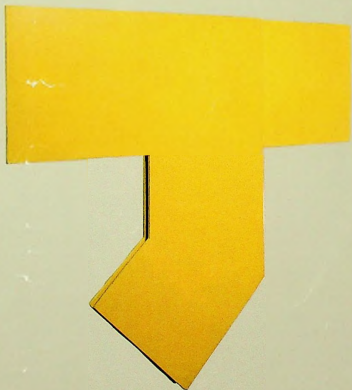


MODERN

TATE

Hélio Oiticica

THE BODY OF COLOUR



6 June–23 September

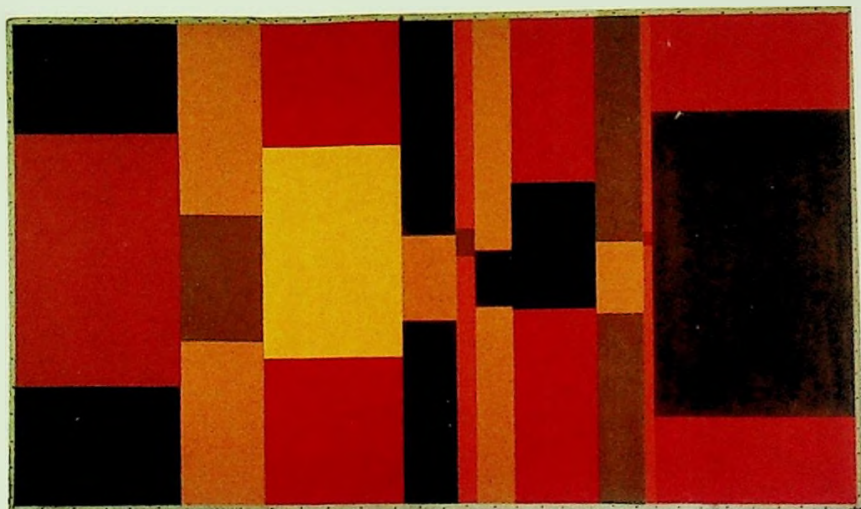
Sem título (Untitled)

1956

Oil on wood fiber board

César and Claudio Oiticica Collection, Rio de Janeiro

Photo: César Oiticica Filho/Projeto Hêlio Oiticica



Hêlio Oiticica (1937–1980) was one of the most innovative Brazilian artists of the twentieth century and is now recognised as a highly significant figure in the development of contemporary art.

Oiticica produced an outstanding body of work, which had its origins in the legacy of European Modernism as it developed in Brazil in the 1950s. But his unique and radical investigations led Oiticica to develop his artistic production in ever more inventive directions. Through his work he was to challenge the traditional boundaries of art, and its relationship with life, and to undermine the separation of the art-object from the viewer, whom he turned into an active participant.

Among Oiticica's most original achievements was his inventive and uncompromising use of colour. This exhibition explores the dimension of colour as a vital focus of his work, from his early career onwards. It includes several related series of works which unfold in sequence, showing the conceptual and technical processes that led to the artist's liberation of colour from the two-dimensional realm of painting out into space, to be walked around and through, looked into, manipulated, inhabited and experienced.

Oiticica emerged as an artist during a period of optimism in Brazil, before the utopian dream

of a modern society was thwarted by the oppressive military regime in the 1960s. In the cultural sphere this period saw many new developments: the instigation of progressive architectural projects by Lúcio Costa, Oscar Niemeyer and others; important innovations in the worlds of avant-garde film, music, poetry, theatre and choreography; the establishment of the international Sao Paulo Biennale; and the founding of museums of modern art in both Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.

It was at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio that Oiticica was taught painting by the influential abstract artist Ivan Serpa. He later joined the Rio-based *Grupo Frente*, a radical art organisation founded by Serpa that also included the innovative artists Lygia Clark and Lygia Pape. Oiticica exhibited in the group's second exhibition in 1955. His work from this period shows an affinity with the abstract idiom of the group, as well as the influence of modernist masters such as Paul Klee, Kasimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian. These early works, mature for such a young artist, contained the essence of what was to follow.

