

Rubens Gerchman and the pedagogy of the everyday

by Claudia Calirman

The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible.

Allan Kaprow

Legend has it that when Rubens Gerchman entered Parque Lage as the new director of the School of Visual Arts, his first act was to throw the easels onto a bonfire¹. In classes devoted to painting from live models, Gerchman added long canes to the brushes, so that control of movement would not be restricted to the hand, but expanded throughout the body. The students began to draw standing up, rather than sitting down; the surface resting on the floor, not on an easel, and the model in constant movement, no longer static.

The old Institute of Fine Arts (IBA), founded in 1950 and moved to Parque Lage in 1966, became an open arts school, headed by Gerchman under the new name of Parque Lage School of Visual Arts (EAV). Under Gerchman's guidance as director of the EAV, between 1975 and 1979, the institution experienced a period of accelerated development, marked by a new sense of effervescence and intensity. The former home of the Italian opera singer Gabriella Besanzoni, built in the 1920s in the Jardim Botânico neighborhood, ceased to be an exclusively academic space and was transformed into one of the most active cultural centers in Rio de Janeiro. Rather than training painters, the goal of the school became the integration of art and life, through a multidisciplinary approach and interaction between different fields of knowledge.

¹ Catalogue of the exhibition *O Jardim de Oposição, 1975-1979*, under the curatorship of Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda and Hélio Eichbauer, at the Parque Lage School of Visual Arts (Rio de Janeiro), from June 19 to August 30 2009. *O Jardim de Oposição, 1975-1979* (Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano, 2009), 29.

The new school gained a reputation as a bustling place, with renowned artists and intellectuals as professors, who offered “workshops” rather than classes². In the evenings, the courtyard of the EAV was converted into a stage for performances and musical shows, such as the frenetic *Verão a mil* project, organized by the poet Xico Chaves, with performances by Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Luiz Melodia, Jards Macalé and Jorge Mautner, among others, as well as evenings with *Nuvem Cigana* (Gypsy Cloud), a marginal poetry group. According to the historian Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda:

“The EAV, around 1976, was already considered the great cultural center of Rio de Janeiro. It was at the EAV where marginal poetry, the most important literary expression of resistance, found a space for creation and performances, in events that brought together a huge young audience for literature, something which to this day is practically unheard of in the literary world. It was at the EAV that Francisco Bittencourt launched our first gay publication, *Lampião da esquina* (“Lamppost on the Corner”). It was there that the psychoanalysts of the Lacanian avant-garde met the Freudian School of Brazil. It was at the EAV that the conductor and composer Joachim Koellreutter organized his historic twelve-tone music concerts. In short, at that time it was from the EAV that the cultural life of Rio and Brazil was propelled”³.

A new way of thinking and acting, focused more on practice than on theory, would define Gerchman's pedagogical method. If the goal was to ‘de-academize’ the school, it was by

² The EAV professors included among their number Roberto Magalhães (Painting Workshop), Celeida Tostes (Arts of Fire Workshop, ceramics), Marcos Flaksman (Scenography Workshop), Dionísio del Santo (Screen Printing), Sérgio Santeiro (Cinema Workshop), Claudio Kuperman (Acrylic Workshop), Roberto Maia (Photo-Language) and Hélio Eichbauer (Multidimensional Workshop – environment/body). Eventually, the EAV created more than 60 art workshops and trained more than 2000 students in its first five years, through classes in painting, sculpture, photography, cinema, ceramics and design, as well philosophy, literature, art history, theater, dance, music and psychoanalysis, etc.

³ *O Jardim de Oposição, 1975-1979*; 19. In addition to poetry and literature, the EAV also provided a stage for theater groups such as “*O Asdrúbal Trouxe o Trombone*”.

no means to de-intellectualize it. The idea was to encourage exchanges between artists, in addition to giving students a vision of contemporary art, setting aside the academic approach to the teaching of art that had dominated previously.

