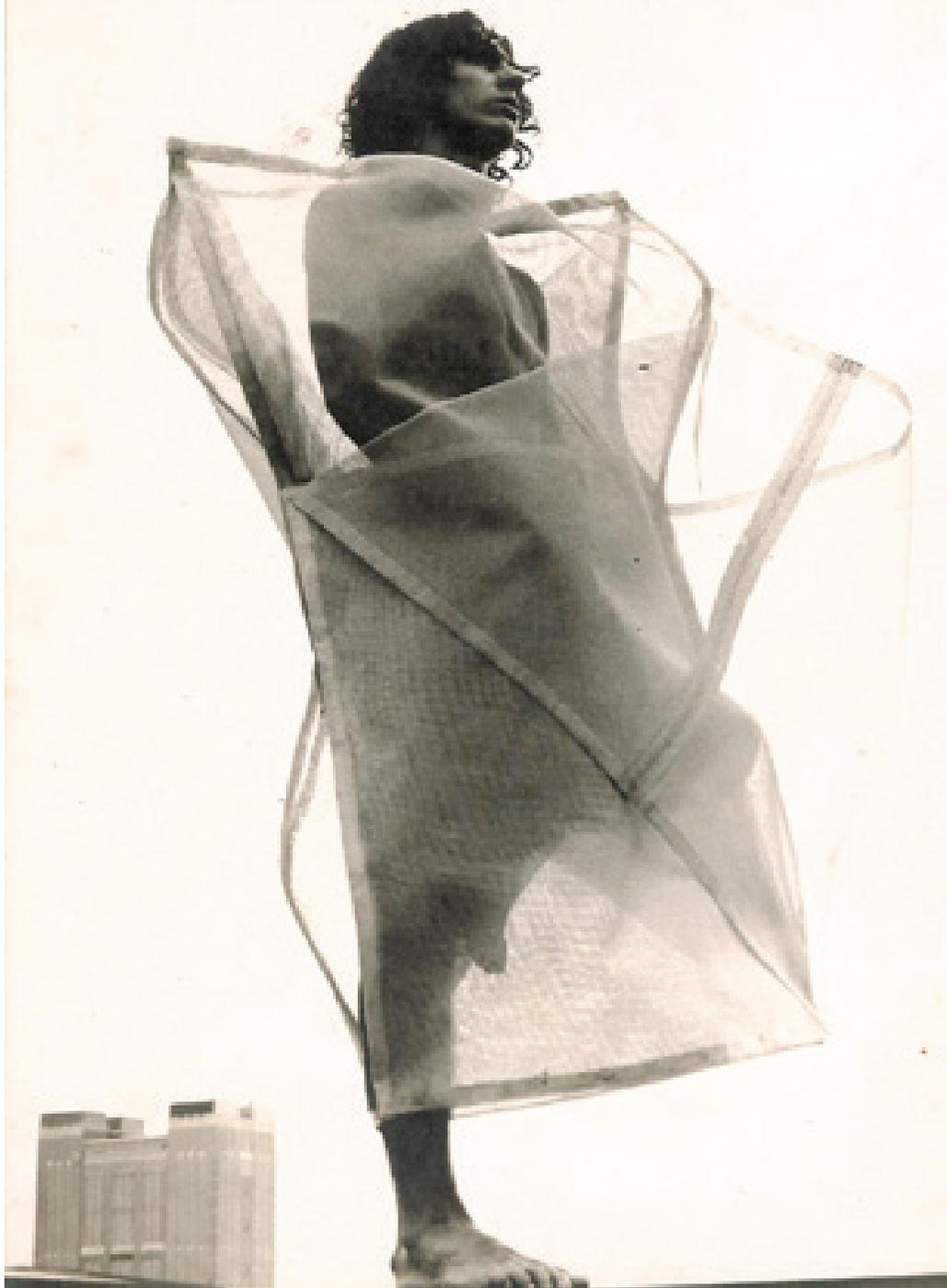
One of the most important elements of the Whitechapel Experiment, the installation Tropicália PN2 and PN3 1966-7, forms the centerpiece of the display exploring the intersection of the British and Brazilian art scenes of the 1960, in which Signals played a significant role. The display presents work by a number of artists associated with the gallery (and its influential publication of the same name), contemporaries based both in Brazil and in Europe, including Lygia Clark, David Medalla, Mira Schendel, Takis, Li Yuan-Chia, Sergio Camargo, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Jesus Rafael Soto and others. Tropicália PN2 and PN3 is a landmark work of early installation art and a pivotal work for Oiticica himself, from which wider trajectories and implications can be traced. Its title – another word coined by Oiticica – and the work's underlying thesis helped to trigger a broader cultural and political movement in Brazil which adopted this same name and encompassed visual art, music, film and literature. For Oiticica this work combined many of his previous strategies – colour experimentation, spatial investigation and appropriation of everyday materials (from organic material and everyday objects to the appropriation of television images, as a retort to US Pop art in PN3 'Imagetical' 1966-7), and at the same time manifested his desire to give avant-garde art a specifically Brazilian character; it also led him to progress to a less literal, image-driven approach in the large-scale installation Eden designed specifically for the Whitechapel Experiment. Through these two installations – Tropicália and Eden – Oiticica articulated and refined his concepts of Creleisure and the Suprasensorial.

