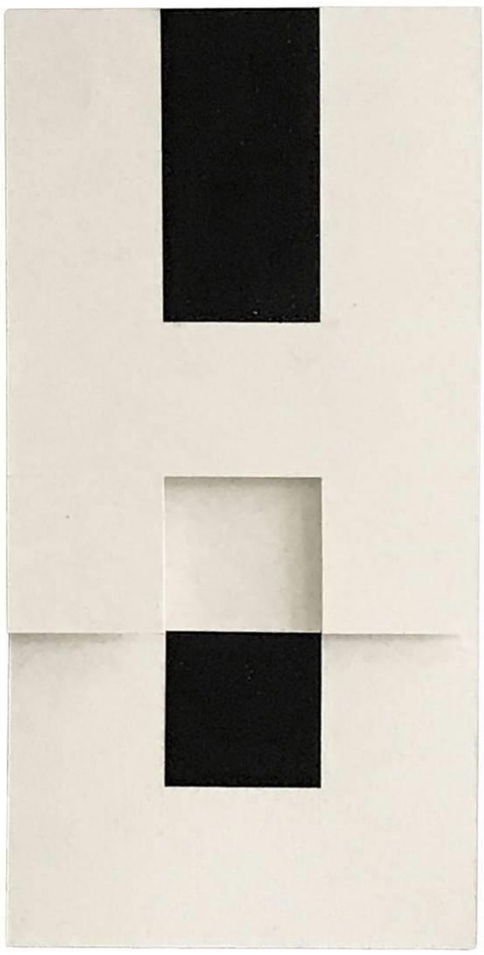
karla osorio galeria

Roland Gebhardt
Almandrade

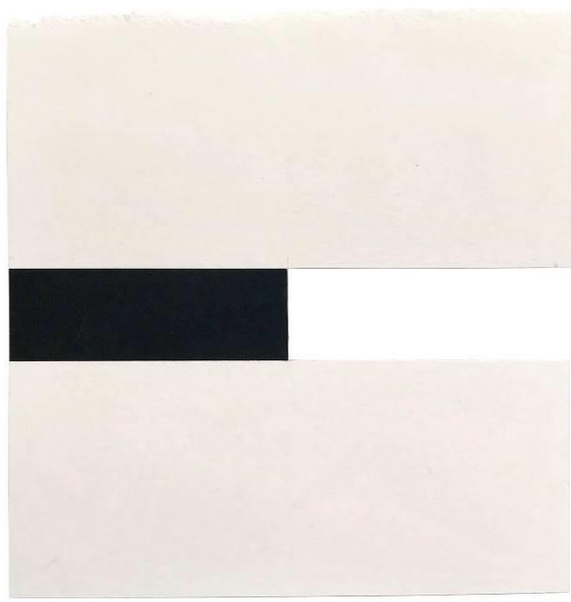
not cancelled

BRAZIL

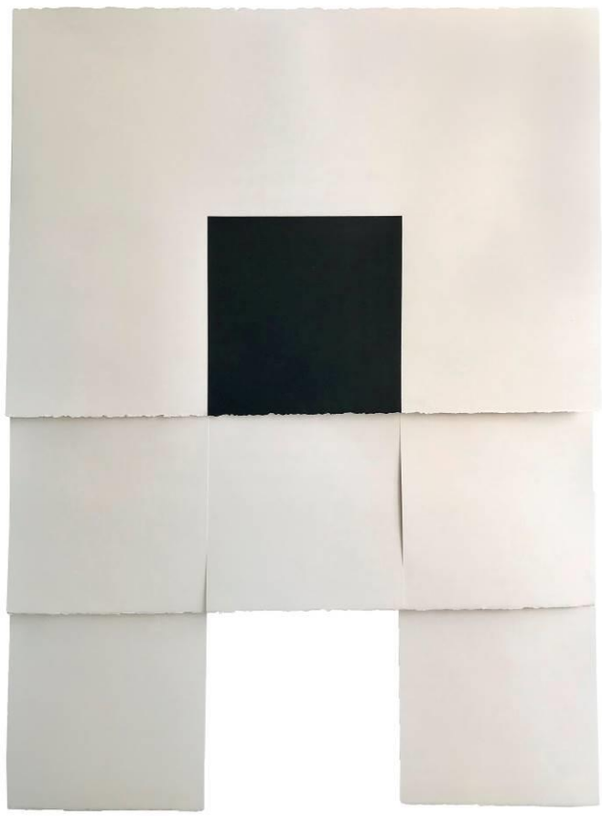
0219 – 3D Drawings
Arches 555 and Lanaquarelle cold pressed
63 x 22 x 2 in
160.02 x 55.88 x 5.08 cm
2017



0237 – 3D Drawings
Lanaquarelle paper and black matte acrylic paint
18 × 9 × 1 1/2 in
45.72 × 22.86 × 3.81 cm
2018

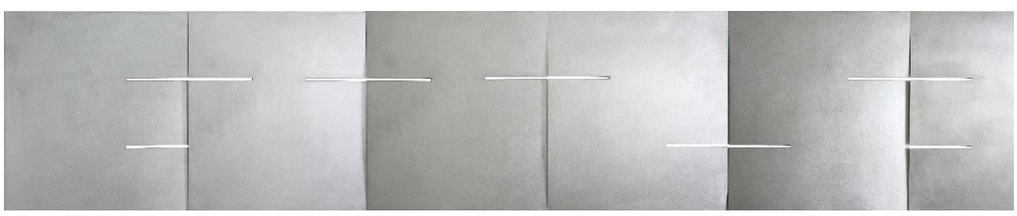


0243 – 3D Drawing
Lanaquarelle 300lb paper, black matte acrylic paint
12 x 12 x 1 in
30.48 x 30.48 x 2.54 cm
2018



0332-3D Drawing
Lanaquarelle paper, black matte acrylic paint
80 x 60 x 2 in
203.20 x 152.40 x 5.08 cm
2018

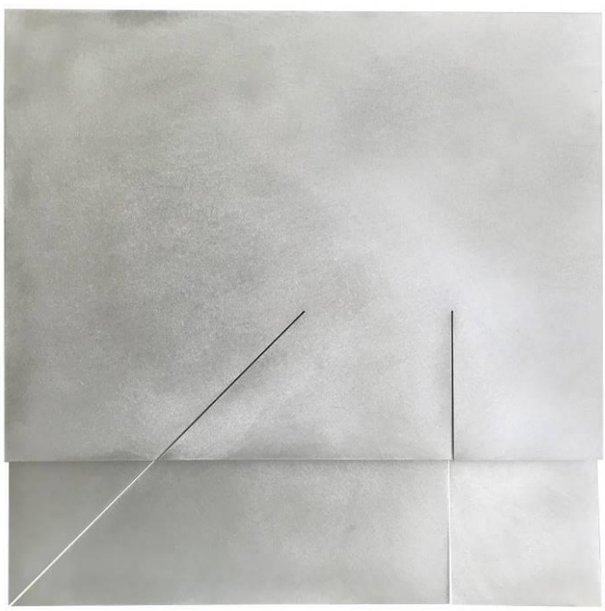
LV0061 – Linear Void
Poplar wood
26 ¼ x 6 x 6 in
66.68 x 15.24 x 15.24 cm
1979 – 2018



