

Thank you so much Guy Brett, you live on in some form or another!

Paula Terra-Neale^I

Abstract: Key concepts in Guy Brett's works are seen from a personal viewpoint and read through his texts, reflecting upon his intellectual qualities but also on his values. A touch upon the historical background: a new wave in historiography, a strong counter-cultural pathos, Mario Pedrosa's and other Marxists libertarian ideas and Brazilian contemporary international artists avant-garde.

Keywords: *Guy Brett. Latin American art. Art Criticism.*

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I believe in human memory. If nobody remembers you, then you've gone, but if people remember you, you live on in some form or another [...] that is the afterlife.¹

Guy Brett

To Guy Brett I am immensely grateful for the open and generous dialogue we have had for two decades. Initially in the 90s, he offered me his professional advice during my research on Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, for my doctorate, as well as for other publications I wrote at the time; work he did voluntarily and independently. But I am especially grateful to him for his kind and encouraging support of my work and me, personally; and of course, for all that he has done for contemporary art and artists, and particularly Latin-american and Brazilian artists. I am delighted to have had this opportunity to publicly thank him, a critic and curator whom I admire and who has influenced me.²

Guy was also a rare, genuine, simple, curious and gentle person. A unique type within our fields of work. He never favoured prestige, fame, fortune or office. On the contrary, one of his most recognizable attributes was brio, a somewhat old-fashioned word but quite accurate in his case. This leads us to what Yve-Alain Bois wrote about Guy, a curator of 'exquisite taste and rare intelligence, and without the now common pretense of the curator-as-artist-as-entrepreneur.' In today's competitive arts world, when many curators compete for the spotlight with artists, some in search of international celebrity or corporate success, it's understandable that Guy Brett didn't fit into that picture.³

1 Guy Brett: 'Ideas in Motion - Sound and vision' blog. Hester R. Westley interviewed Guy Brett for the National Life Stories Project Artists' Lives in 2007-2008. The full life story interview is available for researchers at the British Library and can be found by searching C466/270 at sami.bl.uk

2 He would be patient and generous to discuss my texts on the Brazilian artists' works for the catalogue *Experiment Experiência Art in Brazil 1958-2000* published on the occasion of the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art Oxford in 2001/02, and some entries I wrote on Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape and Mira Schendel for 1st Edition of *The Dictionary of Women Artists*, Edited By Delia Gaze, Published by Routledge in 1997.

He really surprised us when I was organizing one of the University of Essex's annual graduate symposia in 1995 and I invited David Medalla as a speaker, but I was worried about the presentation, we all knew about David's laid-back lifestyle and his verbose way of speaking. But I didn't have to. David was an excellent speaker, of course he didn't keep his speech in the allotted time, but no one stood up, everyone was perplexed by his stories, and Guy on that occasion simply lent us his entire file of slides that would soon be sent to the editor of the David Medalla's book. This demonstrates the trust he placed in people, or in us.

3 Yve-Alain Bois review on Guy Brett exhibition 'Force Fields: Phases of the Kinetic' in *Artforum*:

He helped me through conversations we had during my doctoral research at Essex University between 1992 and 1996. The final thesis defended was entitled: *Resignifying modernity: Clark, Oiticica and categories of the Modern in Brazil*, finished in 1996;⁴ and his support was fundamental in my first curatorial work, the exhibition *Continuum, Brazilian Art 1960s-1990s* at the University Essex Gallery, 1995. Amongst other things, he wrote the introduction to the catalogue, lent me some works from his private collection by Hélio Oiticica, Jac Leirner, Lygia Pape, Lygia Clark, and Rubens Gerchman and pointed me in the right direction towards other collectors.⁵

Professor Carlos Zilio, my former advisor for my Masters in Social History of Culture at PUC-Rio (Thesis entitled Hélio Oiticica, from Aesthetics to Ethics, 1990)⁶ had introduced me by letter and suggested the meeting. Guy wasn't attached to the academic staff of any university at the time, and he only stayed in a university for two years during his lifetime, but he took me in without hesitation. We met a few times in the early 1990s to discuss my

'It did so with exquisite taste and rare intelligence, and without the now common pretense of the curator-as-artist-as-entrepreneur'.

Extracted from <https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/200009/force-fields-phases-of-the-kinetic-32064>. Accessed 18 November 2021.

4 Paula Terra Cabo, *Resignifying Modernity: Clark, Oiticica and Categories of the Modern in Brazil*, doctoral thesis, University of Essex, 1997.

5 Paula Terra Cabo; Guy Brett; *Continuum: Brazilian art, 1960s-1990s* (hand-printed cat.) University Gallery; University of Essex (Colchester). Collection of Latin American Art, 1995.

For the exhibition at Essex university Gallery, 1995, he wrote the introduction to the catalogue, lent me some works from his private collection and pointed me in the right direction towards other collectors, for example to Simon Lee who at the time worked at Gimpel Fils, a gallery in London that represented Sergio Camargo. Simon Lee not only helped us with a loan to an excellent work by Sergio Camargo, but also donated a Cildo Meireles Bank Note to the collection that was featured in the exhibition. This work was later registered in the University of Essex's Latin American art collection, ESCALA, as a donation from the directors, as Simon preferred to remain anonymous. Guy was so attentive to details and to everything that was going on around him that he even taught me a little etiquette, as when we all had dinner with the Ambassador of Brazil and the University Dean at Wivenhoe House, after the opening of the exhibition at the University of Essex, he alerted me to a convention I didn't know about, as I didn't know the maitre d'hotel would be waiting for my signal to start serving dessert, a small but significant gesture.

6 Paula Cristina Terra Cabo. *Hélio Oiticica - Da Estética para a Ética (From Aesthetics to Ethics)*

(Master's Dissertation, Advisor: Carlos Augusto da Silva Zílio), PUC/RJ/PPGH, 1991.



