

Arts, Linguistics, Literature and Language Research Journal

MARCANTÔNIO VILAÇA FROM 1985 TO 1999: THE RESSIGNIFICATION OF MARCHAND'S PROFILE IN BRAZIL

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<http://lattes.cnpq.br/8551727332323960>

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Abstract: Regarded as one of the most important marchands that Brazil has ever had, Marcantônio Vilaça is constantly remembered by its tireless role in the diffusion and circulation of Brazilian contemporary art in fairs, galleries and exhibitions around the world. This work sought to monitor the emergence and affirmation of Marcantonio Vilaça as Marchand in the 1990s art scene based on texts published in the press or specialized essays, from its employment as commercial manager of the Algodoeira Palmeirenses SA, passing through its exclusive dedication His future Camargo Vilaça gallery in partnership with his friend Karla Camargo, until his tragic death at the turn of the year 1999.

Keywords: Marcantônio Vilaça, Brazilian contemporary art, art market, Internationalization of works of art.

Born in Recife on August 30, 1962, Marcantônio Vilaça from an early age demonstrated interest in the arts and collection. According to the catalog of the inaugural exhibition of the Camargo Vilaça Gallery in 1992, in the introduction written by the Marchand itself, it collects art since the age of 15. Marcantônio says in this catalog: "This uninterrupted process took me to a direct and intense contact with the artist. I always sought to be close to the creative act and the emergence of the new" (Vilaça, 1992, p. 4). It is precisely this emergence of the new ones that brings such a special character in the role played by brandontonium for Brazilian contemporary art. He started his studies in the law course at the University of Brasília and, after moving to São Paulo in the early 1980s, he finishes his graduation from the Presbyterian Mackenzie University.

In the National Field, the period prior to the work of Marctonio was closely linked to the idea of a search for the country's

redemocratization and reintegration in the global flow of relations, which is to highlight the then recent lower repression and, consequently, greater freedom of expression mainly artists. Maria Amelia Bulhões in her article "Ancient absences, new presences - the market in the visual arts circuit" emphasizes the idea that this democratic opening was "result of social pressures, but also part of a strategy for conservation of power by dominant" (Bulhões, 2007, p. 270). In addition, the author also reports the emergence of new productions in the field of the arts and the market reaction for this project of redemocratization:

Thus opened spaces for new productions. By the action of some marchands, the market began to absorb the most hermetic experimental vanguards [...]. The tendency of the arts system at that time to absorb a more diverse production was in line with the action of the State who, facing the crisis of his development model, sought to find the balance, at the levels of politics and culture, between the Selective repression and the reestablishment of representation mechanisms that attract, for their support, middle-class groups and elite, until then removed by excessive authoritarianism. As a result, several artists were also returned to the scene in the 60's and removed during the hardest period of the dictatorship. (Bulhões, 2007, p. 271).

EXECUTIVE MARCANTÔNIO (1985 - 1989)

Although he never left the arts aside, Marcantonius initiates his professional trajectory outside the field of arts by cotton palmeirenses sa, company of his maternal family, in the early 1980s. Ileana Pradilla Ceron records in the book "Worlds Invention - Collection Marcantônio Vilaça" "that this same time was fundamental for the structuring of a new art in the country. Young artists emerged in every corner of the country

although with a very restricted circulation on account of the then valuation of artists already enshrined as Di Cavalcanti, Portinari, Dacosta and Guignard. Marcantonio then inserts in the circuit of these young artists as they had already been doing the São Paulo Biennial, the Lage Park Visual Arts School and some other institutions, serving as launching platforms for these artists. It is from this interest in the new art that Marcantonio is introduced to João Manuel Sattamini, at the time of the commercial subdistrict of art, which later presented him to several of the artists that marcantônio would collect, as Beatriz Milhazes and Nuno Ramos (Angels, 2006, p. 180). And this narrow contact with young artists and the world of new Brazilian art that led Marcantônio to become a member of the Advisory Board of Gallery magazine, considered, in the words of ileana pradilla, “one of the rare publications which, from 1986 to 1992, they dedicated themselves to the discussion and promotion of modern and contemporary art in the country” (Angels, 2006, p. 181).

Bulhões portrays this new characteristic of acting next to the avant-dawn present in the Brazilian marchands of this time:

The performance of the Marchands with the vanguards became a preponderant characteristic of the art in Brazil, mainly considering the growing importance of the market as a legitimation instance and its decisive role as a means of flow of production. (Bulhões, 2007, p. 272).

