

RODOLPHO PARIGI . UNTITLED

CURATED BY **IVO MESQUITA**

OPENING: 10.04.2018 FROM 5 TO 10 PM

FROM APRIL 11 TO MAY 12 . MONDAY TO SATURDAY FROM 10 AM TO 7 PM



La Danse (detail), 2018 . 290 x 500 cm . oil on canvas

THE IMAGE OF THE IMAGE OF THE IMAGE; THE PAINTING OF THE PAINTING OF THE PAINTING

by Ivo Mesquita

The boom of so-called postmodern art in the 1980s, after more than 40 years of important developments and extensive production, can now be seen in its full significance, beyond being a reaction to minimalism and conceptual art, or a market strategy: it was a transformative and consistent moment, constituting a starting point for the art produced today. In contrast to neo-expressionism, neo-geo, postminimal, postconceptual – names suggested not only for painting, but also for a variety of works of different expressions in manifestations that have broadened the artistic practices and institutional agendas since then – this production today looks less close to its historical predecessors. The boom now sounds like the implosion or shattering brought on by the politico-culturalist debate in the artistic and intellectual (creative and academic) circuits, with the multiplication of perspectives and strategies, discourses and agendas, stemming from globalization and the adhesions and/or reactions to it. In this period, art and its entire system – organization, professionalization, market, institutions, agendas – were redimensioned and transformed into a powerful economy, simultaneously consolidating a strategic territory for the clashing and visibility of questions that drive the relations, knowledge and demands in the social field.

On the one hand, it is notable how its rise was leveraged by the experience of feminism in the confrontation with sociocultural questions during the 1970s, and which allowed for the emergence of a more pluralist, inclusive and cosmopolitan era, engaging in and raising awareness about the artistic practices and diversified programs, with many artists – men and women – who use art as a form of trench warfare for their personal political stands. There was certainly appropriation or sequester of strategies, outlooks and techniques of the previous generations (tradition, the territory or discipline, and the institution are parts of the game), but the questions problematized at that moment seem to be the same ones the circuit is concerned with today: gender, identity, prejudice, inclusion, censorship, injustice and violence. Uniqueness and diversity – woman, homosexual, black, Latino, Indian, migrant, trans, white, religious – gave way to the exercise of micropolitics as a resistance

to macropolitics and to the hegemonic and totalizing discourses in the art system and in contemporary society in general.

On the other hand, it is also remarkable what happened with painting in particular. Rescued from its geometric (boredom) and abstract-expressionist (exhaustion) death by Andy Warhol with his silkscreen paintings and by Robert Rauschenberg with his *Combines*, painting did not return in postmodernity as a ghost, something repressed to fuel the market; rather, converted into an image (concepts/sense/meaning), it had its narrative prolonged, its practice expanded, for better or worse. Strategies of appropriation, citation, and collage, or the notions of intertextuality and hybridity brought freedom to new and productive relationships with photography, filmmaking, video, installation, architecture, the city, and more recently with the dialogic, virtual images and their infinite reproducibility. Beyond, clearly, the practice of painting itself, as a manual procedure, as well as the imagery and tradition of this art, a wellspring of perspectives and knowledge. Painting was converted into a fact in and of itself, abstract structures that focused on themselves in a *mise-en-abyme* narrative: a painting in the painting, an image of painting always put into movement, that does not wish to be anything but painting. It may appear not to be affirming atemporal values or seeking to transform the world, but among cynics and romantics it is possible to perceive today that the signs of disbelief in painting are no greater than those of hope, the boredom is no less palpable than the intellectual engagement, the parody is no more powerful than the reverence, the ugliness is no less incisive than the beauty.

Ever since the outset, Rodolpho Parigi's painting has been difficult to describe. Between figurative and abstract, or both at once, his paintings present themselves stridently to the eye, like hyperactive, vibrant surfaces, defying any perspective and not offering any rest to the gaze. The compositions are predominantly centered and give rise to a vertigo within the image, spaces that are closed off for an orgy of colors and lines that stir a wide spectrum of signs and visual references – the history of art, design, advertising, pop culture, queer culture, botany, zoology, anatomy – creating a world where hierarchy is banned and everything is the same. The difference lies in that Parigi is not a cynic. His production is the work of a masterful and obsessive artist who is simultaneously avid and ambitious, who believes in and celebrates the capacity of decorative pictorial tradition to produce meaning and therefore attacks the surface of the painting like a battlefield, in a libidinal, all-out and passionate clashing. Something with a lot of testosterone.

This continued interest in saturated surfaces and optical effects, this taste for artifice and excessive ornamentation, with layers of paint marked by bright, luminous colors, unsettled by calligraphy and sinuous lines that lie between writing and naturalist drawing, between the erotic and the pornographic, placed this initial production by Parigi in a “singular” place in Brazilian art. Although his art does not appear to belong to anything immediately recognizable in his generation, his excessive, eloquent style, his abhorrence of emptiness initially associated him to an established Brazilian tradition: the taste for the baroque. If his more recent production recalls anything historical, however, it is another moment of art history: mannerism, those few decades in the 16th century, the years troubled by the crisis of humanism between the end of the Renaissance and the rise of the baroque. Many historians see in the production of those artists, in the manneristic way they operate with their forms and compositions, the first moment in which art, particularly painting, focused on itself: the formal and technical achievements of the Renaissance or the “manner of Michelangelo” in a surface painting, of effects, full of ambiguities. The production of the artists of that period can be seen as the expression of a modern awareness of the artificiality of art, of the limits of representation.

Curiously, this understanding of mannerism by the art historians of the 20th century arose after the rise of surrealism (1924), which, inspired by psychoanalytic theories, opened art up to the unconscious, to the drives, to spontaneous and automatic expression of thought and desire, proposing an art free of sentimentalisms, logic and reason. It was a modern gaze that identified a historical style, considered up to then as a lesser and derivative moment of art.

