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Five Women Artists in Brazil in the 1990s

Art Basel OVR

28–31 Oct 2020

Leda Catunda | Jac Leirner | Beatriz Milhazes

Valeska Soares | Adriana Varejão

Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel is delighted to present *Five Women Artists in Brazil in the 1990s*. The project, specially developed for Basel OVR20c, comprehends major historical works by Brazilian artists Leda Catunda, Jac Leirner, Beatriz Milhazes, Valeska Soares and Adriana Varejão, whose works have achieved an undeniable relevance and whose presence was central to the vibrant scene that flourished in Brazil in the late 1980s and 1990s. To this day, these artists remain leading female voices as we continue to struggle with issues of gender inequality and witness fierce discussions about female representativeness in the most diverse sectors of society.

The 1990s in particular were a pivotal moment for the acknowledgement of Brazilian contemporary art, its prolific and powerful production. Emerging at a time when the country saw the end of its military dictatorship, this is the generation that could finally engage in a global dialogue. From Soares's sensorial installations to Leirner's formal rigor, Catunda's poetics of softness, Milhazes's dizzying compositions, to Varejão's pictorial investigation of transcultural history, these bodies of work articulate local lexicon with universal resonance.

Leda Catunda

São Paulo, 1961

Leda Catunda in her studio, 1998
Ph: Juan Esteves



In *Gotas Coloridas III* (1998) several tear shaped modules in shades of deep crimson and burgundy are sewn together and overlaid. The organic forms of cascading drops are somewhere between plant and critter precariously poised within our quotidian perception, and continuously morphing into other signs. Those modules, half soft and half stiff with thick brushstrokes of black acrylic paint, challenge conventional painting. The seductive reliefs of the overlapping planes seem to gain a particular beat, in the inclusion of drops, formed in places where one plane penetrates another.

“In these paintings by Leda Catunda, the space is made in a process of self-multiplication. In paintings such as *Gotas*, without delimiting the chassis or organizing them by a logical method, the gaze could be confronted with a flood of drops or with a plague of insects of proliferating forms that would invade the world and stifle the gaze. Chassis and order is what keeps us at a distance from epidemic ferocity. We are faced with ideas of excess-presence as well as excess-absence” (Paulo Herkenhoff. *Leda Catunda, o pincel e o conta-gotas*. Catálogo [exhibition catalogue] Galeria Camargo Vilaça, São Paulo, 1996.)

[Click here for more information on the artist](#)

LEDA CATUNDA
Gotas Coloridas III, 1998
Acrílico sobre veludo
[Acrylic on velvet]
192 x 130 cm



LEDA CATUNDA
Gotas Coloridas III, 1998





LEDA CATUNDA
Gotas Coloridas III, 1998
Detalhe [Detail]



LEDA CATUNDA
Gotas Coloridas III, 1998
Detalhe [Detail]



LEDA CATUNDA
Gotas Coloridas III, 1998

Histórico de exposições [Exhibition history]

1998 *Leda Catunda*, Galeria Camargo Vilaça, São Paulo, Brazil

Bibliografia [Bibliography]

1998 CHIARELLI, Tadeu. Texto [catalogue text]: *Leda Catunda*. São Paulo, Cosac&Naify.

Casca (1997) was made by layering pink fabric on a tridimensional pear-shaped base, then painting it with nude tones of acrylic. Leda Catunda has always looked to push the boundaries of painting to its utter limit, adamantly avoiding the conventional canvas. In this important work the artist reverts to a shape – typical of her work – between the abstract and the organic. The title *Casca* (literally rind or shell) suggests we are in the presence of something that could be simultaneously hard and soft, both limitation and opening, not unlike the human skin.

LEDA CATUNDA

Casca, 1997

Acrilica sobre tela e tecido

[Acrylic on canvas and fabric]

140 x 130 x 20 cm



LEDA CATUNDA
Casca, 1997





LEDA CATUNDA
Casca, 1997
Detalhe [Detail]



LEDA CATUNDA
Casca, 1997



Leda Catunda
Paço Imperial | Rio de Janeiro, 1997

Histórico de exposições [Exhibition history]

- 1998 *Leda Catunda*, Casa da Imagem, Curitiba, Brazil
- 1998 *A Tríplice Mostra*, Galeria Kolams, Belo Horizonte, Brazil
- 1997 Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Bibliografia [Bibliography]

- 1998 CHIARELLI, Tadeu. Texto [catalogue text]: *Leda Catunda*. São Paulo, Cosac&Naify.
- 1998 Catálogo de exposição [exhibition catalogue]: *Leda Catunda*. Curitiba, Galeria Casa da Imagem.

