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Revolutionary themes for the São Paulo Biennale 1973

The São Paulo Biennale¹ is also going through a crisis. It is not easy to promote a youthful spirit in an already aged organism. The São Paulo Biennial is indeed twenty-four years old². It is very similar to the Venice Biennale, it was politically contested in recent years³ and it is still aesthetically contested today. For these reasons, the 12th São Paulo Biennial which will take place in October 1973 wants to be revolutionary.

Professor Flusser is in charge of its organization with Mr. Bento⁴, president of the Brazilian section of the international association of art critics (AICA), under the aegis of Mr. Matarazzo⁵, founder of the Biennale. Mr. Flusser revealed to us one of the main innovations of this event. He would like to set up international groups made up of artists, scientists, theoreticians who, together with critics, filmmakers, television producers and the Brazilian population, would propose, through various themes, solutions aimed at, according to his expression, "the aesthetic dimension entering into mass culture", that is to say art should manifest itself in everything that concerns our daily life.

He envisions about seventy themes, here are a few examples:

THE APARTMENT. New types of apartments designed by an architect, an artist, a sociologist, with the participation of three inhabitants of a Brazilian municipality, will be proposed to the public who can formulate counter-proposals concerning the shape of the rooms, the color of the walls, the dimensions of the bathtub, the material of the partitions, calling into question all traditional designs.

PRIMARY SCHOOL would be redesigned by a Swiss group: an artist, a teacher, a psychologist, in collaboration with a musician, a sociologist, a teacher, Brazilian parents and children.

FOOD PRODUCTS would be considered from an aesthetic point of view by an artist, a chemist, a sociologist, a manufacturer, who would change both the shape of the bottles and the way of eating, rediscovering the beauty of food like the tea ceremonies practiced by the Japanese.

THE WINDOW would become a plastic element - it was in the Middle Ages when it was made of stained glass - instead of being a hole overlooking the void or another place, a small screen imposing a vision of the world without taking into account the desires and the needs of each televiewer.

¹ Published in Le Figaro, September 19, 1972. English translation and footnotes by Marc Lenot.

² Actually, 21 years since its founding in 1951

³ The 10th and 11th Biennales were boycotted by many artists and organizations.

⁴ Antonio Bento (1902-1988) was a journalist and art critic, and a member of the management team of the 11th and 12th Biennales.

⁵ Ciccillo Matarazzo (1898-1977) was the founder of the Biennale and the president of the first thirteen Biennales.

Popular art must be reborn

The São Paulo Biennale would thus be a vast laboratory with mock-ups, audio-visual programs and encounters between specialists and consumers. The artist would no longer be isolated and the masses would take a share of responsibility in all creation.

Rather than proclaiming: "art is dead", Mr. Flusser prefers to promote its resurrection. Popular art, which has disappeared since the masses consume functional products created by science and technology, must be reborn.

Art is no longer in exhibitions where one currently presents a sterile anti-art, ephemeral and inaccessible to the general public, but it must appear in shop windows, in cheap movies, in TV programs, in urban planning, in lifestyles.

"Mass culture today is alienating because it is imposed, it conceals reality, and elite culture is alienated because it no longer has contact with the masses," says Mr. Flusser. We should waste no time to get out of this dead-end which engages the art of tomorrow. "

Will Mr. Flusser find enough followers to carry out his revolution?