

Clovis Aparecido dos
Santos

Biography

1960, Avaré | SP Brazil

Clovis Aparecido dos Santos likes to travel, he's a wanderer, he walks, roaming from one place to the next by the edge of the urban highways, by the edge of the big avenues like Rio de Janeiro's Linha Amarela, which connects Jacarepaguá in the West Zone through to Madureira in downtown Rio. He says that when he's walking, he thinks of nothing; he simply makes up songs and sings. On one such day, in the heat of a late Rio afternoon, alongside the Linha Amarela on his way back to Colônia Juliano Moreira, where the Bispo do Rosário Museum and Ateliê Gaia are located, Clovis was seen looking proud and staring straight ahead. He walked with quick, wide steps toward Taquara, the neighborhood which is home to the Colônia. Cars sped by him displacing the air with their long, splaying shadows and the rumbles of their engines, leaving spindly stains like passages in time, similar to those in the paintings of German artist Gerhard Richter. Human history, since its most ancient beginnings, with the homo erectus, is one of displacement. A history of going from one place to another. For food or water, searching for safer places to procreate or (why not?) other landscapes in which to live. Humans are vagrant by nature.

In 2004, the artist participated in a exhibition, *PuzzlePólis II*, curated by Livia Flores, as part of the 26th São Paulo Biennial, with 58 works. Flores, a teacher and artist herself, created a phantasmagoric mirage of the city with his pieces. Clovis creates ghosts with his strange shapes, deformed beings and the intense colors that inhabit our unconscious. The artist shared a little of his life's story so that I could write this text about his work. He was born in Avaré, in rural São Paulo state. The oldest of his siblings,

he heard his mother tell him at a young age that if he was unable to contribute economically to the family's well-being, he should find a way to support himself. It was his chance to take off and hit the road, heading on until he reached the highway that connects the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Via Dutra – an interstate where it's common to see wanderers and tramps on both sides of the road. From Avaré, which is located almost in the center of the state of São Paulo, Clovis traveled several highways before arriving in Rio de Janeiro, collecting scraps from the trash on the streets back when he used to pull a cart. He was aware that he was doing good by recycling. And collecting scraps is something he still does. He still has the desire to scavenge and a taste for the road. Today he collects materials for recycling – cardboard, PET bottles, toys made of pieces of plastic and the vinyl tarps of political ads that remain in the city's outlying neighborhoods long after elections are held. But he no longer collects them with the intention to trade them in, but rather as material for his works of art.

He doesn't talk much but when he does, he has a smile on his lips. With short but pithy sentences, he does away with doubts as to whether he's there because of some mental disturbance. It seems that he's found shelter at Colônia Juliano Moreira, which after changes in its approach to mental illness in the 1990s, is no longer a hostile place. Perhaps that's why he's stayed. Disagreeing with those who insist on saying that what Clovis does isn't art, since, due to his mental condition, he isn't able “to have” the intention to do so, he, on the contrary, has the clarity of one who knows what he makes is art indeed. The artist has frequented Ateliê Gaia for over ten years now. What keeps him there is that it allows the possibility to create his artwork, the peace to make his drawings, his paintings and odd sculptures shaped like cars under the watchful eyes of his colleagues at the studio. These forms are strange, resembling human figures, animals, vegetables and cars. They bring to mind beings from a film of prehistoric humanity, but also an inhospitable world which seems like it will still exist thousands of years from now. Clovis's drawings, paintings and sculptures are undefined beings and crude, amusing automobiles. The sculptures are made out of combinations of the remains of toys and other pieces he builds from scraps of iron taken from construction sites, pieces of wood and wire. A mixture based on the techniques used to create papier-mâché. Instead of glue, he uses cement, combining it with

newspaper and the pages of magazines. He molds this mass into the shapes of vehicles that could pass for toys from another time period.

