

## Some Faces of the Work of Amílcar de Castro

by Rodrigo Naves

I have lived with the work of Amílcar de Castro for more than thirty years. Besides, I was his friend and I could write about his work a dozen times. Such proximity would not allow for a sloppy approach to production that has never given up on rigor and consistency. However, Amílcar's seriousness was never confused with stiffness. On the contrary, the clarity of its formalizations was always shared with his material - iron, in which the sculptor encountered possibilities never imagined - something of its resistance and opacity. And so I believe that a less formal tone in the analysis of his work can be justified from the artist's own aesthetic decisions, always averse to formal solutions that did not take into account the unforeseeable results with which reality would respond to his precise gestures. However, in commenting on the work of Amílcar de Castro, I can not escape - at least in the beginning - of some analyzes I have done previously, especially those published in a book called *The Difficult Form*, of 1996. For this reason I still believe they have some power of enlightenment. Let us consider some of our best modern artists, such as Volpi and Guignard, with works of great quality, even though there are irregularities in their works. I think that the painting of both is characterized by a formal shyness, which shows itself in different ways in their works. What do I mean by formal shyness? In the case of Guignard, I think this characteristic is really there. . This text is based on a conference held on the work of Amílcar de Castro at Casa Fiat de Cultura, in Nova Lima, Minas Gerais, on April 9, 2008, during an exhibition of the artist. I thank José Eduardo de Lima Pereira, president of the institution, and Afonso Borges, for the invitation. His best works - the imaginary landscapes, the nights of St. John, the misty landscape of Ouro Preto - find a very original solution to a problem that occupied almost all modern art: the attempt to question the tight relationship between figure and background, between object and space. But this originality also seems to me highly problematic. In the landscapes of Guignard, there is a diffuse, misty space that turns on itself and thus instills itself in the things it involves - be it mountains or cities - dissolving its sturdiness and converting everything into the same misty substance. In this way Guignard would reach a surface more or less homogeneous that would break with that firm relation, allowing a greater interaction between the elements of the picture. However, to get to this closeness, Guignard needs to break almost completely with the definition of objects. And that is how he understood his need to paint with the very diluted paint, which would help produce those liquefied images, lacking more marked structures. These solutions make the nature that emerges from his pictures have an elusive configuration reluctant to

externalize. Everything in Guignard's painting, therefore, conspires to, on the one hand, the idea of a nature that does not manifest itself, that hesitates between showing and hiding that which insinuates itself "in the background", without revealing itself fully. It would be possible to find some point of contact between the paintings of Guignard and the more radical paintings of Turner, in which both have diffuse, of indefiniteness. But in Turner's painting this dissolution is obtained by very powerful natural forces - reminiscent of the potency of the four primordial elements - which transmit their energy to the surface of the paintings: the opposite of what we see in Brazilian painting. On the other hand, Guignard also has a very curious thing about the fact that in his painting, unlike what happens on a 3 Matisse, Picasso or Miró screen - just to keep up with exemplary cases - original is not what which is shown in a different way, because of the relations of a new order, different from those that determine our daily life. Original in the art of Guignard, given this porous and indecisive appearance of the works, it is precisely that which is not shown, which is hidden in the background. This produces extremely interesting works, while at the same time revealing a trauma of complicated origin. In Volpi's painting, which moves in a reasonably different direction, there are similarities. The first thing that catches my attention on Volpi is the fact that he returns to the temper. Tempering is a medieval technique, which is replaced by oil as soon as it develops in the Netherlands. And it ceases to exist for very specific reasons: very quick dry temper, is opaque - so it does not allow velatura - and prevents colors from mingling on the canvas. That's funny. And there is also, in Volpi's very subtle use of tempering, a clear dialogue with the whitewashed houses of the interior of the country. And, from a more erudite point of view, also with the light colors of the frescoes. That is, a strange bond with something highly vernacular and local and, at the same time, one of the most powerful traditions of European painting. It is easy to remember that in the only time he returned to Europe in 1950, Volpi visited the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, one of the greatest frescoes of Giotto, almost twenty times. So, what comes of these decisions of the artist? On the one hand, given the way Volpi uses tempering, there is a color that is never very well defined, because it uses it very openly, without producing homogeneous color surfaces, which will only happen on the screens that have A closer dialogue with concrete artists in the mid-1950s. 4 On the other hand, and almost paradoxically, there is a considerable influence of constructivism on Volpi's way of organizing his canvases. Although his works always refer to elements of figuration - the flags of São João, the facades, roofs, masts, flags - it seems to me indisputable that the painter takes advantage of the simple geometry of those patterns to articulate his paintings more clearly. But the "geometry" of Volpi will always be marked by a hesitation that keeps referring to the manual origin of those figures. Volpi's original use of quenching will result in this expressiveness without drama: an explication of the activity of the hand which, instead of opposing the resistance of matter, delights in ways of sweetly overcoming its solidity. In Volpi's painting, colors and shapes need to be

