

## Press Release

### Hélio Oiticica

October 28, 2020 – January 23, 2021  
504 & 508 West 24th Street, New York

Lisson Gallery is pleased to present a selection of important works by Hélio Oiticica, occupying both New York galleries. An artist with indisputable influence on all aspects of Brazilian avant-garde culture — visual art, music, theater, literature and more — this exhibition demonstrates the profound impact his ideas had on the wider art world, both past and present. Oiticica was a prolific and inquisitive thinker in his short lifetime, and the works featured here include examples of his exploration and expansion of formal artistic modes, and layered approach, pushing the boundaries of the possibilities of color and structure, as well as representations of his investigation into experiential, environmental art and interactive installation. This evolution underlines his multidimensional development and ultimately the cosmological ideas that guided his approach to art and life.

On view at 504 West 24th Street is Oiticica's ground breaking, large-scale installation *Tropicália* (1966-67). Conceived in late 1966 and created in 1967, *Tropicália* was the first architecturally scaled installation that the artist realized, and the first in a series of works that would portray, and critique, his native country of Brazil. In this work, Oiticica addresses the clichés of the country's association with a tropical paradise, including bright colors, sand, and exotic birds and flowers. It is composed of two *Penetrables*, small wooden shed-like structures referencing Brazil's *favela* shantytowns, arranged to form a maze and intended to be entered and explored. *PN2 (Purity is a Myth)* is the smaller closet-like structure of the two, composed of wood panels, each painted a different color, with the phrase 'Purity is a myth' ('a pureza é um mito') printed in Portuguese on the inside. *PN3 (Imagetical)* incorporates fabric coverings and patterns in its larger construction, which weaves around until the visitor confronts the black and white television emitting continuous images and sounds from local stations. These structures are surrounded entirely by sand and gravel pathways which circle the island-like construction. Vibrantly colored macaws occupy another structure and objects scattered throughout — bricks, metal signs and cardboard — display handwritten poems by Roberta Salgado.

*Tropicália*'s sharp characterization of Brazil's conflicted contemporary identity inspired the title of Caetano Veloso's popular anthem against Brazil's dictatorship, but also gave rise to a larger cultural movement addressing the country's changing dynamics titled *Tropicalismo*. Widely regarded as the artist's most important work, combining the many dimensions he explores throughout his practice, *Tropicália* has been included in over twenty major museum exhibitions of the artist's work since its creation. The other two editions (in the edition of three), are held in the permanent collections of the Tate Modern, London, and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid.

While *Tropicália* signifies his first realized architectural project, *Hunting Dogs Project (Projeto cães de caça)*, on view at 508 West 24th Street, set precedents for much of Oiticica's most important work — collaboration, individual contemplation, experiential action, and social interaction — and marks his first invention of a social place and inhabitable site. The work's title comes from a spiral nebula discovered in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by a Polish astronomer who believed it looked like two canines. Created in 1961, it is a maquette for an unrealized public garden, composed of several *Penetrables* meant to resemble a labyrinth or archeological site, as well as a theater to be controlled by the participant, and a set of stacked boxes which the visitor physically excavates, unveiling a buried poem as each layer is removed.

The genesis of Oiticica's ideas for his more ambitious projects came from his early works on paper, where the color and structure begin to become inseparable and start to define the movement into the third dimension. The selection of gouache on cardboard works on view at 508 West 24th Street demonstrate the geometry and intuition of Oiticica's early practice, his engagement with the work of European modernists like Paul Klee, Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich, the influence of his studies with Ivan Serpa, and his association with the pivotal Group Frente in Rio de Janeiro. As the youngest member of this influential group, he led the charge for their innovation with his own distinct exploration of space, color and technique. These works would be distilled of their representative elements, color and surface texture in the late 1950s, evolving into another of Oiticica's well-known series of works, the *Sêcos* and then the *Metaesquemas*. These dynamic compositions begin to break the frame's boundaries, foreshadowing the later works, and expanding the artistic possibilities of painting into another dimension.

By the late 1970s, Oiticica illustrates this influence most literally in a series of works that combine the geometry of his early work with the visionary models for large-scale installation. *Ready Constructible I* (1978) uses the shapes constructed within the *Sêcos* and *Metaesquemas*, to construct a model made of stacked bricks. By this time, he has also further refined the maquette format to create demonstrative structures that suggest a certain visualization of the work's objecthood, thereby creating a purposeful suspension of the specificity of scale.

To coincide with the exhibition, Lisson Gallery will present a rare 1958 *Metaesquema* oil on canvas painting at TEFAF New York Online from November 1 – 4. Oiticica's work is also the subject of a major exhibition this autumn at Museo de Arte de São Paulo – MASP (October 13 – November 22, 2020). *Hélio Oiticica: Dance in My Experience* is curated by Adriano Pedrosa and Tomás Toledo, and investigates the artist's performative works.