On August 20, 1989 Marcantônio Vilaça, at 26, gives an interview to the newspaper Leaf of São Paulo about the repercussion of the subject published on the previous Sunday “The Arts of the Market”. The newspaper at the time describes Marcantônio only as “executive”, although it has collected art since fifteen years: “Executive, Marcantônio Vilaça (26) that buys art regularly for 8 years says: ‘I found it important (the report)

Demystification, because it is an aura that the art market is different from the other [...]” (Strecker, 1989b, F. 14). Marcantonio referred to the controversy Matter of the previous Sunday, August 13, 1989, by Márn Strecker, questioning certain attitudes in the art market. The matter asked:

Is it lawful that a magazine earns money from the artist to those who dedicate an issue? Is it correct to pay a critic to recommend an artist? Is it fair that a gallery covers exposure expenses and stay with half of sales? Is it reasonable that an artist steals customers from the gallery selling cheaper in the studio? (Strecker, 1989A, p. D’13).

It is necessary to contextualize that in that period, as stated by Bulhões (2007, p. 272), “two important aspects are highlighted in the development of the art market in the country: the predominance of commercialization of works by living Brazilian artists and the growth of the investor client”. These aspects take the dynamics of the art market to a new level, since in the past art and its value were eventually conditioned by the artist’s death and the transformation of art into an asset. It can be seen from this that the artist’s relationship with the media and, consequently, dealers and gallery owners is increasingly closer, a situation that ends up generating new controversies, such as the one mentioned in Márión Strecker’s report.

EXECUTIVE AND COLLECTOR MARCANTONIO (1989 - 1991)

Maria Bulhões highlights some of the characteristics of Brazilian art markets in the 1980s:

At that time, there was also a new expansion of the Brazilian artistic circuit, this time in national terms. Several States, such as Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul, Goiás, Bahia and many others, have dynamized their regional markets and established links that had not existed until then, with the Rio-São Paulo axis. These were quite significant

innovations, as, for the first time, certain regional markets for modern art were set up in the country. However, this articulation was and continues to be quite fragile, although the hegemony of the Rio-São Paulo axis has remained predominant in the national circuit. (BULHÕES, 2007, p. 271).

Therefore, there is a very favorable scenario for greater integration and insertion of Pernambuco, the home state of Marcantônio, in the national circuit previously basically dominated by São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro

Taking advantage of this context, it was in 1989 that Marcantônio, together with his sister Taciana Cecília and friends Carla and Andréa Mendonça, founded the renowned Galeria Pasárgada Arte Contemporânea in Recife. In its three years of operation, the gallery played an important role in promoting these new artists that emerged in the country, in addition to young artists already established in the Rio-São Paulo axis, such as Leda Catunda, Beatriz Milhazes, Marco Gianotti and others. At just three years old, Galeria Pasárgada already saw itself as one of the great art galleries in the country, even located outside the Rio-SP axis (ANJOS, 2006, p. 181). And it is in a *Folha* report two years later, on January 4, 1991, that Marcantônio, in a comment on the formation of a commission to decide which projects will receive government incentives, is now described not only as an executive, but also as a collector:

Marcantônio Vilaça, collector and commercial manager of cotton palmeireense SA says: "Any form of incentive is commendable. I just found the commission strange. Who will name its members? The requirement that they be people of recognized notoriety in the cultural area is very vague. The problem is to approve films with Xuxa that do not need incentives to exist. The commission must also analyze the merits of the projects beyond their budget". (GASPARIAN, 1991, p. E2).

It is from this first appearance, being described as an art collector, that Marcantônio starts to be present in the art columns and, mainly, in the *Entrelinhas* column, then commanded by Joyce Pascowitch: only in 1991 there were six apparitions. On September 14 of this year, the columnist reports the presence of a great North American collector in the country, who was hosted by Marcantônio: "In order to check the biennale's debut, the North American collector Loris Diran lands on Thursday in the city as a guest of Marcantônio Vilaça" (PASCOWITCH, 1991a, p. 5-2). On October 20, Joyce registered the presence of Robert Storre, then MoMA's Contemporary Art Curator, in the city of São Paulo: "In order to check out the collections of Adolfo Leirner, Augusto Livio Malzoni, Ricardo Akagawa, Marcantônio Vilaça and Kim Esteve, MoMA's curator of Contemporary Art, Robert Storre, from November 13 onwards, will skim through the city" (PASCOWITCH, 1991b, p. 5-2).

