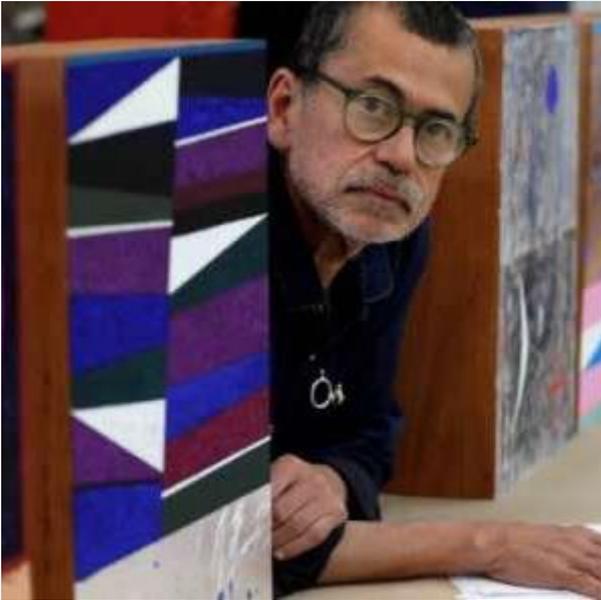


## GONÇALO IVO



Born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1958, Gonçalo Ivo is an artist who is on the verge of imposing himself and reaching more-than-deserved international renown. He, incidentally, has taken part in a great number of international manifestations both in Brazil and in the United States and Europe.

There is a significant number of catalogs and books on Gonçalo Ivo's work, both in Brazil and in France

and Italy. His work is listed, for example, in a luxury volume published in three languages (Portuguese, English, and French) by Edições Pinakothek, Rio de Janeiro, 2008.

In these catalogs and books, we find signatures by prestigious critics, such as Fernando Cocchiarale (in a long interview with the artist), Roberto Pontual, Edgar Lyra, Ligia de Franceschi, Oscar D'Ambrosio, and Frederico Moraes. And we shall not forget Luciano Figueiredo, another Brazilian artist, born in 1948, who pays veritable homage to his colleague, ten years his junior.

### **“Listening” to Gonçalo Ivo's painting**

I am a “pictorial animal”. The studio is my realm. There, I feel free, as time does not exist. My painting is not the illustration of my feelings.

I work all the time with that which is real. Even subjectivity and ambiguity are real...

## **GONÇALO IVO IN TRADITION**

One is able to connect Gonçalo Ivo, in Brazilian abstract painting, to what emerged in Rio de Janeiro around 1959, with the formation of a Neoconcrete group, which prioritized the integration of Brazilian art to life.

At this time, the São Paulo Biannual Exhibition, under the care of internationally known critics and art historians, implicitly rivaled with the Venice Biannual, and kept Brazilian artists abreast on the art world, several times much before Paris even became aware of what was going on in this world.

What took place and asserted itself in the United States, through some currently very famous artists (such as Mark Rothko and Barnett Newmann, soon followed by another generation of painters, such as Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis, supported, among others, by Clement Greenberg and the representatives of “Minimal Art”, who led to the extreme, in their own manner, what their predecessors had done), could be seen and acknowledged by the Brazilian artists without Europe ever coming to suspect this.

Thus, one should not forget that Brazil reached a rare and important interethnic integration, which serves the intellectuals as a guarantee for free thought and absence of bias, with the undeniable tropisms for what is done in the Northern hemisphere, be it in the United States of America, or in Europe.

Alas, we have to take into account that modern Brazilian architecture asserted itself precociously, thanks to the presence of Le Corbusier and of Oscar Niemeyer and his creations in Rio de Janeiro, as well as the construction of Brasilia by the latter, who also designed the French communist Party headquarters in Paris.

## **GONÇALO IVO AND THE STUDIES**

The young Gonçalo Ivo graduated in Architecture in 1983 and worked as designer and illustrator for various publishing houses. He also studied at the Museum of Modern Art under Aluisio Carvão, an artist linked to the “concrete painting” group, but he did not stop there...

Inserted into an intellectual milieu (his father, Lêdo Ivo, is a famous poet and writer who, among other things, translated Arthur Rimbaud into Portuguese), Gonçalo Ivo has cultivated a spirit and a mood characteristic to him.