In his drawings and paintings, which make up the majority of this first exhibition presented by Galeria Estação and co-curated by Germana Monte-Mór, these same forms appear, in even more abstract incarnations. At times they recall the shadows of animals, at others they look those same cars that Clovis invents, but on paper and canvas. Some colors are prominent and trend more toward the vibrations of yellow, avocado green, olive and citric fruits. Earth tones also emerge – brown, grey, reds, blues, the pink in the background of a deformed, greenish figure. The color of a volcanic land. White and yellow combined. A myriad of unusual colors. These choices might be mere reflections of the precarious conditions in which the artist creates. Meager resources, the use of poor material and few colors of paint available. But the combination is inventive and provocative by creating a pattern of colors and forms that at times recall arabesques and decorative symbols with matching colors, while, at others, they are unusual and dissonant. Depending on the individual work, we may or may not recognize what he draws or paints. When they don't fall into total abstraction, the figures suggest living beings with bug eyes, or even creatures like fish, an elephant on a starry night, plants, leaves and flowers. In a nucleus of painted drawings, indecipherable, compulsive writing appears. More akin to a painted text than the symbols of writing in brushstrokes.

I asked Clovis a question in order to leave no doubt regarding his creative process. I asked him what he thought about while he was creating. And he answered plainly: "I don't know. Everything I make comes from my hands. It passes through my hands." And he showed me the large, paint-stained hands of someone who works with physical force. When observing the artist's serenity, the idea struck me that a mental hospital doesn't cure. On the contrary, according to reports from former residents, it actually makes one sicker. It worsened the fragile states of those who are committed for an endless array of reasons. The system of mental hospital colonies in the early 20th century, at the time of their founding, was defended in a newspaper article for their public utility, as concentration camps to exclude and eliminate undesirables from society. As such, not everyone who committed could be considered insane. They might have been individuals with strong ideologies. They might have been

wanderers without destinations. They might not have been truly mad, just timid and intimidated. It has been reported that at its height, Colônia Juliano Moreira contained around 5000 people subjected to a system of penitentiary internment. Many people survived it, others succumbed to its violence, others went even further and continued living in the region surrounding the old hospital in community homes or their own houses with families constituted in the context of the end of the hospital internment system.

Perhaps now these people feel freer, with the right to come and go, and that place is part of their memories, like it or not, while still forcing them to recall the atrocities experienced by so many there. Today the hospital complex is another space for socialization, where a variety of activities are promoted to stimulate community life. It is there that I found Clovis. The artist found his place there along with the other artists at Ateliê Gaia, which receives guidance and coordination from the Bispo do Rosário Museum of Contemporary Art. The studio has been training artists for nearly three decades now. It was founded in the wake of artistic proposals made by Nise da Silveira, a doctor from Rio de Janeiro who created a therapeutic psychiatric methodology in the 1940s and '50s. The doctor saw art as a way to stimulate socialization among patients in treatment. It was a way for them to root themselves in the world and also create art. Ateliê Gaia is a space for art and creation which, through the construction of aesthetic thought, stimulates the artistic practice among its regular visitors through dialogue and production, developing an autonomous operational logic together with the artists.

And so I ask the question: is what Clovis makes art?

This question persists in conversations surrounding art and madness. They introduce doubt as to whether the work of artists undergoing psychiatric treatment is actually art or merely the obsessive need of a schizophrenic to accumulate, transform and make things. Clovis accumulates and creates things. He draws and paints on paper. He creates images on canvases made of cardboard and plastic vinyl. This is the medium he most uses, the plastic canvas of his paintings. But he also uses paper. Actually, the artist uses any flat surface he finds. He even – and this is curious – paints over already-painted canvases that he finds in the streets, incorporating the frames into his paintings. Regarding the origins of Clovis's work, the best parallel we can draw is to

German Neo-expressionism, an artistic movement that appeared in the 1980s and '90s. Artists like Georg Baselitz, Julian Schnabel, Anselm Kiefer, A.R. Penck and Sigmar Polke, among others, who became known as the *Neue Wilden* (literally the “new wild ones”) and were identified with the Fauves and their violent, brightly-colored brushstrokes, are the closest thing to his style of painting. Emotion, expression, angst, rage, vigor, forms which may or may not be recognizable, those that are not entirely abstract nor entirely figurative. Somewhere in between the deformed things that inhabit his memory and ours. In this sense, I take the perilous risk, without the slightest shadow of a doubt, thinking of what Clovis brings to us from his subconscious, to affirm that insanity is a state that is vital to art. Because his art gives way to the freedom to express himself unconditionally, a condition that is so necessary for creation. Without any pre-established, conceptual binds. This is what can be learned from Clovis's work. The man that flees mentally from normalcy, according to this logic, is freer than the average person to create, invent and drift in thought. Contemporary French philosopher Frédéric Gros affirmed precisely this in his book, *A philosophy of walking*, writing that there is something magical about the wanderer (he or she who heads off at random, travels and journeys long distances) who creates, invents, and thinks without thinking while simply going.