Jac Leirner

São Paulo, 1961

Jac Leirner, 1986
Ph: Luiz Anhaia Melo



Part of Jac Leirner's critical body of work *Todos os Cem* (1998) is made entirely from worthless banknotes during a period of hyperinflation in Brazil. The title is a suggestive pun on their value as 'cem' in Portuguese means one hundred whilst its homophone 'sem' means without. The work questions notions of value – material, economic, artistic – possessing a strange intimacy as embodiments of modern human interactions.

While amassing an astonishing number of bills that are normally dispersed in space and time the artist noticed that most bills carried graffiti, drawings, comments and messages left by previous owners. Leirner began to produce a series of wall works where she organized the bills by theme -love, sex, religion, politics among them- as well as by their more formal qualities of color and size.

[Click here for more information on the artist](#)



JAC LEIRNER

Todos os Cem, 1998

Cédulas de dinheiro [Brazilian banknotes]

54 x 76 cm



JAC LEIRNER
Todos os Cem, 1998
Detalhe [Detail]



JAC LEIRNER
 Todos os Cem, 1998
 Detalhe [Detail]



JAC LEIRNER
Todos os Cem, 1998

A certain poetry of absence comes into play in *Fantasma/Ghost* (1998). This piece is the shadow of another artwork titled *Os Cem* consisting of old banknotes turned worthless by a period of hyperinflation in the Brazilian economy in the 1980s. *Fantasma/Ghost* is a reproduction made with white, blank paper cut in the exact same size as the original notes. Both are winding and sinuous, however *Os Cem* carries the weight of history, of the value and intermittent circulation of these notes, while *Fantasma/Ghost* is a virgin stand-in suggesting stories that still have to unfold, a silent companion for its double. In the artist's words: "it was like a shadow of the other (*Os Cem*), despite its whiteness - a shadow in the sense that, although real, it had no printed value."

This body of work has been exhibited in several institutions, often conceived as a work in situ. The presentation at the Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art (Malmö, 1991) for instance took over the corridors and stairs of the museum. It was a wandering presence, ultimately concerned with the use of the exhibition space as a medium where artistic work develops.



JAC LEIRNER
Fantasma / Ghost, 1998
Papel e cabo de aço [Paper and steel cable]
7,5 x 15 x 480 cm



JAC LEIRNER
Fantasma / Ghost, 1998
Detalhe [Detail]



JAC LEIRNER
Fantasma / Ghost, 1998



Jac Leirner
Museu de Arte da Pampulha | Belo Horizonte, 2006

Histórico de exposições [Exhibition history]

- 2019 *#tbt*, Carpintaria, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2013 *Correspondências*, Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo; Centro Cultural Correios, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 2012 *Parque Industrial*, Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo, Brazil
- 2011 *Exigências do Presente*, Centro Universitário Maria Antônia, São Paulo, Brazil
- 2006 *Jac Leirner*, Museu de Arte da Pampulha, Belo Horizonte, Brazil



Beatriz Milhazes

Rio de Janeiro, 1960

Beatriz Milhazes in her studio, 1996

Romântico Americano (1998) represents fully Milhazes' interests in the 1990s. The central motif is heavily painted in an intense arrangement of frills, flowers and circles that unfold into a precise composition of concentric movements. The uninhibited expression of color and elaborate motifs echoes the vibrancy of Milhazes' Brazilian heritage. Oscillating between figuration and abstraction, rich cultural references emerge from the vivid chromatic patterns. The intricate web of lace and beads results in a balanced picture which retains an organic feel in its wildly colorful combination of graceful arabesques, geometric abstraction, and floral arrangements. As the artist has identified, *"I am an abstract painter and I speak an international language, but my interest is in things and behaviors that can only be found in Brazil"* (B. Milhazes, quoted in A. Drucks, 'Beatriz Milhazes: No Fear of Beauty', in ArtMag, 2012, n.p.).