Image1 1
Poster for *Continuum-Continuum: Brazilian Art, 1960s-1990s*

research at his residence in Brixton, a suburb of London, on the south bank of the river; it was only years later that he moved to the north of the city.

Initially, he seemed to me a modest and authentic person, dedicated to work and family, soft-spoken and calm in demeanor, reserved. It reminded me of what I knew in the posture of a psychoanalyst. Always in a listening position, and for the respect of never imposing his ideas or knowledge. And when he spoke, always returning to my speech, he showed great sensitivity, depth and acuity. He was very punctual and precise, it seems that he knew the value, importance and meaning of the words. He would re-elaborate my questions, putting them back to me. Making me listen to myself when I felt inhibited about talking in a foreign language. I left these sessions feeling lighter and with a busy head, the long way back home to Colchester was always more pleasant than the coming.

But what most impressed me was his attitude, his generosity and acceptance. For me it was essential, since I was a young Brazilian immigrant arriving here in England, in the early 1990s, a foreign researcher already bringing a family, living on the outskirts, in the city of Colchester, county of Essex, and facing prejudice and the usual obstacles that we know today both in the upright academic milieu and in a neoliberal society of the post-Thatcher period. His support then made me feel welcome and more comfortable, secure. He was a noble man in his respectful attitude towards others. I say noble not of titles, I only came to know that his parents had titles of nobility, Viscount and Viscountess, now, after his departure. And at the time we spoke several times about his father. I came to live years later right where his father had designed a square in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, and he had talked to me about the man and the father and the designer architect, about his loss of this father, which marked him, never, ever, mentioned of titles. That was Guy.

He was kind, sending us books and texts, getting us access to invitations for the openings at museum exhibitions, inviting us to art meetings and events; whether at a renowned university where he lectured, such as Oxford, for example, or it could be in a ground-floor apartment or an abandoned warehouse, obscure places where Medalla performed in London; we went because it was sure to be of interest.

He was also considerate, to the point where he gave us personal support. I think maybe the fact that he married a foreigner, his wife Alejandra was Chilean, might have accentuated his empathy towards foreigners?⁷

Since I needed time to mourn the loss of my son, it was the advice he gave me, passed on to him from Mona Hatoum when he lost his father, I withdrew a bit from the art scene for a few years. And the last times I remember having been with him in person were at Tate Modern, in 2007, at the opening of the show and seminars for Hélio Oiticica's exhibition, he was not the curator but had numerous parallel participations.⁸ And in 2008, in the first retrospective of Cildo Meireles in the United Kingdom (co-curated by him

7 My family and I could count on his kindness in moments of joy or loss. At my wedding, for example, there were cards, phone calls, flowers, and even a bottle of champagne that he and his wife sent us because they were traveling at the time. And of all the pity I received at the time of the loss of my son, his words to me were among the most significant I heard at the time.

8 Helio Oiticica, *The Body of Colour*. London, Tate Modern, 6 June- 23 September, 2007.

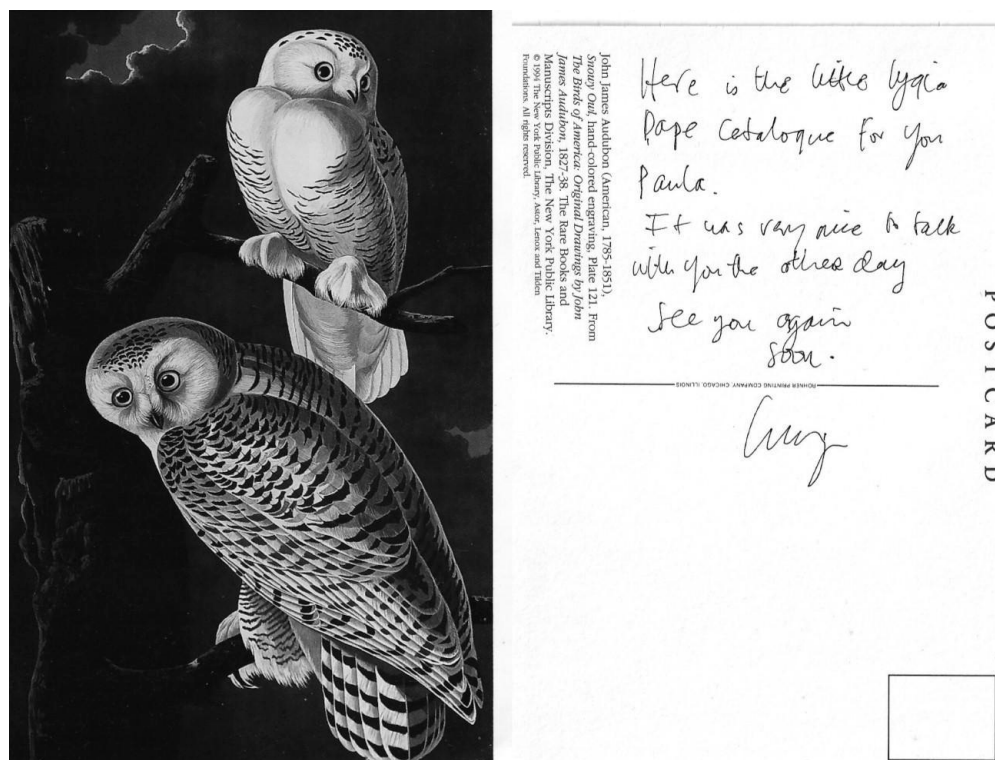


Image 2
Postcard from Guy
to Paula, mid-90s

and Vicente Todoli).⁹ This was the time when we experienced a growing interest in Brazilian art, when many of the artists he supported finally gained space in major international museums, and consequently their work was also in evidence, or vice versa. A few years later he became ill and I never saw him again. The last time I saw his co-curated work, for me it was a re-encounter with him too, it was in the extraordinary Takis retrospective, also at Tate Modern in 2019.¹⁰