shown reluctantly. If it flirts here and there with the rigorous and industrial formalization of the constructivists, it is only to make clearer the distance that separates them from them. Once, Nuno Ramos showed Frank Stella reproductions of paintings by Volpi. The American artist, who certainly lacked a greater familiarity with Volpi's art, did not hesitate: he found them primitive, almost naive. In fact, Frank Stella's painting is almost the opposite of that of the Brazilian artist: the decorativism of the works carried out in the second half of the 60s is solved with areas of intense color, outlined without any reluctance or gesture. So it is curious that both in the work of Volpi and Guignard we have a refusal to decisive aspects of modern art: the capacity to produce relations of form and color that differ from the other appearances of the world, obtaining bonds that would give reality a more free and sovereign appearance. It is in this that I see the formal shyness of a considerable part of our best art, for I believe that some of these aspects could also be identified in the works of others of our 5 most original modern artists: Tarsila, Anita Malfatti, Milton Dacosta, Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark etc. I think few people like these artists as much as I do. However, the limit I see in them is in the excessive proximity that they maintain with important aspects of our sociability that seem to me very complicated. In other words, what bothers me in these traits of the modern art of the country is to see in them the same annoyance that so many of us identify in Brazil: not being able to imagine another place to live and, at the same time, not being able to adhere to a kind of life charming and very troublesome. In fact, I believe that to a large extent this reluctance, this formal shyness, this refusal to bring the forms to the surface, to make them have a marked presence has a lot to do with our sociability. At least until the 60's it was this way that our coexistence was based. Until that time, more than half of the Brazilian population lived in the countryside. In addition to the limitations that rural life tends to impose on social life - in our case, a world in which the father commanded the family, in which the family commanded the peasants, extending their influence to the cities and to the nation - all the sociability of the country conspired against the processes of differentiation that marked the life of the more advanced countries: the autonomous organization of social classes (in parties, trade unions or social movements), the establishment of norms to be followed by all citizens, a notion of individuality and citizenship that surpassed the practices of favor and clientelism. Although slavery was abolished at the end of the nineteenth century, it undoubtedly was decisive for the general jelly that, to some extent, still guides our coexistence. I am not saying that Volpi and Guignard simply reiterate those ambiguous and problematic aspects of our coexistence. I think that they seek to find, to reveal in them an affirmative dimension, a sort of lyricism of closeness, that would make that indifferenciation the possible place of a new life, in which beings and nature would relate in a little mediated and happy way. Undoubtedly, a project particularly averse to the distances and complexities established by modern life and industrialization. But what, after all, does Amilcar de Castro's work have to do with this Brazilian social trap, with the

