

AMAZÔNIA

CHRISTINA OITICICA

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The artist who buries paintings

Christina Oiticica creates in tune with Mother Earth

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In 1986, author Paulo Coelho walked on foot the 800 kilometers separating the French border town of Saint Jean Pied d'Port to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain. Such was the importance of the trip in his life, that the Road of Santiago was the subject of his first book, *"The Pilgrimage"*. Something similar happened to his wife, the architect and artist, Christina Oiticica, in 1990, walked the track and laid down after completing the pilgrimage, decided to devote herself exclusively to art.

The expression of *"Female"* was the initial feature of her work, something that remains present even today in her creations. In the exhibition *"Joana D'Arc"*, for example, held in 1996, at Casa França-Brasil (Rio de Janeiro), Christina showed the picture of the woman warrior, with tenderness and tenacity. Even exploring the mythical figure of the French heroine, brought the great women of today (like Mother Teresa of Calcutta) and the anonymous and brave warriors of everyday life (a black slum-dweller, Islamic, India, the geisha, etc.). In each one she placed a

particular object of the original model, as part of a shield, a spear, a sword, but emphasized what really exists behind the steel and armor - the feminine principle. The iconography was still the traditional and Christina applied to the painting interferences of photography and digital art.

In the beginning of the last decade, when Christina and Paulo moved to France, specifically to a hotel in the Pyrenees mountains, started a milestone in her life. With a pre-scheduled exhibition in Paris, Christina would have to create a considerable number paintings but the hotel did not have enough space for the execution of the work. The artist began to paint outside. As the canvas were big and the ink still wet avoiding to be rolled, the artist left them overnight in the cold. When she went back, the leaves, seeds and insects fell on the paintings, adhering to the ink. Christina realized at that moment that, somehow, the nature interfered in her work. It was an insight that changed the course of her career.

During the period of one year between 2002 and 2003, Christina Oiticica left 57 works in different soil types - river beds, rocks, soil, forests. Thus, let nature, in the previous four seasons, could interfere directly in her paintings

All screens - except one - were later recovered, processed through a special treatment to avoid spoiling. The project was first shown in the city of Lubljana, Slovenia, in December 2003, at Metn Galerija. The series, with the title of *"Four Seasons"*, was later displayed in Brazil in 2004 at Casa França-Brasil.

Christina radicalized in her searches. Since then she has buried paintings all over the world. She had been at Amazon Forest, Chile, Japan, India, Swiss Alps and at the Road of Santiago de Compostela. The artmaking of Oiticica is full of a mysticism. For her, it was as if the *"Earth, the Great Mother and Our Lady"* was becoming co-author of her paintings.

Back to the Pyrenees, in 2006, Christina Oiticica began an ambitious project, to walk the Pilgrim Way to Santiago de Compostela, burying 100 works along the main stops. It was a return to the path she traveled 16 years earlier, an artistic ambition that Christina took two years to complete. The result was a big exhibition of 59 paintings, in March of 2009, at the Church of the University of Santiago de Compostela and later at the capital Madrid.

While waiting for the time to dig up the works that were off the pilgrim route, Christina has developed a job in Japan, along the Road to Kumano, considered sacred to the Taoists and Buddhists, like the Road of Santiago is for the Christians. For the monks of the mountains of Yamabushi, in the local culture, it's common bury their sacred objects, so the work of Christina was received with great ease and respect. The Road to Kumano and Santiago are considered as "brothers", similar to each other.

In the same period, the artist was in India, at the sacred valley of Ganeshpur, where she buried some works, which remain there today.

Christina Oiticica continues to experiment in the field of interaction with nature. In 2007, invited to the Festival of Performance Infr'action in Sète, France, the artist made a work that best represents the integration of the four elements of nature: water, earth, fire and air. She made a painting in four stages, first submitting the screen to power of the sea, to the **Water** element. The next day, on the Mont St Clair, near to the Chapel of Our Lady of La Salette, Christina marked the screen with burning candle, the **Fire**. The work of the **Air** was to remove the excesses. The **Earth** was represented by the burial of the work for a year.

Nowadays, the ritual burial of her paintings is, where is Christina, an event closely followed by population of the city, earning sometimes coverage in loco of the press. Christina Oiticica is a woman who expresses to the world the power of the nature.



Spanish media watches Christina burying painting of the exhibition "Pilgrim Way"

"I'm here on the banks of Rio Negro, today is April 10, 2004. What I felt when I walked into the Amazon forest, is that the forest is impenetrable. You really have to have a permission, not only a physical permission like a scythe in the hand or a knife that goes cutting to join you must have a permission of the forest come to you. The nature here is very strong. It is very concentrated, both visually and aurally, it is a lot of life you find there. Much life."

The text over shows the emotion of the artist Christina Oiticica front of the majestic nature of the Amazon rainforest. During the year 2004 she ran away in the corners in the Amazon forest crossing rivers and forests in order to establish a unique interplay of her art with the earth. On her journey, the artist has buried 20 works in areas of difficult access for, approximately one year later, take them out, stating how the nature had interfered in her paintings.

In 2010, finally, the collection **"Amazon"** is shown together, at the centennial Hotel Diplomat in Stockholm, with the support of **Jornal do Brasil** and **Casa Brasil**. It was at Diplomat that, in 2008, **Casa Brasil** and **JB** carried out the exhibition **"50 Years of Bossa Nova"**, repeating the success of the event occurred just before at United Nations headquarters in New York.

For Christina, an artist used to travels to mystical places across the planet, the passage through the Amazon surprised her. There, more strongly, she felt the presence of: *"Mother Earth" - she said - that nourishes and gives life.*

In recent decades the preservation of the Amazon has become a staple in the international agenda. Not without reason. The balance of the climate in the world, in a sense, depends on the preservation of the forest to prevent global warming make the earth hotter and hotter and inhospitable. Besides its immense biodiversity is far from being totally unveiled. The art of Christina is attuned to this concern.

