

CHRISTINA OITICICA - THE FOUR SEASONS - LJUBLJANA - 2003

Four Seasons: Before – After

What are the main focal points in contemporary South American art, especially in the continent's largest countries, Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia and Chile? A feature common to almost all is a context of explicit social criticism (particularly in Argentina, Chile, Bolivia); socially critical modernism was first introduced by European émigrés, and later took on (more or less overtly) religious overtones, either in the form of popular, folkloristic figurative art or more intellectually ambitious art that in Venezuela and Brazil reached its highest and purest stage as abstract constructivism and concrete art. This resulted in a form of conceptual art (mostly originating from a tradition of, as it were, intrinsic shamanism) in certain cases.

Brazilian artist Christina Oiticica originates from, and in a way continues to belong to, the art scene of Rio de Janeiro, which began to emerge in the 1970. The so-called “neo-concrete” art, a reaction to the rigidly mathematical concrete art of São Paulo, stressed physical being and subjectivity above all else. Lygia Clark, Mira Schendel and Hélio Oiticica (whose family Christina also belongs to) are names from this circle and have become a part of the history of art.

In recent years, Christina Oiticica has worked in Europe, having retreated to an all-natural space, as it were; her “frontier” is the French-Spanish Pyrenees. What she has chosen to present in Ljubljana are the Four Seasons (*As quatro estações*), works from a period that began on 19th September 2002, when she started painting in the middle of the woods, west of a place called Tarbes in the Pyrenees, and ended in late summer 2003.

How and in what way?

She painted canvases with acrylic paints (sometimes using paper and mixed media), then covered or buried them, or attached them to tree trunks, and left them in the woods, letting nature do its work – but only for a limited period of time. After that she went looking for them again, unearthing them, suspending them in the same natural environment so that they could be in a sense cleansed, without herself actively removing the traces of the Pyrenean wood, which are obviously essential. Her paintings exude a special (female) eroticism, evident in sensuous reds, in the figurative metaphors of full, sensual red lips and heart-shaped forms – an inventory familiar to Oiticica from the Brazilian pop culture, both that of everyday life in the streets and that which bursts with religious symbols (Jesus' bleeding heart, punctured by thorns, encircled by roses), and the Latin American temperament. She brings together simultaneously a disturbing libidinousness and sensuous devoutness in the new *genius loci*, in the heart of pristine nature which also offers itself in a kind of pre-spirituality (not to mention the physical proximity of Lourdes which also influences the artist's creativity).

Christina Oiticica builds a world of testimonies, fetishism and imaginary spaces, evident not only if we follow the titles of her previous exhibitions (in Dublin, Brussels, Berlin, Paris, Rio) but also if we look closely at the state of her unique artistic spirituality.

Aleksander Bassin