

GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



Opening on March 6

**Lygia Clark: Painting as an
Experimental Field, 1948–1958**

Lygia Clark:
Painting as an Experimental Field, 1948–1958

- Dates: March 6 – October 25, 2020
 - Curator: Geaninne Gutiérrez-Guimarães, Associate Curator, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation
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- This presentation of Lygia Clark's early practice debuts on the centenary anniversary of the artist's birth, bringing a renewed attention at an international level to a significant postwar Latin American female artist.
 - Viewing painting as an "experimental field", a phrase from a keynote lecture given by the artist in 1956, Clark sought to redefine the medium by pushing the boundaries of traditional painting.
 - Along with a pertinent representation of her early figurative work, this show assembles paintings from major series created during this early period to provide a fundamental overview of the first decade of Clark's artistic career.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents *Lygia Clark: Painting as an Experimental Field, 1948–1958*. A pioneer in abstraction, Lygia Clark (b. 1920, Belo Horizonte, Brazil; d. 1988, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) was a major artist of the second half of the twentieth century. This exhibition presents a reexamination of Clark's crucial formative years from 1948 to 1958, when she was experimenting between figuration and abstraction to articulate the compelling visual language that defined her mature production. Along with a pertinent representation of her early figurative work, this show assembles paintings from major series created during this early period to provide a fundamental overview of the first decade of Clark's artistic career.

Viewing painting as an "experimental field," a phrase from a keynote lecture given by the artist in 1956, Clark sought to redefine the medium by pushing the boundaries of traditional painting. Dedicating herself to art without formal training, she embedded herself within the artistic milieu of Rio de Janeiro in the late 1940s and participated in seminal artistic movements, such as Concrete art and geometric abstraction, throughout the 1950s. This focused exhibition traces Clark's artistic evolution in three structured historical sections: "The Early Years, 1948–1952;" "Geometric Abstraction, 1953–1956;" and "Variation of Form: Modulating Space, 1957–1958." Each chapter addresses Clark's most significant ideas and provides an in-depth representation of her artistic development through a concise selection of works.

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The museum is thankful to the Lygia Clark Cultural Association, Rio de Janeiro, and the artist's family for their tremendous support of the exhibition.

OVERVIEW OF THE EXHIBITION

The Early Years, 1948–1952

In her early years as an artist, Lygia Clark addressed traditional subjects in charcoal drawings and oil paintings, such as portraiture, still life, the domestic or studio interior, landscape, and architecture. These works illustrate Clark's early handling of line, form, color, and space, which laid an important artistic foundation for her later works. Clark's informal training with Brazilian modernists Roberto Burle Marx and Zélia Ferreira Salgado also influenced key elements in her early painting, such as vernacular color, stylized form, and flattened space.

Clark's distinct mode of abstraction continued to develop during the short time she spent in Paris, between 1950 and 1952, when she briefly studied painting with modern masters Fernand Léger and Árpád Szenes, the latter of whom resided as an exile with Maria Helena Vieira da Silva in Rio de Janeiro between 1940 and 1947. Clark's work from 1952 ranged from architectonic graphite drawings and paintings to chromatic, modular configurations of prismatic geometries and triangular pointed forms. Prior to returning to Rio de Janeiro, Clark had her first solo show at L'Institut Endoplastique in Paris in June 1952, where she most likely exhibited a selection of the works included in this section of the exhibition.

Geometric Abstraction, 1953–1956

Upon Lygia Clark's return to Rio de Janeiro in August 1952, Concrete art in Brazil was beginning to take form, first with the establishment of Grupo Ruptura (Rupture Group) in São Paulo in 1952, and later with Grupo Frente (Front Group) in Rio de Janeiro in 1954. Clark joined the latter group along with her contemporaries Aluísio Carvão, Willys de Castro, Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Pape, and Ivan Serpa. Like their counterparts in São Paulo, Grupo Frente absorbed the ideologies of European Concrete art and adhered to strict principles of pure form and objectivity as opposed to the naturalism and figuration prevalent in Brazilian early modernism. In particular, Clark embraced a unique geometric aesthetic in dialogue with the rise of modern geometric abstraction in Brazil and participated in the group's exhibitions between 1954 and 1956.

This section features Clark's precise geometric compositions of 1953 and other major series that propelled her to challenge the spatial conventions of the plane, such as *Discovery of the Organic Line* (*Descoberta da linha orgânica*, 1954) and *Breaking the Frame* (*Quebra da moldura*, 1954). Additionally, this section showcases three existing architectural models, *Maquettes for Interior* (*Maquetes para interior*, 1955), which exemplify the artist's concept of a dynamic living space. Partly under the influence of her earlier teachers Fernand Léger and Roberto Burle Marx, these maquettes highlight Clark's artistic investigations between art and architecture, which later evolved into easel paintings of flat, planar, and modular structures in her series *Modulated Surfaces* (*Superfícies moduladas*, 1955). By 1956, Clark embraced a more vibrant, colorful palette with abstract compositions comprising zigzag shapes, diagonal forms, sharp angles, and rhythmic patterns.