Gros, in his book about the act of walking, leaves an open question: why have so many important artists and writers, like Rousseau, Kant, Rimbaud, Nietzsche and Jack Kerouac, adopted this practice of wandering? Does the act of traveling liberate a poetic flow? This is what we can learn from this reading. I would add to this conversation artists like the American Robert Rauschenberg, the Englishman Richard Long, the Brazilian Ana Amorim with her performance-walks entitled *Looking for Richard Long*, Arthur Barrio with his work *4 days 4 nights*, in which he roamed the streets of Rio. The duo from Rio Grande do Sul Maria Helena Bernardes and André Severo, who go to the bus station in Porto Alegre, take a random bus and head off in search of fantastic stories, traveling to remote towns in the state. And also São Paulo native Daniel de Paula, who incorporated the the act of roaming the city with reading. Walking is treated like a performance and has become an art-form nowadays. The illusion of speed is the belief that it saves time. Days of slow walks are very long: they make us live more, because we experience each hour, each minute, each second to breathe and deeply immerse ourselves in our senses. When you walk, nothing moves beside

you. The mountains are still and that static presence establishes a relationship with the body. The landscape is made of senses. Tastes, smells and colors, essences that the body absorbs. Walking to simply breathe in the scenery. Each stop can be or contain its own inspiration, thinking of something or inventing something, that dies immediately afterward. In closing, I asked Clovis another question-- what was it he thought about while he walked. His answer was precise. "Nothing. I write songs. I make up songs in my head and I sing." According to him, he doesn't memorize them. After, his creations, his art, as he told me in our conversation, pass through his hands. It's as simple as that. And he went back to painting, immersed in a pile of paper. Clovis's paintings and drawings are the impetus, the creative force that moves this man with no pretense of affiliating himself to the currents of modern or contemporary art, and which also leaves no room for conceptual reverie.

Ricardo Resende



Untitled, 2014
Acrylic on paper, glue and cement
32 x 82 x 45 cm | 12.59 x 32.28 x 17.71 in

Individual Exhibitions:

2015 Clovis, Galeria Estação, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

Collective Exhibitions:

2022 I came – apparition, impregnation, impact, Itaú Cultural, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2022 So Many 22, Arte 132 Galeria, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2021 Art Vital Ponto, Museu Bispo do Rosario Arte contemporânea, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

2019 Utopias life for all time and glory, Museu Bispo do Rosario Arte contemporânea, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

2019 Modern and Eternal, Mosteiro de São Bento, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2018 Delirium Places, Museu de Arte do Rio, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

Public Collections:

Museu de Artes do Rio, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

Projects:

Ateliê Gaia, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

Projeto Arte Cuidado, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

Selected Publications:

2022 So Many 22, Arte 132 Galeria, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2021 Arte ponto Vital, Museu Bispo do Rosario Arte contemporânea, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

2015 "Clovis", Vilma Eid, Germana Monte-Mór e Ricardo Resende, Lis Gráfica, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