The acquisition of this important work, as well as a number of works from earlier series, will enable Tate to demonstrate the extraordinary developments and conceptual leaps in his work, and how these innovations contribute to the wider history of modern art. The acquisition therefore has repercussions for the entire collection and significantly changes the way the collection is able to represent the history of Modernism from a global perspective. Oiticica can be seen to be one of the key reference points of subsequent generations of artists, one of a select number of his generation who continue to present a powerful example and source of inspiration to artists working today. His work continues to resonate forcefully with audiences and yet, in

many respects, also remains a challenge to both museums and their visitors. Oiticica refused to stay within comfortable limits, preferring to push the boundaries of what was deemed possible in both art and life.

Many people have contributed towards bringing this publication and display to fruition. I would like to extend my warmest wishes and gratitude to Hélio's brothers Cesar and Claudio Oiticica for enabling us to bring Tropicália, as well as a number of other important works, into Tate's collection. I would also like to thank Hélio's nephew Cesar Oiticica Filho for his kind assistance. We are particularly grateful to the editors of this book, Guy Brett and Luciano Figueiredo, for the generosity, dedication and in-depth knowledge they brought to the project, not least in their own extended statements and recollections. Paulo Venancio, Michael Asbury and Isobel Whitelegg have contributed insightful essays on different aspects to Oiticica's work and the London scene. David Medalla, Mark Glazebrook, Caetano Veloso, Jill Drower, Edward Pope and Paul Overy have also shared their unique memories and thoughts. At Tate, Ann Gallagher, Tanya Barson, Amy Dickson and Alejandra Aguado have helped shape the publication and conducted important interviews and research. Steve Berg's extraordinarily perceptive and subtle translations convey the spirit and originality to Hélio's writing. Lillian Davies has guided the publication to completion with skill and efficiency, and Philip Lewis has produced an arresting design with his customary sensitivity. We would also like to thank Ariane Figueiredo for her advice and assistance with material from the archives of the Projeto Hélio Oiticica.

I am delighted that this publication is able to provide a unique insight into Oiticica's work and his time in London, demonstrating how this moment in his career contributed importantly to the body of his work by furnishing him with the opportunity to realize his ideas more exhaustively than ever, and on an unparalleled scale. Oiticica in London brings together disparate accounts and reminiscences of the Whitechapel Experiment, Signals Gallery, the Exploding Galaxy, and Oiticica himself, expanding on what has been recorded previously and adding significantly to the literature on Oiticica's career by focusing on his London, as well as his Whitechapel, experiment.



luiz fernando veste capa 23 p30 - parangolé -- photography -- 24,2 X 17 cm -- 1965/72