[Click here for more information on the artist](#)



BEATRIZ MILHAZES

Romântico Americano, 1998

Óleo sobre tela [Oil on canvas]

189 x 219 cm



BEATRIZ MILHAZES
Romântico Americano, 1998
Detalhe [Detail]



BEATRIZ MILHAZES
Romântico Americano, 1998
Detalhe [Detail]



BEATRIZ MILHAZES
Romântico Americano, 1998

Histórico de exposições [Exhibition history]

2014 *Jardim Botânico*, Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, USA

1998 *Beatriz Milhazes*, Galeria Anna Maria Niemeyer, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

In *Fresca e disposta como uma compota* (1992), Milhazes successfully blends aesthetic qualities of the iconic Hispanic imagery of the Virgin of Guadalupe with her own artistic ideology. She looks as much to the Brazilian cultural history of the Baroque as to the work of European Modernists such as Henri Matisse, Fernand Leger and Robert Delauney. In a kaleidoscopic vision, series of layered frills are punctuated by roses in a shape that mimics the mandorla depicted around the Virgin of Guadalupe. In Milhazes' characteristic style, the visually stimulating composition is energetic and dynamic in its organic progression with vibrant colors in undulating forms.

“From the late-eighties to the mid-nineties, I was developing my own language in painting. I found in Hispanic culture a complexity of imagery that interested me deeply, especially in folk imagery and church architecture such as The Virgin of Guadalupe symbols, the rooms full of ex-votos, and the simplicity of the altars with their bare painted walls contrasting with the Baroque saints.” (B. Milhazes in an interview with Arto Lindsay, published in *Parkett* v. 85, 2009)

BEATRIZ MILHAZES

Fresca e disposta como uma compota, 1992

Óleo, aquarela e tinta metálica sobre tela

[Oil, watercolor and metallic paint on canvas]

197 x 103 cm





BEATRIZ MILHAZES

Fresca e disposta como uma compota, 1992

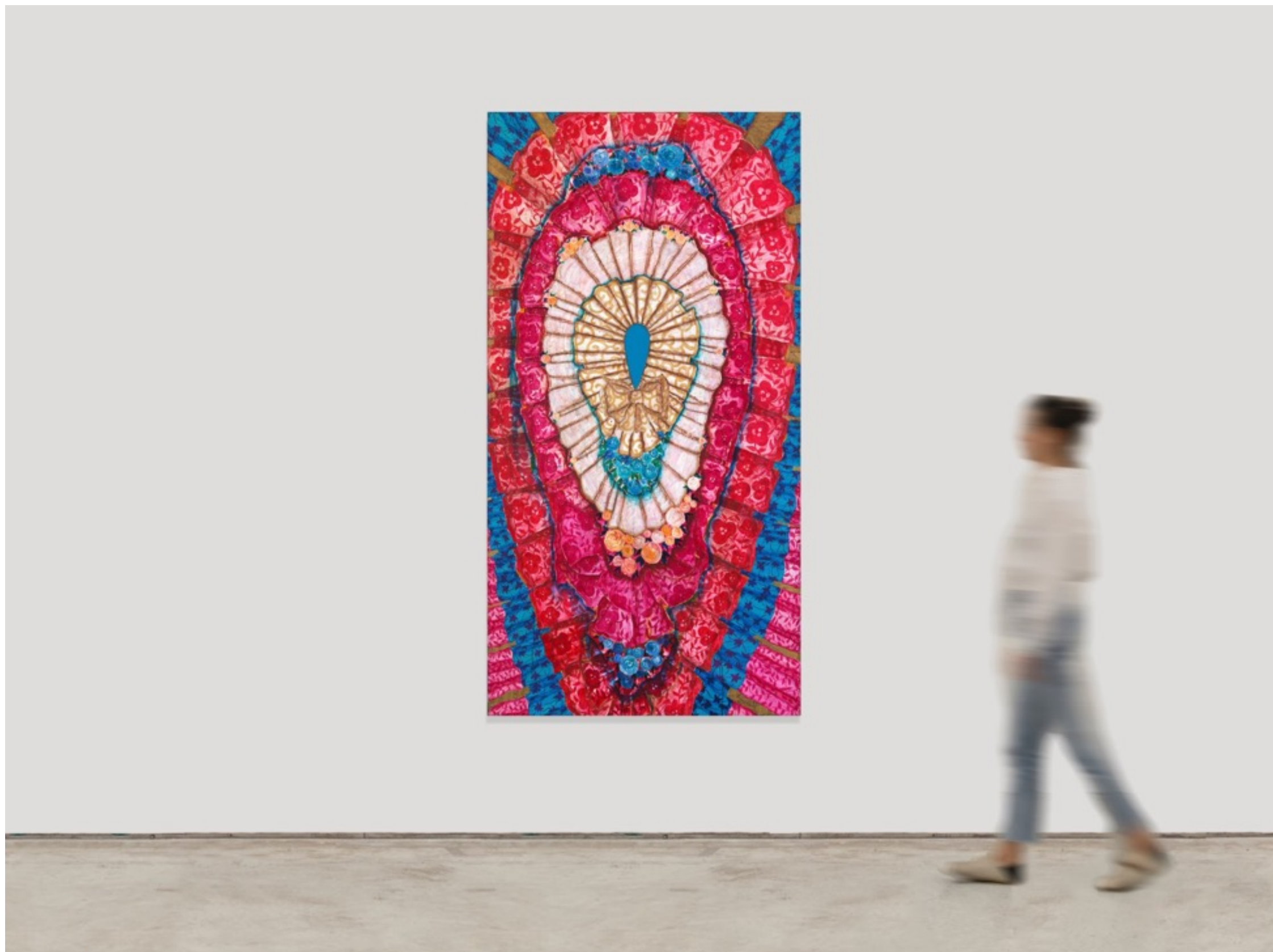
Detalhe [Detail]