Christina Oiticica brings to her creations all the power of the four elements of nature - **Water, Earth, Fire and Air** - as reflected in the canvas shown in Stockholm. It is therefore an opportunity to show the Amazon to the world through a prism less conventional, art pieces in which the forest itself is co-author.

The journey along the rivers of the Amazon was full of special moments, sometimes magical. Christina began to bury their paintings in the town of Bethania, Amazonas. In the words of the artist:

- It was In Bethania where I left the first paintings, just because of the difficulty of entering in the forest. There was the first stage of my contact with the Amazon. I put the frames between the leaves of different plants, to see how this would influence the leaves.

The apparent ease was an illusion. When the paintings were collected in the locality, in 2005, the difficulties were immense. The site had gone through many changes and flooding.





In her search for "female", while crossing the jungle rivers, the artist saw a mystical symbolism behind the form of a tree:

- I saw a tree, huge, beautiful and she had three breasts. That is, all about the things I work: signs, breasts, food, the wolf. I put a picture on this tree, he stayed there for a year. It was a painting with the portal of the birth of Venus, the Portal of Gaia.

Christina reveals that, in her conception of art, the energy of the nature is more important than aesthetics:

- The intention is not only about the physical appearance of the work, certainly the aesthetic appeal to me as an artist is very important. But it is the importance of energy that material gets, the energy of the forest, the invisible the pure energy of the Immaculate Conception, you know? Mother.

An amazing moment of the trip was when Christina was with the Indians Katukinas in Acre:

- There, I painted with the women of the tribe, women who are dedicated to tribal art. The indigenous symbols are totally geometric, but I did not have this perception. They only wanted to paint in the blank for not interfere in my work, they did not make curves, they saw me doing and began to imitate, but it was a great difficulty for them, ended up working only with straight lines. They laughed when I painted curved shapes like the moon or a heart, it was very funny. There was an Indian, who began to breastfeed her child, a very beautiful scene, the scene of the mother feeding the baby.

Among the 10 days she spent in the Amazon rainforest, the day on which the artist entered in the tribe of Katuquinas was special.

It was there, inside the reserve, which the artist left two pictures to the nature work on, a small one was part of the series "**Mouths**" and the big painting whose theme was "**Love in the Universe**" a blue screen representing the addition of some symbols of "Female" like hearts and roses - theme of Oiticica - the universe, the sacred.

By being in a very fertile soil, the moment of burial has gained energy and a special blessing, as was done along with the Shaman of the tribe.

Later this same day, the artist made a series of paintings together with the women that called the "**Voice of Women Katuquinas**".





The golden rose

I have just had dinner, now I am having some coffee and contemplating the painting in front of me: it was put in a river and left there for a year, waiting for nature to give the final touch to the painter's work.

Half of the painting was carried off by the waters and bad weather, so the edges are all uneven, but even so I can still see part of the beautiful red rose painted on a golden background. I know the artist, I remember 2003, when together we went to a forest in the Pyrenees, discovered the creek – which at that moment was dry – and hid the canvas underneath the stones that covered the river bed.

I know the artist, Christina Oiticica. At this very moment she is physically at a distance of 8,000 kilometers, and at the same time she is in everything around me. That makes me happy: even after 29 years of marriage, the love is more intense than ever before. Never did I imagine that this would happen: I had been in three relationships that did not work out right and was convinced that eternal love did not exist until she came along – on a Christmas afternoon, like a present sent by an angel. We went to the movies. We made love that same day. I thought to myself: "this won't last long". For the first two years I was always expecting one of us to give up the relationship. For the following five years I went on thinking that it was just an arrangement, that in a short while each of us would go our own way. I had convinced myself that any commitment of a more serious nature would deprive me of my "freedom" and stop me experiencing all that I wanted.

Twenty-nine years on, I am still free – because I discovered that love never enslaves us I am free to turn my head and watch her sleeping at my side – that is the photo I have on my mobile phone. I am free for us to go out, enjoy a stroll, go on talking, discussing – and occasionally arguing, as always. I am free to love as I have never loved before, and that makes a great difference in my life.

Let's go back to the painting and the river: it was the summer of 2002, I was already a well-known writer, I had money, I felt that my basic values had not changed, but how could I be absolutely certain? By testing. We rented a small room in a two-star hotel in France, where we began to spend five months each year. The wardrobe could not get any bigger, so we had to limit our clothes. We wandered through the forests, dined out, spent hours in conversation and went to the movies every day. The simplicity of it all confirmed for us that the most sophisticated things in the world are precisely those that are within everyone's reach. All that I needed for my work was a portable computer. But it so happens that my wife is ... a painter.

And painters need gigantic studios to produce and keep their work. By no means did I want her to sacrifice her vocation for me, so I proposed renting a place. However, looking around, seeing the mountains, the valleys, the rivers and the lakes, the forests, she thought: why don't I work here? And why not let nature work with me?

And thus was born the idea of "storing" the canvases in the open air. I carried my laptop and went on writing. She knelt on the grass and painted. A year later, when we removed the first paintings, the result was original, magnificent.

We lived in that small hotel for two unforgettable years. She continued to bury her canvases, no longer out of necessity but because she had discovered a new technique. The Amazon, Mumbai, the Way to Santiago, Lubijana, Miami. Today she is far away, but tomorrow or next week she will be close again, sleeping at my side. Content, because her work is beginning to be recognized all over the world.

At this moment I see only the rose. And I thank the angel that gave me two presents on that Christmas of 1979: the ability to open up my own heart, and the right person to receive it.

Paulo Coelho