**relevo espacial V6** -- acrylic on wood-- 98,4 x 78,1 x 10,2 cm -- 1959 / 1991

**relevo espacial V10** -- acrylic on wood-- 99 x 235 x 10 cm -- 1960 / 2000

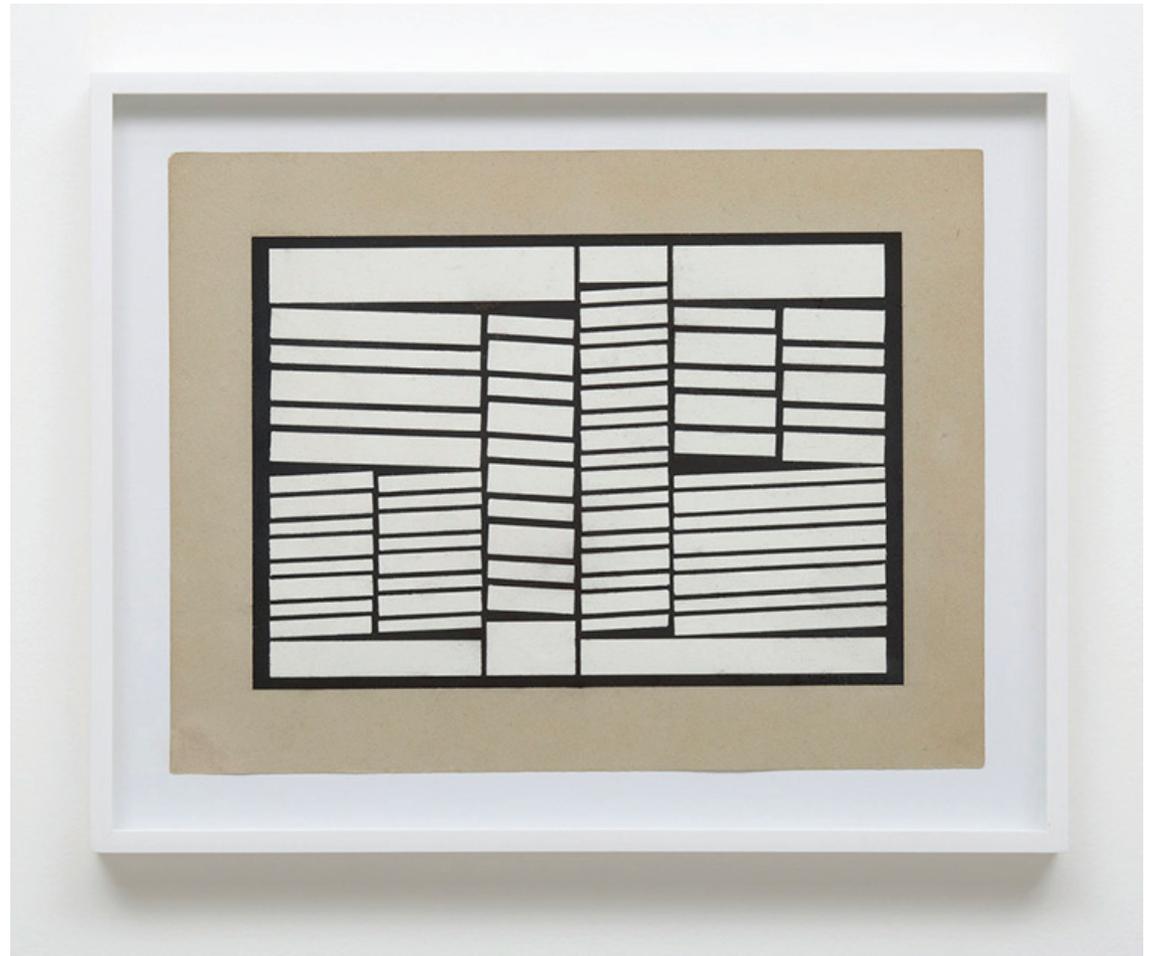




metaesquema -- gouache on paper -- 46,1 x 52,8 cm -- 1957/Hélio Oiticica



metaesquema 189 -- gouache on paper -- 30,5 x 40,4 cm -- 1958



metaesquema -- gouache on paper -- 30,2 x 40 cm -- 1958



metaesquema 240 -- gouache on paper -- 30 x 40 cm -- 1958



seja marginal, seja herói -- silk-screen on fabric -- 105 x 90 cm -- 1968/1996



Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium -- Whitney Museum -- exhibition view -- july 14 - october 1, 2017



Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium -- Art Institute of Chicago -- exhibition view -- february 18, 2017--may 7, 2017