From these episodes, we can already perceive the enormous influence that Marcantônio exerted not only nationally but also in the international art circuit. Also on October 20, Marcantônio Vilaça shows some of his personal decoration items to the newspaper in the column "Bed, table and bath", including works by artists he had in his already extensive catalogue, such as the *Luminária* "brain in stand" by Leda Catunda; paintings by Fábio Miguez and Nuno Ramos; tree sculpture "Ladies of the Night" by Lia Menna Barreto; 1986 drawing table by Ester Grinspum (CAMA, 1997, p. d'16). On November 13, 1991 Joyce Pascowitch says in her column: "Marcantônio Vilaça landed in the city the day before yesterday after an intense cultural-session between Barcelona, Paris and Madrid" (PASCOWITCH, 1991c, p. 5-2), information he says a lot about the intense life of Marcantônio, who was present in several exhibitions around the world.

MARCANTÔNIO COLLECTOR AND GALLERY OWNER (1992 - 1999)

Even though the Pasárgada gallery had been working intensely not only on Pernambuco, but also throughout the national territory, Marcantônio only began to be effectively recognized as a gallery owner by the newspapers in 1992. The fact is that in 1991 Marcantônio left for São Paulo, and at the beginning of the following year, lends for 20 years as a loan for 20 years to MAC USP (USP Contemporary Art Museum) about 50 pieces from its collection, which had names such as: Ângelo Venosa, Caetano de Almeida, Cristina Canale, Daniel Senise, Leda Catunda, Jorge Guinle, Nuno Ramos and Valeska Soares, among others (ANJOS, 2006, p. 183).

In 1992, Marcantônio Vilaça was invited by his friend and partner Karla Camargo to start together the Camargo Vilaça gallery. Regarding this fact, Maria Bulhões emphasizes the relevance that the economic crisis the country has just gone through had in the formation of a new profile of gallery owners in the country, focused on the internationalization of national works while seeking the foreign market:

The economic crisis of the 1990s, with the restrictions imposed on the internal market, on the other hand, seems to have helped to reformulate the panorama of absence of Brazilian art in the international market, which was observed until then. A new type of performance started to be conducted by some gallery owners, such as Luiza Strina, Thomas Cohn and Camargo Vilaça, the latter created much more recently (1992). They sought to adapt to the new rules of globalization, working on an exclusive basis, with a restricted number of artists and basically investing in their recognition. (BULHÕES, 2007, p. 272).

It can be seen then that the focus of these new dealers was on greater participation in international events, such as fairs and the

organization of exhibitions of their artists in galleries and museums in other countries. This internationalization was an “important alternative for survival and consolidation in the face of the retraction of consumption in the national economy from the 1990s onwards” (BULHÕES, 2007, p. 273). And it’s impossible not to notice the importance Marcantônio gave to living in exhibitions. A frequent visitor to exhibitions, galleries, fairs and museums, it was in these places that he strengthened his network of contacts and expanded his collection. An example is the entry of November 21, 1993 made by Paulo Giandalia in the Fotossíntese column: “Photo of MV at the opening of the exhibition by Beatriz Milhazes” (GIANDALIA, 1993, p. 8). Three years after this registration (in 1996), the actress Beatriz Milhazes would be accompanied by the dealer’s gallery in one of the most important art fairs in the world: Art Chicago (ANJOS, 2006, p. 186).

In 1994, in the column between the lines, Pascowitch records passages by renowned artists at the Camargo Vilaça gallery. On April 10, the visit of Paula Trabulsi: “Photo by Paula Trabulsi in the gallery of Marcantônio Vilaça and Karla Camargo” (PASCOWITCH, 1994a, p. 5-2). On July 2, Laura Vinci visited: “Photos of the preparation of works by the artist Laura Vinci at the Camargo Vilaça gallery. Aguilar present to see the works” (PASCOWITCH, 1994b, p. 5-2). There are even records in the book “Invenção de Mundos” organized by Moacir dos Anjos (ANJOS, 2006, p. 113) of a work by the artist Laura Vinci from the same year present in the dealer’s collection.

Ileana Pradilla, in the book “Invenção de Mundos”, highlights the immediate success of the Camargo Vilaça gallery: with less than a year of experience, the dealer had already managed to bring together several highly representative artists, including Lygia Pape and Iberê Camargo (ANJOS, 2006, p.

185). About Marcantônio and Karla's gallery, Bulhões reiterates her pioneering role and explains how she gave new meaning to dealing with art in the country:

The Camargo Vilaça gallery, for example, appears as a new phenomenon, boasting hype in newspapers, adopting the installment plan when negotiating with museums, producing catalogs and events, acting openly to build an international insertion for its artists. With a political vision of the international art circuit, he formed a group with contemporary Latin Americans in the international dissemination of his artists. (BULHÕES, 2007, p. 272).