BEATRIZ MILHAZES

Fresca e disposta como uma compota, 1992

Detalhe [Detail]



BEATRIZ MILHAZES
Fresca e disposta como uma compota, 1992

Histórico de exposições [Exhibition history]

1993 *Beatriz Milhazes: pinturas recentes*, Sala Alternativa Artes Visuales, Caracas, Venezuela.



Valeska Soares

Belo Horizonte, 1957

Valeska Soares, 1989

Campo Minado (1989) is composed of two antagonist elements, a cast iron sphere is found on the verge of falling on a cluster of white feathers. The physical proximity between the two opposites leaves the spectator feeling uneasy, with a sense of imminent danger. The nest form refers to the idea of receptivity, maternity and lightness, which contrasts with the threatening presence of the iron ball. At first glance the piece may seem harmonious, yet it is evident that considering the different weights and materials, contact between these objects would lead to mutual destruction. Soares' work often explores the point of transition from one physical or psychological state to another and her installations repeatedly employ contrasting materials revealing her interest in matters of subjectivity, perception, reflection, and distortion.

"People tend to just see romance in my work, but I think it's perverse; it always has a darker side." (V. Soares quoted in Evan Moffitt, *My Influences*, Frieze Sept. 2018)

[Click here for more information on the artist](#)

VALESKA SOARES
Campo Minado, 1989
Penas e ferro fundido
[Feathers and cast iron]
30 x 30 x 30 cm