Rather than being a space dedicated to leisure, to the so-called "disorder" of the time, the EAV became an unrelenting powerhouse of artistic production, in tune with the transformations that would mark the second half of the 1970s. Brazil was being ruled by a military dictatorship and by the time that Gerchman took over at Parque Lage in 1975, towards the end of the "years of lead", the urban guerrillas had been decimated and the student movement dismantled. Armed action was no longer a viable option, and many young people chose political disengagement, which was viewed by the orthodox left as the product of alienation.

The EAV emerged as an alternative option, between, on the one hand, the "disorder" group associated with the counterculture and the hippie movement, and on the other, the committed left and its attachment to nationalist-populist cultural production. According to Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda, "it was a time when the university did not speak out, nothing was said, there was nowhere to meet. Gerchman took over at Parque Lage and transformed it into an island, a garden of opposition. It was a place where everyone was permitted to talk; they could meet, they could believe, and they could express themselves freely, and Rubens was daring, he didn't let the police enter, he defended the place tooth and nail"⁴.

⁴ This testimony by Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda is part of the interview project *Rubens Gerchman: com a demissão no bolso*, focused on pedagogical thought at the Parque Lage School of Visual Arts (EAV), in Rio de Janeiro, implemented by Gerchman from 1975 to 1979. The project functioned alongside the exhibition *Rubens Gerchman – com a demissão no bolso* (August 8 2014 – February 8 2015), held in the Casa Daros, curated by Eugenio Valdés Figueroa, director of art and education at the Casa Daros, and by Clara Gerchman, the artist's daughter and curator of the Rubens Gerchman Institute, created in 2010. The project includes a record of the testimonies of former students, professors, artists, curators, art critics, poets, musicians, filmmakers and influencers, in the form of audiovisual recordings and their respective transcriptions. The interviews are available at: <http://www.institutorubensgerchman.org.br/entrevistas.html>. The interviews included in this project will be cited as "Projeto Audiovisual Casa Daros: Rubens Gerchman: com a demissão no bolso".

Gerchman's project for the EAV could have been threatened, censored and even closed down in the context of the repression exercised by the military regime, but the school managed to remain a space for cultural resistance.

The Bowery experience

The “pedagogy of the everyday”, which Gerchman would introduce at the Parque Lage school, was intrinsically bound up with the period he spent living in New York, from 1969 to 1972. As the winner of the National Salon of Modern Art award, the artist traveled to Manhattan with his wife, their two children and the artist Anna Maria Maiolino, supported by a modest monthly scholarship of five hundred dollars⁵. The couple's apartment at 250 Bowery Street, on the Lower East Side, later became a reference point for Brazilians passing through the city, including Lygia Clark, Sérgio Camargo, Glauber Rocha, Antonio Dias, Amílcar de Castro, Ivan Freitas and Roberto De Lamônica, among others.

The neighborhood, which was then the haunt of homeless people and drunks, has now been completely gentrified. Today, for anyone visiting the imposing International Center of Photography (ICP), in front of the New Museum, on the Lower East Side, it is impossible to imagine that this was the address where Gerchman lived with his family. This is how Oiticica described the neighborhood in a letter to Lygia Clark: “The first time I went there, I thought I was entering a scene from Bosch: a thousand bodies in the street, with urine, blood, garbage, empty bottles everywhere, people approaching to ask for money, etc.”⁶.

⁵ To supplement the scholarship, Gerchman worked in an acrylic factory and Anna Maria Maiolino worked in a fabric printing factory, while the couple's two young children, Micael and Veronica, were in school.

⁶ Hélio Oiticica, letter to Lygia Clark (Rio de Janeiro, August 2 1970), doc. No. 0749.70, AHO/PHO. Oiticica stayed at the Gerchman and Maiolino apartment in July 1970 when he went to New York to take part in the *Information* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art (July-September, 1970). Later, when Oiticica arrived in New York in late 1970, with a scholarship from the Guggenheim Foundation, he stayed with the artist Lee Jaffe for about one month, before moving to an apartment at 81 Second Avenue, on the Lower East Side, where he remained from January 1971 to October 1974, when he moved to an apartment on Christopher Street, in the West Village, where he remained until January 1978, the year he returned to Brazil.