It didn't take Marcantônio to represent artists in biennials around the world. On October 14, 1994, the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper records an interesting fact: "Marcantônio was one of the most exhausted the day before yesterday at the opening of the biennial due to his new florist cote. It is he who takes care of the installation of Valeska Soares with thousands of roses. Supplying said whose with fresh flowers straight from their refrigerator" (PASCOWITCH, 1994c, p. 5-2). Valeska Soares even participated in the inaugural exhibition at the Camargo Vilaça gallery in 1992 (ANJOS, 2006, p. 184).

In 1996, Marcantônio was already considered, in the words of an August 3 report, one of the "most important gallery owners in Brazil". This specific article, called "Galeristas approve initiative", was about a pioneer project in the country: *Antarctica Artes com a Folha*. Marcantônio comments on the initiative:

The mapping of contemporary plastic arts in Brazil [...] and the selection of artists [...] pleased some of the most important gallery owners in the country. Marcantônio Vilaça, from Camargo Vilaça, commented on the lack of initiatives similar to *Antarctica Artes* with *Folha* and the lack of participation by the private sector in supporting culture, especially in the plastic arts. He also praised the selection criteria: "The way the choice was made was very good, with visits to

studios and not based on CVs. I found it interesting that the list was not based on a geographical concept, but rather on the quality of production. I know a good part of the list, there are great names. It will be a great complement to the *Bienal SP*". (GALERISTAS, 1996, p. 5-3).

Such was his success on the national art scene that Marcantônio soon became a reference when talking about the new Brazilian art. Also in 1996, Vilaça participated in a debate about the art market for young artists, accompanied by the current minister of culture Francisco Weffort, critic Alberto Tassinari, videomaker Sandra Kogut and artist Nuno Ramos. According to the article on 07/09 regarding this debate, Marcantônio says that "one of the great problems in the art market in Brazil is the lack of institutional buyers, made up of companies, museums and the state". He adds: "in Europe and the USA, many companies form collections that will circulate and even be donated to museums. This makes the market very dynamic" (MERCADO, 1996, p. 4-7). Maria Bulhões points out that the entry of business groups into the art market started in the 70s, consolidating itself more and more since then:

The relationship between the art market and business groups was a trend that was implemented in Brazil from the 70s onwards, gradually consolidating up to the present day. Lacking significant legitimizing institutions, the arts system progressively anchored its credibility in the market which, strengthened in terms of cultural capital, made its alliances with social and economic capital. The new strata, enriched by the development process, were largely made up of executives with extensive international contacts, interested in promoting local, modern and bold artistic production, compatible with what they saw in major international centers. (BULHÕES, 2007, p. 270).

Two days later, on July 11, 1996, *Folha* published the following report: "Weffort

supports the creation of a foundation". In this article, the newspaper presents some of the results of that debate: The gallery owner Marcantônio Vilaça criticized the lack of an acquisition policy by museums and the inexperience of companies with collection formation policies. He also stressed the need for the state to assume minimal functions in relation to the market, such as sending works of art abroad. (WEFFORT, 1996, p. 4-3).

Ileana Pradilla highlights the intense international presence of Marcantônio Vilaça and his gallery in 1996. They actively participated (being the only Brazilian representative) in two of the main art fairs in the world: Art Chicago and Arco. In the first, which he had already participated in the previous year, he presented several artists from the national scene such as Adriana Varejão, Beatriz Milhazes, Jac Leirner, Ernesto Neto, Leda Catunda, Rosângela Rennó, Valeska Soares, Pedro Cabrita Reis and Luiz Zerbini. The second, based in Spain, would make Marcantônio a member of the organizing committee three years later (ANJOS, 2006, p. 186). Bulhões (2007, p. 273), however, states that in this period "the new presence of Brazilian art in foreign markets are discontinuous and disconnected, basically depending on individualized actions and subject to external legitimation instances".

