

## THE ETERNAL EXPERIMENTAL EXERCISE...

Jeanine Toledo

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I keep wondering what the role of the artist is nowadays. In other words, what is the artist's behavior in light of the demands of the current world?

The political positions that the artist shall have in the society goes back to the old times. In the past, there were demands coming from the aristocracy and the church and the artists had to adapt or rebel against the conventions of the period. There were always the 'sponsor' dictating the paths to their orders.

I think that may be the role of the artist, even in respect of entering the circuit and everything that involves it, is to be able to speak about pressing things related to the current universe, as Aracy Amaral<sup>1</sup> (2016) says "but, if the artist is the antenna of the world, as Pound used to say in other words, we should be able to see more, through the art and we are not seeing this".

I am from Alagoas and moved to Recife to attend college in the late 1970s. At the time, I wanted to have attended *Belas Artes* (Fine Arts), but the school had closed. Therefore, as I have always liked to draw, I thought I would like to create brands and ended up graduating in Visual Design.

After I graduated, I felt that visual design was not exactly what fulfilled me. As I really liked to paint, I felt the need to dive head first in painting. In painting I found myself, it challenged me every day and it was a relationship of passion and dialog between the picture and me. In it, I felt fulfilled.

My work in painting followed a German expressionist line. At that time in Brazil, especially in the Southeast (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro) there was an artistic movement to resume the painting, a movement that culminated in the anthological exhibition in Rio de Janeiro called "*Como vai você, geração 80?* (how are you, 80s generation?)", Rio de Janeiro 1984. It was an exhibition that wanted not only to bring back painting but to also show what the artists were doing during the period of military dictatorship in Brazil. Many exponents of such exhibitions remain working in this cause until the present day, such as Luiz Zerbini, Beatriz Mihazes, Leda Catunda and Cristina Canale. This outlook evidenced that the 1980s represented not only the return of painting but also a path to rapprochement to the image.

At the time, in Pernambuco, there was a true collective effervescence in visual arts. Pernambuco always has had a tradition of painting, since the very beginning when the Dutch Frans Post went to Recife in 1637. He portrayed better than anyone had done the

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<sup>1</sup> Aracy Abreu Amaral, São Paulo, 22 de fevereiro de 1930 is an art critic and curator of art currently full professor of History of Art for the Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo of USP. She was also director of the Pinacoteca of the State of São Paulo (1975-1979) and of the Museu de Arte Contemporânea of the University of São Paulo (1982-1986) and member of the International Committee of Prince Claus Fund Awards, in Hague, Netherlands.

landscape and the costumes. His style, predominantly figurative, continued for many generations for centuries.

Of the Brazilian Northeastern states, the state of Pernambuco was the one that stood-out the most for always have being a birthplace of wonderful artists, such as Telles Junior (1851-1914), Vicente do Rêgo Monteiro (1899-1970), Cícero Dias (1907-2003), Francisco Brennand (1927), João Câmara (1944), Paulo Bruscky (1949), among others.

I inherited such tradition. My work has always had references to the body, or parts of it, contextualizing the history of art, the memory, the time. Many times, I have used iconic pieces of the history of art as theme to my work and as a way to question its canons.

I have always worked alone, I have never included myself in any group, something that was common at the time. My work reflected some of this condition, to the margin. With the passing of time, I realized the need to give more context to the things I did. Painting only for painting's sake did not bring answers to my restlessness. Therefore, in the end of the 1990s, I started working in other materials and technics and, due to this change, I also realized the need to speak more about my work. This was a difficult thing to an artist like myself, who got involved with the painting in "dionisic" way. I never though painting should be explained. Painting is painting and it immediately captures you or you can pass by it unaffected. Explanations are not for fruition. But contemporaneously, the artistic circuit started to demand contexts, specially large texts, true manuals, to explain art works. Something that I have always thought to be boring.

Among the exhibitions I made, I highlight two that I consider to be very satisfying to me. They were *Uns e Outros* (Ones and Others) and *A Lente Turva* (The Blurry Lens), respectively in 2003 and 2007 in Recife. Both addressed in a very clear way a big part of my poetic being.

In the first, I was inspired by artists that were part of my "genealogic tree". I heard once from a Brazilian artist who I admire very much, Nelson Leirner (1932), that we have an artistic genealogic tree. On it, there are the names of the artists who influence us, with whom you can identify or have identified throughout your artistic path. The ones that are closer to your poetic are your parents, siblings; a little further are the cousins, uncles and aunts. In *Uns e Outros*, I listed my artistic "genealogic tree". I used their works, phrases, adapting them to my own context. All the pieces were created in many materials and technics in accordance with the need, such as videos, paintings and photos.

In the second, *A Lente Turva*, I started with a research on the role of women during the decades of the history of art. This because it has always intrigued me the role of women during the centuries of the history of art, as only an Object and not the Subject of the artwork. I made a thorough research to find out who were the first leading women and how some iconic pieces, even the ones that were created by men, had women portrayed in an active and not passive attitude<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> At the time, I also found out the first leading female in painting, the amazing Artemisia Gentileschi, an artist of the 17th century, whose talent may be evidenced by the fact that she was the first woman to be admitted to the Florence Academy of Fine Arts, in Italy, the same that Michelangelo attended. Artemisia suffered with the apathy and rejection of the artistic

All the works of the exhibition basically showed my own protagonism as the Subject of the art work, the artist that revisited the history of art doing a review of the iconic pieces that had women as the Object. It gave me great satisfaction to make this exhibition, from the researches until the final result. I understood that the artist can and should create beautiful things based in concepts and questions that are prevailing and surrounding us.

After having allowed myself to go through other tecnicos and materials, I also could see the fields expanding in my own artwork. I found out that, despite the manuals, textbooks and various explanations, what really matters is the power of the artwork that speaks for itself. I found the freedom to create without attachments. Maybe that is what Mário Pedrosa<sup>3</sup> referred to, when he said: “art is the experimental exercise of freedom” (Freitas, 2015)<sup>4</sup>.

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### BIONOTE

Jeanine Lima Toledo (Maceió / AL, 1962) graduated in visual communication from UFPE, Recife, in 1983. Her work is focused on painting and sculpture, with an emphasis on the representation of parts of the human body. Without neglecting artisanal production, she also contemplates conceptual issues in her work. From the appropriation of a phrase by Waltercio Caldas “What is art? Art is this?” she gives a new direction to her artistic research, which still refers to the body but reflects and questions the nature of current art.

Email: [jeanine.toledo@gmail.com](mailto:jeanine.toledo@gmail.com)

Av. Flor de Santana, 139 apt 401 - Parnamirim, Recife, PE CEP: 52060290, Brazil.

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world of the time for being a woman, and went through the humiliation of seeing the authorship of her paintings attributed to her father and other male artists. She had already started painting strong female figures, inspired by the bible and mythology, but with a new perception: the one of the subject of the art. It took a long time until for her artistic value was recognized. Only in the decade of 1970, Artemisia became a symbol of feminism.

<sup>3</sup> Mário Pedrosa, April 25, 1901 – November 11, 1981. Art critic, journalist and professor.

<sup>4</sup> The art critic invented in the 1960s the expression “experimental exercise of freedom (exercício experimental da liberdade)”. The expression was created when Pedrosa saw himself confronted by art problems, which, every time more, he refused the pure form and took conceptual path. The critic then stated reconsidering the dissolution of the project that presented itself as the succession of ismos.

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