Variation of Form: Modulating Space, 1957–1958

Toward the late 1950s, Lygia Clark embarked on an extensive, methodical investigation of pictorial form, producing a series of large monochromatic modular compositions composed of positive and negative planes. Eventually, her analysis of linear form in a multidimensional space aimed to manipulate and deform the geometry of the plane.

This final section of the exhibition features three major series of two-dimensional works between 1957 and 1958: *Planes in Modulated Surfaces* (*Planos em superfícies moduladas*, 1957–58), *Modulated Spaces* (*Espaços modulados*, 1958), and a reprise of *Modulated Surfaces* (*Superfícies moduladas*, 1957–58). These works, some of which were exhibited at the 1968 Venice Biennial, showcase the artist's range of serial, linear configurations composed of black-and-white geometric forms. Additionally, this section includes a selection of collages that explore the mutability of line, color, and space formed by intersecting lines and contrasting colors.

Lygia Clark: Biography

Lygia Clark was born in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil in 1920 and received informal artistic training in the late 1940s by Brazilian artists Roberto Burle Marx and Zélia Ferreira Salgado in Rio de Janeiro. By 1950 she traveled to Paris to continue her artistic training with modern masters Fernand Léger and Árpád Székely. She held her first exhibition, *L. Clark-Ribeiro* (1952), at the Institut Endoplastique, Paris, where she exhibited her early experiments with abstraction and constructive forms in two-dimensional works. Upon her return to Brazil later that year, she held her first solo show, *Lygia Clark 1950-1952*, at the Ministério da Educação, Rio de Janeiro. Recognized as an emerging artist, Clark began to participate in important regional group exhibitions, including the first *Exposição Nacional de Arte Abstrata* (1953) and the Bienal de São Paulo (1953).

In 1954, Clark became involved with the vanguard collective, Grupo Frente, along with her contemporaries Aluísio Carvão, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape, among others, and participated in the group's groundbreaking exhibitions through 1956. Following the tenets of Geometric Abstraction, her work from this period embraced a rigorous representation of geometric form, bold colors, and a sense of order. She participated in other major exhibitions, such as the *Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna* (1956 and 1957), the first *Exposição Nacional de Arte Concreta* (1957), and the Bienal de São Paulo (1957). Towards the end of the 1950s, Clark's aesthetic and philosophical concerns coincided with those of Neo-Concretism, a Brazilian artistic movement established in 1959 that rejected the impersonal and objective quality of Concrete abstraction. The Neo-Concretists conceived of their works as existing between art and life and as experiences in the public realm. A founding member, Clark participated in the *Exposição Neoconcreta* in 1959, and created three-dimensional work that fostered the active participation of the spectator in the artwork.

From 1964 through the early 1970s, Clark resided in Paris and created a series of unconventional works paralleling her lengthy psychoanalysis with psychiatrist Pierre Fédida, which led her to conceive the idea of a therapeutic form of art. These investigations coincided with groundbreaking events in the world, such as the events of May 1968 in France and the rise of a new generation of Brazilian artists involved in movements such

as Nova Objetividade (New Objectivity) and *Tropicalia*. Clark's works from this period incorporate elements that stimulate the body through eyes, ears, and nose as a way of integrating the senses without privileging the visual. Her artistic investigation from this period embraced a therapeutic performance that aimed to activate subjective and corporal awareness. After 1978, during her last stages of her career, Clark solely dedicated herself to her psychoanalytic practice. She died in Rio de Janeiro in 1988.

DIDAKTIKA

As part of the Didaktika project and thanks to the *Connect with Art* program, sponsored by BBK, visitors will find additional information about Lygia Clark's career in one of the educational areas on the third floor. This presentation will explain the larger context of the Latin American art scene in the 1940s and 50s and illustrate Clark's pioneering role in advancing research and experimentation at the intersection of body and mind. Her unique practice, part art and part therapy, was developed in the 1960s and 70s. This area will also feature a film with the testimony of those who were closest to her, members of the Cultural Association "The World of Lygia Clark," and several replicas of her sensory objects that reinforce the interactive aspect of the experience for visitors.

In addition, the following activities will be offered in connection with the exhibition.

Round table. *Lygia Clark: Painting as an Experimental Field, 1948–1958* (March 4)

Three leading experts on Modern and Contemporary Latin American art will participate in a round table session on the work of Lygia Clark. Geaninne Gutiérrez-Guimarães, Associate Curator, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, and curator of this exhibition; Adele Nelson, Assistant Professor of Art History and Associate Director of the Center for Latin American Visual Studies at the University of Texas, Austin; and Paulo Miyada, curator of the Instituto Tomie Ohtake and Adjunct Curator of the 34th São Paulo Biennial, will discuss the early years of Clark's artistic career with reference to the selected works and the three historical sections of the show.

