

LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Hélio Oiticica & Neville D'Almeida *Cosmococas*

June 29 – August 11, 2023
508 West 24th Street, New York

Lisson Gallery celebrates the 50th anniversary of Hélio Oiticica's pioneering *Cosmococas - Programa in Progress* (1973) with a presentation of two works from the seminal series. Developed in collaboration with Brazilian filmmaker Neville D'Almeida, the enveloping installations were an essential facet of what Oiticica termed "quasi-cinemas". To commemorate the anniversary, the series will be installed throughout the year in cities across the world.

Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1937, Oiticica was a prolific and inquisitive thinker in his short lifetime. Exploring and expanding formal artistic modes and pushing the boundaries of the possibilities of abstraction, sculpture, performance and film, he probed experiential, environmental art and interactive installation. His inherently countercultural practice questioned the entrenched social and institutional framework. Until his untimely death at the age of 42, he continued to invent new modes of art-making, as well as challenge the traditional art-viewing experience.

Oiticica embedded himself the liberationist, underground cultural scene of New York in the 1970s, where he met and collaborated with Neville D'Almeida to create a series of nine 'supra-sensorial' environments which they altogether titled *Bloco-Experienciâs in COSMOCOCA – programa in progress* (*Block-Experiments in COSMOCOCA – program in progress*). Numbered CC1 to CC9, the *Cosmococas* were plans for complex installations that incorporated concurrent slide projections, soundtracks, mattresses, balloons and other various materials, as well as sets of instructions for participants to create future public and private performances. Throughout the series the projected slides feature album covers, newspaper clippings and photographs of celebrities including Yoko Ono, John Cage, Marilyn Monroe, Luis Buñuel, and Jimi Hendrix among others. Images of the pop culture icons are stratified under white pigment drawings the artists made using cocaine as a raw material, illustrating the concept of constructing sensory experiences as well as the possibility of changing one's perception of time.

The installations are traced through a direct dialogue with Oiticica's "quasi-cinemas", which intertwined Oiticica's Super 8 films with meticulously selected soundtracks encompassing a diverse range, from Brazilian samba to avant-garde compositions. These audiovisual compositions are projected onto various surfaces, metamorphosing the exhibition space into a dynamic and fluid tapestry of color, movement, and sound. Reconfiguring the relationship between art and the public, the *Cosmococas* intend to transcend the limitations of conventional cinema, offering a multisensory encounter that engages not only the visual and auditory faculties but also the physical, mental, and emotional dimensions of the participants.

On view in the gallery presentation are *CC3: Maileryn* and *CC5: Hendrix-War*, both of which integrate everyday objects such as hammocks, sand and mirrors to necessitate physical engagement. The *Cosmococas* represent an integral aspect of Oiticica's broader artistic pursuits during his time in New York, revolving around the concept of 'creleisure,' a term created by the artist in 1969. It signified Oiticica's idea of merging art and life, aiming to reclaim the exploitation of leisure time under capitalist systems. The environments serve as a testament to Oiticica's radical approach and his commitment to blurring the boundaries between artistic expression and everyday experiences. *CC3*, positioned in the front half of the gallery, features projections of Marilyn Monroe and over 1,000 balloons. The title combines the names of Monroe and her biographer, Norman Mailer, who concluded Monroe was assassinated by American secret service agents. *CC5* references the third compilation album by Jimi Hendrix, "War Heroes" (1972). In addition to projections of the album cover and sound elements the room features a number of hammocks available for use by participants.

This fall, a number of other art institutions, such as the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art at SUNY New Paltz, NY, USA; the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, UK; The Mistake Room, Los Angeles, CA, USA; and Hunter College Art Galleries, New York, NY, USA will join the 50th anniversary initiative by presenting works from this series. More information can be found on their websites.

About the artist

Hélio Oiticica (1937 – 1980) is widely regarded as one of Brazil's leading artists of the twentieth century and a touchstone for much contemporary art made since the 1960s, primarily through his freewheeling, participatory works of art, performative environments, avant-garde films and abstract paintings. Even before the age of 20, Oiticica was a key member of the historic Rio de Janeiro-based Grupo Frente (1954-56), his radical play with geometric form and vibrant colors transcending the minimal lines of European constructivism and imbuing his work with an exuberant rhythm that resonated with the avant-garde music and poetry of his native Brazil. In the late 1950s, Oiticica would go on to become a leading figure of Brazilian Neo-Concretism (1959-61) that included other ground breaking artists such as Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape and the poet Ferreira Gullar, ultimately giving rise to the artistic movement known as *Tropicalismo*, named for a work of Oiticica's from 1967.

Increasingly, Oiticica became a countercultural figure and underground hero, foregrounding bodily interaction with spatial and environmental concerns over pure aesthetics. "Ambient art," he wrote, "is the overthrow of the traditional concept of painting-frame and sculpture – that belongs to the past. It gives way to the creation of 'ambiences': from there arises what I call 'anti-art,'" which he later defined as "the era of the popular participation in the creative field." This generous and generative practice would become highly influential for subsequent generations of artists, especially his *Parangolés* or 'habitable paintings' and all-encompassing series of installations, known variously as *Núcleos* (ceiling-hung geometric panels forming gradual chromatic experiences) and *Propositions* or *Penetrables* (labyrinth-like architectural environments made of sand and semi-permeable cabins). This supra-sensorial approach continued until his untimely death in 1980 at the age of 42.

Oiticica's work has been the subject of major recent museum exhibitions, including the critically acclaimed retrospective *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*, which debuted at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Philadelphia in 2016 and traveled to the Art Institute of Chicago and the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2017. *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Color* was exhibited at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in 2006-2007 and in London at the Tate Modern in 2007. His work is included in the collections of numerous international institutions including Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA, USA; Inhotim Centro de Arte Contemporânea, Belo Horizonte, Brazil; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, USA; Museo de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain; Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX, USA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA; Tate Modern, London, UK; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, USA; the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; and the Pérez Art Museum Miami, FL, USA, among others. The Projeto Hélio Oiticica was established in Rio de Janeiro in 1980 to manage the artist's estate.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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