inability of the social groups to differentiate themselves, the classes to be structured, the people articulating institutionally, formally, etc.? In my view, everything. But with one fundamental difference: in his sculptures - especially in the formidable works of cutting and folding - what in the painting of Guignard and Volpi was, as I see it, an attempt at lyric redemption of our lack of distance and of institutionality, In his sculptures, I repeat, reached an intensity rarely seen in Brazilian art. What, in general lines, characterizes the first autonomous works of the Amilcar, the works of cut and fold mentioned above, of which in this exhibition some examples very beautiful? There is a very great formal rigor in them, whose constructive origin has no mystery at all - you strike the eye and you know that the artist started from a flat plate, cut it and folded it, thus reaching three-dimensionality. But if we were to reduce these sculptures of Amilcar to this, we would in fact lose sight of almost all the uniqueness and grandeur of his work. For what is most constitutive in his work, what actually structures these works, is precisely the doubling, that is, the resistance of steel<sup>2</sup> to formalization - which undoubtedly calls into question the transparency of the process that led to Amilcar's Castro, as a matter of fact, mostly used steel in his sculptures, though he generally referred to his material as "iron." However, as the difference between the two is only in the percentage of carbon that enters its composition, I use the two words here indifferently. 7 them. It is enough to think of the changes that the use of weld, instead of the folds, would introduce in the works to have clarity of its importance in the structuring of the sculptures. To make clear what I want to emphasize, I will take as reference the conception of an artist who was very influential for Amilcar and for many of our artists, Max Bill, one of the great figures of late constructivism. The strength he had in our art medium, I believe, can not be attributed solely to the delay of national artistic discussion, or to the demands that JK's developmentalism has placed on the aesthetic discussion in Brazil. In addition to being really seen by the artists - Max Bill won with the Tripartite Unit the first prize in the First International Biennial of São Paulo - and to have argued in a clear and, let's say, rational way with artists and architects from our milieu who were not very fond of oppositions , I think the Swiss artist has touched on another decisive (and vulnerable) point of our fragile art medium. Before the presence of their arguments and, above all, their confirmation in works of art, only a few artists - Waldemar Cordeiro, for example, trained in Europe - strove to remove Brazilian art from the scope of romantic dilettantism and, consequently , Averse to discussions. Undoubtedly, with all the problems that an avant-garde platform had of schematic and sectarian. With the presence of Max Bill - personally and with his works - in the cultural environment of the country, the visual arts became a region susceptible of being criticized in the form of arguments, which, by their very nature, contradicted the alleged ineffable character of the constructed works Without the support of that universal and shareable instrument by everyone, the word. But Max Bill's civilizing mission - something still lacking in a deeper and more enlightening research - also led to a belief in the transparency of the meaning

and meaning of art that certainly fell short of the dilemmas of our time, even those of a backward country . In the background, for Max Bill and for late constructivism, including for a considerable part of the production of Lygia Clark and of so many other concretes and neoconcretes, the ideal was the tape of Moebius, that strip that draws the symbol of the infinite, in which Turns out, in which the surface becomes volume etc. And given the fact that on Moebius's tape there is no resistance to form, the reversibility of the figures obtained is absolutely feasible - I mean by this the almost reduction of the sense of a work of art to the possibility of the spectator to retrace the steps taken by the artist to To reach that work before us - something that does not exist in the work of Amilcar. In his case, we may know that the work was done in a certain way, but the ostensible presence of the folds causes that, if we disregard it, we disregard a fundamental dimension in Amilcar's work. So it is precisely this tension between a very great formal rigor and the incorporation into the work of a resistance of things to the form that makes not only the work have a greatness, a very interesting intensity, but that, above all, it differs from all The constructive tradition. I think this is what helps to understand the lesser effectiveness of Amilcar de Castro's circular sculptures: in addition to the precision of the cuts, the circle makes the configuration of the works excessively accentuated, making the presence of steel and its resistance difficult. What is the material par excellence of the later constructions? Basically the acrylic, or else the stainless steel and the bronze. In the case of acrylic, the option is justified by the fact that it is transparent, and so the observer can fully follow the artist's reasoning. In addition, it is a ductile material, which offers no resistance to molding, making the movement of ideas even more triumphant. There is in many of these works almost a delusion of honesty when, in the name of breaking with any obscurity of the subject, with inspirations, intuitions, or any such mysticism, the meaning of the work of art is reduced to a procedure controllable by the observer, To which remains the steps employed by the artist. In the case of Amilcar this is not possible, because of that magnificent fold. All transparency of the process of moving from surface to three-dimensionality - a dimension linked to a quest for the essential, of Heideggerian origin, which faced Amilcar at a certain point in its formation - was problematized by the thickness of matter in the world, To the impositions of technique. This decision to bend the iron, instead of welding it, created some practical problems for the artist because, even for lack of money, he could not, by the second half of the 90s, double more than two inches. And even at the end of my life, with a somewhat loftier economic situation, I believe that it did not exceed 3 inches in such works. As you may know, cutting steel is the simplest thing in the world: you use a torch and cut steel like butter. Doubling is another world. Chillida, an interesting Spanish sculptor who died a short time ago, and who is not superior to the Amilcar from the aesthetic point of view, was doubling a bar of more than 20 centimeters in width. And for one simple reason: because he had the money and institutional support to carry out the jobs he planned. The biggest problem I see in this material limitation of