VALESKA SOARES
Campo Minado, 1989





VALESKA SOARES
Campo Minado, 1989

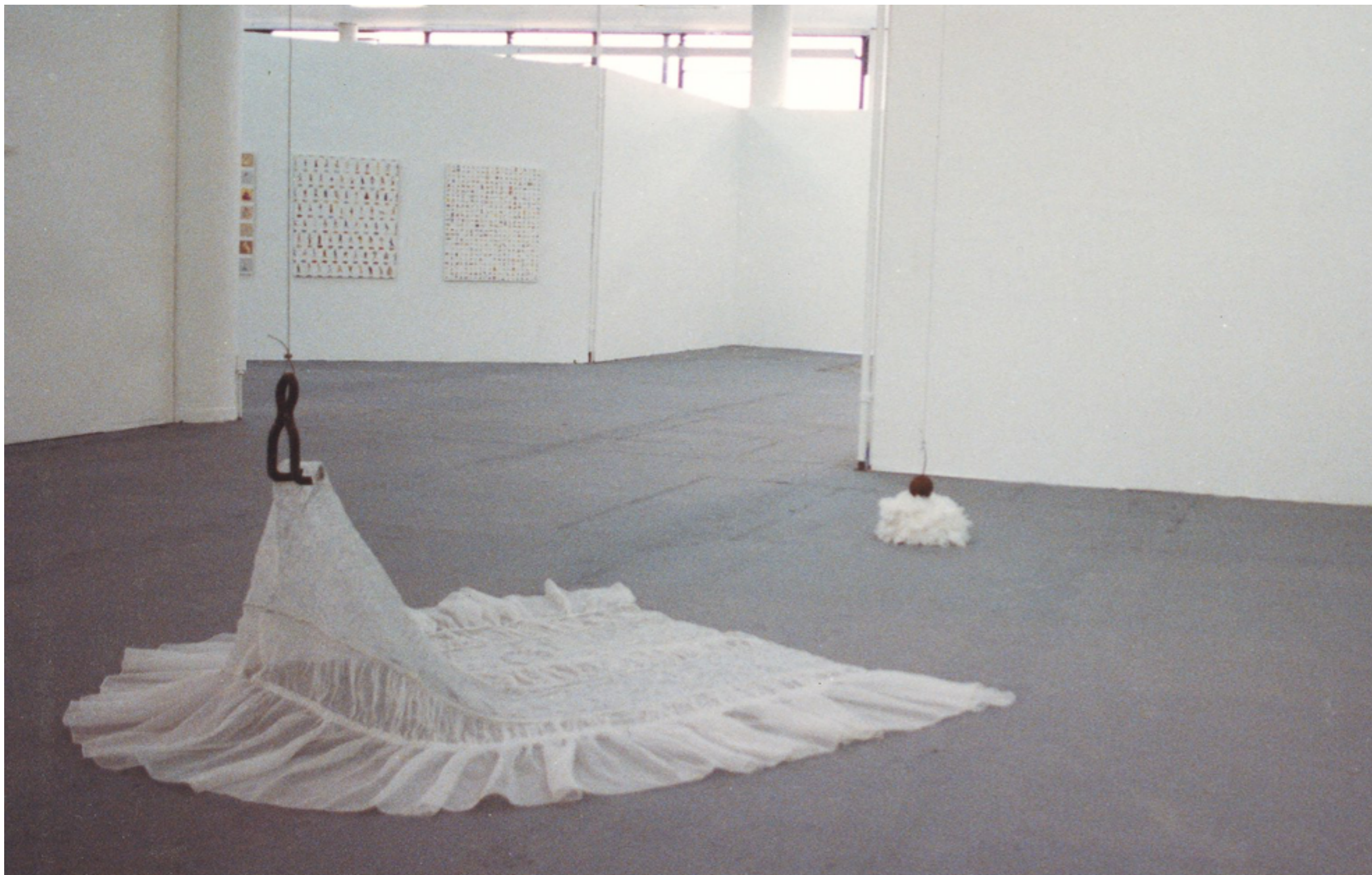


VALESKA SOARES
Campo Minado, 1989
Detalhe [Detail]



Entrementes

Estação Pinacoteca | São Paulo, 2018



XI Salão Nacional de Artes Plásticas
Funarte | Rio de Janeiro, 1989

Histórico de exposições [Exhibition history]

2018 *Entrementes*, Estação Pinacoteca, São Paulo, Brazil

1999 Centro Cultural Sérgio Porto, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

1989 XI Salão Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Funarte, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Bibliografia [Bibliography]

2018 REBOUÇAS, Júlia. Catalogo de exposição [exhibition catalogue]: *Valeska Soares: Entrementes*. Textos [Texts]: Rebouças, Julia; Rjeille, Isabella; Rocha, Melissa; do Carmo M.P. de Pontes, Maria. São Paulo, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo.

Adriana Varejão

Rio de Janeiro, 1964

Adriana Varejão in her studio, 1991



Linha Equinocial (1993) sets up a complex dialogue using broken pieces of porcelain, painted renderings of the ocean, and colored string to create a compelling installation that draws on the history of the colonization of Brazil. On the one hand, it is a play on ruins, decomposition and fragmentation; on the other there is reconstruction, recomposition and collage. The finely painted porcelain —a symbol of the finer objects that travelled overseas— are broken shards set besides bloody wounds that permeate the canvas. The wounds not only disrupt our relation with the object, but also represent the untold violence that lurks between the retellings of the colonization of South America.