Oiticica began to disrupt the dense colouring and structure of his early paintings in a series of gouaches on board called *Sécos* 1956–7. These

Metaesquema

1958

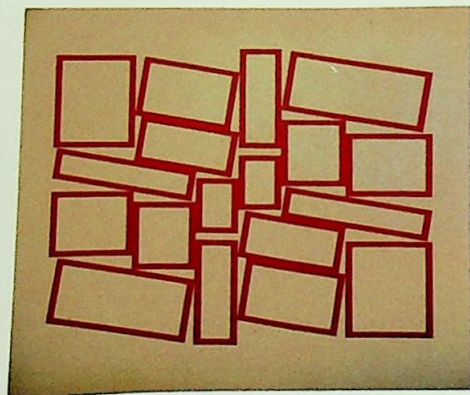
Gouache on cardboard

Private Collection

Courtesy of Lurixs Arte Contemporânea

Rio de Janeiro

Photo: César Oiticica Filho/Projeto Hélio Oiticica



Metaesquema

1958

Gouache on cardboard

César and Claudio Oiticica Collection, Rio de Janeiro

MET 212

Photo: César Oiticica Filho/Projeto Hélio Oiticica



formed a transition into a major series begun in the following year, titled *Metaesquemas* 1957–8. In these spare compositions he sought to dissolve the two-dimensional picture plane by demolishing the suggestion of a frame, and deconstructing the grid structure with a dynamic combination of squares and rectangles in black, red, blue and white.

The final pieces from this series were white abstract compositions, which eventually led to the series of white-on-white paintings, *Série Branca* (White Series) 1958–9. Here Oiticica explored ways of producing different tones of white, and experimented with layering and brush techniques to maximise the effect of light on the colour. He later referred to white as ‘the ideal colour-light, the synthesis-light of all colours’.

Meanwhile he began working on a series of irregularly shaped double-sided white paintings, *Bilaterais* (Bilaterals) 1959. These were designed to hang from the ceiling, compelling the spectator to walk around them.

Oiticica's experimentation with the interaction between colour and light continued with a series of yellow and red monochromes, including triangular paintings, and the first in the series of *Invenções* (Inventions) 1959–62, painted

structures composed of vertical layers of colour. Here he developed ways of experimenting with the physicality of colour that he later made use of in three-dimensional works.

In 1960 Oiticica joined the Neo-Concrete group, a Rio-based movement that broke with the principles of the Concrete movement that had originated in São Paulo, by reacting against its extreme rationalism and advocating an expanded creative freedom. Oiticica had by then begun the ground-breaking series of red and yellow painted hanging wood constructions, *Spatial Reliefs* 1960, which effectively liberated colour into three-dimensional space. He designed many maquettes for these complex forms, but few were built in full scale.

By the end of 1960 Oiticica had arrived at a synthesis of his experiments with colour. In his theoretical text *Colour, Time and Structure* of 1960 he referred to this integration of colour as ‘a supreme order similar to the supreme order of architectural spaces’. This thinking led to the concept he called ‘côr nuclear’ (nuclear colour) – embodied in a group of works in which colour ascends or descends in gradual hues from its centre. This series, called *Núcleos* (Nuclei) 1960–6, consists of open mazes of double-sided

Bilateral 'Teman'

1959

Oil-casein emulsion on wood fiber board

Cesar and Claudio Oiticica Collection, Rio de Janeiro

BIL 003

Photo: Tom Jenkins

Relevo espacial (vermelho)

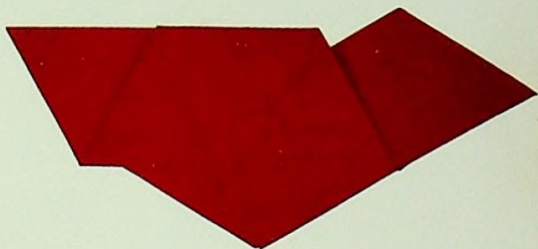
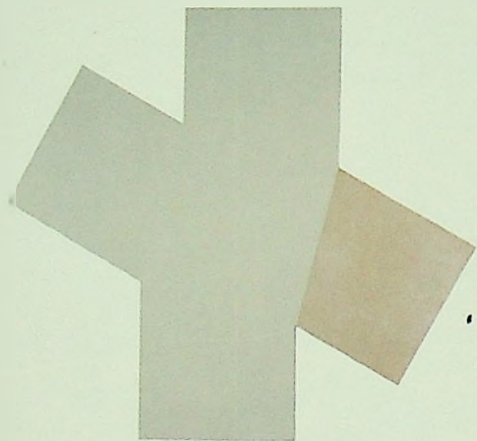
[Spatial Relief (red)]

