

WHITNEY

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PRESS RELEASE



Hélio Oiticica (b. 1937), PN1 Penetrable (PN1 Penetrável), 1960.
César and Claudio Oiticica Collection, Rio de Janeiro. © César and Claudio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro.

THE WHITNEY TO PRESENT *HÉLIO OITICICA: TO ORGANIZE DELIRIUM*

NEW YORK, NY, April 17, 2017 — *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*, to be presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art from July 14 through October 1, 2017, is the first retrospective to survey the groundbreaking Brazilian artist's entire career, including the formative years he spent in New York in the 1970s. One of the most influential Latin American artists of the post-World War II period, Oiticica (1937–80) was a tireless innovator, from his start with the Neo-Concrete movement to his groundbreaking environmental installations. Co-organized by the Whitney together with the Carnegie Museum of Art and the Art Institute of Chicago, the exhibition presents a wide array of his paintings, interactive sculptures, films, audiovisual works, writings, and environments.

"Oiticica was one of the most daring artists to appear anywhere in the years following World War II," said Elisabeth Sussman, co-curator of the exhibition. "In conceiving this show, it was particularly important to us to focus attention on Oiticica's presence in New York City in the 1970s, a time when many international artists came to live and work here. The expansion of his ideas into film, photography, and writing has been fully explored, as never before, in the research for this exhibition, and the works, some displayed for the first time, identify Oiticica as a paradigmatic presence in the global expansion of art practice in that decade."

Co-curator Donna De Salvo commented: "Oiticica's departure from traditional notions of the static art object and his transformation of the viewer into an active participant were part of a larger, international desire to integrate art and life. Though his reputation is due primarily to his earlier work in Brazil, Oiticica was drawn to the scene of artistic experimentation in New York, and the eight years he spent working in the United States had a huge impact on his thought and continued to shape his art after his return to Brazil. By calling attention to the distinct differences that he absorbed in each locale, we hope to further the notion of art history as one comprised of multiple stories, and emphasize the Whitney's expansive definition of who belongs in a museum of American art. This openness to patterns of artistic migration and cross-cultural thinking has a long history at the Whitney, which we are delighted to extend with this important exhibition."

During his brief but remarkable career, Oiticica seamlessly melded formal and social concerns in his art, seeking to be internationally relevant and, at the same time, specifically Brazilian. The exhibition begins with elegant, geometric works on paper (1955–58): formal investigations in painting and drawing. These dynamic compositions gave way to more

radical works as Oiticica became increasingly interested in surpassing the limits of traditional painting. By 1959, his painterly-sculptural *Spatial Reliefs* and *Nuclei* broke free of the wall and morphed into three dimensional investigations of color and form. The *Nuclei*, composed of panels suspended from the ceiling, created areas through which the viewer could walk.

Throughout the 1960s and '70s, Oiticica moved further toward the destabilization of the art form, making art that is intended for the viewer to manipulate, wear, and inhabit, including his *Parangolés*, wearable paintings inspired in part by samba schools in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, and *Penetrables*, colorful structures for viewers to navigate. In addition to viewing works on display, visitors will be invited to engage interactively with some of the artist's works.

As Oiticica became further concerned with bringing his art into the everyday, he began to create total environments suffused with color, texture, and tactile materials which were increasingly immersive in nature and transformed the viewer from a spectator to an active participant. The exhibition will include a number of these large scale installations, including *Tropicália* and *Eden*. "Tropicália," a name subsequently borrowed by the musician Caetano Veloso for his anthem against Brazil's dictatorship, became an important and powerful movement in all the arts.

Oiticica's move to New York City in 1970 marked a period of deep investigation and experimentation. He arrived in New York shortly after completing a major show at the Whitechapel Gallery in London and conceptualizing the term "creleisure"—a melding of the words creative and leisure which would foreground his New York activity. Intent on engaging the avant-garde art world, Oiticica lived primarily on the Lower East Side, turning his living space into a "Nest" or experimental art environment in which invited friends could engage in "creleisure." During his New York years, Oiticica extended his work into filmmaking, slideshow environments, and ongoing writing projects, including concrete poetry, letters, manifestos, proposals for public art projects, and performative actions throughout the city. Oiticica returned to Brazil in 1978, most of his ambitious New York projects unrealized. This exhibition is the first to treat these later works in depth, acknowledging Oiticica's New York years and his return to Brazil as discrete periods within his career.