"The representations of the seas point to the map, as does the title of the work, which refers to the equator line. If the seas and the world are found represented in the painting by way of synecdoche, the shards of porcelain, in their three dimensionality, are true fragments (...) The shard is connected to the wound image, both as the trauma and the outcome of a break with the existing order or integrity, be it cultural or territorial, or physical and bodily" (Adriano, PEDROSA in *Histórias às Margens*, published by Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 2013, p.55)

[Click here for more information on the artist](#)



ADRIANA VAREJÃO
Linha Equinocial, 1993
Oleo sobre tela, porcelana e linha de poliamida
[Oil on canvas, porcelain and polyamide thread]
220 x 160 cm



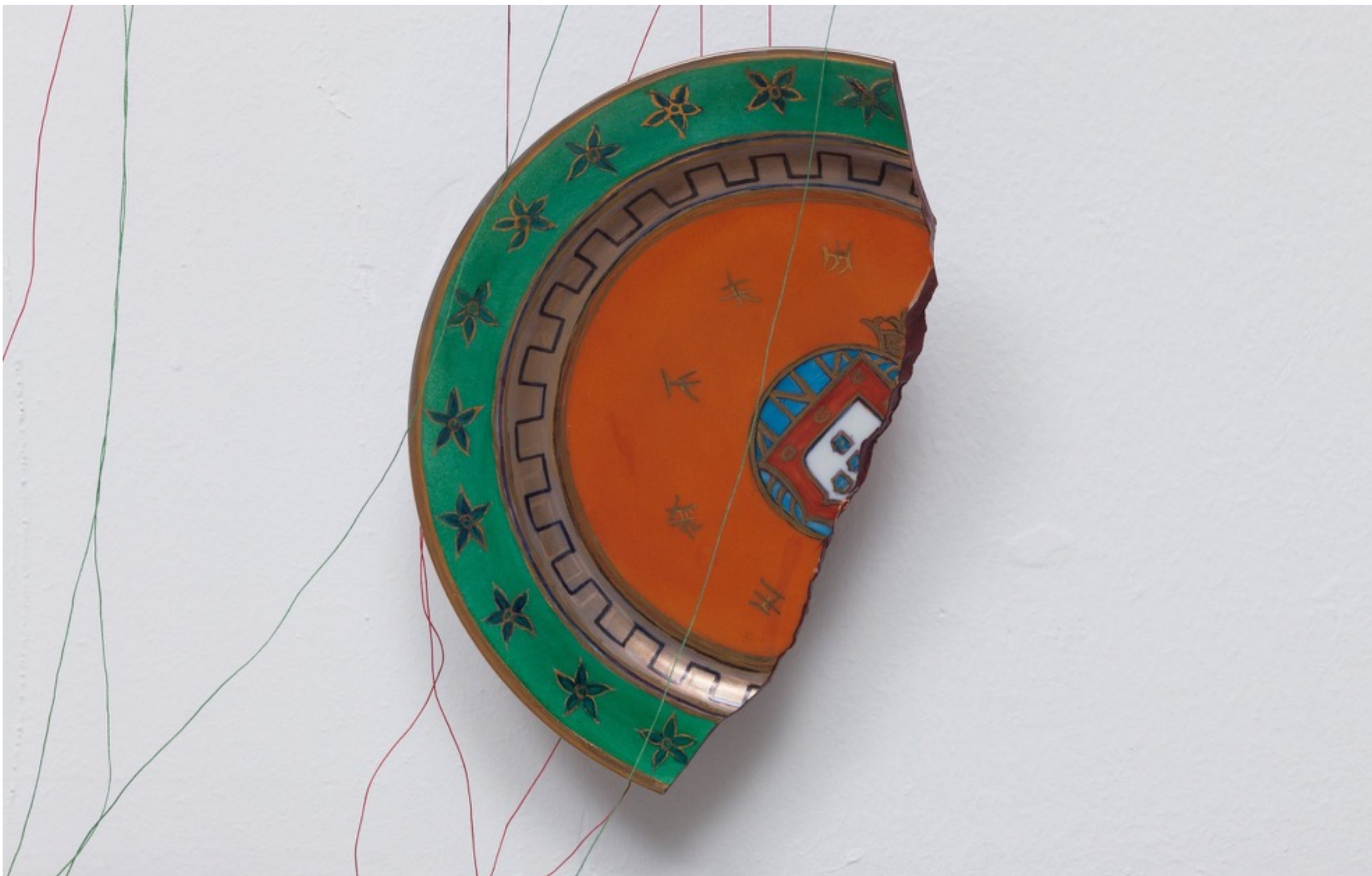
ADRIANA VAREJÃO
Linha Equinocial, 1993
Detalhe [Detail]