In the 70s, Latin American artists looking for a cheap place to live in the city were attracted to the neighborhood. Most of them, like Gerchman and Maiolino, were self-exiled artists, who were not necessarily being politically persecuted, but who were finding it difficult to produce art within the repressive climate of Latin America.

Until then, Paris had been the most popular destination for Brazilian artists and intellectuals. The ambivalent attitude of the time towards the United States, one of the great centers of the counterculture, but also one of the greatest allies of the military dictatorship, made it a daring option⁷. Gerchman already had a solid artistic career in Brazil, with market recognition and participation in major exhibitions in museums and galleries⁸. This was a situation that would not be replicated in New York.

After disembarking from a cargo ship and beginning life as a Latin American artist in the US's greatest metropolis, the daily reality of Gerchman's existence would be very different. Penniless and struggling to find suitable materials with which to work, Gerchman began to produce small works; acrylic boxes with English words like "sky/color/blood/sun/herb", through which he created a kind of poetry/object⁹. The accelerated pace of the big city, the emphasis on art as a marketable product, the pragmatism that defined relationships, all these factors would contribute to Gerchman's new artistic production, which began to acquire a more compact character, devoid of excess. The grandiose and monumental became synthesized and condensed.

⁷ For a good analysis of the precarious situation experienced by Brazilian artists living in New York, see: Dária Jaremtchuk, "*Exílio artístico e fracasso profissional: artistas brasileiros em Nova York nas décadas de 1960 e 1970*". ARS (São Paulo), São Paulo, Vol. 14, No. 28, December. 2016. ISSN 2178-0447. Available at: <<http://www.revistas.usp.br/ars/article/view/124002>>. Accessed: April 02 2017. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.2178-0447.ars.2016.124002>

⁸ Gerchman had a solo exhibition at the Relevó Gallery (1965) and participated in other major collective shows, including *Opinião 65* (Rio de Janeiro Museum of Modern Art, 1965), *Pare na Galeria G-4* (1966), and *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro Museum of Modern Art, 1967).

⁹ For his *Pocket Stuff*, Gerchman created a black cube on which was written "white" and a white cube on which was written the word "black". Other objects bore the words "sea salt" (a box containing salt and sand); "sky" (with cotton wool clouds); "men" (three black cubes, one for each letter); "color" (rectangle with colored cylinders); "sun" (yellow box with a yellow acrylic circle and sand); "blood" (transparent box containing a red circle with a drop of blood); "herb" (transparent box with herb). Interview with Gerchman by Fábio Magalhaes, *O Rei do Mau Gosto* (São Paulo: J.J. Carol, 2013), 82.

During his time in New York, the gigantic words of the “*Cartilha do superlativo*”¹⁰, conceived when the artist was still living in Rio de Janeiro, were down-sized to pocket poems.¹¹ In the poem/object “Sky”, contained within a small blue box and covered by a clear acrylic lid, the word/object “sky” spills out into the space beyond the box. Through this semantic/spatial game, Gerchman addressed concrete poetry and the propositions of neo-concretism.

In early 1970s New York, conceptual art was establishing itself as the new trend, superseding the excessive imagery of pop art and the emphasis on materiality advocated by the minimalist movement. The image came to be seen as language, and art itself as an idea, process and reflexive proposal, rather than a purely visual experience. The art critic Wilson Coutinho considered that, by working with conceptual practices through words and their semantic connections, “[Gerchman] assembles his bricolage; he wages a battle against the image, which forces him to practically extirpate the sensory and intellectual media offered by painting or drawing, considered failed media”¹². Observing the direction that Gerchman's work was taking, Oiticica stated:

“What interests me about this evolution by Gerchman is precisely the progress from an age of the superlative image to the formalization of a synthesis that is required today. In Brazil, the idolatry of the image reaches a level of redundancy and descends into a dangerous morass; there is a kind of

¹⁰ *Cartilha do superlativo* consisted of constructions forming giant words, uniting architecture and sculpture. The first constructed word was *AR* (AIR), made from blue Formica, followed by *LUTE* (FIGHT), and *S.O.S.* In 1967, he built *ÁGUA* (WATER) –a transparent acrylic box, in large format, filled with water. These works were produced before Gerchman traveled to New York and are embryonic versions of his *Pocket Stuff*. Interview with Gerchman by Fábio Magalhães, *O Rei do Mau Gosto*, 81.