It is enough to look at his pictures, his watercolors, or his objects to convince oneself of that. We move into, at once, a known universe, but we feel disoriented by the wealth, the splendor, and the elegance as well as by the substantiveness of the objects, as can be seen in the catalog of his paintings and objects, Campo Santo, held at the Anita Schwartz Gallery, in Rio de Janeiro, 2010. This catalog still holds a text by Luciano Figueiredo and a beautiful essay by poet Antonio Cicero.

A greater part of the year in France, where he has a studio, and exhibits at the Flak Gallery, Gilbert Lascault wrote a beautiful text on his work. In 1999, regarding Gonçalo Ivo's exhibition at the Flak Gallery, Lydia Harambourg published a synopsis in the La Gazette de l'Hôtel Drouot revue, partially reproduced in the exposition that the Multiarte Gallery, Fortaleza, dedicated to him in August 2009: "Gonçalo Ivo's sense of color and an evident concern about construction are manifested on his oils on canvas, a consequence of his background as an architect [...]. His compositions are influenced by a mixed culture, in which classicism and Baroque, a colorful effusion and luminous serenity, imagination and will coexist. Gonçalo Ivo, who is also a poet, exchanges words for colors, which he borrows from the brilliant fabrics of the Bahia and Recife fishermen, heirs to the African culture".

It cannot be said better, even if the description, somehow, remains incomplete.

## **GONÇALO IVO THE POLYGLOT**

What is surprising, in the first place, is the extensive use that the painter makes of geometric figures, in which, most of the times, color predominates and undeniably enthralls. A color which he associates to the format of the works, which range from 18 x 18 cm (untitled, 1985) to 250 x 550 cm (Tissu d'Afrique, 2007).

I observe that painting and object titles, when not in Portuguese, are generally in French: Tissu d'Afrique, Prière, Les Poissons, Lanterne magique, Les Papillons, Fenêtres... or in Italian.

Gonçalo Ivo is, like his work, recognized as a polyglot. It does not surprise me that he expresses himself in English and Italian so well as he speaks Portuguese and French.

A polyglot indeed, he makes use of his vast artistic culture. In this use, however, he keeps himself Brazilian, above all.

When visiting his studio, one cannot fail to notice the multiplicity of the references he bears at hand. And which he cites, as if he were exercising a ludic and formal play regarding what is looked by their references.

From the “École de Paris”, with reminiscences by Vieira da Silva, Serge Poliakoff or Nicolas de Staël; from Americans, such as Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman and Kenneth Noland; from “Pop Art” representatives; and from Germans, such as Paul Klee, Kurt Schwitters or Wassily Kandinsky, Gonçalo Ivo appropriates himself of what is best in the multiple projects he faces in life, rendering them his in a synthesis which is undoubtedly his.

As he himself states: “Intuition drives me.”

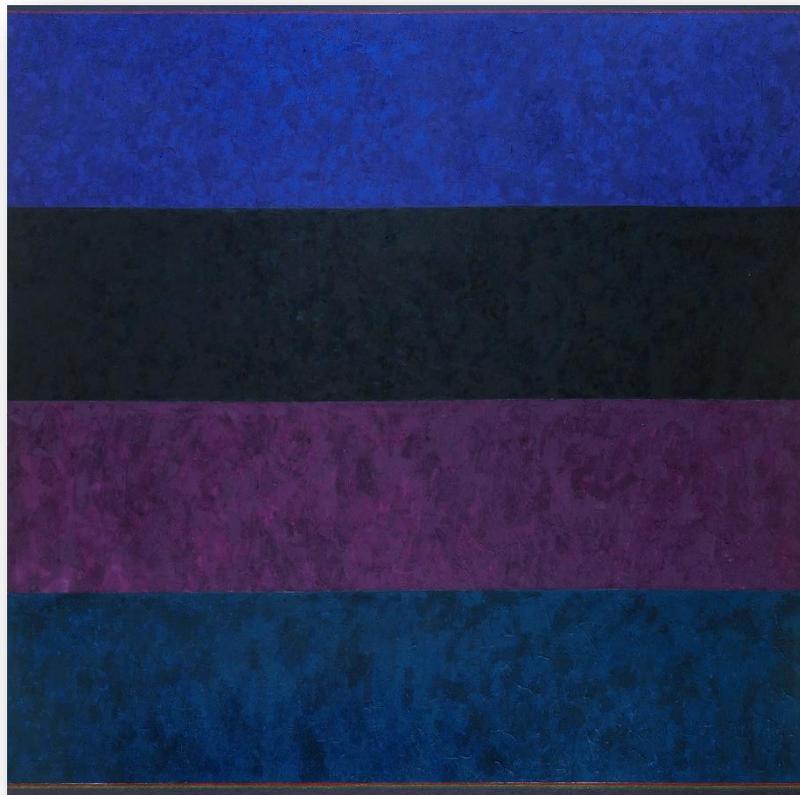
It is this “intuition” which we have to follow when approaching the beautiful singularity of Gonçalo Ivo’s work. In special, as to how it is determined by a clear stressing of the spiritual in art, the title of one of Wassily Kandinsky books.

