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ANA MARIA TAVARES AND THE ART SIEGE

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An endeavor enhances Ana Maria Tavares' production: A struggle between an understanding of art as an existential field - the most efficient shape-forming zone of her sensibility - and the awareness (derived from the Duchampian lesson) of the impossibility of art nowadays freeing itself from the institutional circuit created by society.

A reference to this struggle might clarify why the artist consciously has not defined herself within one specific media of artistic activity, but has always operated on the borders of these fields. For Ana, it seems, that one day having to define herself as a sculptor or a painter meant confining herself even more within a tirelessly explored and limited territory. Doubtlessly, this attitude is not seeking to circumscribe an absolutely original posture within contemporary art. After all, ever since Dada and, in the case of Brazil, ever since the "fenômeno neoconcreto"*, several artists have been working these undefined perimeters. The originality in Ana's path is in the manner she singles out this attitude - knowingly adding to this procedure, also perceptible in other poetic fields, certain attributes that distinguish her performance.

Remarkable in the artist's production is her capacity to bring forth in each piece the above mentioned endeavor, focal point of her purpose in art. Her pieces and installations are more than balance points between Apollonian and Dionysian attitudes, Ana's work seems to be the proper concretion of the conflict of art as a manifestation of self, operating within a pre-determined mode - all of which are metaphors of possible action for the artist nowadays.

The fact that the artist always intervenes with the physical space where she is exhibiting, be it through installations or through works establishing a dialogue with its surroundings and the spectator, shows a concern or awareness of the impossibility of pushing forward a concretion of her individuality without taking into account — at the very moment of creating a piece - the real and metaphorical space where her work is irremediably inserted.

This singularity in her work reaches a high point in the exhibition at Gabinete de Arte Raquel Arnaud where the artist shows that her struggle has arrived at a higher level of purity. Note: This does not mean that Ana has solved this conflict with the work exhibited, something she has no intention of doing, knowing that this conflict is insolvable. At this moment, and this being no small feat, it seems that Ana has reached a phase in her development where the reasons for her performance are more accentuated.

Her present pieces, more so than the previous ones, are located within the fields of sculpture and design. The works dribble these areas conforming a possible territory where the concepts of an industrial - and a craft-object, an utilitarian - and a purely esthetic-object, art and no-art struggle within each of the presented pieces facing the spectator with a situation where passive contemplation is transformed into participation.

The works are strangely familiar, related to objects that fill our everyday universe. All of them rigorously executed. Works with a rational that initially provoke an immediate of utilization. This immediate utilitarian present in Ana's

configurations is, nevertheless, fallacious - a fact the spectator becomes aware of when the first impression is waning. If this fact is barely evident and if the final shape of each exhibited work is not aimed at a practical purpose, what then, are these objects about since they do not place themselves comfortably within a traditional view of sculpture, lacking a certain basis to appear as such?

Between design and sculpture, between a traditional work of art and an apparent utilitarian work, Ana's pieces reaffirm the impossibility of art establishing new meaning if not through critical denial or tangibility of traditional artistic means – or through the reinvention of the same means, which is not Ana's case.

As has already been stated, the works of Ana Maria Tavares, now at display, are a purification of the expressed endeavor - a fact which has been haunting the artist since the beginning of her career. In a recent past, 1988, Ana gave evident signals of her purification through her "móveis"***, exhibited at the itinerant Arte Híbrida, shown in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre. With the brakes on, the pieces - being indefinite objects rolling between the fields of sculpture and design - parodied sculptures and traditional works of art creating tension between the two fields of production. Due to the elaborate industri-alized finishing, the works, in their final form, seemed to lack elements justifying the feeling of curiosity inherent in a work of art - after all, the objects were situated in an exhibition of "modern" art. They lacked an aura of "uselessness" present in works traditionally understood as being "transgressive". Moreover, the objects were moveable like certain household appliances, revealing a (false) utility, sufficient to incommode a spectator accustomed to take delight in objects which reaffirm a "lack of significance" in art of today.

On the other hand, the mobility of the works established a dubious – almost ironic - dialogue within the space where they were shown. In theory they could easily have abandoned each room where they were presented, leaving art rendered to itself. The ability to dialogue with space and its elements becomes evident in the artist's installations, only in her intervening works. If in her pieces of 1988 and the works now shown, Ana operated within the territory of sculpture and design, she has worked the more typical elements of painting in her installation Bico de Diamante executed this year at Paço das Artes, São Paulo. Transforming the chosen room by the inclusion of a lit, green metallic panel (between two planes formed by a wall and two columns), and a handlebar facing this superposing of planes, the artist reinforced some of the more severe specificities of traditional painting: perspective and the exercise of frontality which this medium solicits from the spectator.