My relationship with him started in the early nineties and continued until he became unwell, we didn't see one another in the last decade. The last times I remember staying personally with him were both at Tate Modern. I met him in 2008, at Cildo Meireles' first UK retrospective (co-curated by

9 Cildo Meireles. London, Tate Modern, 14 October 2008 – 11 January 2009.

10 Takis. London, Tate Modern, 3 July 2008 – 27 October 2009. (Exhibition organised by Tate Modern in collaboration with MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona and the Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens)

him and Vicente Todoli) and in 2007, in the opening and seminars of Helio Oiticica solo exhibition. At a time when the many artists he championed for so long were finally getting space in the major international museums. The last time I saw his work, sort of seeing him too, was at the extraordinary retrospective of Takis, also at Tate Modern in 2019.

I find it difficult to write about him as I am moved by wanting to do justice to the thinker and the person. I feel torn between writing something personal, like a kind of homage, an obituary, about his small gestures that were big to me and everybody he touched, or discussing his thoughts and writings on arts. To me, they are interconnected. So let the text and thoughts flow freely, like an essay, invoking both as we weave through some of his texts and extracts. My choices are based on aspects of his work that are meaningful to my own practice as a curator. This exercise has made me realize new aspects of his personality and work as I believe that we keep learning about, and from, a person's life and ideas after their departure, and with it changing ourselves. This brings him alive for me, and hopefully to you as well, that is what he has surmised as 'after life'.

Guy was an autodidact with no academic training in art history or criticism. Although he did study at the prestigious Eton College, his writing about art drew not on academic jargon. In his words. 'All I have learnt about art I learnt from artists and knowing artists and talking with artists and looking at what they did and my own reading'.¹¹

I believe his knowledge was based on his experiences, feelings, and close involvement with both the work and the artists, associated with his own life journeys as a man, writer, husband, father, friend, son, and many trips around the world through art, which began at the age of twenty-two as a critic for The Times newspaper.¹²

Effectively focusing on the relevant issues brought up by the direct experience of the art object and the keen respect for the artists' ideas and lives, he achieved unlimited independence of vision and substantial knowledge of his

11 Guy Brett: *Ideas in Motion - Sound and vision* blog. Op cited.

12 Guy Brett was a writer and art critic from the precocious age of 22 when he was appointed chief art critic for *The Times* in 1964 and stayed there until 1975, and from 1981-83 he was visual arts editor of *City Limits*. He has written extensively for the art press, including *Art In America*, *Artforum*, *Art & Text*, *Third Text*, *Studio International*, *Signals*, *Macula*, *Block*, *Artscribe*, *Art Monthly*, *Black Phoenix*, *Revista de Critica Cultural*, *Les Cahiers du MNAM*, *Cahier Witte de With*, *Performance Magazine*, *C Magazine*, *Trans*, *Archis*, *Parkett*.

subjects, which favoured his work. In his vast output, we find an extensive stream of articulate and insightful articles and monographs on modern and contemporary artists who have become seminal, published in specialist art journals in London and around the world, in the large international art press and in museum catalogues and books published by various publishers.¹³

Among its main topics are the issues that were most urgent and relevant to contemporary art: the relationship between art and life, between subject and object, the relevance of the spectator's participation, of art as a language and field of knowledge, of the dissolution of the object, performance, visual poetry, popular and erudite culture, about the relationship of art with other disciplines and science in particular, and the evolution of kinetic art that extends to participatory art from the 60s to the 70s. And in his last years, in the dissolution of dialectical thinking, or the artificiality of dualities. All this without losing sight of the internal dynamics and poetics of each artist with their unique background and culture, and not just their practices in relation to international trends.

I note that he had a comprehensive view of art criticism, where all aspects are relevant: theoretical, cultural, social, political, ideological, and everything else that could relate to his themes, both in terms of areas of knowledge or not, including in this list his own love of art, of which he spoke openly, he declared himself to be in love with his objects.

There was no false pretense of pure objectivity in his criticism, he was aware that he was making choices, making assumptions and inscribing the arts and artists he elected to the flow and historical system of art. He was aware of his own ideological choices. His criticism also turned to the exercise of art criticism itself.

13 His books include: *Kinetic Art: The Language of Movement* (Studio Vista/Reinholdt, London and New York, 1968), *Through Our Own Eyes: Popular Art and Modern History* (New Society, Philadelphia, 1986), *Transcontinental* (Verso, London and New York, 1990), *Exploding Galaxies: The Art of David Medalla* (Kala Press, London, 1995), *Mona Hatoum* (Phaidon, London, 1997), *Force Fields: An Essay on the Kinetic* (Actar in association with MACBA, Barcelona, and Hayward Gallery, London, 2000), Li Yuan-chia: tell me what is not yet said (inIVA, London, 2001). *Carnival of Perception: Selected Writings on Art* (inIVA, London, 2004), Guy Brett; Katia Maciel; Renato Rezende. *Brasil experimental: arte, vida, proposições e paradoxos* (Contra Capa Livraria, Rio de Janeiro, 2005) and *The Crossing of Innumerable Paths Essays on Art* (Riding House, London, 2018).

His choice was to contextualize and promote innovative and lesser-known artistic practices in the whitish scene of Western European and American art, which he ended up focusing mainly on Asia and South America.