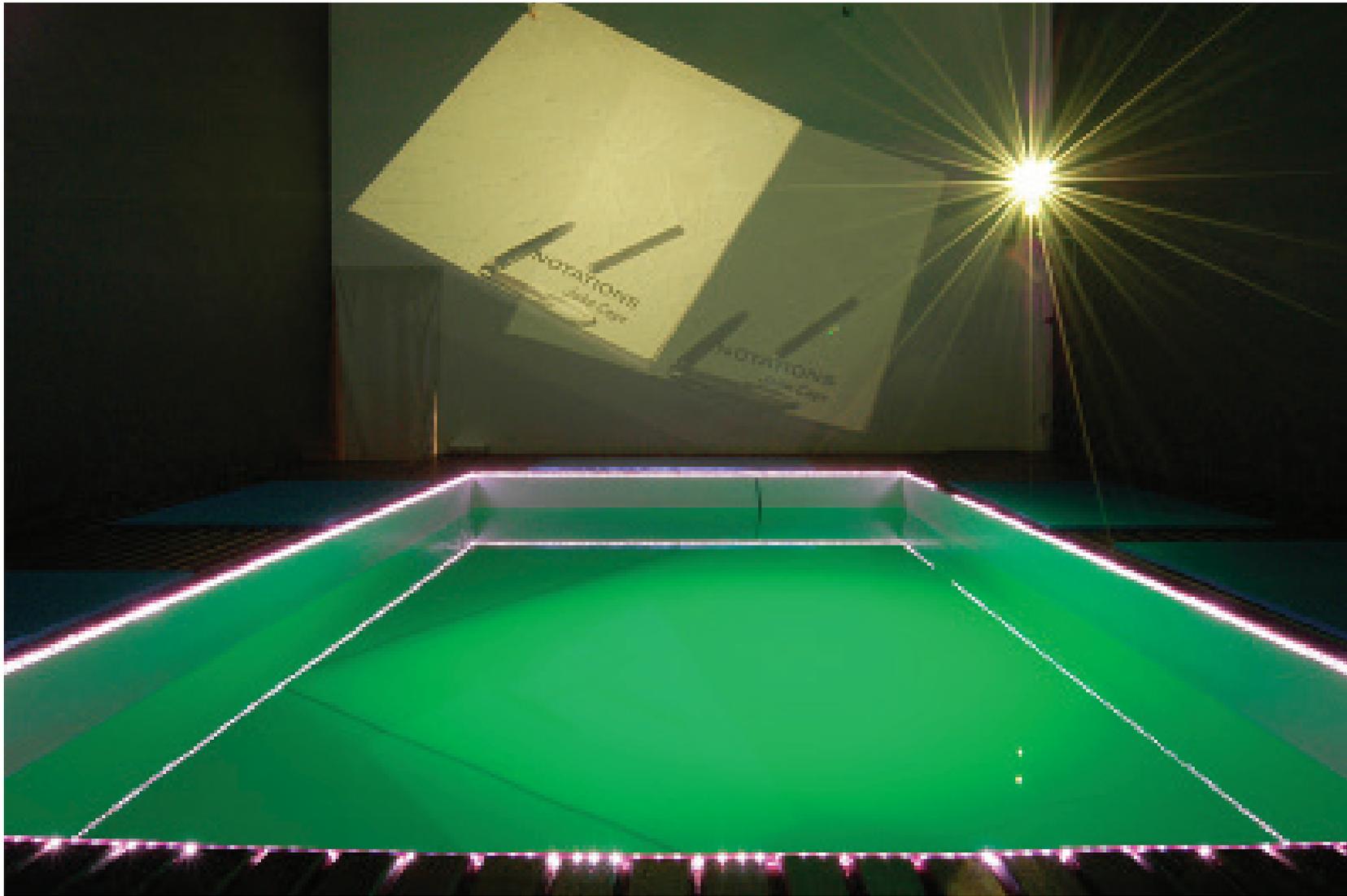
invention of color magic square n.3 -- sand, wood and oil paint -- 5 x 15 x 15 m -- 1977

COSMOCOCA - program in progress CC5 hendrix-war --  
project for installation environment -- 80 m2 room -- 1973/2006



nas quebradas | PN 28 -- gravel, soil, wood and oil paint -- various dimensions -- 1979





Hélio Oiticica & Neville D'Almeida - Cosmococa - programa in progress CC4/Nocagions -- 2 slide projectors, a swimming-pool and lights. On the deck, thin mattresses for laying down. Visitors are also allowed to swim. -- 7 x 14 m room/0.90 x 4 x 8 m swimming-pool -- 1973