There occurs an undeniable paradox in this title and in the work illustrated by him. Incidentally, it was regarding this book by Kandinsky that philosopher Alexandre Kojève wrote the very successful essay, both in Brazil and in Germany, On concrete art, in Hegel’s wake.

## GONÇALO IVO AND THE SPIRITUAL IN ART

We find ourselves thus in the “heart” (“choir”) of the birth of abstract art and of modern or post-modern art. It is this choir that Gonçalo Ivo, when retaking from his professor the notion of “concrete painting,” associates to his own work.

When considering the paintings in several formats (oils and watercolors, as well as several painted or



burned objects – or still painted and burned) which Gonçalo Ivo shows me, I hear, with perfection, the multiple voices which comprise, in unison, the tuning notes of this “choir”.

If we consider the tridimensional objects, it will be necessary to also take into account the voice, not to be disregarded, of Kurt Schwitters, Marcel Duchamp and some others, to understand why some of these objects are partially calcined or created as from walks on a beach, of objects found by chance and collected by the artist.

Gonçalo Ivo’s work reaches, therefore, very vast sonorous extension, used by him with unparalleled “mastery” in the art said to be modern or contemporary.

I have no doubt that the large-format canvases – *Tissu d’Afrique*, 2007, 250 x 500 cm, and more recently *Campo santo*, 2010, 260 x 580 cm – extend a landscape of colors and, I dare say, of sounds containing a singular chromatic breadth of extreme beauty.

In these large formats, one perceives the subtle play and the cleaving of horizontal color strips, which not always cross the limits of the canvas and are interrupted, to the right and left, by small colored bands and thin horizontal stripes.

The gaze thus tends to disorient itself and does not cease to search for a more rational reference, never found, without becoming tired of restarting the path it started to plot, harkening to music which only belongs to Gonçalo Ivo.

Let us return to this surprising reference to Kandinsky's book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, as it, to me, what undeniably particularizes the unity in Gonçalo Ivo's work.

A clear spiritual atmosphere, distinct from almost all the art of his Brazilian, American, and French contemporaries emanates from his paintings (independently from their format).

I am not able to avoid this spiritual, musical, almost religious dimension, when trying to understand what seduces and fascinates me in what I see. The large paintings impose themselves with the majesty of a religious monument or, I would say, of a cathedral, and the small ones as well as tridimensional pieces as objects of worship.

Without, however, one knowing what worship this is.

## **CAMPO SANTO**

The title Gonçalo Ivo gave to his most recent exposition, and the oil on canvas *Campo santo* (oil on canvas, 260 x 580 cm) are, regarding this, what we have as most representative.

This vast painting of a pale gray field in movement evokes exactly what its title makes us suppose, when we translate the Italian word to the French not as "holy field" (plains, cultivated earth), but rather as "cemetery" [cimetière]... or, still, "a field for the dead" [camp pour les morts], the artists and painters now dead and who are not necessarily saints.

It is equally the name of the island, in Venice, where the dead... painters, writers and musicians now dead are buried and brought together: Campo Santo.

Even if we wished to ignore it, the other works of his last exhibition so confirm it: several crosses, such as *Cruz de Espanha*, 270 x 78 cm, and some tombstones, such as *Campo santo*, tempera on plaster and marble and stone, 50 x 32 x 16 cm, made in 2010.

We also find in this exhibition a large format, very colorful, canvas, *Santa Maria de Taüll*, 2009 (oil on canvas, 260 x 650 cm), and other large paintings, visibly darker, among which *Oratório*

da noite, from 2010 (oil on linen, 260 x 650 cm). In this case, with the spirituality apparently linked to death and to the Christian religion.