About the Artist

Although quite well-known in Brazil, Oiticica has only gradually come to be recognized internationally as one of the most profound and adventurous artists of recent times. Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1937, he was the firstborn child of José Oiticica Filho and Angela Santos Oiticica; his father was a mathematics teacher and entomologist, as well as a photographer and painter, and his grandfather a philologist and the publisher of an anarchist newspaper. When his father was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship in 1947, Hélio and his family, including his two younger brothers, César and Claudio, moved to Washington, D.C. for two years, returning to Rio in 1950. In 1954, Hélio began studying painting with Ivan Serpa, who served as a mentor; he also began writing about art and exploring the work of such painter-writers as Kandinsky, Klee, Malevich, and Mondrian. In the mid-1950s, Hélio became a member of Grupo Frente, a Rio-based group of artists, led by Serpa, whose members included Lygia Clark, Abraham Palatnik, Lygia Pape, and Franz Weissmann, and began exhibiting his work in group shows; in 1959, he joined the Grupo Neoconcreto at the invitation of Lygia Clark and art critic/poet Ferreira Gullar. At about this time, he moved from painting on cardboard to wood and canvas.

In 1965 Oiticica participated in the exhibition "Soundings Two" at Signals Gallery, London, with Albers, Brancusi, Lygia Clark, and Duchamp among others. In 1969 he had a solo exhibition at Whitechapel Art Gallery, London. In the same year, he was a resident artist at Sussex University, Brighton. In 1970 he participated in the exhibition "Information" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In the 1970s, during which time he moved to New York for most of the decade, Oiticica increasingly devoted himself to writing. In 1978 Oiticica returned to Rio, where he died in 1980 at the age of 42.

Catalogue

A fully illustrated catalogue covering the artist's entire career in essays by authors from the United States and Latin America accompanies the exhibition. Contributors to the catalogue include Lynn Zelevansky, Adele Nelson, Guilherme Wisnik, James Rondeau, Elisabeth Sussman, Martha Scott Burton, Anna Katherine Brodbeck, Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz, Federico Coelho, Sérgio B. Martins, Irene V. Small, and Donna De Salvo. The book includes a chronology of Oiticica's life, a selected posthumous exhibition history, and a selected bibliography. The foreword is by Lynn Zelevansky, James Rondeau, and Adam D. Weinberg.

Organizers

Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium is organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; and The Art Institute of Chicago.

Curatorial Credits

Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium is curated by Lynn Zelevansky, The Henry J. Heinz II Director, Carnegie Museum of Art; Elisabeth Sussman, Curator and Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography, Whitney Museum of American Art; James

Rondeau, President and Eloise W. Martin Director, The Art Institute of Chicago; and Donna De Salvo, Deputy Director for International Initiatives and Senior Curator, Whitney Museum of American Art; with Anna Katherine Brodbeck, associate curator, Carnegie Museum of Art.

Sponsors

Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium is organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; and the Art Institute of Chicago.

Support for the national tour of this exhibition is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists at a time when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for more than eighty years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists themselves, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

<i>Fast Forward: Painting from the 1980s</i>	Through May 14, 2017
Whitney Biennial 2017	Through June 11, 2017
<i>Where We Are: Selections from the Whitney's Collection</i>	Opens April 28, 2019
<i>Calder: Hypermobility</i>	June 9–October 23, 2017
Bunny Rogers	Summer 2017
<i>Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium</i>	July 14–October 1, 2017
<i>Jimmie Durham: At the Center of the World</i>	November 3, 2017–January 28, 2018
Laura Owens	November 2017–February 2018
<i>David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night</i>	Summer 2018

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Museum hours are: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday from 10:30 am to 6 pm; Friday and Saturday from 10:30 am to 10 pm. Closed Tuesday. Adults: \$22 in advance via whitney.org; \$25 day of visit. Full-time students and visitors 65 & over: \$17 in advance via whitney.org; \$18 day of visit. Visitors 18 years & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit whitney.org.

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