Amilcar was the difficulty of dealing with the scale increase of the sculptures. In those times when he ventured to make works of larger dimensions - such as the sculpture of the Praça da Sé, in São Paulo - the impossibility of increasing the thickness of the pieces diminished their intensity, since, as they increased, they perceptually made the iron plate lose in Presence and resistance. What do I want to emphasize in speaking of the tension between formal rigor and resistance of matter to formalization? That this kind of national tragedy - this difficulty of the 10 different things, of the son getting rid of the father, of the farm getting rid of the family, finally, this indifference in which everything ends up pointing to a structural impotence or to the savior of the Our country, our populist tradition - in Amilcar's work is transformed into intensity, not formal shyness. I think, therefore, that Amilcar - and he thought Volpi was the greatest Brazilian artist, I am repeating what he told me, precisely because I do not want to simplify the positions of our art medium in a positive way - he shares those same questions. However, in my view it gives our difficulties an aesthetic intensity that few artists have managed to achieve. On the other hand, there are in certain choices of Amilcar - let us still consider the works of cut and fold - a kind of very powerful intuition that is the fact that he uses the color steel. Iron and steel are similar things, with a percentage difference of carbon entering into the composition of one and the other. Corten steel, which Amilcar began to use almost continuously after the late 1960s, is a steel that has a percentage of copper. It has the property of, after suffering some oxidation, it does not allow the corrosion process to continue. And, for those who were close to Amilcar, it was very interesting to see how he worked with the Corten steel. There was a metallurgical company where he made his work, which was outside Belo Horizonte. There, the pieces stood on the edge of a ravine, which opened onto a singular vegetation, with palm trees and *cerrado* vegetation. And there, when he watched the making of the steel pieces, he used to say, "That one rusted well, that one did not." These assessments of it, plus the rugged landscape, gave a very peculiar status to the works, because it combined the industrial aspect of a small metallurgy and nature, which claimed its rights for rust, which in turn was reinforced by chance and in a remarkable way, by the arid and irregular landscape. But beyond this natural and unpredictably pictorial dimension, rust - which, it should be noted, is an aesthetic decision of the artist. He could work with stainless steel, or, as Franz Weissmann did remarkably, paint the surfaces of metals - It's kind of adding to world's resistance, to the constructive pretensions of ordering the world through good forms and rational relations. Why? Because rust explains that time acts in the world. Besides being a smart man, Amilcar had great well-turned phrases. Once, talking to him about it, I asked: why do not you use aluminum? "Just because aluminum has no character." And why does aluminum have no character? "First, because it bends easily, and those who bend easily have no character. Second, because it does not age, that is, it does not rust. And those who do not grow old, also have no character." After he observes this it seems obvious, does not it? And Amilcar

