

Exhibition: **COLECCIÓN FOTOGRAFÍA MAM**
(MAM Photograph Collection)
(IVAM) Institut Valencia d'Art Modern
21st September 2006 – 17th December 2006

Organised by: (MAM) Museo de Arte Moderno de Sao Paulo,
Institut Valencià d'Art Modern

Curator: Tadeu Chiarelli

Until 7th January next, the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern will hold an anthological exhibition of contemporary photography comprising 66 works between photographs, assemblages, videos, silk screen prints, photocopies and digital processes by the best-known and most outstanding artists in Brazil, including, among others, Alberto Bitar, Aloísio Magalhães, Bené Fonteles, Edouard Fraipont, Farnese de Andrade, Mário N. Ishikawa, Rubens Mano and Waltercio Caldas. The works included in the exhibition belong to the collection of the Museo de Arte Moderna Sao Paulo, with which the IVAM has an agreement to exchange works periodically.

The exhibition will provide the public with means to reflect on the production of some of the major Brazilian artists of the last few decades, and, above all, with a way they have faced up to crucial issues at the present time, both in the field of art and those arising from the social situation in Brazil and the loss or surmounting of traditional, collective or individual parameters of identity.

The catalogue published for this exhibition reproduces the works displayed and contains texts by the director of the IVAM, Consuelo Císcar, the president of the Museo de Arte Moderna de Sao Paulo, Milú Villela, and the curator, Tadeu Chiarelli.

The exhibition aims to demonstrate that Brazilian art is not limited to exoticism or an exacerbation of sensorial and cathartic themes. Art is and will continue to be an element for the configuration and discussion of the problems that most concern Brazilian society today.

As a point of departure for the exhibition, we present a series of works by Mario Ishikawa dealing with the subject of the lack of communication. Created at a time of severe political repression and conceived with a view to divulging it clandestinely by post, it serves as a metaphor of the limits of this exhibition. At the same time, it shows how the possibility of communicating ideas among Brazilians during the dictatorship after 1964 eluded censorship.

In order to illustrate the crisis suffered by the Brazilian society, above all after the military coup in 1964, works showing how certain myths created in the country were overcome have been selected for the exhibition.

The first of these is related to the figure of the typical Brazilian, who possesses all the positive qualities of the people: the native. Romantic in origin, the understanding of the figure of the Indian as a symbol of Brazil and all Brazilians resisted the demands of Modernism in the early 20th century, which attempted to replace it with the figure of the Negro. In spite of the opposition of critics and artists, the concept of the Brazilian continued to be associated with the indigenous population and was largely accepted by the masters of the dictatorship after 1964.

Also included in the exhibition are the “cartemas” by Aloísio Magalhaes, which belong within the context of Brazilian art of the nineteen seventies –marked by censorship during the dictatorship– because it is a type of production conceived in the traditional dissolution of the concept of the artist as a privileged author.

The “cartemas” selected for the exhibition present abstract formal solutions, consisting of images of Brazilian natives from the cities of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. In them, the idea of the native as the symbol of the “indigenous” Brazil is questioned, just as the images of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro –the two Brazilian megalopolis where the military leaders had no census– are eradicated.

These works establish links with two works by Bené Fonteles dating from 1980. These are photocopies that address issues that made artists take a stance at the beginning of that decade and connected with the challenges facing the country and the world.

In Tall, Fonteles redesigned the structure of the Brazilian flag –the maximum symbol of the nation– using the image of a newspaper bearing a text and a photograph about the famine in Cambodia. While in *El dedo del metalúrgico* (The Metal Worker’s Finger), the artist takes a picture of the metal worker and union leader of the time, Lula da Silva, and appropriates the formal solution of American art of the sixties (Andy Warhol’s works, for example).

The destruction of the images of the megalopolis for the extinction of photographic objectivity was the proposal of several Brazilian artists in the seventies, as a token of their awareness of the failure of the short-lived project for a modern Brazil. Regina Silveira with his silk screens, Rubens Mano with his unfocused photograph of Sao Paulo, Márcia Xavier’s

objects and Círio Reisewitz's installation question the idealised idea of the economic vigour of Brazil that the powers that be wished to promote. These artists, by rearticulating the photographic image of the megalopolis, contrasted the urbanistic chaos of the city with the intention of transforming it into the best definition of contemporary Brazil.

Other artists opposed to this ideal view of the large Brazilian cities are José Guedes, Paula Trope, Marcelo Zocchio, Rosângela Rennó and Alberto Bitar.

The figure of the Indian, deliberately misrepresented in Aloísio Magalhães's "cartema"—a token of the destruction of another myth of Brazilian identity—is also addressed in works by Ana Bella Geiger and Farnese de Andrade.

The breakage of the subject's unity, perceived in the coexistence of signs of collective and individual experiences in Farnese's work, can also be found in the work of other artists who concentrated on the genre of the selfportrait at the end of the 20th century.

Within the large number of artists in Brazil who worked on the issue of erasing personal and collective identity by means of selfportraits, Lenora de Barros's productions occupy a prominent place. Based on visual poetry (broadly practised in São Paulo between 1950 and 1960), the artist worked throughout her career, which began in the late seventies, on a series of photographs-cum-performances, where she addressed the eradication of the ego in tragicomical terms, endowing the subject with an unusual dimension.

This group of selfportraits, addressed by the artists' investigations into new codes about their identity, also acquired other possibilities for

reflection in Brazil thanks to the works of Sandra Cinto, Keila Alaver and Lia Chaia.

Another important work is the “collective selfportrait” proposed by Michel Groisman, Polp, produced by and donated to MAM in 2000. In this sort of group performance, the artist proposed a game where the individual became aware of his own body little by little. Linked to the proposals of Lygia Clark, Polp, however, introduced irony about the rules of the game, showing that purely physical contact with one’s body is not always the most efficacious strategy for constructing identity, whether individual or collective.

With all the difficulties inherent in a museological institution operating in a country with serious socio-economic problems like Brazil, the MAM has managed to include in its collection works considered fundamental for an in-depth understanding of the artistic process in Brazil today, less besieged by certain myths that strive to restrict contemporary Brazilian art to two or three artists, or, at the outside, one artistic movement.