I consciously felt, since I had the freedom to do so, I wanted not to contribute to that continuous name dropping but bring attention to artists who I felt were unjustly underrated or unjustly neglected or simply not successful in terms of the usual criteria of success... but the art world is a very unjust place.¹⁴

Yes we know, we agree, the art world is an unjust place. Aiming to achieve a certain social balance, aware of his autonomous condition both in relation to the academy and the art market since it did not depend on them to live, Guy was able to support the art produced in the so-called 'Third World'. Guy Brett "was not interested in the market view of art" said Andrew Nairne in one of the obituaries published in newspapers.¹⁵ Some other critic, I think Yve-Alain Bois, called Guy's art world the 'Fourth World'. Yes, he was a creator of new worlds. His help was essential for the production, advertising, development and understanding of the work of many he defended. During his lifetime, he offered relentless support to many foreign artists who lived in London and also to UK artists who were outside the centrality, the mainstream. Many of whom had been touched by the diasporic experience, coming from immigrant families who either escaped the horrors of economic impoverishment or political turmoil in their countries.

He has written extensively and knowledgeably about 'peripheric' artists focusing on those who in their artistic experience have radically reoriented the relationship between object and subject, among its main protagonists are Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica and David Medalla, but the list of others to whom he has dedicated his work is long. I quote his speech, in which the criteria of his choices are based upon:

14 Guy Brett: *Ideas in Motion - Sound and vision* blog. Op.cit.

15 Andrew Nairne, ex-diretor to Modern Art Oxford and Director at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge. Extracted from <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/02/04/constantly-curious-uninterested-in-the-market-led-view-pioneering-curator-and-writer-guy-brett-has-died-aged-78>. Accessed 15 November 2021.

I was somehow attracted to cultural misfits because they were not absolutely typical of their own cultures: they were on a kind of journey themselves across cultures, and this is the thing that instinctively fascinated me ... I was somehow picking up the tendency that has been of people, of cultures mixing, people moving, migrating, travelling, cultural clashes and cultural communications as being what's going on in the world. I think that's why the notion of trying to tie art to a national base — like British art, what is British art — is, I always felt that's not what the question is, that's not an issue of any importance, it's just a hangover from the past... So it wasn't that I didn't take any notice of what was happening in London — I did; I was very much involved in innovatory work — but I saw that London as an incredibly complex mixture of people coming from different directions with different origins and meeting and influencing one another. I just thought it as an incredibly positive thing, exciting and funny. Because what happened in the 1960s was that London did become a magnet for people from all over the world, and people arrived here with different sorts of notions of freedom — well, let's say different kinds of behaviour — which could be very liberating in one sense and very hidebound in another area... so I thought all these different degrees and types of freedom and types of conditioning are all mixing up together and complementing one another.¹⁶

His choice, which resides in the 'cultural misfit', is centered on the character of the one who is defined by difference and not by homogenization. He shows us that he is not interested in great historical discourses, or nationalist scopes, but in particular aspects, circumscribed to the human sphere and their intercultural relations. How artists react to their own experiences of displacement, the diaspora; and how arts discourses contaminate each other. These discourses are primarily based on an idea of freedom through art.

Migration, impoverishment, displacement, diaspora, identity are subjects mentioned in many of his monographic texts, for example, when he writes about Mona Hatoum, Ana Mendieta, David Medalla and others. Some of these were published in the catalog of the exhibition of Latin American artists that he curated for the Ikon gallery (2000). But he is averse to constructing these great discourses about 'Latin American art'. So, for example, in the *Transcontinental* exhibition, despite the artists being from Latin America, the title itself gives us the hint, *Transcontinental: An Investigation of Reality, Nine Latin American Artists*. The artists are all Latino, but the art is transcontinental.¹⁷

16 Guy Brett: *Ideas in Motion - Sound and vision* blog. Op. cited.

17 *Transcontinental: Nine Latin American Artists*. Curator: Guy Brett. Ikon Gallery: Birmingham, Jointly hosted with Cornerhouse: Manchester. 24 March — 5 May 1990. (Waltercio Caldas, Roberto Evangelista and Regina Vater, Juan Davila, Eugenio Dittborn, Victor Grippo, Jac Leirner, Cildo Meireles e Tunga)

Unlike many art historians, he never focused or specialized his work in just one country, or a particular, isolated art movement, not even in his lifelong commitment and study of kinetic art; he is more interested in the experience of the work, and in the ideological and emancipatory bases of art, as he tells us:

It was never a question only of movement in a literal sense. In fact, as time has gone by, it has become more and more logical to place avant-garde innovation in the 1960s on a sort of vector: kinetic - fluxus - neo-Dada - pop. Much of the most interesting work points in several directions at once, echoing Duchamp's earlier experiments: for example, Tinguely, Takis, Klein, Fontana, Warhol, Oldenburg, Paik, Oiticica, Medalla. A much more significant difference in the long run than that between 'kinetic' and 'pop' (just as had been the case earlier with 'constructivist' and 'surrealist') is that between the subversive, emancipatory potential of work and its absorption and dilution into the discourse of academia, the media and consumerism.¹⁸

We could, and I would like to isolate in this one paragraph, a few crucial ideas that I think he sustained throughout his life. That is, the inappetence of art history when isolating and classifying a work within a single art movement (constructivism or surrealism, for example), when so many works discuss principles and concepts of various movements. The artistic trends or movements by themselves merge with and/or connect to the previous movements, through the re-agency of previous ones, and re-signify them as they are in permanent flux (kinetic art - fluxus - neo-Dada - pop). And, above all, the wider dissemination of conceptual ideas in arts can happen simultaneously in different places, regions, territories without necessarily being derivative. Finally, analogous ideas and trends can coexist conceptually, even at different times, such as the consonance found between the beginning and the end of the 20th century, the case of the modern vanguards of the 1920s and the neo-vanguards of the 1960s-1970s (Duchamp and neo-dada).

