

LISSON

ESTATE OF HÉLIO OITICICA

BIOGRAPHY



Hélio Oiticica (1937 – 1980) is widely regarded as one of Brazil’s leading artists of the twentieth century and a touchstone for much contemporary art made since the 1960s, primarily through his freewheeling, participatory works of art, performative environments, avant-garde films and abstract paintings. Even before the age of 20, Oiticica was a key member of the historic Rio de Janeiro-based Grupo Frente (1954-56), his radical play with geometric form and vibrant colors transcending the minimal lines of European constructivism and imbuing his work with an exuberant rhythm that resonated with the avant-garde music and poetry of his native Brazil. In the late 1950s, Oiticica would go on to become a leading figure of Brazilian Neo-Concretism (1959-61) that included other ground breaking artists such as Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape and the poet Ferreira Gullar, ultimately giving rise to the artistic movement known as *Tropicalismo*, named for a work of Oiticica’s from 1967.

Increasingly, Oiticica became a countercultural figure and underground hero, foregrounding bodily interaction with spatial and environmental concerns over pure aesthetics. “Ambient art,” he wrote, “is the overthrow of the traditional concept of paintingframe and sculpture – that belongs to the past. It gives way to the creation of ‘ambiences’: from there arises what I call ‘antiart,’” which he later defined as “the era of the popular participation in the creative field.” This generous and generative practice would become highly influential for subsequent generations of artists, especially his *Parangolés* or ‘habitable paintings’ and all-encompassing series of installations, known variously as *Núcleos* (ceiling-hung geometric panels forming gradual chromatic experiences) and *Propositions* or *Penetrables* (labyrinth-like architectural environments made of sand and semi-permeable cabins). This supra-sensorial approach continued until his untimely death in 1980 at the age of 42.

Oiticica’s work has been the subject of many major museum exhibitions, most recently at Dia Art Foundation, Beacon, NY (2025-2026). Critically acclaimed retrospectives include *Hélio Oiticica: Dance in my Experience* at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo and the Museu de Arte Moderna do

Rio de Janeiro in 2020-2021, and *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*, which debuted at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh in 2016 and traveled to the Art Institute of Chicago and the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2017. *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Color* was exhibited at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in 2006–2007 and in London at the Tate Modern in 2007. His work is included in the collections of numerous international institutions including Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA, USA; Inhotim Centro de Arte Contemporânea, Belo Horizonte, Brazil; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, USA; Museo de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain; Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX, USA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA; Tate Modern, London, UK; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN, USA; the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates; and the Pérez Art Museum Miami, FL, USA, among others. The Projeto Hélio Oiticica was established in Rio de Janeiro in 1980 to manage the artist's estate.