1960

Polyvinyl acetate resin on plywood

Cesar and Claudio Oiticica Collection, Rio de Janeiro

Photo: Tom Jenkins



hanging panels of varying sizes and closely related colours. The first to be made was the *Pequeno Núcleo no. 01* (Small Nucleus No. 01), which includes a mirror that enhances the light and colours, and reveals the viewers to themselves as active participants in the work. Three medium nuclei were eventually combined into a large-scale hanging environment to form the *Grande Núcleo* (Grand Nucleus) 1960-6. This spectacular work, with panels in tones of violet at the nuclear centre unfolding into a range of luminous yellows, amplified the spatial and temporal aspects of the *Spatial Reliefs*.

By contrast the *Penetrável* (Penetrable) series 1960-79 consisted of closed labyrinthine environments, as in the large scale model of *Projeto Cães de Caça* (Hunting Dogs Project) 1961 (its title taken from a group of stars in the constellation of Orion). Like all Oiticica's maquettes, this model was considered a work of art in its own right. Consisting of five chromatic penetrables, it was conceived as a monumental magic garden for intense aesthetic experience, and incorporated sand gardens and areas for the appreciation of music, poetry and theatre. Oiticica continued to construct maquettes for colour environments, including the *Magic Square*

maquettes of 1978, which were also conceived as large open-air penetrables. *PN I Penetrável* 1961 was the first free-standing penetrable, a small-scale cabin with sliding coloured panels, which the viewer was encouraged to enter and participate in the sensory experience. It was with this series that Oiticica felt that 'the sense of spectator involvement reaches its apex and its justification'.

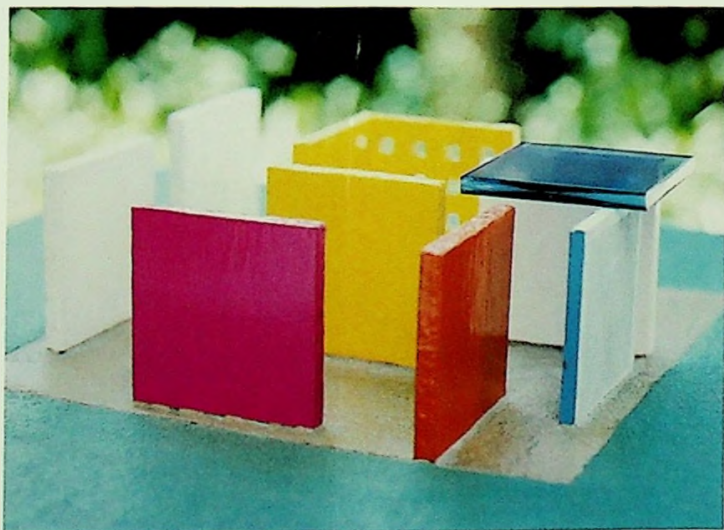
Oiticica began to work on the first *Bólides* (Fireballs) in 1963, after the completion of the *Invenções* (Inventions) series, through which he had discovered the means of infusing colour with depth and luminosity. The *Bólides*, small wooden boxes, appeared to be 'inflamed' by light and charged with energy, an important evolution in Oiticica's idea of 'totalidade-côr' (total colour). They were designed to be handled, with moveable panels revealing new chromatic planes. With the introduction of glass *Bólides* into the series Oiticica began to incorporate loose pigment in the works and to include everyday materials such as glass vessels, plastic, earth, painted cloth, shells and foam, to expand the range of sensory experience offered through interaction with the artwork. The range of colours was extended to include pinks and blues, and

Maquette para Magic Square No 05, Rio de Janeiro
[Maquette for Magic Square No 05, Rio de Janeiro]

1978

Acrylic on wood, acrylic on wire screen, Plexiglas
César and Claudio Oiticica Collection, Rio de Janeiro

Photo: Cesar Oiticica Filho/Projeto Hélio Oiticica



ready-made objects also began to find their way into the work, including poetry and images, further encouraging the viewer's emotional and intellectual participation.