ADRIANA VAREJÃO
Linha Equinocial, 1993
Detalhe [Detail]



ADRIANA VAREJÃO
Linha Equinocial, 1993
Detalhe [Detail]



ADRIANA VAREJÃO
Linha Equinocial, 1993
Detalhe [Detail]



Adriana Varejão: Por uma Retórica Canibal

MAMAM – Museu de Arte Moderna Aloisio Magalhães | Recife, 2019



Histórias às Margens

MALBA – Museu de Arte Latino-Americana de Buenos Aires | Buenos Aires, 2013



Histórias às Margens

MAM-RJ – Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro | Rio de Janeiro, 2013

Histórico de exposições [Exhibition history]

- 2019 *Adriana Varejão: por uma retórica canibal*, Museu de Arte Moderna Aloisio Magalhães (MAMAM), Recife, Brazil
Adriana Varejão: por uma retórica canibal, Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, Salvador, Brazil
- 2013 *Histórias às margens*, Museu de Arte Latino-Americana de Buenos Aires (MALBA), Buenos Aires, Argentina
Histórias às margens, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ), Brazil
- 2012 *Histórias às margens*, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), Brazil
- 2007 *Adriana Varejão*, Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan
- 1997 *I Bienal de Artes Visuais do Mercosul*, Porto Alegre, Brazil
- 1995 *Adriana Varejão*, Annina Nosei Gallery, New York, USA
TransCulture, The 46th Venice Biennale, Palazzo Giustinian Lolin, Venice, Italy
- 1993 *Adriana Varejão: Proposta para uma catequese*, Thomas Cohn Arte Contemporânea, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
De Río a Río: Cuatro artistas brasilenõs de la galería Thomas Cohn, Galería OMR, Mexico City, Mexico

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- 2014 SCHWARCZ, Lilia Moritz; VAREJÃO, Adriana. *Pérola Imperfeita: A história e as histórias na obra de Adriana Varejão*. Rio de Janeiro, Cobogó.
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MORAES, Marcos. Coleção Folha Grandes Pintores Brasileiros; v.5: *Adriana Varejão*. São Paulo, Folha de S. Paulo; Instituto Itaú Cultural.
- 2009 DIEGUES, Isabel. *Adriana Varejão: entre carnes e mares [Between Flesh and Oceans]*. Textos [texts]: Santiago, Silviano; Schwarcz, Lilia Moritz; Schøllhammer, Karl Erik; Osorio, Luiz Camillo; Cartaxo, Zalinda. Rio de Janeiro, Cobogó.
- 2007 HARA MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART. Catálogo da exposição [exhibition catalogue]: *Adriana Varejão*. Tokyo, Hara Museum of Contemporary Art.
- 2001 NERI, Louise. *Adriana Varejão*. Texto [text]: Herkenhoff, Paulo. São Paulo, Takano.
- 1998 BAPTISTA, Josely Vianna; FARIA, Francisco. *Gazeta do Povo: Estesia vertiginosa do corpo*. Curitiba, June 1998.
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- 1996 HERKENHOFF, Paulo. *Adriana Varejão: Pintura / Sutura [Painting / Suturing]*. São Paulo, Galeria Camargo Vilaça.
- 1995 THE JAPAN FOUNDATION. Catálogo da exposição [Exhibition catalogue]: *TransCulture. The 46th Venice Biennale*. Venice; Tokyo, The Japan Foundation.
HARRIS, Susan. *Art in America: Adriana Varejão at Annina Nosei*. New York, May 1995, vol. 83, nº 5, p.121.
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- 1993 HERKENHOFF, Paulo. Catálogo de exposição [exhibition catalogue]: *Adriana Varejão: Proposta para uma catequese*. Rio de Janeiro, Thomas Cohn Arte Contemporânea.
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