¹¹ “Pocket Stuff: Rubens Gerchman”, text written by Oiticica in London, July 24 – September 7 1969. In: *Instituto Itaú Cultural. Programa Hélio Oiticica*. Available at: <<http://www.itaucultural.org.br/programaho/>>. Typed pages (Document 0463/69). The pocket poems also make reference to the coin-like metal tokens used in place of tickets on the subway, and carried in passengers’ pockets.

¹² Wilson Coutinho, “*Na era do conceito e a antropologia do desejo*” (1989). In *Gerchman* (Rio de Janeiro: Salamandra, 1989). Reproduced in *O Rei do Mau Gosto*, 44.

exercise of the power of the image, but that does not lead to transformations and it tends to be converted into an aestheticism, or into an all-encompassing anecdote”¹³.

Gerchman was already living in New York when Oiticica arrived in the city, towards the end of 1970, traveling from London, where he had exhibited *The Whitechapel Experience* at the Whitechapel Gallery (February-April, 1969)¹⁴. As part of that show, Oiticica created the *Eden* installation, a space where the visitor walked through delimited areas containing straw and sand, experiencing a variety of sensations. At the end of the exhibition, there were the "*Ninhos*" ("Nests"), wooden boxes forming a rectangle, with divisions lined with straw, where participants could curl up and nest: playing, sleeping, listening to music, and wrapping themselves up using materials of different textures¹⁵.

Based on this experience in London, Oiticica developed the notion of *Crelazer* (a combination of the Portuguese *crer* –believing–, *criar* –creating– and *lazer* –leisure, not doing). The idea was to combine work and leisure, not as a passive attitude, but as an agent of transformation. According to Oiticica: “[I] invented a thing called *Crelazer*, I wanted to transform the day in its entirety, including leisure and laziness, into something like a permanent inventive state, that's why I started to transform the place where I live, that was the ideal, to live in the work itself”¹⁶.

¹³ Hélio Oiticica, "*Série Aberta1/ Gerchman*", text written by Oiticica in London, July 30 – August 4 1969. Reproduced in Wilson Coutinho, "*Na Era do Conceito e a Antropologia do Desejo*" (1989). In *O Rei do Mau Gosto*, 44-45.

¹⁴ Oiticica went to London to prepare his exhibition *The Whitechapel Experience* on December 3 1968, ten days before the military regime issued the AI-5 institutional act. The exhibition opened at the Whitechapel Gallery on February 24 1969. Later, Oiticica took up a residency at the University of Sussex, in Brighton, which ended in 1970. Oiticica then moved to New York, and only returned to Rio de Janeiro in 1978.

¹⁵ Celso Favaretto, *A Invenção de Hélio Oiticica* (São Paulo: Edusp, 1992), 188-89. Another version of *Ninhos* was produced by Oiticica for the exhibition *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1970).

¹⁶ Interview with Oiticica by Ivan Cardoso (1979), *Folha de São Paulo*, November 16, 1985; 48 ("*A Arte Penetrável de Hélio Oiticica*"), cited in Celso Favaretto, "*A Invenção de Hélio Oiticica*", 194. See also: "*Crelazer*" and in "*As Possibilidades do Crelazer*", in *Hélio Oiticica, Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto*, eds. Luciano Figueiredo, Lygia Pape, Waly Salomão (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco, 1986), 113-17.

