

Becoming a partner

Sergio de Camargo is a Brazilian living in Paris, one of those vital South Americans who have had such great influence on international art. His reliefs, halfway between painting and free-standing sculptures, are studies of how light alters vibrations in an assemblage of similar forms.

His customary procedure is to cover a rectangular surface with segments cut from wooden rods of varying dimensions. Each section has been sliced at a different angle and is glued in place so that nothing is actually level or frontal.

The curved sides and the oblique end planes acquire shadows or reflect light. Protruding forms and comparatively receding ones conduct an intricate play; together they articulate the rhythm into design. When the light source or the viewer moves, the entire pattern changes. The wave of optical activity thus set up provokes nuances, usually subtle — at times impressive.

In this "Relief" we have an added feature: the eyes are pulled to the intensely uninhabited central strips which exert a surprising demand — we find it rather difficult to withdraw the eyes.

The method Camargo follows is strict, his color invariably white. Aesthetic appeal depends on the harmonious combination of many like forms. The arrangement complies with a specific, mathematical order. Shadows and reflections are carefully calculated. Adhering to a rule, very likely unknown to us, ensures we will encounter in those compositions a mysterious but lyrical pleasure.

Optical art is a version of kinetic art; Camargo accepts as basic the premise that motion is the spark of life. Indeed a work in which movement has been incorporated, even though it may be extraneous, cannot be static or aloof. It initiates a dialogue with the spectator, leads him to participate, to become an active partner with the artist.

Choice of the cylinder as a compositional element was not by chance nor because he saw it as a ready-made convenient form. Camargo's earliest abstractions were casts of fingerprints in sand or plaster pressed into ruffled pieces of cloth — quite far away, but one gets a glimmer of his later work.

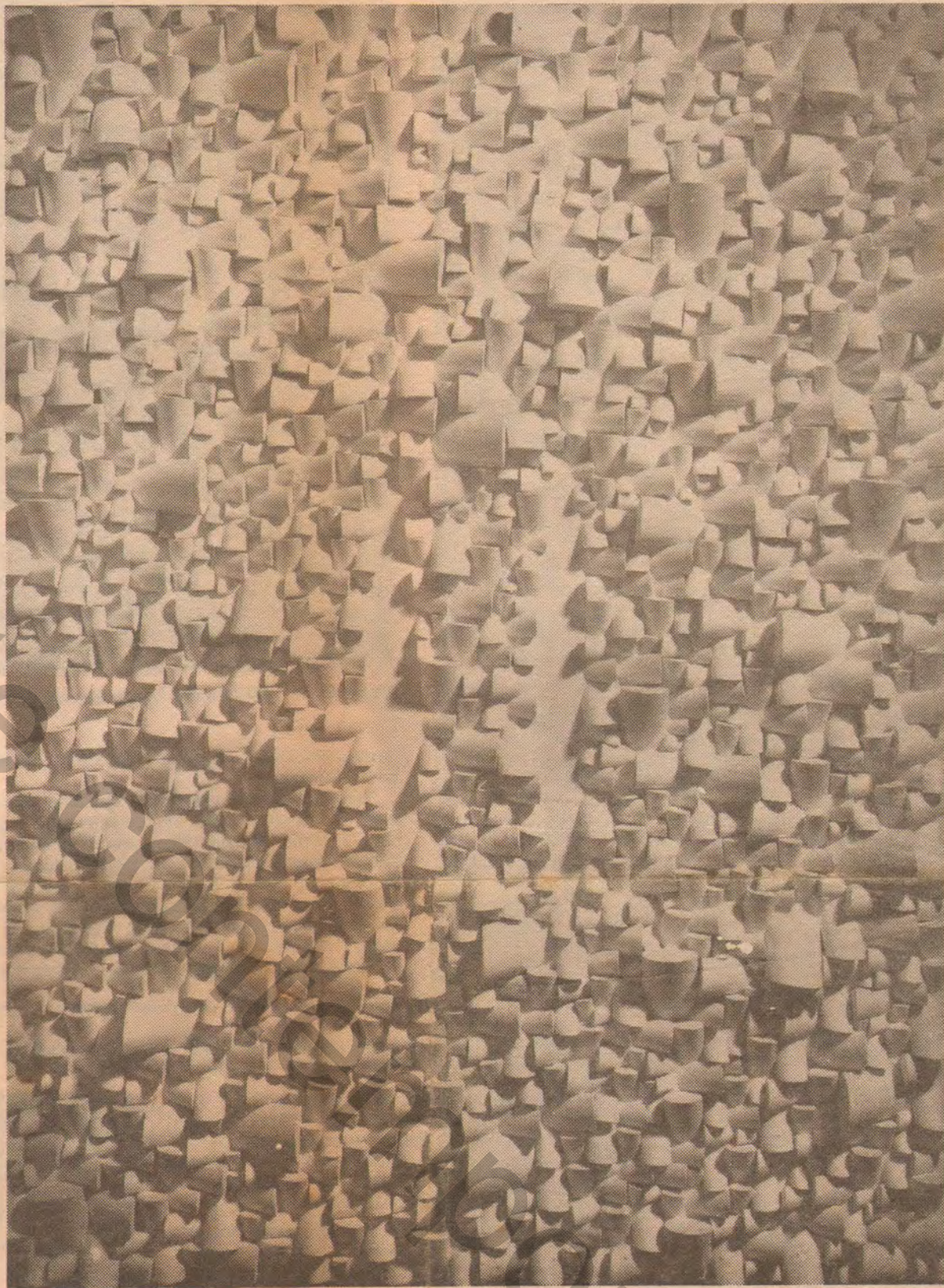
He arrived gradually, thoughtfully, at cylindrical forms, able to push and pull them at will, to transform them into his own material. Due to a rare ability, each beautiful variation appears completely new.