even created an iron mythology about Minas Gerais in his work, but the question goes beyond that. Because, in keeping with the thickness of the world, the resistance of the world to organization, which is what we Brazilians experience at every moment - it is no use making a perfect construction or constitution, because Brazil will continue resisting this perfect construction, for obvious reasons. There is this kind of sedimentation of the action of time on the Amilcar material, which is admirable, and which also sets it apart from all other constructive ones. In addition to the resistance of the world to good form, there is the past, history, which hampers movements, and at the same time needs to be considered for transformative actions to be effective. Max Bill used stainless steel frequently. And this says a great deal about the differences in conception when seeing, for example, the following text by Amilcar: "It is made of an iron plate. Of a plate because I intend, starting from the surface, to show the birth of the third dimension. Iron because it is necessary. It is from Minas Gerais and it is within easy reach. Everyone knows how to work the iron. The surface is tamed - it is cut and is being folded. It is when, and by fatality, space is integrated, creating the unpredicable. It's pure surprise. (...)" "both, although, possibly, the trajectory of Amilcar de Castro might have been different without the influence of Max Bill. Another aspect that I find very interesting in Amilcar's work, and here I am already leaving the ideas of my book aside, is as follows. Note that in both the cutting and folding works as well as cutting and moving work, as well as in these last works - which were first exhibited at Praça Tiradentes and at the Hélio Oiticica Art Center in 1999, and of which there are some beautiful examples in this exhibition, in which the plates are finer but still folded-and even in the drawings, however different they may be, there is in them a kind of common term, which is that they suppose a strong unity from which they depart. What do we have in the cut and fold works? The artist starts from a rectangle (or circle), cuts, folds, and reaches three-dimensionality. In cutting and shifting jobs-where sheets could be thicker because, as I said before, cutting iron with blowpipe is the simplest thing in the world-its action was simply to cut and displace some parts. In the later works, although Amilcar does not work with forms as regular as in previous sculptures, he also starts with in an integral form, folds and produces differences. And in the drawings, which he did either with a regular brush, or a huge brush, or with a broom, the work is almost always the result of a continuous gesture. He would wet the brush or broom in *nankin* or ink, and make a single movement to the end. Notice that in the four procedures, we always have a given unity that is broken and redone, or else the continuous gesture of the drawings. With the difference that, in drawings, the continuity of the movement of the brush or broom will also have differences: speed, amount of pain, between straight lines and angular lines, and so on. Why does this strike me as interesting? What Amilcar reveals in this effort to break from given units -and which is remarkable both from the aesthetic point of view and from the understanding of the world supposedly in these actions- is, precisely, the refusal to accept established relations, by custom or

authority, as contingencies that would need to be taken as needs. Actually, as something that could not be dispensed with or get rid of. In the case of cutting and folding, I believe I made it clear how the folds create heterogeneous regions on the steel surfaces, which will also affect the spaces created by them. In cutting and shifting, where he often handles much thicker plates, Amilcar introduces an issue unrelated to the constructive tradition, to the preexistence of a volume. Until Rodin, modern sculptures work with what is called a monolith, that is, an intact and impenetrable volume, compact, which was placed in space as if in opposing to it, and from which it would have to differentiate itself, although, it seems to me, it had a fabulous time intervening in his perception. What changes with Picasso's tin guitar in 1912, which makes him not only one of the greatest painters but also one of the greatest sculptors of the 20th century, and no doubt the artist who has opened the way for 20th century sculpture? With it, the volume becomes constituted by the juxtaposition of surfaces, open to a freer articulation with space. And almost all of the great modern sculptural productions, with the exception of Giacometti's Brancusi, who has almost no volume, and a few others, like Arp and Henry Moore, that leave this path opened by Picasso. Lygia Clark's animals, the *Relevos Espaciais* and the *Nucleos of Helium Oitica*, the sculptures of Amilcar's and Franz Weissmann's, just to stay with the Brazilians, are indebted to that guitar. With it a conception of volume is created, which no longer supposes a given wholeness. A hollow space constructed by the juxtaposition of planes that communicates freely with the space is created and that takes from that interchange much of its force. What is curious, as I mentioned before, is that in the cutting and shifting pieces of more pronounced thickness, there comes a kind of lazy volume. Lazy why? Because it does not wonder about its origin. And what is admirable is that when he cuts and displaces the parts of the iron monolith, he on the one hand, honors Morandi, because he creates these admirable tonalities by the action of light in the various parts of the work - and Amilcar was indeed a very singular man, because, in spite of his constructivist background, he had an openness to recognize the greatness of an artist, even when totally different from his own thinking. On the other hand, by breaking with that given, lazy, unreflective unit, obtained by the displacement of the parts, causes the reflective dimension to re-enter the monolith and to empty the preexistence of a given three-dimensional volume. Because it becomes a set of blocks, almost a Lego, that not only removes the opaque solidity of the given volume, but also introduces in this notion of traditional volume a lightness, a game, a range of possibilities that we thought impossible to be conquered. I do not find it difficult, in this case too, to perceive a very shrewd criticism of the traditionalist way of thinking about reality, always averse in these thoughts, to any more radical change. However, the libertarian character of this reactivation of realities also has another very revealing dimension. The different configurations allowed by the different parts of the sculptures, make us perceive with clarity the relational nature of the determination of objects and social