In short, art history does not have a linear development. Artists from different countries may be experiencing the same principles, issues, across territorial boundaries. Finally, checkmate, without taking into account the ideological aspects of the production and reception of art, the meaning of the work that has an essentially political and emancipatory ethos is lost.

18 Guy Brett, 'Internationalism Among Artists in the 60s and 70s', in Rasheed Araeen (ed.), *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery/ South-Bank Centre, London, 1989.

Some of these historiographical principles, which today in the 21st century, we take as granted, were not yet established when Guy began writing. And some of the ones he helped to foster were emerging at this time, in the 1960s, with the development of post-structuralist discourses in France (Barthes, Derrida, Foucault), countercultural movements around the world, and the great advance of psychoanalysis and of critical theories, whilst many discourses about modernism struggled to sustain themselves. Therefore, in addition to campaigning for diversity, evaluating the intention and reception of the work as well as the issue of authorship, there was still a crucial point in challenging Western attitudes and values regarding the connotations of race and colonialism. In addition to the assumption of dissatisfaction, there was a desire to challenge the intellectual direction of Western discourses, and in some cases such as Guy's case, maybe there was even questioning about the form and ideology of Western society as a whole.¹⁹

It is important to note that Guy belongs to a generation of art critics that comes at a time when art history was under epistemological revision, all disciplines were, a period that in historiography was defined as the so-called the 'New Histories Wave'.

He was not the only one who questioned the narrowness of previous methods, about, for example, ignoring not only the social context of art, artist and audience, but also power structures and the development of an interdisciplinary approach. But he lived it, this was his life. He experienced this reality by writing as a critic for *The Times* and other periodicals and working at the gallery and at *Signals* newsbulletin,²⁰ and doing there and elsewhere the curatorship of 'misfit' artists, and a whole trajectory that is beyond the scope of this text to analyze. His father in an interview says he was a follower of Marcuse.²¹

One of his curatorial works, the exhibition *Transcontinental: Nine Latin American Artists*, an exhibition he organized at the Ikon Gallery in Birmin-

19 Cf. 'The Late Twentieth Century: New Art Histories'. In: *Art history and its methods: a critical anthology selection and commentary* by Eric Fernie. Phaidon, 1995.

20 On this aspect I recommend ASBURY, Michael. 'Beyond Brazil: remembering Guy Brett through his own eyes'. In: *Arte & Ensaios*, Rio de Janeiro, PPGAV-UFRJ, v. 27, n. 41, p. 350-377, jan.-jun. 2021. ISSN-2448-3338. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37235/ae.n41.19>. <http://revistas.ufrj.br/>. Accessed 22 November 2021.

21 Esher, Lionel and Gordon Baliol Brett. (1 of 13). 'National Life Story Collection: Architects' Lives'. <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Architects-Lives/021M-C0467X0014XX-0300V0>. Accessed 22 November 2021.

gham, UK, in 1990, sought to respond to these misguided approaches to history that he has always criticized as limited, full of structural prejudices. He vehemently refuted the constant assumption and prejudice that art that does not come from the Western metropolis is derived, a poor imitation of modernism or folklore.

The exhibition reflected on his multidisciplinary and internationalist, trans-continental vision, as he called it, and his constant challenge to the demodé historical discourses on art and its clichés. The exhibition appears right after the publication of one of his texts that I consider seminal on these issues of identity, nationalism, internationalism and transnationalism, *Internationalism among Artists 1960/1970*, part of a publication for Rasheed Aareen's Hayward Gallery exhibition, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Great Britain*, 1989, which has received numerous criticisms for the métier it criticizes:

I have wanted to show a glimpse of an actually existing internationalism through chinks in the heavy curtain of typical nationalist priorities, in which context Britain is probably no different from other countries. But we have seen... that the corollary of this kind of nationalism is a 'globalism' which still insists on seeing many of the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America chiefly in terms of the exotic and primitive. And in doing so, even the Western modernist or postmodernist mainstream exhibits itself in a curiously parochial light.²²

We can see that his efforts to break up with these limiting schemes, whether from the market, the academy, the art system or the canons of the discipline of history itself, have motivated him to make a wide choice in terms of the artists he worked with. Those coming from various continents and nationalities, classes, sex or age. In one of his publications, entitled *Carnival of Perception*, inIVA, 2004, for instance, he republishes texts he wrote about Rasheed Araeen, Derek Boshier, Lygia Clark, Juan Davila, Eugenio Dittborn, John Dugger, Rose Finn- Kelcey, Mona Hatoum, Susan Hiller, Tina Keane, David Medalla, Hélio Oiticica, Gabriel Orozco, Hannah O'Shea, Cornelia Parker, João Penalva, Carlyle Reedy and Takis.²³

22 Guy Brett, 'Internationalism Among Artists in the 60s and 70s', in Rasheed Araeen (ed.), *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, exhibition catalogue, Hayward Gallery/South-Bank Centre, London, 1989.