Oiticica reached a crucial point in his integration of colour, structure, time and space with the *Parangolê* series: banners, capes and tents constructed from a variety of materials, including fabric, plastic, mats, screens and ropes. He began to develop these flexible colour structures as a result of his involvement with the people of Mangueira Hill, a Rio de Janeiro shanty town, and they encouraged his immersion into the world of traditional Brazilian samba. The *Parangolês*, designed to be worn or carried while dancing to the rhythm of samba, represent the culmination of Oiticica's efforts to encourage the viewer's interaction with the artwork and to liberate colour into three-dimensional space.

This exhibition was conceived by Mari Carmen Ramírez, Wortham Curator of Latin American Art and Director of the International Centre for the Arts at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, where it was shown 10 December 2006–1 April 2007. The exhibition has been curated for Tate Modern by Ann Gallagher, Tate Curator and Head of Collections (British Art) with Amy Dickson, Assistant Curator, Tate Modern.

Supported by

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THE ~~ARTS~~ TIMES

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Text by Ann Gallagher

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Rio de Janeiro



'Colour is one of the work's dimensions. It is inseparable from the phenomenon as a whole, from structure, from space, and from time but, like those three, it is a distinct dialectic element, one of the dimensions. It therefore possesses its own, elementary progression, for it is the very nucleus of the painting, its reason for being. However when colour is no longer submitted to the rectangle, nor to any representation of the rectangle, it tends to "embody" itself; it becomes temporal, it creates its own structure, and the work then becomes "the body of colour".'

Hélio Oiticica, October 5, 1960



Events

For full details visit www.tate.org.uk

For tickets visit www.tate.org.uk/tickets
or call 020 7887 8888

Symposia

Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour Symposium

Saturday 2 June, 10.00–18.00
Starr Auditorium

This international symposium reassesses Hélio Oiticica's work with reference both to his Brazilian contemporaries and the legacies of Utopian artistic models such as those championed by Paul Klee, Piet Mondrian and Kasimir Malevich, as well as the theoretical work of critic Mario Pedrosa

£25 (£15 concessions), booking required
Price includes entry to the exhibition and drinks afterwards

Supported by Ministerio da Cultura do Brasil and University of Essex Collection of Latin American Art (UECLAA)

Transnational Correspondence

Friday 14 and Saturday 15 September
10.00–17.00
Starr Auditorium

Transnational Correspondence brings a group of Brazilian artists, writers and curators into dialogue with their UK contemporaries. Participants consider how entwined national and international contexts are negotiated in producing, exhibiting and interpreting art.

£22 (£15 concessions),
booking recommended

Performances

The Fight: A Multidisciplinary Performance

Saturday 21 July, 19.00–21.00
Turbine Hall Bridge

A unique music and dance performance and an amateur boxing match by youth and community groups from Southwark, led by London-based Panamanian artist Humberto Velez.

Free

Films

Glauber Rocha

In 1968 Hélio Oiticica appeared in the ground-breaking film *Câncer* by

Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha. Rocha's fiercely avant-garde films stylishly depict Brazil's political corruption and social upheaval. This rare survey of his films includes *Câncer* plus six other landmark titles. For further details visit www.tate.org.uk

Friday 21 September, 19.00

This special screening features films by Hélio Oiticica such as his unfinished super-8, *Agripina e Roma Manhattan* (1972), plus Brazilian director Ivan Cardoso's portrait of the artist, *HO* (1970).

Sunday 23 September, 17.00

Câncer (Glauber Rocha, Brazil 1968/72, 86') plus *At Midnight with Glauber* (Ivan Cardoso, Brazil 1997, 17'), a critical meditation on the nature of film, featuring a conversation between Glauber Rocha and Hélio Oiticica.

All tickets £5 (£4 concessions),
booking recommended
Starr Auditorium

Young People

Raw Canvas Summer Courses

Construction of Colour: Hélio Oiticica
Monday 20 – Thursday 23 August,
11.00–16.00
McAulay A

Hélio Oiticica's vibrant and tropical works are the source of inspiration in this course. You'll construct a new civilisation influenced by Oiticica's architectural work and the way he used colour and structure in his art. For ages 15–23

Free, booking required

General Information

Photography and mobile phones are not allowed in the exhibition

Exhibition hours

6 June – 23 September
Sunday – Thursday 10.00–18.00
Last admission 17.15
Friday and Saturday 10.00–22.00
Last admission 21.15

Exhibition catalogue
RRP £24.99

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The Unilever Series: an annual art commission sponsored by Unilever

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11 October 2007 – 27 January 2008
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The World as a Stage

24 October 2007 – 1 January 2008
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