Roland Gebhardt
0030

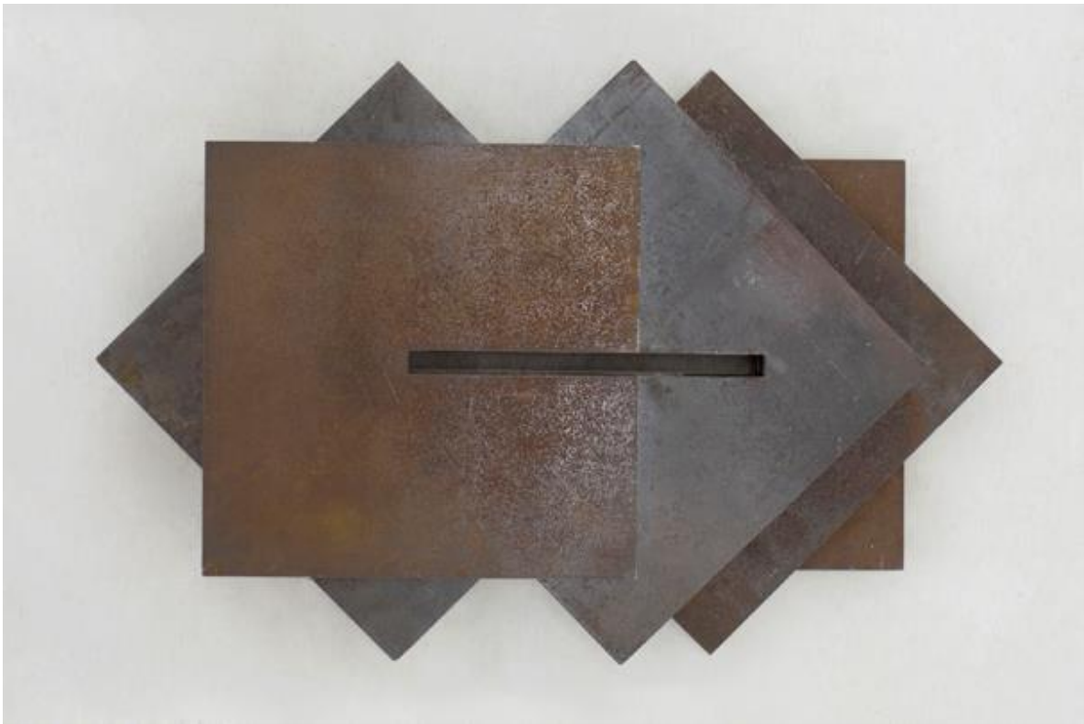
Zinc #16
76 x 380 x 5 cm
2017

0018 – Wall Plates
½” Aluminum
46 ½ x 30 x 2 in
118.11 × 76.20 × 5.08 cm
2017



0037 – Wall Plates
Zinc
24 x 24 x 1 ½ in
61 x 61 x 3.8 cm
2017-2018

Roland Gebhardt
Untitled 1 (Plates – C)
steel - 6 plates
19.5 x 20 x 4.5 inches
49.5 x 50.8 x 11.4 cm
2005,



Roland Gebhardt
Untitled 2 (Plates - A)
steel - 6 plates,
19.5 x 20 x 4.5 inches
49.5 x 50.8 x 11.4 cm
2005

ROLAND GEBHARDT (Suriname - USA)

Born in Paramaribo (1939, Suriname/NL). Lives and works in NY. Educated in Suriname, Switzerland and Germany. Master of Fine Arts. Art Academy of Hamburg, 1964. Roland Gebhardt is a sculptor whose minimalist work has been shown around the world and is already included in several prominent collections. Best known for its monolithic sculptures at the 70s exploring the concept of linear emptyness, some run as large-scale environmental sculptures (Wave Hill and Storm King in New York). He was released with the group of minimalist artists as Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Richard Serra, Brice Marden and many others, at shows in 70-80 years including 'The Minimal Tradition', at Aldricht Museum. In 2008, he launched the multi-media piece "The One Tribe" in Art & Technology Center 3LD in New York and did sculptural masks in "Dancing Sculpture" series. Since 2013 he conducted experiments on Storm King Art Center and at Institute Chautauqua unveiling spatial relationships built at the intersection of identity, abstract sculpture and landscape. In 2014, he presented "Trophies" unique collaboration between sculpture, dance and music that explores issues of identity and transformation of the living (Erie Art Museum in Erie, Pennsylvania). Very active in community activities related to the preservation of city planning and architecture in New York. For many years devoted more to the design, participated in projects in the United States, Europe and Japan, creating line of sculptural furniture. He never abandoned his authoral artistic production, but did not exhibit it for almost four decades. In recent years he developed a series of three-dimensional drawings on paper and striking sculptures in corten steel in the tradition of minimalism and conceptual sculpture.

A Visual Mallarmé in the Tropics

Biagio D'Angelo
University of Brasilia/CNPq
Brazil's National Council of Scientific and Technological Development

I like to feel my tongue as it rubs up against
The tongue of Luis de Camões.
I like to be and being
I want to dedicate myself
To create confusions in prosody
And profusion in parodies
That shortens the pain
And steal colors from chameleons
(...) What does it want?
What can
This tongue?
(Caetano Veloso, "Tongue")

Naming, classifying:
here begins our problem, that of cultural taxonomies.
(Christian Metz, Semiotic Essays)

In the beginning, there was chaos. And this chaos, a shapeless and confusing mass, represents the universe's nature, diffused germs of detached things, just the way Ovid poetically described in his *Metamorphoses* introduction. The chaos is the beginning of Ovidian's reflection on the origin of the cosmos (men, animals, objects), a *chaosmos* in which the writing takes it turn as a creative element, developing new thoughts and cognitive dynamics. Almandrade's poetic language (visual and textual – an authentic poetry synthesis) is located – at the same time – in a chaotic and cosmic place.

Almandrade is one of the poets-artists that emerged in the 70's, a generation that took to the last straw the discursive strategies of conceptual art, postal art and the Neo-Concrete's experiences. We could say that his participation was realized in a distant and isolated Bahia, apart from the São Paulo-Rio de Janeiro axis, they were the center of the national culture in those years.

It was determinant for Almandrade's artistic research the approximation to the Neo-Concrete's movement. The movement became more suggestive and curious from the moment that he joined it if we consider that the Neo-Concretes had never really had an outstanding performance outside the carioca's artistic scene. The Neo-Concretes from São Paulo criticized him, with effect, because they believed that the movement's performance could not be minimalized to symbolic consequences and sentimental effects. Otherwise, Almandrade recovers the logic of the "emotional" and goes on, even being on a distant capital from all the artistic fuzz.

