

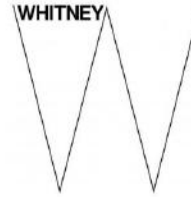
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André Ricardo In Conversation with Amanda Millet-Sorsa



André Ricardo in his studio in São Paulo (2021) Photo: João Liberato

By AMANDA MILLET-SORSA, July 2023

André Ricardo in conversation with Amanda Millet-Sorsa at his first solo exhibition in New York, André Ricardo: Imaginarium (May 24 – July 28, 2023), with the gallery Hutchinson Modern & Contemporary in collaboration with Galeria Estação. He was born and raised in São Paulo, Brazil and for the past 10 years, has been working with egg tempera uniting forms, images, and shapes from his urban environment, nature, architecture, and his mixed heritage in European, Afro-Brazilian, and Indigenous cultures. His work flattens these images to create new combinations across time and space, captivating viewers with brilliant fields of color achieved through grinding pigments with egg tempera. His work has gained recognition in prominent Brazilian art collections of Museu de Arte Contemporânea MAC-USP, Inhotim Centro de Arte Contemporânea, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Ribeirão Preto Art Museum, Casa do Olhar Luiz Sacilotto Museum as well as solo exhibitions in Brazil at Iberê Camargo, Galeria Periscópio, Galeria Estação, Museu de Arte de Ribeirão Preto MARP, and Pilar Gallery.

AMS: I'm intrigued by your journey to Italy during your time in Europe for a residency to study egg tempera. Your practice of making your own paint is incredibly special. What drew you to this medium?

AR: Egg tempera took me in a particular way because this technique provides a quality of color and a powerful luminosity. My first encounter with egg tempera was through Alfredo Volpi (1896-1988), an Italian born Brazilian painter. During his career, Volpi started painting with oil, and once he discovered egg tempera, it was an important transition in his paintings because he started to flatten out the space. His work caught my attention and I began researching materials, process and the history behind this technique. I traveled to Florence, Venice and Bologna in 2015-2016 saw egg tempera paintings dating from the 13-16th century by great masters like Cimabue, Duccio, Simone Martini, Giotto, Lorenzetti, Mantegna, Fra Angelico, and Piero Della Francesca.





Untitled, 2022 Egg tempera on linen 50 x 39 3/4 in (127 x 101 cm). Photo: Erika Fujiyama

I first came across your work when we met at “Residency Unlimited” in the Fall 2022, where you had a residency in New York. I was struck by this connection you drew with Medieval European painting and Brazilian Folk art. Could you elaborate on that relationship and what it means to you?

The relationship is more about conceptual ideas and the technique, while the iconography is different. In “Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages” by Umberto Eco, there is a chapter about light and color in the Middle Ages and he talked about why color is so powerful in these pictures. Color can be a metaphorical representation of something spiritual where gold is depicted as real gold and blue is truly blue, devoid of shadows. It’s flat, the color is concrete and employed with a sense of totality like the perfection of a circle. It expresses a sense of spiritual creation and is a metaphor of God’s creation. Back in Brazil, I saw this powerful use of color in a lot of religious and folk culture in Brazil. In Brazil, religions are mixed and there is a synchronicity between Catholicism and Afro-Brazilian traditions. People wear costumes with beautiful colors and flags, playing music, and the colors are an expression of religious culture. And even in our parties, like Carnival, color is so important. Colors are part of our visuality, of what we see.

We have the divine and the luminosity found in medieval work that you encountered in Italy and the colorful symbolism and expressions in Brazilian rituals or spiritual worlds. How do you relate to color?

When I’m thinking of chromatic relations, I try to access this memory of color that reminds me of something in my cultural background. The folk culture expressed in our religious celebrations, festivities, music, dance, architecture... Something that is part of our life in some way even if you’re not affiliated with a specific group.

Why do you think, in Brazil, color expresses such spirituality?

Color is part of our cultural expression. It is so diversified. In our forest, our different kinds of plants, animals, nature, fruits, the taste and color of the fruit... color is part of our tropical environment. The population expresses the importance of color in their celebrations, their clothes, and the façade of the house. It’s not only a spiritually specific manifestation, but it’s a color expressed in different situations.

You were talking about these festivities, these ways to bring people together through dance, ritual, music, and I love that you said these are paths of resistance towards opposition. I was wondering, how does that relate to your work?

In Brazil you have the important contribution of the African diaspora in a lot of our music, for example. We can regard that some of these manifestations is in opposition to violence, like slavery, that is so oppressive. But at the same time, our festivities are full of colors to celebrate life so we can understand that these cultural expressions are a way to survive. I feel that in my paintings, I am looking for other possibilities to see the world. I remember I have these colors inside of myself so when I’m painting, I’m discovering my background, and preserving this pleasure or sensibility.



