



CÉRÈS FRANCO: FOR AN ART WITHOUT BORDERS

[Cérés Franco: Pour un art sans frontières]. by Raphaël Koenig, Paris, Lelivredart, 2019. 128 p. ISBN: 978-2-355532-324-9

This book offers the first monographic study of the intellectual and aesthetic trajectory of the Paris-based Brazilian art critic, curator and gallerist Cérés Franco (b. 1926). It first delineates the three main sources of Franco's aesthetics: her early years were marked by the debates that surrounded

Brazilian modernism, aiming both at emulating the latest developments in the international art world while also rooting Brazilian modernity in a form of localism. A student of Meyer Schapiro at Columbia, she retained from his teachings a deep attachment to expressive visual styles, beyond established aesthetic hierarchies. Living in Paris from 1952 onwards, she was also influenced by the radical upheavals of the French art world in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War.

Koenig's study focuses on the decade 1962-1972, corresponding to some of Cérés Franco's most singular accomplishments. The first two exhibitions she curated, "Forms and Magic" (1962) and "The Ox's Eye" (1963) continued the Surrealist legacy, especially in regard to the movement's penchant

for esotericism and fantasy. Her career, which started in Paris, quickly expanded internationally, especially in her native Brazil, where she was actively involved in denouncing the 1964 military coup: her exhibition "Opinião 65" largely contributed to rehabilitating the notion of politically committed art among the Brazilian avant-gardes.

In the second half of the 1960s, she focused more specifically on Brazilian folk and self-taught art, organizing major exhibitions in France and in Eastern Europe, most notably by participating to the 1972 Bratislava Triennial of Naïve Art.

For Franco, combining "naïve" and avant-garde works was meant to bring about an aesthetic and social desegregation of visual production. It also constituted an attempt at championing forms of folk art perceived as free from European or North American influences, whose figurative strength would reflect the irreducible singularity of its producers. Franco remained true to her ideals throughout her career, as evidenced by the activities of the art gallery she opened in Paris in 1972, and by her eclectic collection, now housed in a dedicated public museum in the South of France.

As this book convincingly argues, Cérés Franco's eclecticism and her attempt at challenging established political and social boundaries foreshadow a number of recent developments of contemporary art, from the 1989 exhibition "*Magiciens de la Terre*" at the Centre Pompidou curated by Jean-Hubert Martin (who also wrote the foreword to this volume) to Massimiliano Gioni's 2013 Venice Biennale.

Laurent Perez