The neoconcretist artists, such as Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Pape, with whom Almandrade was directly connected, sustained the idea that to do art didn't mean to be in the front of a senseless algid objectuality.

For them, the artist object is not mere geometry but, in fact, it is sensible, expressive and subjective. The artistic object can be touched, manipulated, such as to become, from the moment it was touched and manipulated, incorporated by the observer. Then, being able to see the artist as a new authentic creator (and not only a mere producer of serial artistic objects) makes it possible to eliminate that technocratic impression present in the concrete art, mostly seen as a cerebral activity.

For Almandrade, the artist must stand and produce as an engaged and compromised figure. Thus, being the real "contemporary" artist, he or she must always be at the vanguard, almost like a prophet, from the tough moments that Brazil faced in the lack of freedom until nowadays, facing the political and cultural reality of the country.Therefore, Almandrade is heir to the Concrete Poesy tradition that became the Poem/Process, from which he took the visual to a total radicalization, releasing the words from the poem, until he got a non-verbal plasticity. Then, there was only left signs as "image-words", occidentalized ideograms, giving highlight to the blank space of the paper.

With Almandrade we are ahead of a strange cognitive dynamic, because the ambiguity in which he presents visual texts and tensions, the silence in the speech and the language that an image carries within itself, they manifest the impossibility of complete knowledge. What is the language? What is an image? What is the writing? The totality that comes from the inquirer writing within the depths of Nothing, from the Alphabet of Nothing, anchors and bonds itself in the "threshold" production of Everything.

In Almandrade the observer finally lives an experience and a feeling that reveal themselves as disturbers of the Unspeakable. Can I speak without seeing? Can I see without speaking? The expressive language boundaries in Almandrade threshold the moment of death. Not that we speak of gory death, nor of disgrace or existence. Everything is about boundaries in Almandrade's production. Its seems that we are in a holy and, yet, unholy religion, where the spoken and the non-spoken intersect until they reach the apex of the textual-visual articulations. The artist's language performance of the visuality (which I would not like to call it as a painting, because it is not) is seductive. It denounces, though the bias of the words, of the images, of the onomatopoeic sounds of the letters, the intimate transformation of rational thoughts of the subject in other dimensions of the *human logos*: what is behind of the sound, or the letter, or of the image? Is there any purity *behind, within or outside* that I don't perceive or rescue?

Indeed, there is something "childish" in the aesthetic proposal of the Brazilian artist. I'll hereon use the adjective "childish" not in its sweetened meaning, but in a much more structural one. With effect, it takes the observer to a childish logic of a "*heart of an impenetrable darkness*", as Joseph Conrad says in his famous novel, the *Heart of Darkness*. Almandrade speaks in *another* language, almost as a larval dialect – a dialect of the stone and of the thing, a dialect of the word and the image. To see his visual poetry makes the demand of recovering an original language, a language of the origin, of the beginning, of the inauguration of everything – the language of *Beres'hit'*, as Haroldo de Campos would say - (re)born, making it possible that a language return to its simplicity of recognition and reality to learn again the essence of the dynamic flow of the things.

There is a very intense visual poem from the *baiano* artist in which it seems to appear from an inexplicable horizon the word "language". It is a very singular book-poem, perhaps from the 70's (the author himself mysteriously "swallowed" the date), named "Linguagem" (Language), that precisely remembers the materialization of the Verb. Hereon, I would like to evoke the magical words from Haroldo de Campos: "*Mallarmé – sempre Mallarmé! – foi ainda o pioneiro e continua o mestre*"[1] (Mallarmé – always Mallarmé! – was yet the pioneer and still is the master). With effect, the famously quoted and parodied (from Marcel Broodthaers, in *primis*) "*Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*" (1897), the poem-composition, circular poem, constellation-poem, the poem about a poem, can be considered as a corelative objective of the masterpiece of Almandrade, The Book that should have a "new physics" [2], being its own "book-boundaries from its own occidental idea of book" [3].

Mallarmé's poem "arises from the struggle against the chance, the disorder, the entropy of the physical processes" [4]. Mallarmé prophetically leads to a "non-linearity", to a fragmented sinuosity, because, as said by Jacques Lacan, every human experience "goes against this linearity"[5]. As Mallarmé, or better, as Mallarmé read by Haroldo de Campos would say, Almandrade withdraws the image its future mobility.

Paul Valéry called Mallarmé's poem "*un spectacle idéographique*"[6] (an ideographic show). Almandrade's production is another ideographic show. Even the "Mané Garrincha" piece, which does not seize to be

[1] Haroldo de Campos. *A arte no horizonte do provável*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1977, p. 17.
[2] Haroldo de Campos cita Mallarmé, do ensaio "Le livre, instrument spirituel" (1895): "Le livre, expansion totale de la lettre, doit d'elle tirer, directement une mobilité", *ibidem*, p. 18.
[3] *Ibidem*, p. 19.
[4] *Ibidem*, p. 152.
[5] Lacan, *apud* Campos, *ibidem*, p. 152.
[6] *Ibidem*, p. 68.

affectionately ludic, is an ideography. But not in a visionary sense. On the contrary, there is a way to "think the game", to think the day-to-day, which is behind all the familiar and playful gestures. It is not a mere coincidence that an installation made in 1979 was called "Think the game". We could think of it as a metaphor of soccer, to which is a metaphor of Brazil. That would be a small thing for one of the greatest Brazilian name in the visual poetry. Thinking the game is to think in Johan Huizinga's "*Homo Ludens*". The game is a natural element, culture's consubstantial. I play, therefore I am. But how do I become "am"? All of Almandrade's visual poetry consists in this dramatic questioning.

***

The word spawns geometric. It imbricates, outlines itself as a pure drawing. It looks like calligraphy. But we are in the occidental side of the world. In these latitudes, geometry is much more worth than calligraphy, a pure line, much more than an ideogram. So, aware of this search for purity, Almandrade intuits that line, color, word, sound (if there is), must be reconducted as a poem to, at last, transform themselves into poem. They are objects still in gestation. Only in a second moment they will be shapeshifted to a visual and harmonic composition. Yes, because there is still a recondite harmony inside and beyond the separated and fragmentated traces that some piece of art present.

Almandrade's work is like a palimpsest where word and image resume conscience of where they originate from, but they do not know where to go. Destiny of inanimate objects. Destiny of poetry (not only the visual ones). Mallarmé said that "poetry is done with words and not with ideas" [7]. But in poetry (as Jean-Paul Sartre would add) the word is a thing, an object, a palpable side of the signs (Jakobson would say), "*flor é a palavra flor*" (flower is the word flower), as João Cabral de Melo Neto[8] wrote in his "Antiode".

In the visual production of Almandrade, everything (sign, color, line, geometry) is organized as a "idea-thing".