23 Guy Brett. *Carnival of Perception*, Selected Writings on Art. London, Institute of International

What brings them together is the cultural, transcultural, countercultural scene of London in the 1960s, the relationship between art and life, and the inadequacy of dualistic thinking, one among other themes that are dear to them. In its edition it says that *Carnival of Perception* traces the contours of a collective reality, expressed in a game of intelligence and spirit, full of paradoxes and reversals.²⁴

In addition to being multicultural, his collective exhibitions were also courageous in the sense of breaking away from the precepts established by history and art critics that align, regulate and relate art movements and artists. In one of his most celebrated exhibitions, *Force Fields: Phases of Kinetic Art*, an exhibition presented at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona and the Hayward Gallery in London, 2000, he surveyed the evolution of kinetic art.²⁵ The show also displayed his courageous attitude in supporting artists who would not necessarily be associated with the 'kinetic' label, and critics exposed it. Writing in *The Guardian* newspaper, critic Adrian Searle highlighted how the exhibition made him rethink kinetic art, perhaps recognizing his own Eurocentric vision:

Brett's show seems to me to be brave. In part, this is due to the inclusion of artists one would not necessarily associate with the 'kinetic', whatever that is. One expects Takis, Marcel Duchamp, László Moholy-Nagy, whose mechanical sculptures and objects are canonical objects of kinetic art. But not necessarily the great Lygia Clark, although her sculptures and objects require interaction and manipulation, or Mira Schendel's ropes and worm-casts of rolled and knotted rice-paper, or Agnes Denes's peculiar ink drawing of tiny human figures, in a snail-like vortex.²⁶

Guy, since his first exhibition on kinetic art, had already exercised such a freedom; the exhibition called *In Motion*, organized for the Arts Council in 1966 and which circulated in several galleries already presented a transnational ensemble, with a series of works by Pol Bury, Lygia Clark, Gianni

Visual Arts (inIVA), 2004

24 Idem.

25 *Force Fields: Phases of the Kinetic*. Curated by Guy Brett. Hayward Gallery, London, 2000.

26 From the *Art Newspaper*, accessed on 18/11/21

<https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2021/02/04/constantly-curious-uninterested-in-the-market-led-view-pioneering-curator-and-writer-guy-brett-has-died-aged-78>

Colombo, Gerhard von Graevenitz, Liliane Lijn, David Medalla, Jesús-Rafael Soto, Takis and Jean Tinguely.²⁷

His need to build ‘another story’ had brought him closer to many other artists who faced the same libertarian, egalitarian, inclusive, avant garde impetus as it happened in London with David Medalla and Rasheed Aareen. This exercise of a curatorial and critical practice based on freedom had already been initiated by Guy Brett since his work at Signals, with his partners David Medalla, Paul Keller and others. But he was not restricted to the activities of this ‘collective’, he would happen to participate in many other collectives afterwards. It is beyond the scope of this work to speak particularly of Signals and these other collectives, some recent studies have done it, and there is more to be done.

The belief that art is the experimental exercise of freedom was disseminated by another critic, the Brazilian whose work touches on many other parallel points, Mário Pedrosa. I remember that Guy held Mário in high regard and that he had encouraged me to delve into this aspect of Pedrosa’s interrelationship with Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica at the time of my thesis research. But I’m not sure or seen any records about their relationship. However, I think it’s important to emphasize that I see connections in them both approaching art as a humanitarian cause, centering aspects of culture in the anthropocene, with choices informed by political convictions that, in Guy’s words, ‘permeate his entire consciousness: it is simply the search for some idea of freedom, freedom from oppression’.²⁸

His greatest concern throughout his life, in addition to his appreciation of art, seems to have focused on the issue of social justice. He attributed this continuing concern to an early awareness of the injustices and cruelties inflicted on his peers in English private schools in the 1950s.²⁹

Like Pedrosa, Guy’s concerns about colonialism, prejudice, the lack of social justice in the world, the lack of humanity, overlapped, at particular times,

27 *In motion 1966: an Arts Council exhibition of kinetic art*. Pol Bury ... [et al.], London : Arts Council, 1966. Exhibition shown in 1966-1967: Bear Lane Gallery, Oxford, October 3-28; Arts Council Gallery, Cambridge, November 5-26; Art Gallery, Oldham, December 3-24; City Art Gallery, Leeds, January 2-21, 1967; University, Leicester, January 28-February 18.

28 Guy Brett citado pelo *The Times From The Times*, Guy Brett obituary. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/guy-brett-obituary-rjcznsw2>. Accessed 18 November /2021.

29 Idem.

with questions of art. There have been times in their lives when both have even turned their backs on the art world, by choice and in favor of a political struggle.

About his 1986 book, *Through Our Own Eyes: Popular Art and Modern History*, he confesses that

My interest in those popular forms were connected not with disillusionment, but a disappointment, with the professional art world [...] I wanted to use my writing to make an intervention in the political process through art ³⁰

He could not have been more explicit about his outright rejection of the colonial mentality in the traditions of Western art history, the old school, than in this book. Guy also seems to have been delighted with recent forays into anthropology and ethnology that bring primitive art closer to contemporary art. This is another connection I see between his work and Mário Pedrosa's. I worked on this approximation of the primitive art and contemporary art in the work of Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica via Mário Pedrosa in my doctoral thesis, already mentioned (1996).

Guy and Mário belong to the group of art critics, thinkers, who had already learned about the production of social history in the 40s and 50s, following the tradition of Meyer Schapiro (and Mário as well) who, like other Marxists, rethink the question of the function social art. New ideas in historiography supported a new generation of art criticism that emerged in the 1960s, of which Guy was a part.