On February 19, 1999, the newspaper *A Folha de São Paulo* published an article about the success of Brazilians at the Spanish fair Arco:

Brazilian success yields dollars and contacts: The year started well for Brazilian contemporary art abroad. The 18th edition of the Spanish fair Arco yielded, in addition to many favorable comments, a positive balance for its participants. Gallerist Marcantônio Vilaça, from Camargo Vilaça gallery, could barely contain his enthusiasm: "I sold more than in all previous editions of the event. I think I'm moving to Madrid!" joked the gallery owner on the last day of the

event. The Museum of Contemporary Art of Santiago de Compostela, in Galicia, bought works by three artists: Lac Lerner, Efraim Almeida and Rosângela Rennó (the video "Vulgo"). Another success was Ernesto Neto, who sold three works (one was not even at the fair). Works by Rivane Neuenschwander, Valeska Soares, Adriana Varejão, and others were also sold. Marcantônio Vilaça justifies his success for two reasons: one is the fidelity to the event, which he has been attending for several years. The other is the quality of the works on display. It is necessary to have a solid stand, with important works, hand-picked to draw attention, M Marcantônio said. (FIORAVANTE, 1999, p. 4 -4).

Also in that same year, now on July 9, the *Entrelinhas* column records the presence of Marcantônio at the Ibero-American fair: "As the only Brazilian gallery owner at the Ibero-American fair, in Caracas, Marcantônio Vilaça sits on the jury on Sunday at the young artists salon of Venezuela" (PASCOWITCH, 1999, p. 4-2). Here, it is important to highlight the various efforts by Marcantônio and reported by Ileana Pradilla (ANJOS, 2006, p. 186): with the aim of ending structural prejudices against the people and Latin American art, Marcantônio often organized exhibitions of prominent Latin artists abroad, such as Doris Salcedo and Maria Fernanda Cardoso (Colombia), José Antonio Hernández-Diez (Venezuela) and Fabian Marcaccio (Argentina). About this, Marcantonio said:

Since I opened the gallery, I've always had the proposal to do exhibitions by Latin Americans. Here in Brazil, we have always looked at Europeans and North Americans much more. I want to put an end to this idea that Latin art is a cucaracha thing. (MOACIR, 2006, p. 186).

Marcantônio died at the turn of the year 1999-2000, aged 37 years.

On January 5, 2000, the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper published the article "Vilaça put pepper on the art plate" about the art dealer's

life and work. According to the report, “if he were alive, he would be in NY with the artist Adriana Varejão, one of the names he helped build, who opens his first solo show in the city” (FIORAVANTE, 2000, p. 4-5) .

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

To conclude, we can say that the early death of Marcantônio Vilaça represented an enormous loss not only for national art but also for Latin American art. Throughout this work, his efforts to internationalize Latin art and, thus, make it more visible and valued became quite evident. The dealer himself makes this intention very clear in an interview given: “nowadays, most of my sales are in the international market, more than 50%. It has been a concern of the gallery since the beginning, to seek internationalization” (VILAÇA, 2005, p.119). Marcantônio was present in almost all the major fairs and exhibitions around the world, being called to compose the organizing committee of one of the biggest fairs in the world: Arco, in Spain.

When looking at its collection, comprising more than 500 pieces, one notices a perceptive and attentive look at the national art scene. Marcantônio dialogued in a very synchronized way with the new Brazilian art, that is, the national contemporary art. Just turn to some of the great names in Brazilian contemporary art, such as Angelo Venosa, Caetano de Almeida, Cristina Canale, Daniel Senise, Leda Catunda, Jorge Guinle, Nuno Ramos, Valeska Soares, Adriana Varejão, Beatriz Milhazes, Jac Leirner, Ernesto Neto, Rosângela Rennó, Luiz Zerbini and Vik Muniz, or even to national works present in the great North American and European museums, to get an idea of the influence and propulsion capacity generated by Marcantônio in his brief passage through the history of art.

It can be seen then that several of the characteristics - such as the resounding ease

in creating connections, a keen eye for art and, mainly, the maturation and resignification of the concept of internationalizing - quite evident in Marcantônio’s *modus-operandi*, were fundamental in the influence of the formation of a new profile of dealers in Brazil, giving great importance to looking outside, in addition to a greater diffusion of Brazilian plastic arts. And this diffusion, which provides greater visibility to the artist, is also accompanied by an appreciation (monetarily speaking) rarely seen in the history of Brazilian art. An example of this is the evolution in the price of works by artist Beatriz Milhazes, an artist present since the first year of the Camargo Vilaça gallery’s existence: at the time when Marcantônio began to be represented, her works were not so valued by collectors, reaching the maximum to be worth \$2,000. In May 2008, one of her works, *The Magician*, had been auctioned by Sotheby’s valued at \$250,000, making it the 16th most expensive work on the lot. The piece ended up being sold by Argentine Eduardo Costantini to 1.49m dollars, surpassing expectations.

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