***

How does the process of "idea-thing" goes? To make it clear, considering our criteria, we will use quotes from others, taken from the single Brazilian concrete experience. In a brief lyric that Haroldo de Campos dedicated to Benedito Nunes, the poet from the *Galaxies* observes that, to avoid the danger of an eventual deprivation of other cultures (being them Orientals or Latin-Americans), it is necessary an exemplary exercise of literary criticism. Quoting Heidegger, to Haroldo "to make poetry and to think are mutually needed" (or, using Heidegger's words, *Dichten und denken brauchen einander*). Therefore, the poetry and thought, the criticism and the local, itself or of third parties, always open themselves to the synchronic and universal. Dialoguing with "poet-thinkers, like Heráclito and Al Ghazali, and with poet-thinkers like Dante, Goethe, Leopardi, the poetry of the thought, in its creation or in its anew process of translation, complements itself through the contemplation of poetry, historic and critically considered" (Nunes, 2003, p. 82). This poetic example of Haroldo compensate the aesthetics of the materialized exterior and synchronizes it with fraternity, *kharis*, being the recognition of the Other, indispensable for the definition of the I.

AISTHESIS, KHARIS : I K I
Koan (heidegerian)
for benedito nunes
if heidegger looked
at the ideogram
whilst his disciple listened
japanese
(just as pound looked at ming sollua
Like the cubist eye of gaudier-brzeska
After listening to fenollosa)
he would have seen a cherry cherrytree *koto ba*
das ding dingt
in an unnameable place
of the word
i k i

Almandrade's artistic masterpiece, in an oscillation between poetry and thought, the criticism to the local and of the other, opens himself as synchronic and universal. Because the idea-thing is synchronic and universal, therefore, that line refers to that idea, that "*das ding dingt*". The idea-thing detects when culture is in decomposition, when the movements from the symbolic imaginary of poetry and art is impoverished by the noise of its own misery of the world.

The idea-thing could be expressed by the word "structure". However, we are far from a "structuralist" meaning, which reduces the element to a functional factor to itself. Almandrade's trace structure is a part that dialogues with the component know as "Everything" that it assumes. It is a phenomenon without which would not be possible to leave from chaos. Augusto de Campos proposes the prismatic of the idea in poetry and in visual arts, admitting that this was firstly theorized by Mallarmé:

[7] *Ibidem,* p. 141.
[8] All the authors are mentioned in the book of Haroldo de Campos: *idem*.

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Mallarmé is the inventor of the process of the poetic organization which means that the word art appears to us as comparable, aesthetically, to the musical value of the "series", discovered by Schoenberg, purified by Webern, and, through the filtration of this, legated to the young electronic composers, to preside the sonorous universes of a Boulez or a Stockhausen[9].

I remember a delicate and potent poetry of Mallarmé entitled "*Brise marine*", from 1865, which begins with something that we could denominate as a "intellectual deception" or a "poetic realism": "La chair est triste, hélas! Et j'ai lu tous les livres"[10]. However, nothing, as the poet says, will prevent that the heart submerge in the sea. It is possible to answer to the Boredom whilst listening the "song that comes from the sea".

In this attempt to overcome from the stagnated and devitalized shapes, Almandrade proposes an intimate art in its immaculate interior, a castle where purification occurs as a miraculous act. The space transforms itself as an agent that structures the meaning and transforms the poetry in something visual, due to this new idea of self-support. Thus, the graphic representation is a spiritual necessity, a requirement to harvest from what the Orientals had intuited from their own culture; that is, that the union between image and text, the free verses and the geographic space in the page that suggest the rupture with the centralization of the reading in its single axis, amplifying meaningful possibilities to the visual piece.

It is probable that, by signifying Almandrade as "A Visual Mallermé in the Tropics", the person who is writing might fall in a trap as suspected by Christian Metz and that we quote in epigraph, thus, it is our problem to effectively start naming, classifying, giving space to cultural taxonomies. But a taxonomy is a natural defence to the universal appeal, to the central recognition, to the game which is to put lines and words in match, colour and senses, geometry and sounds.

Some decades ago, Haroldo de Campos proposed a "interlanguage" game, which would take the Latin-American production out of the peripheral axis. The process, programmed by the author of *Galaxies,* mobilized itself to a search of a nexus in translation – as an operation of knowledge of the alterity – and a multilingual creation – in a sense of universalizing the national art (naturally, the Brazilian art, in this case). Haroldo de Campos stated: "writing, today, in Latin America, as in Europe, will mean, increasingly, the act of rewriting and re-mastigating" (2004, p. 255). We could replace the verb "write" to "make art", today, etc. Without wanting to point an auto-referential process, nationalist or ideological, the masterpiece of Almandrade answers and corresponds to this "tropical" drawing, without nostalgic feeling or motives from the past. It is, otherwise, to give voice to one of the "polytonal" and "polyphonic" fragments of a planetary civilization. Is it utopian? Almandrade is a dreamer who wants to win the chaos.

I believe that, in Brazil, with Oswald de Andrade's Anthropophagy, in the 20's (…) we had an acute sense of the necessity of thinking the national as a dialogic relation with the universal. The Oswald's Anthropophagy is a thought of a critical devouring of the legacy of a universal culture (…) according to the brim view of the "bad savage", devourer of white people, anthropophagic. It does not evolve to a submission (a catechesis), but to a transculturalization, or better, to a "transvalorization": a critical view of history as a negative function (as said by Nietsche), either capable of appropriation as of expropriation, the non-hierarchy of deconstruction[11].

It is in this perspective that Haroldo declares a necessity of a utopia as a programmatic model of the artistic *vanguards*. The term *vanguard* must not be read as a synonym to rupture or anti-tradition, but as an aspiration or tension to reorganize, perhaps idealistically, a national thought within the anthropophagic standpoint. Almandrade, as well, anthropophagites the artist experience overseas.In a poetic world of the artist, Text and Book, Art and Shape, mutually speak within themselves and produce senses. Indeed, they blend themselves, due to the cultural proliferation of the geographic tropics. Place and poetry become the pillars, imaginary tropics, where "everything is significative because all the language can reverse itself"[12].Almandrade's masterpiece rejects the simplification of the naivety of its reading that does not overcome the national limits and that promotes, on the contrary, an alterity recognition of culture as a proof of the critic's fertility and the intellectual prosperity.