André Ricardo: Imaginarium at Hutchinson Modern & Contemporary. Photo: Olivia Divechta

You were speaking about getting in touch with your Afro-Brazilian heritage, are there elements in the images that speak specifically to that heritage?

elements in the images that speak specifically to that heritage:

I like that my work would have some ancient identity or talk about something that you feel but at the same time could be contemporary. I'm painting something that looks like a symbolic form in its structure, for example, this is a snake, Untitled (2022) and this iconography has different meanings in different cultures. The way that I do these images, the structure of the snake used to be a vase and the vase can mix with a truck, Like in Untitled(2022) and an ornamental form. This is where I'm trying to speculate where I am from, what is my heritage, what is my painting, that I bring with myself. As a Brazilian, I have this mixture of European, African, and Indigenous ancestry and at the same time I can understand and identify these different visual intentions that I cannot find only in African Brazilian culture. I also express my interest in Henri Matisse. When I think about my work, it's important for me to talk about my identity as an Afro-Brazilian, but I cannot forget all the references in European history that are so important to me too.

I love what you were saying about time in your work--what it means to be in the present, but also to go far into the past and maybe into the future. What is your relationship to time in your paintings?

I think the experience of painting is a possibility to reflect on time, on contemporary life that you're living, but also to bring back some old memories. For example, a truck is a very contemporary and modern vehicle that you can see in the street. But when I'm painting this truck at the same time, I'm trying to touch something older, so I mix different time periods to produce something new. You're constructing and doing something that connects you and your memories.

It's important to me to start looking for the context of my painting that could come from different origins. I can look at something in the streets and that object, façade on the house, could be a motif. But when I'm painting, I have this idea in my head and I need to be free, so the painting can deal with the form and I can invite forms that, in the first moment, you understand as abstraction but then that form comes from some object that I saw and so how can I say it's abstract or figurative? It's both. Much like the colors that are important to me, I think not only about good combinations, but about memory. If the form looks abstract, it's not only in composition, but I also need to look for memory too.



André Ricardo: Imaginarium at Hutchinson Modern & Contemporary, Photo: Olivia Divecchia

I love this image of you drawing during these incredibly long bus and train rides through São Paulo where you absorb these urban environments and find objects like trucks, cars, but also elements in nature. What do you look for when you're drawing and what is your relationship of drawing to painting?

Drawing is very important in my work and my practice. When I started to paint with more flat spaces of color, I felt that I was putting my drawing away. I had a studio and was living in the outskirts of São Paulo, so I tried to deal with my surrounding context. I started to walk in the streets, looking at the environment, do some sketches and then the architecture took my attention because it makes me think about composition and the possibility to deal with the colors. I started to draw this series of works, but I was looking for these colorful facades in the outskirts, because it's a very particular architecture. It's a vernacular expression. As I started to deal with this context that was the beginning of these paintings with egg tempera. I also found a book of photographs "Pinturas e Platibandas" – Anna Mariani (1987), with facades of vernacular architecture located in the North East of Brazil from the mid 1970s and early 1980s. These facades in my local streets connected with my ancestry in the North East, where my family is from. These ornaments on the facades start to look like religious symbols and the colors looks like a flag of a religious festivity or celebration.

You've been painting with egg tempera for more than a decade and when you were first beginning you were interested in your neighborhood where you grew up. With the works we see here today that were painted while in New York, do we still see some of those earlier ornamental forms in your current work or have you had other influences?

The egg tempera demands a time that is very different than a busy city like New York and even São Paulo. But at the same time, in this group of works, I can feel the high energy of New York because it has been produced here and it's a totally different context than my life in São Paulo. There are a lot of things to see, other food, other tastes, a lot of art collections to have contact with. I can feel this movement is more circular, more dynamic, and has more iconic forms that I wasn't doing in Brazil. There are differences of brushstrokes, and some textures were faster, and some color combinations are stronger. Untitled (2022) was inspired

gestures were faster, and some color combinations are stronger. Untitled (2022), was inspired by an African sculpture (Serpent headdress (a-Mantsho-ña-Tshol) I saw in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, by a Baga artist, from Guinea.

This composition Untitled (2022) was inspired by the vertical sculpture of a snake, but it's mixed with other compositions that have a vertical form too with objects from the streets in São Paulo. For instance, in gas stations, there is this object called bobo (an inflatable tubeman). I like to put the things together, cross one to the other formally, but also in colors. Both have the same structure, they're vertical, so these kinds of similar forms and structures interest me a lot because it crosses the frontier of time and space and connects us with something familiar. **WM**



AMANDA MILLET-SORSA

Amanda Millet-Sorsa is a visual artist interested in the transparency and the luminosity of oil painting. She is a contributor to The Brooklyn Rail and a member of AICA (International Association of Art Critics), participating actively in the NY arts community by writing art exhibition reviews and artist interviews. As of 2022, she partakes in the curatorial team at Below Grand gallery in the Lower East Side. She holds an M.F.A from the New York Studio School and B.A. from Brandeis University.

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