

Lygia Clark's Architecture of Feeling

At Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, the artist's participatory practice invites a radical, bodily mode of knowing



BY LOUISA ELDERTON IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 31 JUL 25

There is an all-encompassing satisfaction when an exhibition demonstrates alignment between the artworks on display and the architecture that frames them. Such is the case with Lygia Clark's retrospective at Berlin's Neue Nationalgalerie. Established within the late-1950s Brazilian neo-concrete movement, which prioritized embodied and sensory experience, Clark's practice was concerned with the subjective relationship between artwork and space, artist and viewer. Here, the synergy with the museum building, designed by Mies van der Rohe and defined by its flexible interior space, makes for a presentation that encourages movement, exploration and playful release.



Lygia Clark, *O Eu e o Tu* (The I and the You), 1967, industrial rubber, foam, vinyl, acrylon, zipper, water, fabric, 170 × 68 × 8 cm. Courtesy: © Cultural Association 'The World of Lygia Clark'

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A concurrent aural experience resonates throughout this show. There is the gentle *tap, tap, tap* of Clark's 1960s 'Bichos' (Critters) series, comprising sculptures with hinged aluminium plates that viewers are invited to fold and reshape; the laughter of people experimenting with the masks, bodysuits, glasses and rubber tubing of the 'Objetos sensoriais' (Sensorial Objects, 1966–67), which can be handled and worn to engage unique bodily perceptions; and the gentle *puff* and *rat-a-tat-tat* of her 'Objetos relacionais' (Relational Objects, late 1970s–1980s), made of stones, shells, tights and other items, which Clark incorporated into psychotherapeutic sessions.

What is perhaps most intuitive about this exhibition is how it spatially mirrors the radical development of Clark's oeuvre – small areas are delineated with curtains and then expand into open-plan fluidity. It begins with paintings from the 1950s: after initially rendering figurative scenes, Clark developed a cubist style upon moving to Paris, where she studied with Fernand Léger. Paintings such as *Escada* (Staircase, 1951), where the spiralling form is divided into facets of primary colour, demonstrate her early interest in visualizing constructions of space via this architectural motif.



'Lygia Clark: Retrospective', 2025, exhibition view. Courtesy: © Neue Nationalgalerie - Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz / David von Becker

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With the development of her silver-tongued 'Bichos' – poised like packs of animals across tiered plinths – Clark's experiential work fully unfurls. And so too does the show, which pulls you fluidly from one experiential zone to the next: from *Caminhando* (Walking, 1963), where visitors can cut a paper Möbius strip and play with this infinite loop, to the 'Máscaras sensoriais' (Sensorial Masks, 1967), which smell of cardamom and have ear covers and eyepieces with moveable mirrors, to the compelling video documentation of performances such as *Baba antropofágica* (Anthropophagic Slobber) and *Canibalismo* (Cannibalism, both 1969). In the former, participants pull spools of saliva-soaked thread from their mouths to weave a web that entangles a reclining figure. In the latter, a person lies on the floor in a suit with a stomach pocket filled with fruit, while a blindfolded group kneels and eats from it – a lascivious act of symbolic consumption. For Clark, the idea of mutual cannibalization suggested bodies fusing into a collective entity, be it through web-like cocooning or the suggestion of outright eating one another – she saw these as rebellious acts of sensorial communality, which was anathema to the iron-fist rule of the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–85).



Lygia Clark, *Caminhando* (Walking), 1963, paper, glue, scissors, variable dimensions. Courtesy: © Cultural Association 'The World of Lygia Clark'

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All these years on, Clark's art is still sensuously compelling, absorbing and radical in its proposition of how we might engage not only with our own bodies as a way of accessing selfhood, but in relational experiences that can constitute a collective physicality in which everyone is equal, enlivened and empowered.

Lygia Clark's retrospective is on view at Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, until 12 October