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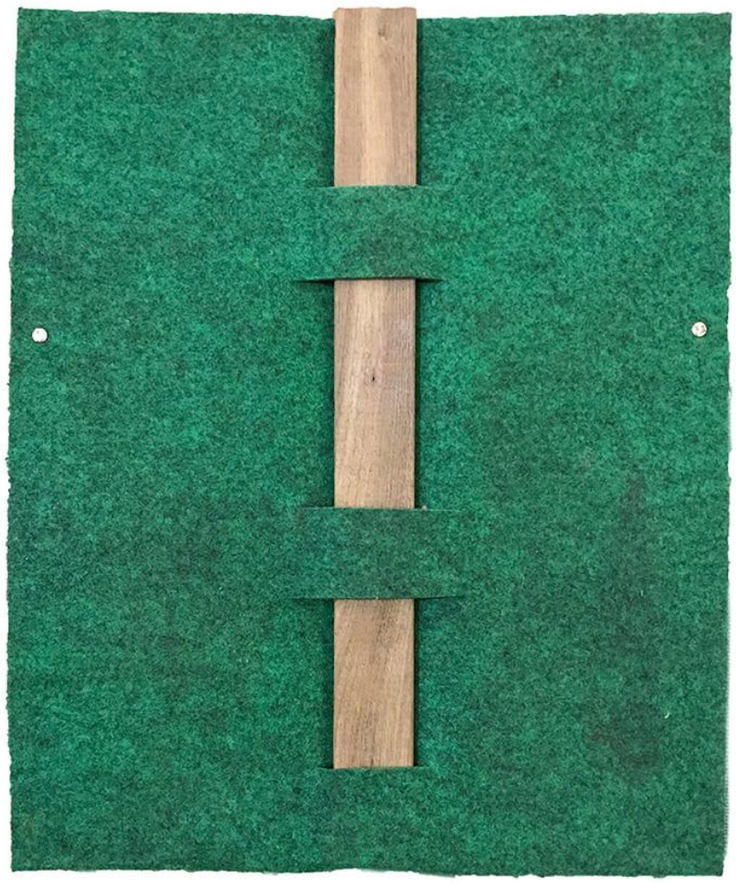
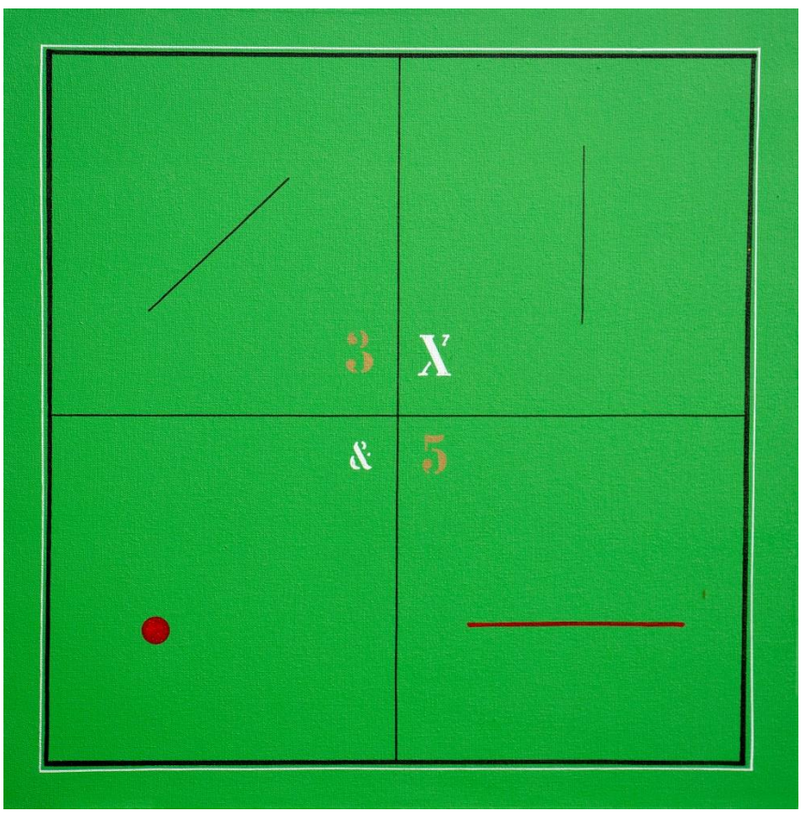
[9] Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari e Haroldo de Campos. *Mallarmé*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1991, p. 177.
[10] *Ibidem*, p. 44. The translation proposed by the Campos' brothers is "The meat is sad, yes, and I've read all the books", in: *Idem*, p. 46.
[11] Campos, Haroldo de. *Metalinguagem e outras metas*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2004, p. 234-235.
[12] Claude Lévi-Strauss, apud Paz, Octavio. *Signos em rotação*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1996, p. 296

Almandrade
Everything is nothing
Acrylic on canvas
19.68 x 15.74 in (each)
Diptych 19.68 x 31.49 in
1982 - 2017



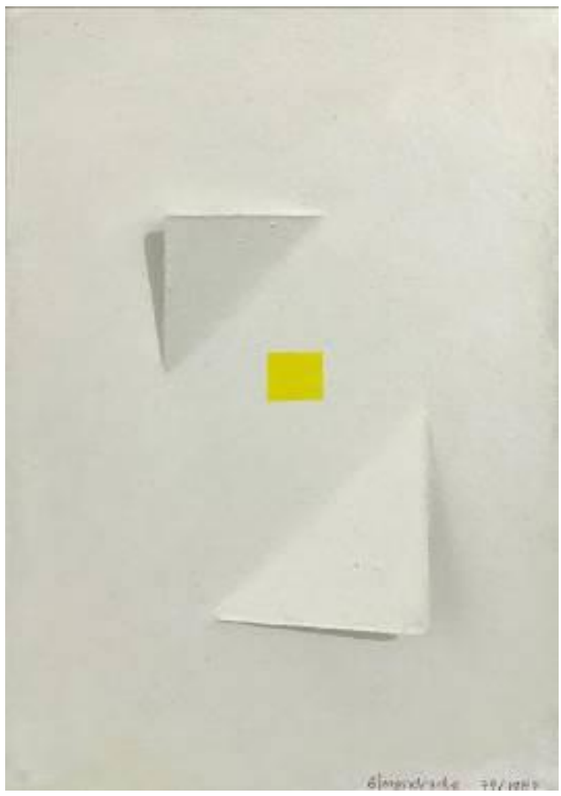
Almandrade
Untitled
Carpet, wood and screw
50 x 40 cm
1983



