

Press Release

Brazil: Tempera Reimagined

28 February - 2 May 2025



Alfredo Volpi, Untitled, 1960, tempera on canvas

The revival of tempera painting in the twentieth century was not unique to Brazil, but in no other country did it embed itself so deeply and essentially in its artistic culture. So abundant from the 1950s onwards, the pure, luminous colour and rhythmic brushwork of tempera painting has come to embody the palette and texture of Brazil at the moment of its arrival to modernity.

Cecilia Brunson Projects presents *Brazil: Tempera Reimagined*, a group exhibition dedicated to this painting discipline. Featuring works by Alfredo Volpi (1896 – 1988), currently spotlighted in the RA exhibition *Brasil! Brasil! The Birth of Modernism*; Ione Saldanha (1919 – 2001); Eleonore Koch (1926 – 2018) and André Ricardo (b. 1985), the exhibition follows the continuity and reinterpretation of this medium by new generations as they enter into a shared pictorial world.

Brazil's most influential proponent of tempera painting was Alfredo Volpi, the son of Italian immigrants, who turned to the medium after seeing examples by Giotto, Paolo Uccello and Piero della Francesca on his travels in Italy. Mixing his own paints became a necessity in the face of Brazil's extortionate import taxes on artist's materials, but also allowed for unparalleled control over the quality and brilliance of his colours. Upon adopting tempera as his medium, he simplified his compositions, essentialising the city around him into geometric forms. The exhibition includes an example of Volpi's iconic *Bandeirinhas* paintings depicting bunting strung across the streets. Painted in deep purple and electric blue, it depicts a city that vibrates with colour, even as the light fades to dusk.

Ione Saldanha was also influenced by the rapidly growing city and its architectural forms, whose intersecting planes can be read in the geometric arrangement of her tempera experiments. Embracing the translucency of the paint, she alternates between the full saturation of sunlight and washes of blues and purples that rest on the surface like shadows. The exhibition features works from her *Bambus [Bamboos]* and *Bobinas [Spools]* series, in which she abandons the flat surface of the canvas to dissect the city in all its dimensions.

Though her figurative practice was a sharp rejection of the geometric abstraction that had come to dominate Brazilian art, Eleonore Koch's work retains a Brazilianness through her choice of medium, the purity and intensity of colour, her paintings' heavy atmosphere and her short brushstrokes, like brickwork, positioning her in concord with both Volpi and Saldanha. Koch was Volpi's only student in the discipline of tempera, using his recipe and pigments to produce a body of work that shares his palette as well as his search for the 'resolution of the painting,' her landscapes serving as a field in which to perfect the relationships between line, colour and space.

Working today in São Paulo, André Ricardo works exclusively with tempera, having committed years to studying both the technique and its history. He extends the use of architecture as a structural base to explore geometric and colour relations, and to celebrate the expanses of São Paulo and its bright, clear light, radiating from his canvases. Ricardo considers himself in the lineage of Volpi, Saldanha and Koch, the use of tempera and its idiosyncrasies allowing him entry into the same visual realm. Moreover, he advances a dialogue around Brazilian identity today, including its anthropophagic inheritance of European culture and a fluid embrace of religion and spirituality, reflecting the artist's own mixed European, African and indigenous heritage. Ricardo's position in the exhibition affirms tempera's continuity – a Brazilian tradition reimaged by each new generation.

About Cecilia Brunson Projects:

Founded in 2013, Cecilia Brunson Projects is the leading London gallery championing Latin American art. The gallery's specialist programme places overlooked historical voices in dialogue with burgeoning contemporary talent, often for the first time. Our mission is to platform exceptional Latin American artists across generations and increase awareness around their role in shaping global art movements.

Events:

Private View
27 February, 6-8pm

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