configurations. Because they no longer have a value of the elements of the sculptures show their dependence on other parts, in a game that opens the world to much more emancipatory and truthful directions. In the last works - and I wanted to insist on this, Amilcar died at the age of 82 and, like few Brazilian artists, he was at the height of his artistic strength, perhaps precisely because the trajectory of his works freed him, widened his field of choices instead of restraining him – thus, he is able to give the iron a new configuration. And in this respect too, I believe that part of the artist's greatness resides: to work for more than fifty years with the same material - although he has achieved remarkable results with wood and, to a lesser extent, with stone - without converting it into something crystallized, sterile, identical to itself. On the contrary, he managed to give to iron a diversity only possible in a non-violent relation with a material, the remarkable permeability to it would allow for that. In later works, those who have surfaces that lean toward opposite directions - giving the sculptures a new instability –and it goes without saying that their principle has changed again. And that happened when he was about 80 years old, I repeat. It comes neither from the circle nor from the rectangle. It is started with irregular shapes that arrive by a complex intersection of circles and rectangles and then, highlighting some concatenations, reaches the final forms of the sculptures, also obtained by means of folds. If you go back to the exhibition and observe these works, you will see that the imbalance between the flaps of the sculptures is accentuated by a very intelligent maneuver of the artist: to section the surfaces so that they narrow or widen as they approach the ground, as if viewed in perspective. In this way, a kind of greater speed is produced in the materialization of the planes, as if the lower and upper extremities of them were further distanced, although paradoxically nothing has changed. This new ambiguity, between distance and width, ends up not only making the pieces even more unstable but also intervening in space in a decisive way, amplifying this issue (the space) in the works of Amilcar de Castro. Consider, for example, the distance between me and you. I believe that they will agree that it constitutes an anodyne space, whose reality is revealed more by the bodies that delimit it than by its own presence. In the face of these works of Amilcar, we experience a very diverse space. These imbalances make surfaces much more than simple beacons. Its instability makes them a precarious and provisional delimitation of a tense spatiality, ready to acquire a new configuration. It is enough to move before the sculptures so that it (spatiality) gains new realities, as well as for our spatial positioning to transform. In addition, the artist's clever understanding of the education of our perception through the tradition of perspective - something that goes far beyond what emerges with Renaissance painting - will intensify that play. For the irregular sectioning of the flaps will cause us to see steel blades extending both vertically and horizontally (their "real" presence and their "*perspectivation*"). And so, again the space will accentuate, our position in it will shift, to the detriment of the elements that would simply delimit it. Curiously, Amilcar de Castro will