They were rethinking and questioning the very nature, status and condition of art. Imbued with even more radical ideals, also propelled by other thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, whom Guy cites in his writings, these were questions that were not limited to the field of history. These are questions that also emerged and were part of the art production itself, by artists with whom Mário and Guy were working. A rich exchange where critical thoughts, history and art making feed each other.³¹

30 Guy Brett interview, from: <https://blogs.bl.uk/sound-and-vision/2021/04/guy-brett-ideas-in-motion.html>

31 On this relationship between art and critical theory in the Brazilian avant gardes in the 1960s and 1970s, I could recommend a text we wrote to the catalogue of the exhibition that I organized

When I organized and curated the exhibition *Continuum*, in 1995, as mentioned, I have addressed this phenomenon, this inexhaustible questioning about the concept of art throughout the 1960s that resumed again in the 1990s, after boom of painting in the 1980s, and I invited and Guy kindly wrote the 'Introduction' to the catalogue of *Continuum: Brazilian Art, 1960s-1990s*. Here I reproduce some excerpts where I see rich examples of his theories on art criticism:

The brilliant period of the fifties and sixties in Brazil was a 'conglomerate', incorporating and cross-fertilising visual arts with music (Bossa Nova, Tropicalia), architecture (Niemeyer, Bardi), concrete poetry (the Noigandres group, etc.), film (Cinema Novo) and theatre. Important to the practice was the critical encouragement of writers, like Mário Pedrosa for example. The Neo-Concrete movement (1959-61) was an inspired and rigorous undertaking which, to put it in the briefest and most schematic terms, moved the geometric paradigm of abstract art to a new conception of the art work as a "quasi-body". This was the basis from which the great experimenters, Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, evolved their precarious and ephemeral work.

He demonstrates that he was acutely aware of this cultural scene, a set of experiences/ experiments in various fields that were in tune with the emergence of contemporary conceptual art in Brazil. He attributes the passage from abstraction to the total work of art, or even the dissolution of the object to 'Neoconcretismo', and to the crucial relationship between thinkers and artists in the epistemological shift, he cites Pedrosa, Lygia Clark, and Hélio Oiticica.

If we knew 'Brazilian experimentality' as well as we know the North American equivalent our view of recent art would be different indeed. We would be aware of complexities and subtleties. We would see beyond the simplistic assumptions which imagine art produced by Brazilians either in exotic and primitivist terms, or as a provincial, imitative version of developments that have taken place in Paris or New York. We would see that there was something more than a 'Brazilian version' of movements (Minimalism, Conceptual Art, Body Art) whose scope has been defined for us by European and North American artists we already know. In the case of certain life's-work, we would become aware of something much more radical: a proposal of themes and issues which, as Sonia Salzstein has written, "go beyond the premises of modernity... [into] the most crucial dilemmas of contemporary culture."³²

and co-curated at Fundação Casa França-Brasil in 2000. Paula Terra e Glória Ferreira. *Situações: arte brasileira anos 70* (cat.) Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Casa França-Brasil, 2000. (63 p. : il.)

32 Paula Terra Cabo; Guy Brett; *Continuum: Brazilian Art, 1960s-1990s*. University of Essex

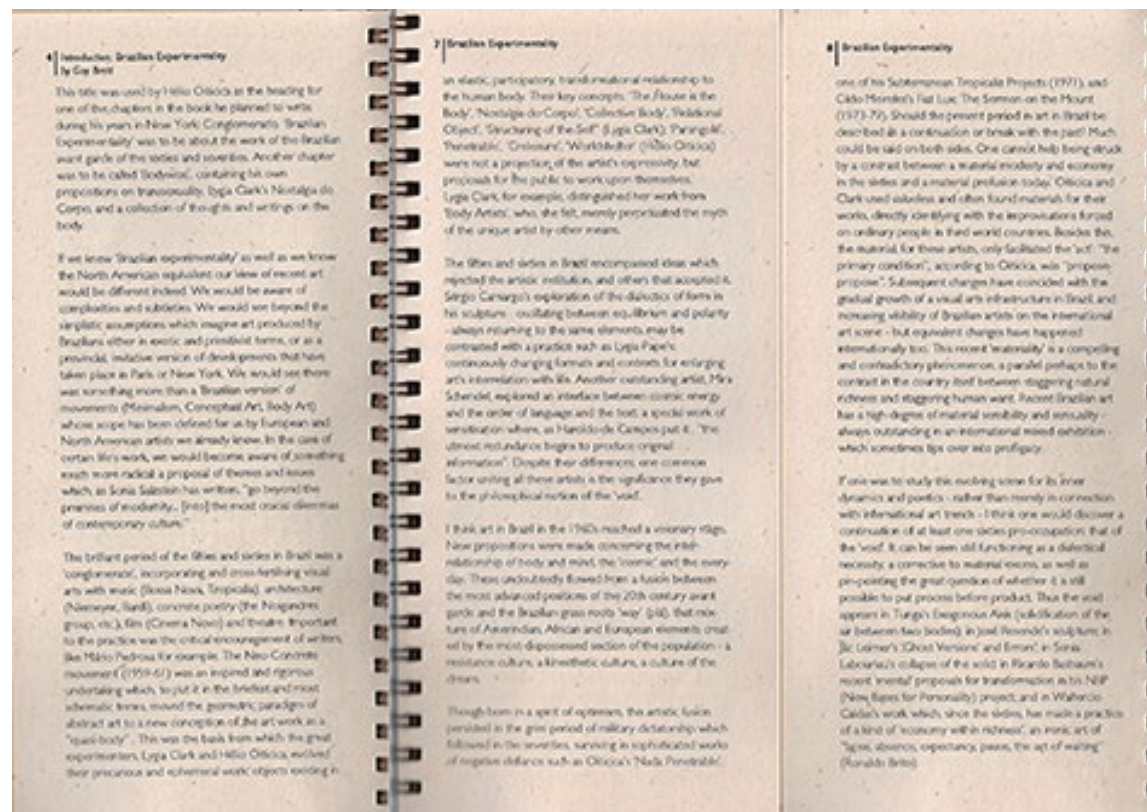


Image 3
Guy Brett's Introduction to Catalogue Continuum: Brazilian Art 1960s-1990s

It seems clear that for him each country had its particular relationship with modernity. The particularities of each culture could not be ignored. And we agree with him, I with my doctoral thesis *Resignifying Modernity*, and curatorship of *Continuum: Arte Brasileira 1960s-1990s* and others, and with Sonia Salzstein and her brilliant texts on culture and art, that the art that he himself supports and is interested in would carry out in this context the passage from a modern to a contemporary episteme, or post-modern as Mário Pedrosa had defined.