Oiticica transformed his living space at 81 Second Avenue in the East Village, just a few blocks from the apartment where Gerchman and Maiolino lived, into a big “Nest”. The “*Babylonest*”¹⁷, as it was called, was described by the concrete poet Décio Pignatari: “In his house, around a bunk bed, he installed a penetrable space in the form of a *parangolé* nest, a labyrinthine bricolage web with collages, augmented by all the informational paraphernalia he had at his fingertips, from pencils to files, from the record player to the television set, one always on, the other turned off, and with phrases and slogans covering the ceiling”¹⁸.

The coexistence with Oiticica, together with the concept of *Crelazer*, played a decisive role in the “everyday pedagogy” that Gerchman would implement a few years later at the Parque Lage School of Visual Arts. The combining of work, leisure and pleasure would be one of the driving forces behind his educational practice. Gerchman converted Parque Lage into a huge space for *Crelazer*, using not only the school but also the surrounding gardens, and transforming the place into a great cultural center, in the heart of Rio de Janeiro.

Create at leisure: *Crelazer* and the Black Mountain College

In New York, Gerchman also lived with the Uruguayan conceptual artist Luis Camnitzer, for whom art was above all a pedagogical tool, a way of acquiring and expanding knowledge, while artistic work was a problem to be solved, in which process and ideas took precedence over the object¹⁹.

¹⁷ Oiticica referred to New York as Babylon, an allusion to the Mesopotamian city that was home to the Tower of Babel, where many languages were spoken, making it difficult for people to understand each other. For a more in-depth discussion of *Babylonest*, see: James Rondeau, “The Cage-Bed of Dreams: Hélio Oiticica and the Evolution of the Barracão”, exhibition catalogue: *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Museum of Art, 2016), 119-21.

¹⁸ Favaretto, 194.

¹⁹ For more on the vision of Luis Camnitzer regarding the role of art teaching, see: *Luis Camnitzer in conversation with Alexander Alberro* (New York: Cisneros Foundation, 2014), 95-100. One of Camnitzer’s most well-known conceptual works is the installation *Living-Comedor* (1969-2008), in which the dining room of a middle class apartment is reconstructed using words like “table”, “painting” and “chair”. The words are

Together with Camnitzer, Gerchman contributed to the Latin American Museum, created in 1969 by a group of Latin American artists residing in New York –including César Paternosto, Luis Wells, Omar Rayo and Liliana Porter, among others– to protest against the policy of supporting military dictatorships in Latin America, and led by some of the key members of the Center for Inter-American Relations (now known as the Americas Society). Together with Wells and Camnitzer, Gerchman created the Integralia Corporation, a short-lived company that developed a variety of productions, including Pocket Stuff.

Despite not having participated directly in the New York Graphic Workshop (NYGW), founded by Camnitzer, José Guillermo Castillo and Liliana Porter, Gerchman was conscious of this important milestone in the history of Latin American art in New York²⁰. During its short existence, from 1964 to 1970, the mission of the NYGW was to redefine the practice of printmaking, in conceptual and artistic terms, in opposition to the emphasis at the time on technique. The Workshop established a space to promote the exchange of ideas among artists, and to serve as a collective center for teaching, exhibiting and experimentation in the field of professional printmaking²¹. The idea was to connect art with the everyday.

The use of art as a pedagogical tool was also explored by Oiticica during his time in New York, when he produced the workshop “Experimentation” (combining the words “experiment” and “action”) at the 92nd Street Y cultural space, on the Upper East Side (from October 1972 to January 1973). The aim of this “anti-course” was to stimulate the sensory perception of materials, the construction of spaces (labyrinths, dressing rooms,

attached to the wall and floor, leaving the viewer to mentally recreate the experience of a familiar space.

²⁰ According to Camnitzer, Gerchman was not involved with the New York Graphic Workshop, but Camnitzer and Liliana Porter gave an engraving scholarship to Anna Maria Maiolino, at the Pratt Graphic Art Center, where they worked. Camnitzer, e-mail sent to the author, March 14 2017.