arrive, through an absolutely modern trajectory, to questions similar to those that will deeply occupy contemporary art, especially the aspects closer to the minimalist ones: the relation between the object of art and the observer, emphasizing precisely the bodily bond that would be established between both. Robert Morris, in a well-known text, shows how for them, minimalists, the object of art was no less important, it was only less self-important. Given the simplicity of his "forms" - obtained by mere juxtaposition, "one thing after another" in Donald Judd's words, which would avoid the establishment of complex internal relations, which would monopolize the observer's perception - the work of art would lead to a practical relationship between objects and the public. For Morris, "the best recent works lead relationships out of work and make them function of space, light and the field of view of the observer" It is from these assumptions that all attempts to renew the relation with the work of art emerge: installations, environments, public art, land art, etc. Undoubtedly, the path taken by Amilcar - that is, his critical link to constructivism, with an important part of the modern tradition - will lead him in a different direction. His latest sculptures undoubtedly help us understand the practical relationship our bodies maintain with reality and how that relationship will influence both the perception of the world and our own way of being in it. They are not naïve in the world. They constantly question their materiality and activate the regions in which they are installed. However, because they have "internal relations," because they are made (and not only willing), they reveal a greater "self-importance" to use the terms of Robert Morris. As I see them, the last sculptures of Amilcar de Castro strive to give space concreteness rarely achieved before, precisely because it is obtained in a moment of maximum tension: when the iron surfaces appear simultaneously as the materialization of a limit and as action that engenders a place. See the essay "Notes on sculpture," by Robert Morris.

In *Minimal art: a critical anthology*. Organized by Gregory Battcock. New York: E.P Dutton, 1968, pp. 221-235. Morris's text was originally published in 1966. And none of this would be possible without the artist's formidable ability to overcome the material rudeness of simple beacons by means of instability that permanently puts them in check. As much as the use of corten steel tends to bring Amilcar's works closer to Richard Serra's sculpture-whose work would also not exist without all the contributions of the minimalists-I think that, at least in relation to the later works, his closest contemporary relative would be Fred Sandback. Even through material limitations, Amilcar could not achieve the scale that is decisive for Serra's work, that experience of world gravity that would not be achieved without the weight, height, and imbalance of his pieces. But I confess that I have doubts about the ability of Amilcar's works to grow greatly, though he would no doubt have reached other aesthetic heights if his material conditions were more favorable. The almost immateriality of Fred

Sandback's sculptures - simple lines of string that created "holes" in the homogeneous and anodyne space of the exhibition sites - reminds me of the tension seen in the steel plates in the last sculptures of the artist from Minas Gerais. And, in an extraordinary way, Sandback gives those tenuous limits an intensity that recalls the strength of Amilcar's surfaces. In the face of the North American space openings one has the impression that a whole labyrinthine reality opens up to the observer. And so, crossing these contours presents a menacing challenge: the capacity to make space heterogeneous and multiple makes emptiness the place of an irreversible experience, capable of leading us to regions without a way back. I would like to return, briefly, to an issue that I raised behind but which I could not develop properly. I am referring to Amilcar de Castro's remarkable ability to give iron so many diverse forms of appearance. A loving relationship with his material made it possible to question it in ever new ways, and thus to obtain from it meanings we did not suspect. In the first works in which he used the error, in the 50's and still with the use of weld, it was simple surface, articulated in a not so innovative way. In the cut and fold sculptures, iron is shown as resistance. In cutting and displacement, it becomes predominantly mass and volume. In the latter, it appears as space. That's lovely. Nowadays, some artistic aspect criticizes modern art in a rough way: formalist, macho, elitist, depoliticized. The response they give to the limitations they see in the modern, tends to return to a narrative art in which the most different elements of reality - from sperm to chairs, blood to paints - are used to make the world speak, as if it were a doll of ventriloquist. It would be foolish to identify all contemporary art with these tendencies.