Guy Brett, as well as Mário Pedrosa, and other humanists who wrote inspired by Marxism, seemed aware that discourses are loaded with ideology and that the mechanisms of cultural heritage, institutions and the art market are always ready and vigilant to embrace and neutralize all the efforts of the avant garde.

It was not easy for these brave thinkers to face their times, we know of the *via crucis* and political persecution suffered by Mário throughout his life,

(Colchester). University Gallery.; University of Essex (Colchester). Collection of Latin American Art;1995.

Matta and Kuitca paintings arrive at Essex

A spectacular early painting by Roberto Matta has arrived at Essex, having been placed on extended loan by Mr. and Mrs. Michael Naify of California. They have also lent a important early painting by Guillermo Kuitca of Argentina and a painting by the Brazilian artist Siron Franco.

Brazilian monumental sculptures for Essex campus

Brazilian sculptors Amílcar de Castro and Franz Weissman have made extremely generous donations of large monumental sculptures to launch a Latin American sculpture garden in the grounds of Essex University. These sculptures, weighing three tonnes and one tonne respectively, were kindly mediated and transported by Mr. Charles Cosac of UECLAA, to whom we extend our warmest thanks. Mr. Cosac has also coordinated donations by other Brazilian artists, including Daniel Senise, Fernando Lucchesi, Marcos Coelho Benjamin, and others. These works are due to arrive at Essex in early 1996.

New museum for UECLAA

Plans are being developed for a purpose-built museum and research centre on the University campus to house UECLAA and provide a temporary exhibition area, as well as an archive, screening facilities and artist-in-residence studios. A fund-raising committee is currently undertaking a full feasibility study with a University grant.

CONTINUUM: Brazilian Art 1960s-1990s

University of Essex Gallery
November 13 - December 15 1995

This exhibition, curated by Paula Terra Cabo, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Art History and Theory, constituted an excellent example of the way UECLAA can enhance the academic work of the University. Paula came from the University of Rio de Janeiro on a Brazilian government scholarship, and her study on the art of Brazil during the middle years of this century, and in particular the radical experimental work of Helio Oiticica and Lygia Clark of the 1960s is nearing completion. Having worked previously at the Casa França-Brasil in Rio de Janeiro she had experience of organising exhibitions, and because the Brazilian material in the UECLAA collection from the 1980s and 1990s suggested a number of interesting cross-currents with her research, she submitted a proposal for an exhibition that would link the two periods.



(L to R) Ms Paula Terra Cabo, Prof. Dawn Ades and Prof. Thomas Patzfalken of the Department of Art History & Theory, the Brazilian Ambassador H.E. Rubens Antonio Barbosa, Vice-Chancellor Prof. Ivor Crewe, and Mr. Robert Butler, Librarian of the Albert Sloman Library, at the private view of Continuum in the University Gallery on 13th November 1995.

The result was an imaginative and thought-provoking show which contributed greatly to Paula's own research while at the same time serving to promote the University's collection. She benefitted from working closely with Guy Brett, one of the leading critics in the field of 20th century Experimental Brazilian art, as well as from selecting and hanging the works, writing and producing an impressive catalogue, and editing an accompanying video. The benefits for UECLAA are considerable. As a result of Continuum six new names have been added to the list of artists represented in the collection - see below for details. Works from the collection were displayed, studied, discussed and written about, in many cases for the first time.

Paula Terra Cabo had also arranged a stimulating round-table discussion involving critics and artists from Britain and abroad, including Guy Brett, David Medalla, Carla Guagliardi and Milton Machado.

Image 4

UECLAA's News on Continuum mentioning Guy Brett's support

exile and prisons. And we are today knowing a little bit more about the struggles faced by Guy as well. I hear for example now in conversations between friends, that Signals was closed for political reasons, that Guy had left his job at *The Times* also due to pressure against his combative stance, despite Herbert Read's support, and it should be noted that despite his brilliance

and commitment, Guy did not obtain prestigious positions in the direction of museums and international biennials, as we have seen happening with other of his colleagues. But that didn't mean he was spiteful or gave up on his ideals. I think that he had above all a hopeful spirit, that supporting the efforts of the 'revolutionary' arts, he believed in the potential of the avant-garde to change and interfere in the real world. Perhaps what has attracted him to the work of artists like Oiticica and Clark was his hopes in renewal, in the possibility of art and life reaching a more visionary state, a world free from the abuses of colonialism and post-colonial capitalist society?

Maybe what drew Brett to the work of artists like Oiticica and Clark was some faith in renewal, a more visionary state, a world free from abuses of colonialism and the capitalist postcolonial society?

I think art in Brazil in the 1960s reached a visionary stage. New propositions were made concerning the inter-relationship of body and mind, the 'cosmic' and the everyday. These undoubtedly flowed from a fusion between the most advanced positions of the 20th century avant garde and the Brazilian grass-roots 'way' (plá), that mixture of Amerindian, African and European elements created by the most dispossessed section of the population - a resistance culture, a kinesthetic culture, a culture of the dream.³³

Following current trends, we could say that he was a decolonial-art-activist-curator, but he wasn't very interested in trends or labels.

We hope that his efforts as a researcher, writer, critic and independent curator, his ethical stance, his texts, interviews, his ideas, will become a legacy for all of us, and will work as an inspiration to bring some hope; not just for us, ours, but for future generations; taking us further away from the incessant merry-go-round of the art market and the multiple trends of curatorial mercantilism that capitalize on everything.

May your beautiful cosmic-community dream inspire us, and may initiatives like these come to guarantee your afterlife.

Thank you so much for everything Guy.

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33 Idem.