The installation both reinforced and denied these specificities by the possibility of the spectator observing or literally penetrating - physically and optically - the planes of the "painting".

This capacity of establishing new relations with space and its elements, reached a high point in 1986 with the work Abrigo Para o Sol carried out for the Projeto Vermelho, a group exhibition at Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado, FAAP, São Paulo: A cylindrical reservoir, 2.8m high by 2m diameter, made of fire-bricks. For the same fallacious utilitarian reasons that the artist uses in her latter work, the monolithic architecture, almost industrial, clashed with the "artistic" surroundings of the FAAP gardens where part of the exhibition took place. Despite the appearance, it was neither a water reservoir nor a common silo, least of all a predictable work of art. It was in fact a construction for the specific purpose of guarding and maintaining the sun.

An interesting facet of this work is the fact that the artist privileges a connection with macrocosm, bringing into the ambient of the project a surprisingly lyrical dimension hard to detect in the majority of the other works exhibited.

The lyricism, the expressiveness in Ana's works, that is, the artist's subjective component in the execution of her works, has recently, as seen, been encountering a more adequate expression relating to the awareness of art as a limited territory. In her recent works and installations, the first component - lyricism - blends with the second - art as a limited territory - producing an interference that brings forth a tense and conflicting relation. Nevertheless, in some of the previous works, when this conflict still had not reached the actual level of purity, it looked like the artist's subjective component wanted to dominate the situation as if it were possible to trick and deceive the institutional context of art through an emphasis on gestural expressiveness. The environment Ana created for the XIX Bienal Internacional de São Paulo in 1987 highlights the tense moment when one clearly perceives an almost naive effort to shield her individuality off from the art circuit. Here, instead of relating directly to the exhibition space, the artist chose to separate herself definitely from the surroundings, constructing a separate universe - an apparently ideal territory for her own subjectivity.

The 228m² ambient was an immense cube made up of three rooms connected by a mural – all covered by white ceramic tiles. A cold and anodyne space populated, however, by lines and volumes originating from immense gestural drawings, invading the rooms, demarking dramatic areas of intense light and shadow. In spite of the

undeniable quality of the installations as an expression of the artist's nonconformist individuality, entering in that ambient was not, however, leaving art (the Bienal) and entering into a purely existential experience. It was positively entering into a self-institutionalized space, a representation of the art gallery.

In her Bienal installation, Ana, recently arrived from studying abroad, was trying to give continuity to her two successful experiences in the U.S.. Through drawings and her well articulated use of the constituent elements of the spaces she operated in - Oxbow Art Center, Oxbow, Michigan and Superior Street Gallery, Chicago, Illinois - Ana demonstrated her capacity of expressing her inherent subjectivity in relation to art and the space it occupies - always taking into account the possibility of proposing to the spectator a more global experience including himself, the work and its surroundings.

This characteristic of not being content with the limits of the traditional artistic areas which Ana radicalized during and after her north-American experience (1984-86), in reality, could have been felt as much in her drawings and prints executed in the first half of the last decade, as in her works presented at the exhibitions Pintura Como Meio, Museu de Arte Contemporânea, MAC-USP, 1983, and Objetos e Interferências, Pinacoteca do Estado, 1982, both in São Paulo.

The drawings exhibited at E O Desenho?, Humberto Tecidos, São Paulo, 1985, distinctively showed the artist's necessity to break out of the boundaries of the plane, enabling her to intervene more profoundly in space and the public's perception.

The paintings, shown at MAC-USP, thrown against panels which limited the space, clearly showed a possible and original way for the return-of-painting movement taking place in Brazil at that time. Moreover, they are evidences of Ana's later discussion of art and art's place in conlemporanity.

With her installation of perforated rubber rugs put on the wall, creating a constanlly changing image for the viewer as he moved about the room, Ana started her professional endeavor; consequently, esblablishing the parameters for her questioning, demonstrating her nonconformist sensibility to wards socially determined rules for art.

It was the same sensibility that made the artist retrace her first apprenticeship in Belo Horizonte, in favor of a more questioning attitude vis-à-vis the current state of art affairs, influenced mainly by her teachers at FAAP and Aster: Julio Plaza, Nelson Leirner and Regina Silveira.

Translator's note:

* Neo-concretism, according to Ronaldo Brito, was born in the second half of the 50s as peak and rupture of the constructivist tendencies in Brazil. This opening the field for contemporary art. Ronaldo Brito is the author of NEOCONCRETISMO Vértice e Ruptura do Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro, Rio de Janeiro, FUNARTE-INAP, 1985.

** In Portuguese the word "móveis" designates pieces of furniture which can be moved. It also designates anything movable - as opposed to the "imóveis" which is static.