



DORA BASILIO *Aquatint/Aqua Fortis/Dry Point* 1964
23 x 11½ inches. R.C.A. Galleries

artists to Brazil, and they also exercised their influence. The Museums of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and other cities were founded, the first São Paulo Biennial took place in 1951.

The São Paulo Biennial is another Brazilian paradox, which every two years transforms the city of São Paulo into the art centre of the world, lending modern art in Brazil the kind of glamour which makes it attractive also to the masses. But the great importance of these shows lies in the tremendous influence which they exert on the whole of Brazilian art.

The upsurge of modern art in Brazil did not begin gradually, with various trends and currents, like in Europe, but at once, and with great violence, with polemics on whether art should be abstract or figurative. But this of course was only the beginning, because in the years that followed Brazil has acquired representatives of almost every existing trend – more or less 'avant-garde' – among artists and critics.

Again some paradoxes appear. Though Brazil is a country of great social and economic contrasts, and many of the artists are deeply concerned with the social and political problems involved, so-called social 'realism' never caught on as an art form. Several attempts were made, but none of them were successful. The same paradox occurs with regard to surrealism. Brazilians as a rule are very imaginative and sensitive people, with many 'dreamers' among them; nevertheless Brazil has not produced one important surrealist painter. The few artists who may be considered surrealists do their work more in the spirit of Bosch and Goya, than in that of the European surrealists of the 20th century.

Another paradox is that though Brazil has a very rich and varied folklore, with many racial influences, its reflex on contemporary art has been negligible – even though many of the 'primitives'

sell very well. There are some authentic primitives who are definitely of interest, and there are many who are the products of certain critics and 'march-ands'. But there were artists, of course, who have been able to include something truly Brazilian in their work, and who above all have been able to transfer these 'native' elements to a truly universal level: they were – on occasion – Portinari, Guignard, Goeldi, Paicetti, Djanira, perhaps Di Cavalcanti.

But perhaps the most astonishing paradox in Brazilian art is the great flourishing of the black and white media, the enormous importance acquired by the graphic arts. After rather timid beginnings by Carlos Oswald and Oswaldo Goeldi, later helped by the teaching of the Austrian Axel von Leskoschek, and after courses given by Johnny Friedlander, Orlando da Silva, etc., a group of Brazilian etchers and engravers was formed which has acquired international standing. And artists like Fayga Ostrower, Roberto De Lamônica, Artur Luis Piza, Marcelo Grassmann, Edith Behring, and several others, have a firm and well-deserved international reputation, based on important awards won at international exhibitions and on individual shows throughout the world. Brazil is an exuberant country with an exuberant nature, and Brazil's probably most important art form is the severe and unadorned beauty of the graphic arts.

This exhibition organised for and by the Royal College of Art, and I believe the first exhibition of Brazilian art to be held in Great Britain, has received the full support of the 'Itamaraty', the Brazilian Foreign Office. It is supposed to show the British public what Brazilian art of today is like. It is for this reason that artists who are physically or artistically dead have not been included. The only 'leitmotiv' in putting this show together has been the effort to present something that is alive, and that truly represents the work and the spirit of most of the Brazilian artists working today. There are some artists of importance – such as Maria Leontina, Milton Dacosta, Alfredo Volpi, who did not participate in this exhibition for reasons of their own, and their absence can be felt. There are other artists who have not been included because their absence would not be felt. For technical reasons it was impossible to include sculpture, and it is to be hoped that on some future occasion the British public will be able to become acquainted with the work of Bruno Giorgi, Mário Cayo,

Lygia Clark, Sergio de Camargo – and very few others; sculpture is not a popular art form in Brazil.

Abstract painting, in its various manifestations, is represented by such mature abstract expressionists as Manabu Mabe, who was born in Japan, who has become a painter in Brazil, and who frequently gives an oriental touch to his otherwise international plastic language; Danilo Di Prete, who was born in Italy, and who also follows the international trend. The great quality of his paintings has placed him among the best of the Brazilian artists. Yolanda Mohalyi comes from Hungary, but her artistic maturity was also reached in Brazil. Iberê Camargo has gradually developed his present-day violent and dark abstractions, going through periods of gentle landscapes and severe still-lives. Antonio Bandeira is sometimes abstract, and sometimes representational, according to the need for expression he may be feeling at the moment. Arcângelo Ianelli, whose reputation in Brazil is becoming more and more solid, expresses himself through serene and monumental forms, using very little colour. Tomie Ohtake, another of the Brazilian Japanese, is becoming one of the most important Brazilian artists, with her carefully done and extremely serious paintings. Paulo Becker's strong structures and colours, Alberto Teixeira's carefully worked textures, Sergio Campos Mello's delicate hues and forms, together with Domenico Lazzarini's ascetic and harmonious designs, Décio Viei's beautifully balanced and carefully thought out canvases, Benjamin Silva's rather romantic and rich paintings in contrast to the meticulous and well-balanced geometric abstractions of Willys de Castro and Hércules Barsotti, or the highly imaginative visions of Ivan Freitas – all this gives a rather good idea of what abstract or rather non-objective art is like in Brazil.

Laszlo Meitner, Frank Schaeffer, Carlos Scliar, Djanira Motta e Silva and José Paulo Moreira da Fonseca have always been figurative artists, always following their own convictions and not the latest trends – which of course does not mean that the latest trends cannot represent the true convictions of many artists. A point in case is Ivan Serpa, who started out as a figurative, for several years was the leading Brazilian constructivist or geometric abstractionist, then for some time was one of our important informalists, and now has returned to

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WESLEY DUKE LEE *First of April Drawing*, distemper and collage 1964 19 x 26½ inches. R.C.A. Galleries.

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