Shared Reflections*

Unique tours led by professionals from the museum's Curatorial and Education Departments that offer different perspectives on the exhibition's content.

Curatorial Vision: Lygia Clark (March 6) with Geaninne Gutiérrez-Guimarães, Associate Curator, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Foundation.

Key Concepts: Lygia Clark (April 22) with Marta Arzak, Associate Director of Education and Interpretation at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

*Sponsored by Fundación Vizcaína Aguirre

Cover image:

Lygia Clark

The Violoncellist (O Violoncelista), 1951

Oil on canvas

105.5 x 81 x 2.7 cm

Private collection

© Courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association

X.2017.23

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All the information on the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is available at www.guggenheim-bilbao.eus (Press Room).

Press images
Lygia Clark: Painting as an Experimental Field, 1948-1958
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

Online press image service

In the press area of the Museum's website (prensa.guggenheim-bilbao.es), you may register to download high-resolution images and videos of both the exhibitions and the building. If you do not yet have an account, you can register and download the material you need. If you are already a user, enter your username and password and you can access images directly.

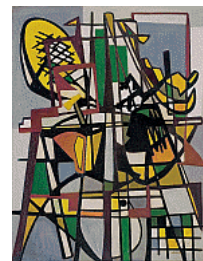
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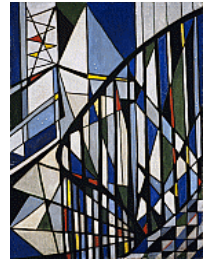
Lygia Clark
The Violoncellist (O Violoncelista), 1951
Oil on canvas
105.5 x 81 x 2.7 cm
Private collection
© Courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association
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Lygia Clark
Composition (Composição), 1951
Oil on canvas
105 x 81 cm
Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros
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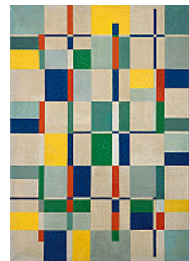
Lygia Clark
Staircase (Escada), 1951
Oil on canvas
100.4 x 74 cm
Acervo Museu de Arte Brasileira – MAB FAAP, São Paulo
Photo: Fernando Silveira
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Lygia Clark
Untitled, 1952
Oil on canvas
54.5 x 81.5 cm
João Sattamini Collection on loan to the Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niterói
© Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association
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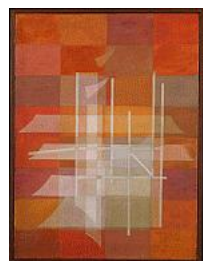
Lygia Clark
Composition (Composição), 1953
Oil on canvas
116.7 x 80.7 x 2.5 cm
Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros
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Lygia Clark
Composition (Composição), 1953
Oil on canvas
89 x 106 cm
Collection MAM, Donation, Sul América Seguros
© Courtesy of “The World of Lygia Clark” Cultural Association
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Lygia Clark
Untitled, 1954
Oil on canvas
56 x 42 cm
João Sattamini Collection on loan to the Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niterói
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Lygia Clark

Modulated Surface No. 5 (Superfície modulada no. 5), ca. 1955

Lacquer on wood

116 x 72 cm

João Sattamini Collection on loan to the Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Niterói

© Courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association

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Lygia Clark

Untitled, 1956

Oil on canvas

113.5 x 79.5 cm

Private collection, São Paulo

© Courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association

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Lygia Clark

Modulated Surface (Superfície modulada), 1955

Industrial paint on Eucatex

62 x 86 cm

Collection Ana Eliza and Paulo Setúbal

© Courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association

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Lygia Clark

Modulated Surface No. 20 (Superfície modulada no. 20), 1956

Industrial paint on wood

60 x 120.5 cm

Fundação Edson Queiroz Collection, Fortaleza

© Courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association

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Lygia Clark

Modulated Surface (Superfície modulada), 1957

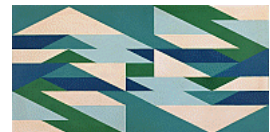
Industrial paint on wood

49.5 x 94.5 x 8 cm

Collection Marcos Ribeiro Simon

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Lygia Clark

Planes in Modulated Surface (Planos em superfície modulada), 1958

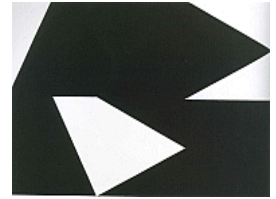
Synthetic polymer paint on wood

100 x 150 x 7 cm

Private collection, Rio de Janeiro

© Courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association

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Lygia Clark

Counter Relief (Contra relevo), 1959

Industrial paint on wood

140 x 140 x 2.5 cm

Collection Jones Bergamin, Rio de Janeiro

© Courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association

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Lygia Clark

Planes in Modulated Surface, Series B, No. 7, Version 1 (Planos em superfície modulada, série B, no.7, versão 1), 1958

Industrial paint on wood

100 x 100 cm

Collection Rose and Alfredo Setúbal

© Courtesy of "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association

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