²¹ *The New York Graphic Workshop, 1964-1970*, eds. Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, Ursula Davila-Villa & Gina McDaniel Tarver (Austin: Blanton Museum of Art, 2009).

nests), and collective participation. Oiticica transmitted the principal elements of his own experience through practical orientation: perception of the body in space, the making of coverings for the body, proposals for games, visits to locations beyond the classroom and the conception of a related situation, the building of “nests” for leisure, exercises with everyday objects, experiences shared with other artists, the production of public performances, the observing of colors in different structures, and even a class in which individuals could offer their own proposals²².

Bringing together the educational practices and concepts of Camnitzer and Oiticica, the "everyday pedagogy" implemented by Gerchman at the EAV also had a solid foundation in the educational model developed at Black Mountain College (1933-1957), an artistic community that broke down the barriers between art and life, and which is considered the cradle of avant-garde experiences in the United States. This legendary school became famous for the spirit of collaboration between artists, the atmosphere of experimentation, a disregard for student-teacher hierarchies, and a teaching method based on improvisation and a playful approach to the creative process. The school based its method on an interdisciplinary approach, with an emphasis on intellectual questioning, discussion and experimentation. The idea was to provide an education centered on the liberal arts, founded upon the pedagogical and progressive ideas of the philosopher/educator John Dewey, with the aim of giving students a holistic training, as individuals and citizens²³. The school advocated the dissolution of the hierarchy that placed the visual arts above other artistic practices such as crafts, ceramics, architecture, poetry, music, theater and dance. Art was seen as a process and not as a final product.

It was here that John Cage developed his experimental music, Merce Cunningham formed

²² “Experimentation” for the 92nd Street Y and Education Dept., in New York, 1972. In: *Instituto Itaú Cultural. Programa Hélio Oiticica*. 1972. Available at: <http://www.itaucultural.org.br/programaho/>. Consulted March 31 2017. Typed pages.

²³ Kenneth Kurtz, “Black Mountain College, its Aims and Methods,” *Black Mountain College Bulletin* No. 8 (1944); 3. Also cited in: Eva Díaz, *The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 2.

his dance company, Allan Kaprow exhibited his first happenings, and Josef Albers taught his theories of perception. Others students included Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, Kenneth Noland, and many others²⁴. Arriving at Black Mountain College, one student asked Josef Albers what he was going to teach. The answer was clear and unequivocal: “how to open your eyes”²⁵.

From Bauhaus to Parque Lage: the technique of action

The experimental pedagogy of Black Mountain College was incorporated into the “*Oficina do Cotidiano*” (Workshop of the Everyday), created by Gerchman at the EAV to teach the 2D (two-dimensional) course. Upon arriving at the workshop, students were invited to open their bags and backpacks to show what they considered necessary to carry with them in their day-to-day lives. They were also encouraged to use materials collected on the street, on the bus, or on the beach, to investigate using newspapers and magazines, and to bring to the classroom narratives of family episodes, and stories related to their own love lives.

Gerchman and his students painted on media spread out on the floor, with little formality. They used ordinary, everyday, cheap, accessible and precarious materials. Gerchman encouraged participants to take risks and to believe in the creative process, and in the making of art without compromise. With no authority figures or templates, students were free to experiment. They could attend as many workshops as they wanted. They were

²⁴ For more on the artistic experimentation at Black Mountain College, see the exhibition catalogue for the show *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College, 1933-1957*, organized by Helen Molesworth and Ruth Erickson at the Institute for Contemporary Art, in Boston, and at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, in 2015. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). See also *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art*, ed. Vincent Katz, (Massachusetts: The MIT Press), 2003.