Almandrade
A bit of green
Acrylic on canvas
50 x 50 cm
1988-2016

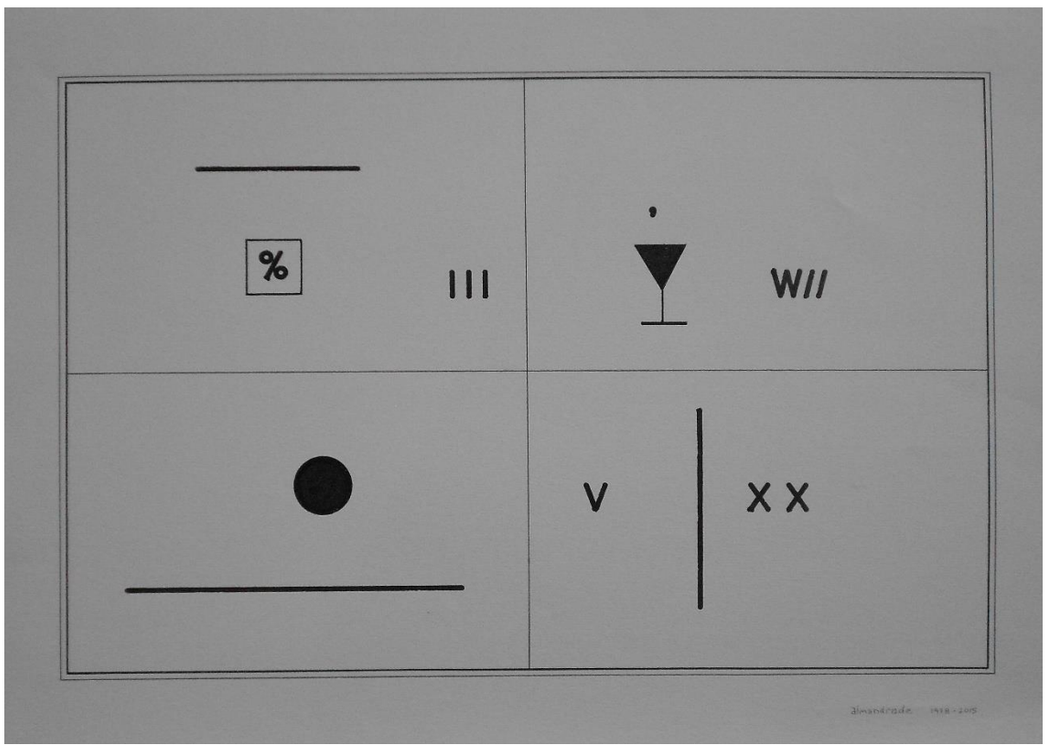
Almandrade
Untitled (Visual Poem 7)
Acrylic on canvas
10.6 x 13.7 in
1983-1994