## About Hélio Oiticica

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; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, 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 two spaces in London and two in New York, one in Shanghai, as well as temporary spaces opened in 2020 in East Hampton and London's Mayfair district. 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 estates of Leon Polk Smith, Ted Stamm and Roy Colmer. 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, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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Hélio Oiticica

*Tropicália, Penetrables PN 2 'Purity is a myth' and PN 3 'Imagetical', 1967*

Wooden structures, fabric, plastic, carpet, wire mesh, tulle, patchouli, sandalwood, television, sand, gravel, plants, birds and poems by Roberta Camila Salgado

Dimensions variable

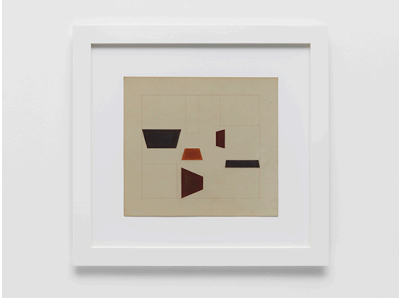
Edition 2 of 3

OITI670001-2

# LISSON GALLERY



Hélio Oiticica  
*Hunting Dogs Project (Projeto cães de caça)* 1961  
Oil on wood, sand  
26 x 161 x 161 cm  
10 1/8 x 63 3/8 x 63 3/8 in  
OIT1610001



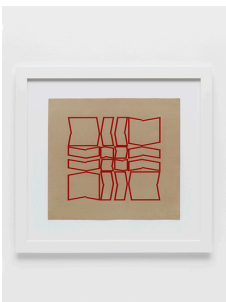
Hélio Oiticica  
*Untitled (Sêco)* 1957  
Gouache on cardboard  
39 x 43.3 cm  
15 1/4 x 17 in  
OIT1570002



Hélio Oiticica  
*Untitled (Sêco)* 1956  
Gouache on cardboard  
39 x 43 cm  
15 1/4 x 16 7/8 in  
OIT1560004

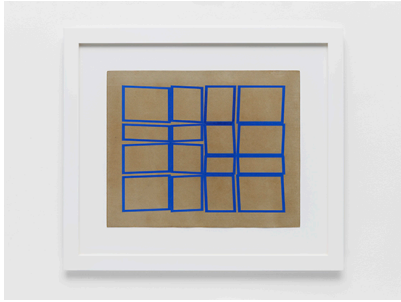


Hélio Oiticica  
*Untitled (Sêco)* 1956  
Gouache on cardboard  
38.9 x 43 cm  
15 1/4 x 16 7/8 in  
OIT1560005



Hélio Oiticica  
*Untitled (Metaesquema)* 1958  
Gouache on cardboard  
53.2 x 58 cm  
20 7/8 x 22 3/4 in  
OIT1580022

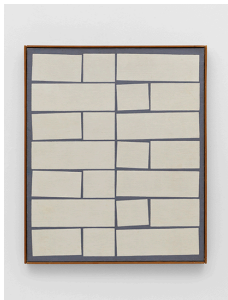
# LISSON GALLERY



Hélio Oiticica  
*Untitled (Metaesquema)* 1958  
Gouache on cardboard  
51.9 x 63.7 cm  
20 3/8 x 25 in  
OIT1580019



Hélio Oiticica  
*Untitled (Metaesquema)* 1958  
Gouache on cardboard  
53.1 x 57.7 cm  
20 7/8 x 22 5/8 in  
OIT1580021



Hélio Oiticica  
*Metaesquema* 1958  
Oil on canvas  
74 x 61 cm  
29 1/8 x 24 in  
OIT1580018



Hélio Oiticica  
*Ready Constructible I* 1978  
Wood, bricks, and earth  
47.3 x 54.9 x 54.9 cm  
18 5/8 x 21 5/8 x 21 5/8 in  
OIT1780002



Hélio Oiticica  
*Untitled (Grupo Frente)* 1955  
Gouache on cardboard  
47.3 x 46 cm  
18 1/2 x 18 in  
OIT1550004

# LISSON GALLERY



Hélio Oiticica  
*Untitled (Grupo Frente)* 1956  
Gouache on cardboard  
60 x 32.4 cm  
23 5/8 x 12 3/4 in  
OIT1560001



Hélio Oiticica  
*Untitled (Grupo Frente)* 1955  
Gouache on cardboard  
47 x 57.8 cm  
18 1/2 x 22 3/4 in  
OIT1550002



Hélio Oiticica  
*Untitled (Grupo Frente)* 1955  
Gouache on cardboard  
30 x 30 cm  
11 3/4 x 11 3/4 in  
OIT1550001