

“Dias’s paintings are deliberately bare and rigorous: often they appear as sequences or iterations of a discourse, inasmuch as they repeat the same graphic elements with very few changes. They have to be grasped as traces of an open, inner progression concerning various collective situations of this historic moment we are living through.”

(Gualtiero Schönenberger, *Antonio Dias. Una collezione 1968-1976*, Studio Marconi, 1995)

Antonio Dias

A Collection

Inauguration: 21 February at 18.00
Exhibition period: 22 February - 14 April 2017

Recognised today as one of Brazil’s leading contemporary artists, Antonio Dias presented his first exhibition *Anywhere is my Land* at Studio Marconi in 1969.

Further shows followed in 1971 and 1987, until 1995, when Giorgio Marconi presented the last exhibition of the Brazilian artist’s work – the same works as those in the current exhibition.

Born in the northeast of Brazil, Dias has a dynamic, ironic temperament, at times sharp and provocative. He was a member of a number of avant-garde groups before departing for Europe. As a gesture of open opposition to the military dictatorship established in Brazil, he moved first to France, where he was able to remain until 1968, due to the painting award he received at the 1965 Paris Biennial. He then chose Milan as his adopted city. In the years that followed, he became a member of the international art scene, particularly in Milan itself, frequenting the circle of artists involved in the Arte Povera movement, among them Luciano Fabro, Giulio Paolini and Gilberto Zorio.

Dias’s art has always dealt with rupture: he has addressed various themes in the form of Conceptual works that are essentially impossible to label. They incorporate a wide range of techniques and are influenced by various artistic movements, such as Pop Art and Minimalism.

The group of works from the Marconi collection presented in this exhibition are from the period 1968 to 1972, and offer a precise and coherent insight into the artistic research of the young Dias, whose signature style was to use an extremely restricted pictorial-graphic code and to investigate the nature of signs, the categories of the imagination, and the uneven and discontinuous manner in which the perceptual dynamics of the work were received by the artist and those viewing it.

The works on display are characterised by graphic-style, black and white geometric painting, designed to reduce the elements to their bare minimum. Dias developed a new, not easily understood conceptual language, partly compensated by the immediacy of words, used according to Magritte’s principle: “In a picture, words have the same substance as images.”

In fact, in Dias’s art words have no denotative value as images; on the contrary, they are dispersed and their meaning dissolved. Even the titles of the paintings are treated like particles: none of them represents itself. And if at first viewers are led to believe there is indeed an intimate, specific meaning, they soon realise that the words taken together lead to a startling revelation: they are all false.

As in Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s language games, where words do not function as strict labels denoting objects, because this is merely one of the many functions of language, one of an infinite number of possible language games, Dias in his turn is not interested in the semantic origin of paintings, and no single text for visual truth exists. Painting and words distributed on the canvas are non-images, particles without form.

Let it Absorb, Monument to All Directions, Environment for the Prisoner, Incomplete Biography, The Day as a Prisoner are just some of the titles of the works on show: phrases that lie between the enigmatic and the insignificant; a ready-made based on advertising jargon or political slogans, in which the word-image association is disconnected and confusing.

Yet there is a leitmotiv running through Dias's art, a possible added value that can orient the way we perceive his work. For instance, with regard to *The Tripper* series, the artist himself has explained that the idea for these works dates back to 1968, when he had the inspiration of making use of the public's preconceived idea about his painting. He had noted that whenever he presented paintings containing white spots on a black background, the only image the public saw was a starry sky.

Struck by the desire to have every observer see different images in his work, Dias decided to study the mental dynamics that trigger the mechanism that makes viewers see the same thing.

And so, after painting an infinite number of dots in white paint on a black background, he began to plot a route by joining some of them with a white line, thus creating a kind of journey that everyone would interpret in their own way; one where a single image gives rise to a variable image, a field open to entirely different interpretations and meanings.

"To trigger in the viewer the mechanism of visual analogies, interior projections, or analytical reasoning: this is the continuous, cerebral movement that interests me. The reason for my choice doesn't matter, I'm not the traveller."
(Antonio Dias, 1995)

Biographical notes

Antonio Dias was born in Campina Grande in the northeast of Brazil in 1944. He later moved to Rio de Janeiro, where he began working as a graphic designer and illustrator, while also following Oswaldo Goeldi's classes at the National School of Fine Arts. In 1964 he held a solo show presented by Pierre Restany at Galeria Relevô in Rio de Janeiro, and also began to exhibit in France. The award of the Paris Biennial Prize in 1965 enabled him to remain in Paris until the end of 1968, when he moved to Milan and began his collaboration with Studio Marconi. In 1971 he was the only South American artist invited to the sixth international art exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, and he spent the following year in the US on a scholarship from the Guggenheim Foundation. His intensive investigation into the function of art as a linguistic and communicative system, and its relationship to the global cultural industry, led him to explore different media: painting, video, photography, installations and artist's books. He also experimented with sound, which led to the creation of *Record: The Space Between*. In 1977 he travelled to India and Nepal, an experience that stimulated works on handmade paper using natural colours. Between 1978 and 1981 he was back in Brazil and at the Federal University of Paraíba, where he founded the Nucleo de Arte Contemporânea, an organisation aimed at promoting the most current research. In the early 1980s he resumed his activities in his Milan studio. In 1984, Helmut Friedel curated a major retrospective of Dias's work at the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich, and Kynaston McShine invited him to take part in a large international exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art. In 1988 he exhibited at the Deutsche Akademische Ausstauschdienst (DAAD); he then moved to Cologne, where he lived for twenty years.

The Mathildenhöhe, Darmstadt, and the Fundação Gulbenkian, Lisbon, both held major exhibitions of his work from 1968 onwards. Meanwhile, Dias continued his collaboration with Giorgio Marconi, who hosted a solo exhibition in 1995. In 1998 Dias took part in the São Paulo Biennale, and in the years that followed, he maintained his intense exhibition agenda at international galleries and museums, among them, the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Niterói; the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; the Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo; the Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, and Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Among the most recent exhibitions have been *Anywhere Is My Land* at Daros Collections, Zurich (2009) and the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (2010); *The World Goes Pop*, Tate Modern, London (2015-2016); *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America 1960-1980*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2015-2016); and *International Pop*, Philadelphia Museum of Art (2016).

Fondazione Marconi Arte moderna e contemporanea

Via Tadino 15 - 20124 Milan

Tel. +39 02 29 41 92 32 – Fax +39 02 29 41 72 78

info@fondazionemarconi.org - www.fondazionemarconi.org

Inauguration: 21 February 2017 at 18.00

Exhibition period: 22 February - 14 April 2017

Opening hours: Tuesday - Saturday 10-13, 15-19

Free entrance

Press office: Cristina Pariset: tel. +39 02 4812584; fax +39 02 4812486

cell. +39 348 5109589 - cristina.pariset@libero.it

IMAGE DOWNLOAD: <http://fileshare.fondazionemarconi.org/index.php/s/hqVvt1TaNC3DBq>