²⁵ In “Martin Duberman’s interview with Josef and Anni Albers,” November 11 1967, a typed text held in the archives of the State of North Carolina. The Black Mountain College was established in a rural part of North Carolina, in 1933, after the closure of the Bauhaus by the Nazis. It was a place where many European exiles went, particularly German Jewish refugees, including Josef and Anni Albers, who came to Black Mountain College after they had passed through the Bauhaus. Josef Albers taught at Black Mountain College from 1933 to 1949.

allowed to sign up for one class and attend as many as they wished. If necessary, they could also sleep at the institute²⁶. The scenographer Hélio Eichbauer recalled the school as a Dionysian experience:

“I gave many classes outdoors and on the terrace. On the terrace, even though there were so many great bathrooms, after working the people would bathe with buckets and hosepipes, they’d wash with a hosepipe and they loved doing it, and all in the morning, and the swimming pool, and so it was a moment that seemed crazy for that time, it was like a big feast of Bacchus, it seemed bacchanalian, it was bacchanalian, but it was also a school where you learned a lot, you studied a lot. But this is what I think. I believe that the right way to teach in the contemporary world is this, it has to be done with joy, with fun, with music, with great passion”²⁷.

When he was invited by the dramatist Paulo Afonso Grisolli (1934-2004)²⁸, the director of the Department of Culture of the Secretariat of Education of Rio de Janeiro, to direct what was known then as the Institute of Fine Arts, Gerchman knew that it would be an enormous challenge, not only because of the difficulties he would have to face in implementing an experimental teaching method, but also because of the censorship imposed by the military regime. The story is well known of how, as Gerchman hesitated, he was encouraged to accept the post by the architect Lina Bo Bardi, who told him: “Accept! And if you feel you should leave, then resign”²⁹.

Through the coming together of Eichbauer, Bo Bardi and Gerchman, what was envisioned

²⁶ Hélio Eichbauer, interview with the “*Projeto Audiovisual Casa Daros: Rubens Gerchman: com a demissão no bolso*”.

²⁷ Hélio Eichbauer, interview with the “*Projeto Audiovisual Casa Daros: Rubens Gerchman: com a demissão no bolso*”.

²⁸ Paulo Afonso Grisolli, theater director and actor, was the editor of *Caderno B do Jornal do Brasil*, from 1964 to 1972, and director general of the Department of Culture of the Secretariat of Education of the State of Rio de Janeiro, from 1975 to 1979.

²⁹ Interview with Rubens Gerchman by Fábio Magalhães, *O Rei do Mau Gosto*, 85.

as a free school, a democratic school, a meeting place for young people, older people, artists and the community of Rio de Janeiro, began to take shape³⁰. Bo Bardi and Eichbauer were responsible for the “*Oficina Pluridimensional*” (Multidimensional Workshop), an experience that brought together dance, the space, the building of models and stage sets, painting, and body art.

Bo Bardi and her husband, Pietro Maria Bardi, had already attempted to create an arts school, the Institute of Contemporary Art of the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (IAC). Inspired by the Bauhaus (1919-1933) and the curriculum developed by the concrete artist Max Bill for the Ulm School in Germany (1953-1968), the goal of the IAC was to train designers for the rapid industrial growth being experienced by São Paulo³¹.

In Rio de Janeiro, the drive to create an arts school based on the principles of the Bauhaus and the Ulm School resulted in the founding of the Higher School of Industrial Design (Esdi), in 1963. While the Esdi was created with the aim of establishing an industry-focused design school, a very different educational initiative took shape at the Rio de Janeiro Museum of Modern Art (MAM-RJ). According to the art historian Adele Nelson, “the MAM student was not the designer of posters and products, but an artist with brush in hand”³². The MAM-RJ School of Art, created in the 1950s, took on a new impetus when the art critic and curator Frederico Morais assumed the coordination of the courses between 1969 and 1973. Under Morais' leadership, the school went through an

³⁰ Hélio Eichbauer, interview with the “*Projeto Audiovisual Casa Daros: Rubens Gerchman: com a demissão no bolso*”.

³¹ The syllabus of the Institute of Contemporary Art of the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (IAC) emphasized the study of colors, materials, shapes and textures, and the learning of design through drawing. The IAC positioned itself as the successor to the Bauhaus in Brazil. Opened in 1951, the institute survived for less than three years. For the influence of Bauhaus teaching in Brazil, see: Adele Nelson, “The Bauhaus in Brazil: Pedagogy and Practice” in: *ARTMargins* (The MIT Press, 2016, Vol. 5, No.2); 31-34.