Almandrade
Untitled (Visual Poem VS)
Acrylic on canvas
13.7 x 10.6 in
1983-1993

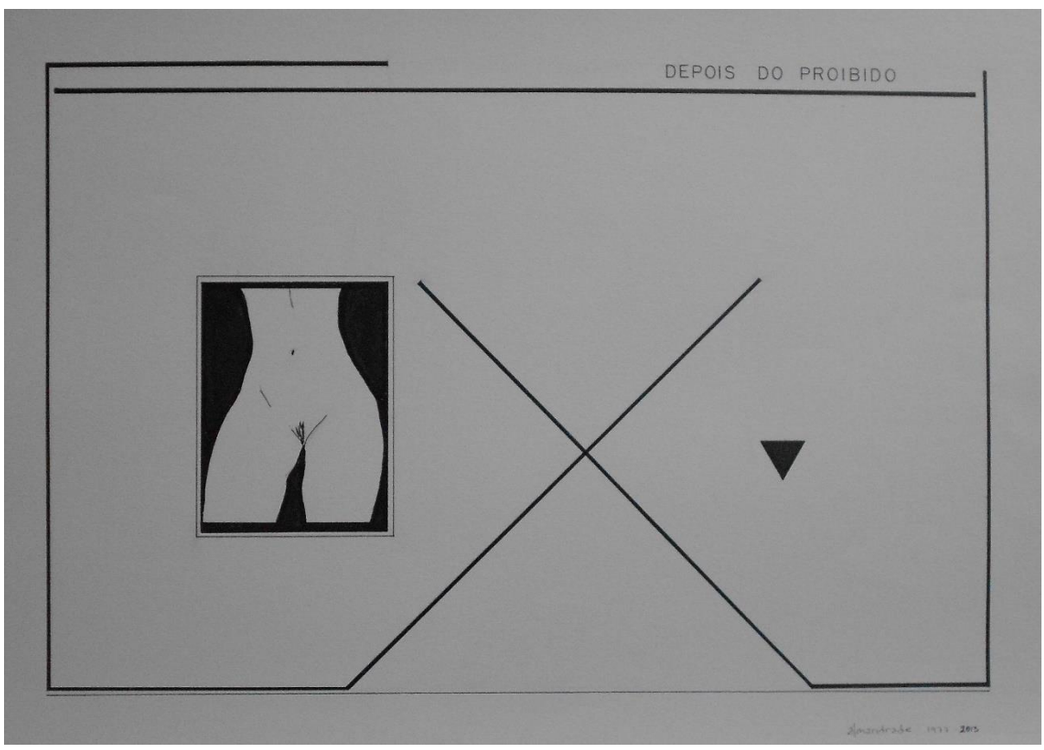


Matemathics of desire
Relief on cardboard and acrylic
30 x 20 cm
1979 -1987

]
Almandrade
Untitled
Object
20 x 30 cm
1978

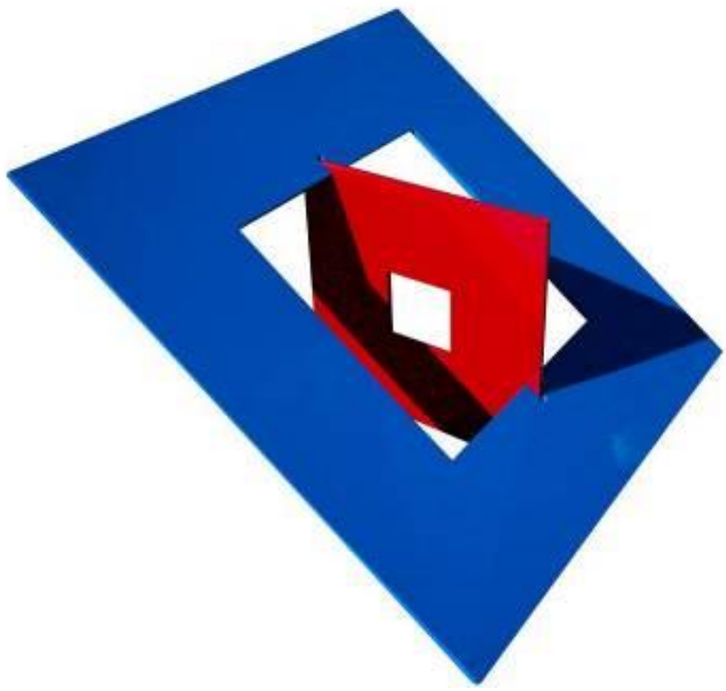


Almandrade
Untitled
Drawing, ink on paper
35 x 50cm
1978 - 2015

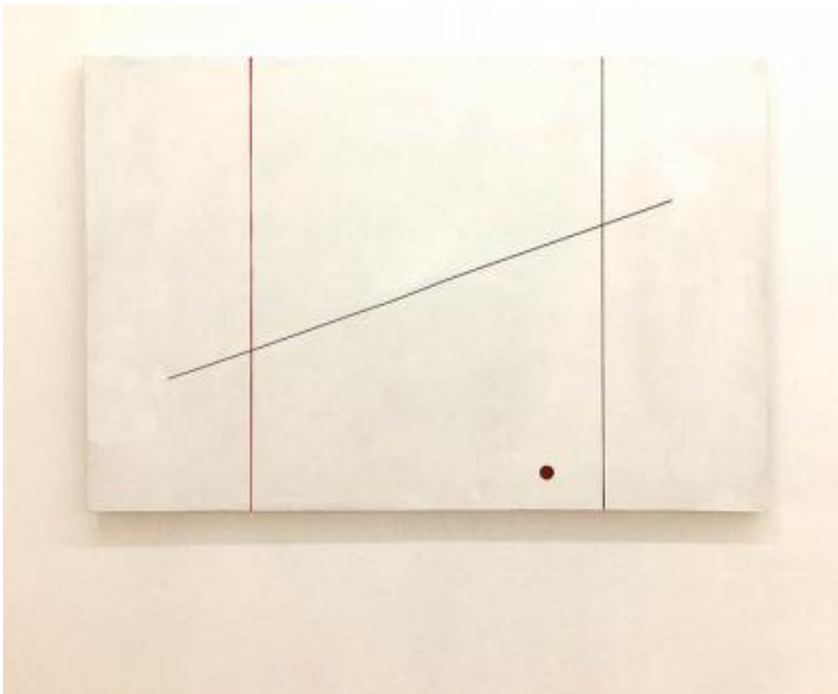


Almandrade
After the forbidden
Drawing, ink on paper
35 x 50 cm
1977 - 2013

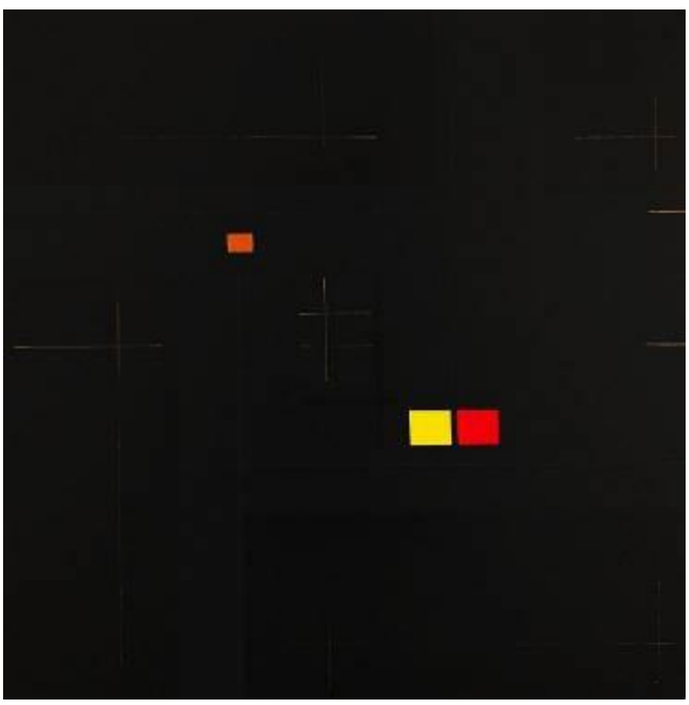
Mondrian / Malevich – version 2
Acrylic on plywood
40 x 40 x 56 cm
1987



Untitled
Sculpture cortén steel with automotive painting
120 x 120 x 100 cm
1993 - 2017



Untitled
Acrylic on eucatex
40 x 60 cm
1982



Untitled
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 60 cm
2007

Untitled
(studies 88 a 9
Laquered Wood
300 x 300 x 200 cm
2015

ALMANDRADE (Ba)

Almandrade is a visual artist, master in urban drawing, poet and a theory of art teacher at the art workshops of the Museum of Modern Art in Bahia and Palacete of the Arts. He participated in several group exhibitions, among them: XII, XIII, XVI Bienal de São Paulo; "In search of Essence" – special exhibition of the XIX Bienal de São Paulo; IV National Contest; Soccer Universe (MAM/Rio); National Fair (São Paulo); II Salão Paulista, 1ª International Exhibition of Ephemeral Sculptures (Fortaleza); I Salão Baiano; II Salão Nacional; He has integrated collections of visual poems, multimedia and installations projects in Brazil and abroad. He is one of the creators of the Language Studies Group of Bahia who published the magazine "Semiótica" in 1974.

He has held more than thirty solo shows in Salvador, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia and São Paulo between 1975 and 2019 and participated of national and international art fairs, such as SP-Arte, Art-Rio, VOLTA NY and Basel, EXPO Chicago, India Art Fair, among others. His works are in major museums in Brazil and in some abroad. With highlights to the collections of the Museu de Arte do Rio (under Paulo Herkenhoff's curatorship), Museum of Modern Art in SP/ MAM-SP, Museum of Art in SP / MASP and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Chicago / MCA. He also published several books such as The Sacrifice of Senses", "Obscurity of the Smile", "Poems", "Night Sweat" and in the press, "Cotton Archicteture". His poems seek to give words a plastic intensity.

Almandrade is one of the greatest names of visual poetry and one of the few heirs of Brazilian neoconcretism movement still alive and producing amazing, actual and provocative pieces poems, drawings, paintings, but also objects and sculptures. Among this most important series are the CARPETS, made in the eighties with material from burocratic military offices and torture elements connected, creating very conceptual strong works. A main concern in his work has always been freedom and reflecting critically about his own time through the arts.

Almandrade

Julia Boaventura
For ART NEXUS, 2018

In sum, Almandrade is an artist who, from the 1970s on, reengaged and developed several of the key pathways in Brazilian art of the second half of the Twentieth Century. An artist who imbibes the geometric art of the 1950s—both from its representative practitioners (Décio Pignatari and the Campos brothers) and from its dissidents (Wlademir Dias-Pino and his Machine for Laughing, or Servulo Esmeraldo)—as well as the Rio de Janeiro Neo-Concrete school, specifically the work of Oiticica, with whom he was in touch since the 1970s, and the poem- process and the poem-book forms: a series of movements ultimately geared towards a fracturing of art as representation. Julia Buenaventura

Too large for a model and too small for a building, Homage to Modern Architecture, by Bahia artist Almandrade, inhabits the interval between physical body and idea—an interval, chasm, space, or gap that the artist was in fact to explore throughout his career, be it as a bridge between the project and the object, or as a link—always lost, always sought—between words and things. Homage to Modern Architecture was first projected in 1979 and built almost thirty years later, in 2012. It is a house of a sort, occupied in its entirety by a staircase that leads nowhere. A Sisyphean ladder that ascends only to descend again, with little more than the space of one of its steps as a summit. Almandrade comments on his own invention, paraphrasing LeCorbusier: "This machine for living does not work, it only laughs (...). A staircase to nowhere. Irony. (...) The absolute symbol of inhabiting an era was rendered redundant. The economy of the square meter came to besiege the modern tenets of a civilization that believed blindly in technology as a solution to the world's problems."

Almandrade's work is part of a modern Avant-Garde tradition (and how contradictory it sounds now to call the Avant-Garde a tradition), a current that in Brazil was taken to its ultimate consequences, from the dream of Brasilia to the ripping apart of art as such in the attempt to transform it into life itself, with the Neo- Concrete movement. In sum, Almandrade is an artist who, from the 1970s on, reengaged and developed several of the key pathways in Brazilian art of the second half of the Twentieth Century. An artist who imbibes the geometric art of the 1950s—both from its representative practitioners (Décio Pignatari and the Campos brothers) and from its dissidents (Wlademir Dias-Pino and his Machine for Laughing, or Sírvalo Esmeraldo)—as well as the Rio de Janeiro Neo-Concrete school, specifically the

work of Oiticica, with whom he was in touch since the 1970s, and the poem- process and the poem-book forms.