However, not pointing out the weight they have on the current artistic scene would suppose an immoderate naiveté. What charms modern great artists, among many other things, is precisely the ability to create realities that arise from the question of the best way to make them true. Matisse, in trimming a sheet of yellow, green, or blue paper, sought to find the limits that would give these colors their most accurate definition, either alone or in relation to other colors. Brancusi performed similar shapes on different materials. And it is enough to compare a Fish in white marble with another one in darker marble with white veins, to make sure that the material itself enters as a decisive part in the final appearance of the works, and not as simple support of lines and 20 contours, are so different. And a Picasso guitar made of wood had almost no terms of comparison with a tin one, because wood and tin could not be cut in the same way, and the artist tried to incorporate into the sculpture itself the different resistance of both materials to the cut. Amilcar de Castro also knew how to handle the iron in order to enhance its multiple facets without reducing it to a raw material to be docilely domesticated. Today, when global warming seems to point to the limits of a violent and unambiguous way of acting on nature, the critical dimension of modern artistic procedures stands out strongly. Unless one wants to return in the visual arts to a notion of traditional and

accessory meaning, in which the will to "say" something overlaps and anticipates the question of how to show the world more freely and sovereignly . Moreover, I believe that this attention to the reality with which he worked gave Amilcar an experience of the world which, in principle, would have little to do with Constructivism, closer to the universals of reason than to the particularities of social practices. In fact, the incorporation of iron contingencies into his sculpture must have contributed to a very acute understanding of the forms of organization of social coexistence in Brazil, albeit by opposition. I explain myself: by refusing to order it by means of technical procedures which would suspend its resistance - casting, welding, surface painting, milling -, Amilcar, perhaps involuntarily (which only improves things), had to equate a kind of relationship that at the same time presupposed a will to order and a pasty social reality, averse to clear concatenations precisely because it had not produced strong differentiations. And so his sculpture took account of some decisive dimensions of our history, without yielding to them. If constructivism was decisive for the formation of Amilcar - without it the adherence to our general mix would become more tempting - it also presented limits that the artist was forced to *problematize*.

To conclude, I would like to say something about Amilcar's public figure, to talk a little about his role not only as an artist, but also as a educator, as a person who decisively influenced the trajectory of many people, not just artists: art critics , graphic artists, gallery owners, directors of art institutions. There is a generous misunderstanding (without equivocation) in the approach that is often made between a great artist and a great man. Often we find in art history the opposite of this. For this reason, I spoke of "public figure". I have always found Amilcar de Castro a formidable man - that alone is beside the point here. In our days, when a reasonable art market already exists in the country, we may lose sight of the difficulties that the generation of Amilcar had. Only at the end of his life could he live exclusively from his art. Before, he had to deal with many things to support the family: he was a civil servant, graphic artist (notable, by the way), a scholarship student in the United States, a university professor ... and an artist. In such an unfavorable environment, I believe that his rigor and his lucidity acquire a meaning difficult to evaluate. And here there is no way to diminish the importance of his lifelong companion, Dorcília, who faced with Amilcar all the hurdles that a life without concessions tends to lead. And that without knowing, as we know today, that she was supporting the work of a great artist ... Amilcar's determination did not lead, however, only to an artistic production of the highest quality. Everyone who had the chance to get along with him - from artists to gallery owners, from art critics to metal workers - undoubtedly had much to learn from his respectability. However - and I have already mentioned this aspect before - his coherence did not lead to dogmatism, as was often the case with people trained in constructivist aesthetics, so inclined to reduce artistic dilemmas to impoverishing normativity.

Amilcar liked Mondrian and Morandi, Volpi and Richard Serra, Mira Schendel and Sergio Camargo, Nuno Ramos and Paulo Pasta. I think it was this availability for the differences that made his activity as an art teacher at the Federal University of Minas Gerais and other institutions, so useful. He did not try to create clones of himself. In general, his teaching was about trying to find with the students a better understanding of what they already did. And everybody in Belo Horizonte knows the importance that he had in the formation of many artists here. And also younger artists from other states, not just from Minas Gerais, were always able to count on his frankness and his support. Not to mention artists whose social origins conspire to confine them to the world of "folk art," such as Artur Pereira and Lorenzato, who also had an indefatigable defender. But all these dimensions of Amilcar de Castro, will always find their point of support and their strength in what he knows best: his works of art. And, in my view, it has only been improving with the passage of time