³² The MAM-RJ School of Art opened in 1952, with the artist Ivan Serpa as its principal teacher. Teaching was seen as a form of expression and experimentation, through abstraction and color theory. Among the students were Oiticica and Aloísio Carvão, who would later create the *Grupo Frente*, in 1954, and later the Neo-concrete Movement, in 1959. Mário Pedrosa was a great admirer of Serpa. Serpa's classes expressed an affinity with the studio that the artist Almir Mavignier had opened in 1946 for psychiatric patients at the Pedro II National Psychiatric Center, known as “*Engenho de Dentro*”, and created by Dr. Nise da Silveira.

important restructuring, incorporating from its surroundings the Parque Aterro do Flamengo, as if it were an extension of the museum³³. The museum's cafeteria became a meeting place for artists, turning the MAM-RJ into a great nucleus of the visual arts. Undoubtedly, the MAM-RJ School of Art constituted the embryonic form of the future project that Gerchman would implement in the EAV. But with all its innovations, the museum was still a space dedicated mainly to the plastic arts, or to the filmgoers who frequented its movie theater, and above all it was an institution dedicated to the mounting of art exhibitions. The union of different tribes only came about with the founding of the EAV in 1975³⁴. And following the fire at the MAM-RJ in 1978, the EAV began to play an even more important role as a place of resistance and mobilization³⁵.

In the different testimonies provided by the protagonists of the time, what is most striking is the exuberant character that Gerchman introduced to the EAV. The effervescence, the vitality possessed by the school at that time, as well as the way that multiple activities were conducted simultaneously, were among the most notable legacies left by Gerchman. With his restless and innovative spirit, he created one of the most active cultural spaces in the country; an open and experimental space for all artistic practices. The EAV played a fundamental role, as a place where Brazil's most active artists,

³³ Frederico Morais wanted to expand the Rio de Janeiro Museum of Modern Art throughout the city. Morais created the famous "*Unidade Experimental*", together with the artists Cildo Meireles, Guilherme Vaz and Luiz Alphonsus, in 1969, and the "*Domingos de Criação*", in 1971, both of which were seen as research laboratories for new artistic languages. Fernanda Lopes, *Área Experimental: Lugar, Espaço e Dimensão do Experimental na Arte Brasileira dos Anos 1970* (Rio de Janeiro: Prestígio Editorial, 2013), 28.

³⁴ The MAM-RJ school counted among its teaching staff Frederico de Morais, Roberto Magalhães, Paulo Afonso Grisolli and Mário Pedrosa, among others, who would later participate in the EAV pedagogical project. The MAM-RJ already offered some classes which would later serve as the inspiration for the model implanted at Parque Lage, including:

- 1) "Body, sound and word" (1971); coordinated by Sidney Miller, Klauss Vianna and Paulo Afonso Grisolli. The idea was to bring together the three classes to form an integrated course of creative liberation exercises.
- 2) "Graphic planning for the graphic arts" (1973); a theoretical-practical course taught by Rosa Magalhães and José Maria Nascimento. The aim was to train students in the technical and theoretical knowledge required as part of the work of the graphic artist.
- 3) "Open polyester – fiber glass workshop" (1974), taught by Claudio Kuperman. The aim was to create a polyester and fiberglass workshop linked to the plastic arts, design and handcrafts.

³⁵ In response to the fire at the MAM-RJ in 1978, Gerchman organized the SOS MAM walk, with support from Parque Lage students, as well as a tribute to the Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres García, whose work had been destroyed in the fire.

musicians and thinkers could meet and exchange ideas. Rather than visual artists with brush in hand, the EAV created citizens willing and able to think, discuss and create. If Gerchman taught anything, it was that there is nothing extraordinary about the teaching process. To create great works and ideas, it is necessary to address the banal and the ordinary, and to allow oneself to be motivated by the endlessly surprising lessons of everyday life.