Are the works realistic? Of course; all art is both abstract and realistic. Camargo's first teacher, the Italian Lucio Fontana, says it well: "The object of today's research is not so much nature as we see it; the abstract artist gives up the description of nature for a representation of structure in a new harmony of spatial dimensions. Reality is inexhaustible and more fantastic than one can imagine."

Particular honor is due to artists who grasp the techniques and tastes of their time, absorbing, exploiting them in accordance with their own needs. Camargo's style is appropriate to the sensibility of the new age; however, he remains aware that reasoning by itself is not necessarily creative. The sensitivity of the artist is a most important ingredient, it decides the manner and determines the content of each work. In his case there underlies and tempers the intellect a tremendous Brazilian feeling for life, augmented by a lingering Mediterranean poetic romanticism.

Camargo writes: "Perhaps what happens with my work is that it liberates, releases, in whoever approaches it, some diffuse emotion, something of what we occasionally experience in front of certain faces or landscapes, or when we feel space, sand, or the wind."

Anna and Giorgio Bacchi



Courtesy of the artist

'Relief' (1965): Wood sculpture by Sergio de Camargo

The gift which, shared, remains intact

There are dances and dances.

Our dance, now:

hesitant, but balanced; post-magic,
pre-analytic, a charming dance.

A dance to catch gleams of the heart's light
and dazzle silently with them,
a silent revolution.

There are structures and structures.

This one holds.

Beautiful, yet solid; pre-miracle,
post-ordinary, a diamond structure.

Let us renew it forever, adding, remodeling:
the very warmest wonder.
the very deepest light.

Jonathan William Yost

On explanation

Ask me not always to explain.

Sometimes words will break with the burden
of their meaning,

Strain under what first frost
evokes in the heart.

Silence is, in the midst of torrent, best
To stretch across an evening's width

As yards of dark brocade,
Closing out the inadequate words

On the tip of the tongue
That would dissect the harvest of spirit

And what the heart would inherit.
Accept silence and know the releast

a slow pulse brings
to the sound of peace.

Gladys McKee