Although it did not flourish in Brazil as in other Latin American countries, the fantastic world of surrealism contributed to an original and intelligent way of producing Brazilian art, aligning artists from different generations who can be taken as “singular,” since they do not fit in either of the two sources that founded modernity in this country: on the one hand, cubo-constructivism, on the other, expressionism. Tarsila do Amaral (*antropofagia*), Ismael Nery, Flávio de Carvalho, Maria Martins, Wesley Duke Lee and Tunga, among others, do not fit under this premise, and each constituted a “singular” work that did not give rise to further developments, sharing in common the fact that, in different ways, they maintained a strong connection with the premises of surrealism. It is with these “singular” artists that we can align Rodolpho Parigi. His work, besides manipulating a series of signs from historical surrealism – eyes, nose, breasts, genitalia, braids, folds, dismembered bodies, open wounds – and resorting to strategies of estrangement with the excessively familiar, aims to instate differences in a thought focused on itself, refusing to mimic its surroundings or other artworks around it.

Sem título [Untitled], Parigi's first exhibition with Casa Triângulo, presents a set of paintings and drawings, an unfolding of his previous production. Distanced from the whirlpool of signs, images and representations, however, they reveal a more reflexive attitude, an enlarged time, a more elaborate process, the internalization of his repertoire. The paintings are no longer treated as a series and take on an autonomy, each imposing its own time. The avidity, commitment, ambition – all the energy that drove the previous works – is now contained and channeled in a search for density and condensation of that which previously marked a carnivalesque and bombastic style. As the British painter Francis Bacon observed, painting is something for old men, that is, it is constructed in the deepening of the artist's experience with painting, his recognition and mastery over it, to define the meaning of his own painting. Parigi dives into this pursuit.

This new phase can be summarized in two large murals, two stagings of painting: *The Song of Love* and *La danse* [The Dance]. They are both histrionic and surreal, with an operistic tone, and are constructed by an intricate combination of successive pictorial layers between foreground and background (now a baroque space within the painting, apt for a staging), and, unlike the claustrophobic and unfinished surfaces of previous works, in these paintings the various steps of the work process remain visible with all the drips and restarts, expressing a sincere and affective view of beauty.

The Song of Love appropriates the title of a 1914 painting by Giorgio de Chirico along with the main objects in the composition of that canvas – the rubber glove, the sculpted Greek bust and a green sphere – introducing these into an epic, slow-motion silent cinematic narrative with wide and gestural brushstrokes, interpenetrated by different pictorial procedures including simulations of them, creating a space where shapes float as though imprisoned on a sort of metaphysics of painting. This notion is accentuated by the ironic presence of a framed canvas overlain to the background, seeking to mimic it, at the same time that it inserts into the scene a tromp-l'oeil for a breast and a nose, thus accentuating the inconsistency of the entire narrative. There is no tension in this place despite the appearance of the power, weight and movement of the painting itself which is interpenetrated like an amorphous body, always pulsating, between dream and memory.

For its part, *La danse* has something of an allegory, a celebration of the joy of painting. A white body, recalling the nudes of Marie-Thérèse Walther painted by Picasso in 1932, centralizes the composition which, despite the strong and vibrant colors of cyberpunk aesthetics, could be described as a “landscape with nude.” And yet, this distorted white body seems to be amalgamated with the landscape of shapes that interpenetrate one another and are transformed between nature and human, between the representation of volume and the planes of the painting, in a continuous dance, a ceaseless and inescapable movement, exuding sexuality. Once again, a frozen time, an uncommon but good-humored image, that demands time to be observed and perceived. From a distance, it arises shining like a weave of decorative shapes in constant metamorphosis; then it seems to suggest parts of a narrative or personal mindset; and from close-up, one can see the intense work, discern shapes, perceive transparencies and nuances, the variety of procedures, and decipher lines and calligraphies that embroider the surface, along with the marks of the process of painting. It is a retinal experience, not a verbal one.

A set of artworks in smaller formats uses a more economical palette to create paintings where the work with nuances of color constructs a shape or excavates the interior of a body in the plane of the canvas. *Violet volumen* and *Magenta volumen* present a long-standing theme in Parigi's repertoire: viscera and detailed anatomical drawing, in two monochromatic works where the painter's mastery over the material is intensified, against the grain of the monochromism of minimalism, proposing a fanciful aesthetic perversion to minimize it. On the other hand, *Tetê and Piscininha* [Little Pool] play with a Brazilian memory of sculptural configurations between Tarsila and Maria Martins, like the sensuous pink outline that descends on the right side of *The Song of Love*. They are images painted schematically, with a somewhat retro-futuristic look, compressed on the surface by a seductive and ambiguous painting of effect, unsettling the notions of beauty and educated taste.

Parigi believes that an artist can manifest the absolute power of individual imagination and that his (Parigi's) search for beauty requires a recognition of the highly artificial as a foundational and productive experience. His imaginary does not refer to the “natural” world, but to the world reconfigured by human culture. It is inhabited by myriad forms and representations, dissimilar images drifting about, which the artist gathers and works on, operating in an indefinite terrain between the demands of the unconscious, the desire, and the process of the work's positivation, which will place them once again into the real. The use of decorative, ornamental and excessive strategies allows the artist to make a symbolic assertion of his sexuality while also allowing him to celebrate the pleasure of simply looking at and imagining the world: the image of the image of the image; the painting of the painting of the painting.

PS: the painting of the photo of Robert Mapplethorpe, *Man in a Polyester Suit*, 1980, is also a monochrome and enters the exhibition as a postscript.