This series of movements is ultimately geared towards a fracturing of art as representation. With this, they inaugurate the possibility of looking at an object or a square shape just for the sake of looking at them, without identifying what it all means—without, moreover, them having to mean anything, just by virtue of a square being a square, a form jut a form, just a spot apprehended by our perception. Come to think of it, it is interesting that the more square shapes this type of art proposes, the greater freedoms it involves. This is an art that expanded the spectrum of the senses, and there, with no other way out, transformed itself into experience and even renounce to be art. The poem became a drawing on paper and the book ceased to be an object in order to become an object to be decoded, manipulated, and sensed rather than read— an object perceived, that is, even with the tips of our fingers. Antonio Luiz Moaes de Andrade was born in São Luiz de Bahia in 1953. Thus, more than a pseudonym, Almandrade is a distillation of his given name, as well as a kind of self-designation. This is closely connected to the exploration of words and signs hat has characterized his work as an artist. Indeed, naming himself appears as the foundational gesture of Almandrade's oeuvre, and this is how he started to sign his paintings and visual poems in the 1970s.

Almandrade left the interior of Bahia in order to study architecture at the University of Salvador. As he has noted, he was already interested in drawing and writing. In fact, he didn't go into the humanities because he couldn't decide between the different fields. As soon as he arrived to the university, he began to explore the library, and this is how Almandrade ran into the 1956 issue of the journal Art and Décor. Let no one be misled by the title: the issue was a vehicle for the Concrete artists—fierce enemies of the decorative and the ornamental—to five publicity to their work. Indeed, it was the unofficial catalog for the first Concrete Art exhibition in São Paulo. The journal was filled with abstract-geometric works of art, harbingers of a new aesthetics that yet to achieve wide circulation, all the more so in Brazil's provincial northeast. Very soon, the future Almandrade was journeying to São Paulo and Rio in order to establish contacts with the artists that were pushing into the fractures of the representational and dissolving the boundaries between art and life; returning to Bahia with a heavy harvest of news, images, documents and poems, he launched the journal Semiotics. The working title for the publication had been "Semiosis", but the censorship organs of the military regime in Brazil rejected this. "Why?", Almandrade wonders. "Because they didn't understand it—and, truth be told, we were not all that clear on what it was about, either," he hastens to answer. Based on Peirce rather than Saussure, the journal delved into questions about the ability to signify and the connection between sign and object, issues that were to become key to Almandrade's work. For example, in a visual poem like Follow, from 1973, the initial "S" functions as a drawing that represents the direction that the term involves. These are poems and creations in which the word—its image on the paper surface—is an active part of the thing or the action being referred.

Almandrade recounts how this journal was the first to present the ideas of Michel Foucault in Bahia; indeed, Foucault's Discipline & Punish was very influential on the artist's thinking about urban issues as an architecture student. Here I can't avoid thinking of The Order of Things, from 1966, which tells how Modernity begins with the opening of a gap between names and their referents, a painful fissure that the Twentieth Century attempted to heal by means of a reconciliation of signs and objects. This dream was more utopian even than the dream of Brasilia, because it attempted to find a language that instead of separating us from the world, would be the world itself. We see this project enacted in various ways from Xul Solar to Concrete Poetry, and beyond. Almandrade's visual poems are inscribed within that framework: visual poetry is a practice where words are seen and read in a single motion, with no seams between the act of perceiving and the exercise of identifying. "Adam's first task," says Almandrade, "was to name things, so as to establish dominion over them," as though knowing a name was a form of subjugation. "I can only have that which I know," the artist adds in order to explain that the other option is to leave things without names and signs without referents. Thus, at times Almandrade proposes titles that have no connection to the object they name. These games leave viewers suspended in an interval, unable to capture the object they have in front of their eyes.

After university, Almandrade began working for the Planning Department of the Salvador Municipal Government, alternating between his job and his artistic practice. The experience was influential in his creative process, both in terms of the conception of the project (architectural plans appear in several of Almandrade's works) and of an interest in public spaces. In fact, Untitled – Sculpture for Public Space, built in 2014 at the Ondina Campus of the Federal University of Bahia, is a clear example of

this. The work consists of three planes that emerge directly from the paper and take over the space; a fluctuating box in which a yellow square is supported by a blue and a red “L”.

More than a painter, Almandrade thinks of himself as a sculptor, someone who crates three-dimensional objects. This might seem a contradiction, as one would think that, being flat, painting is closer to poetry and its support, paper, the quintessential plane. Yet, the opposite is true. I’ll explain. As I said, the project of a visual poem consists in turning words into images, and in that way to bring “pleasure without the need to decipher”, to use a phrase used by the artist in a text about the poetry of Wlademir Dias-Pino, creator of the process poem in Brazil1. In sum, visual poetry’s break with representation directly interrogates painting in its condition as a plane that pretends to be a space. (This is why we don’t have minimalist painters, only sculptors; this is why in artists like Gego or Clark the line escapes the paper and invades the space in the form of wire, or the triangle leaves the canvas to become, transformed into aluminum, become tangible in the physical world.) Almandrade does work in painting, but, along with the insertion of words and the play with titles, he commonly makes small cuts into the canvas or the paper in order to cancel its fiction, showing the plane as a body. The shadow of the “wing” that results from the incision leaves no doubt about it. On the other hand, in his sculptures we find planes that, articulated, become bodies in space. A series of three-dimensional objects raised by means of the articulation of their parts, where a new element stands out: the Brazilian Northeast’s tradition of wooden assemblages.

In Brazil the Northeast region is famous for its bonecos, doll-like figures that are often built using wood planks articulated into surprising shapes. There is even a type of toy whose strips produce the illusion of switching in an infinite loop, so that it is difficult to stop watching it. It is also important to remember that one of the most astonishing collections of such toys belonged to the architect Lina Bo Bardi. Significantly, Almandrade’s sculpture finds nourishment in that northeastern tradition, in those wooden planes, and puts it together with the Modern Avant-Garde as I wrote at the beginning of this essay. Visual poet, sculptor, and essayist: a selection of his critical and historiographical articles appeared as Writings on Art. In that book I found a couple of artists about Carybé, and I asked Almandrade why, being practitioner of abstraction, he defended in such strong terms a figurative, folk-inclined artist. Almandrade answered that he was a defender of the Bahia tradition, a legacy that needed to be protected and preserved. In summary, he said “I don’t have any modern dogmas because, in the end, that Modernism is over: one cannot wake up every day with a new idea.” And he added: “This is why we are all contemporary now.”

NOTE

1. The most comprehensive publication about this movement appeared in OEI Magazine Issue 66, Edited by Jonas Magnusson, Cecilia Grônberg, and Tobi Maier, Stockholm, 2014 (English). Julia Buenaventura

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