Brazil being famous for its various syncretistic religions, I am convinced that this comprises celebrating a new, and at the same time, ancient religion... that of painting, the painting which is, for Gonçalo Ivo – he does not get tired of asserting it – “a vocation” ...

Aren't some paintings from 2006 entitled Prière? They were shown in the exhibition held at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo in January 2008, and can be seen in the book published by Pinakotheke Editions.

Spirituality, undoubtedly, in which the artist finds himself (this is his path and his voice... his “vocation”), and that which he asks us to “see” and listen.

It is necessary to remember a beautiful set of essays on art by Paul Claudel, entitled L'oeil écoute?

## **IN SHORT**

When one leaves Gonçalo Ivo's studio, one takes with himself a spiritual sentiment and the voices, the “coloraturas” of a work, of this point of view, decidedly syncretic. And unique.

**Marcelin Pleynet**

## Chromaticism

Sometimes I imagine that we were saved of all matter and became only identities that inhabit the color. The color is a noun of the matter. I always have the impression that it rebels itself against being adjectivized and becomes whole, like a being that waits. The colors await. As we read the light, the color becomes someone. It knows things and is someone. One day, disintegrated, we may be only amazingly participations in the light.

Gonçalo Ivo's painting is more than a study of color, it is a school for color. There, it learns. It matures, like a hunted animal, which cannot fail to assume its evidence in the world. Each canvas is a class, made by superior mastery, in which the light appears not to be admired, not by chance but by design. This is the difference between the color by awareness and casual color. The work of Gonçalo Ivo, scientist of this art, is a mode of revelation, not as a delusional attempt, but as a wise declaration that comes closer to what we could not see. His canvases exist as evidence of a gesture of light similar to the gesture of God. The light knows what to do. In Gonçalo Ivo's canvas the light learns how to.

The art leaves the figurative behind, because reality exposed is not enough, perhaps it have never been enough, and the dissatisfaction of artists has always been a proof of it, even tragically. The liberation of art related to the obligation to represent or to fully present its significant is essential to enter a mental space that is also a dimension of reality, characterized by an inaccurate question and an even more inaccurate answer. Getting to the point is a challenge, getting some response is the absolute improbability. Gonçalo Ivo's work may be the total negation of matter so that the soul of everything frees itself only under the behavior of light. In this sense it makes me feel like the spirituality of it all. A kind of spirituality that comes exclusively from the power of art. Besides their material contingencies, all things present themselves as only mentally considerable attributes, which is the rational, pragmatic way to refer to questions of the soul. I like to think that Gonçalo Ivo canvas are the lack of body, no bodies, because they still manifest themselves in a passionate way, which proves its intense existence, as intense may be other unfathomable realities. Before transcendence, many things are sufficiently transcendent themselves, art things.

Alluding to the idea of stripping the matter, Gonçalo Ivo's painting reminds us of fabrics, that which handicrafts invented for protection and adornment and that makes intricate

infinitesimal wires. The idea of intricacy interests me. Although we have the impression of great cleanliness, the rigor of Ivo's painting is a form of virtuous goldsmithing of color. Like diamond faceting, the craft of this painter is the depuration of the behavior of light. Yes, as I said before, his canvases are schools for color. There it learns.

The great poet Martin Lopez-Vega (in the perfect catalog *Contemplaciones*, edited in Spain by *Papeles Mínimos*) says that, in Gonçalo Ivo's canvases, very flat, there is no relief, just geography. I really like it. Everything becomes a place, as if we could actually enter a space without anything being entirely set. We are welcomed, but what welcomes us is pure freedom. If his canvases were fabrics, we would be under them, even the act of observing gives us the feeling of standing on or in front of things. In art, because it is a specific transcendence, the inside and the outside, the upward and the downward, can simply be predicated, unutilized. In art, and because it is probably the only existing transcendence, inside and outside up and down, can simply be predicated, unused. Everything in Gonçalo Ivo's work explains this. This conviction that, in geography, there is a way to the other side of matter, like measuring a soul, like a ride through light, picking colors just like we who reap a generous bouquet of roses. I love roses.

**Walter Hugo Mãe**

Porto, April 12, 2015

**English Version**

**Daniel Falkemback**

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