2013 Arte Bra, author Livia Flores, publisher Automática Edições, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil

Exhibitions



2021 Art Vital Ponto, Museu Bispo do Rosario Arte contemporânea, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil





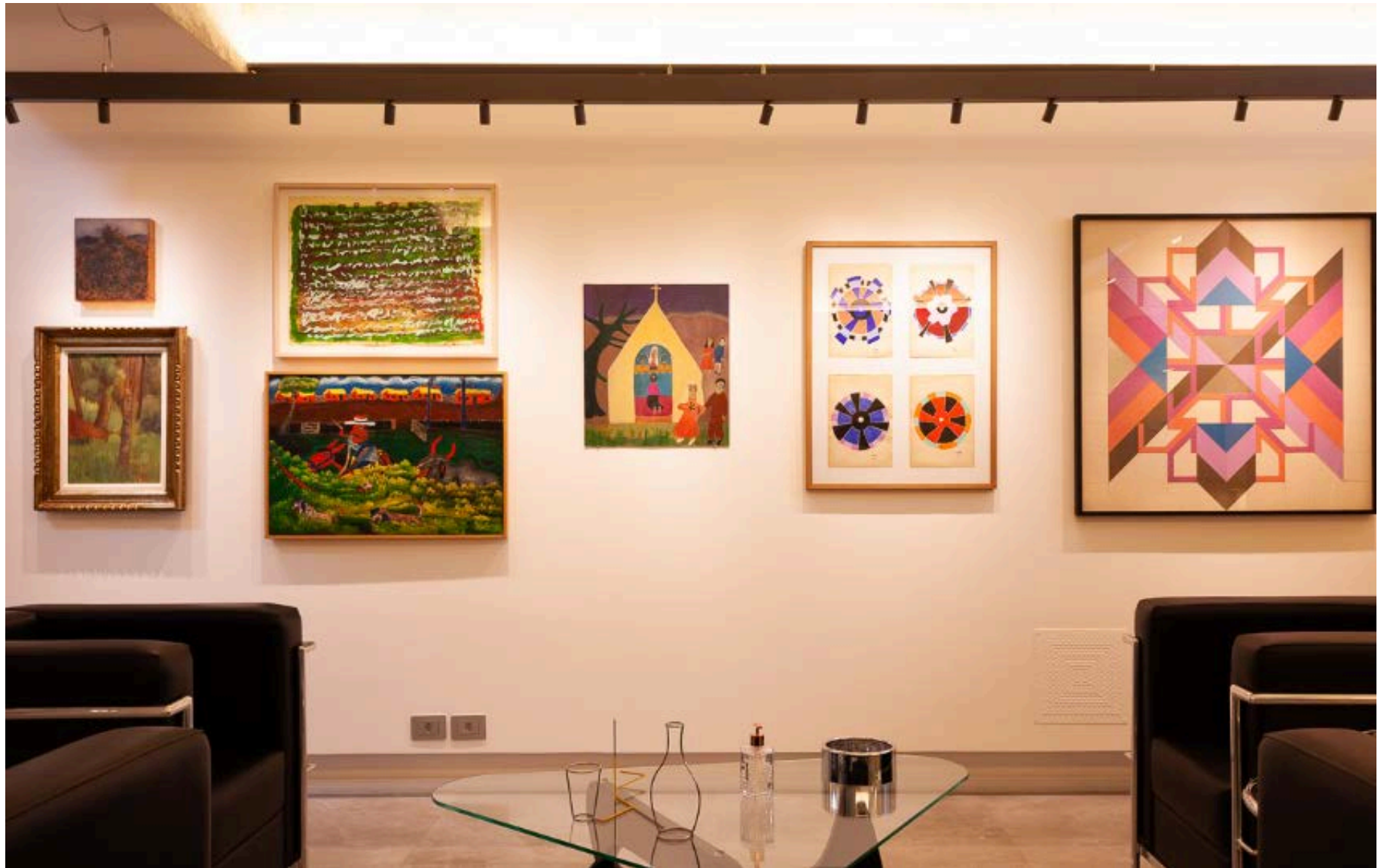
2019 Utopias life for all time and glory, Museu Bispo do Rosario Arte contemporânea, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil



2015 Clovis, Galeria Estação, São Paulo, SP, Brazil







2022 So Many 22, Arte 132 Galeria, São Paulo, SP, Brazil

Artworks



Untitled, 2015
Acrylic on canvas
80 x 100 cm | 31.49 x 39.37 in





Untitled, 2015
Acrylic on canvas
50 x 70 cm | 19.68 x 27.55 in



Untitled, 2014
Acrylic on paper, glue and cement
36 x 22 x 28 cm | 14.17 x 8.66 x 11.02 in





Untitled, 2014
Acrylic on canvas
51 x 66 cm | 20.07 x 25.98 in



Untitled, 2015
Acrylic on paper, glue and cement
23 x 44 x 31 cm | 9.05 x 17.32 x 12.20 in



Untitled, 2015
Acrylic on canvas
70 x 100 cm | 27.55 x 39.37 in



With a collection among the most important of the country, Galeria Estação, inaugurated at the end of 2004, devoted itself to revealing and promoting the production of Brazilian non-scholar art. The gallery was responsible for including this language in the contemporary art scene, while editing publications and holding individual and collective exhibitions inside and outside the country.

Galeria Estação works with well-known self-taught artists from various regions of Brazil, such as Agostinho Batista de Freitas, Alcides dos Santos, Amadeo Luciano Lorenzato, Artur Pereira, Aurelino dos Santos, Chico Tabibuia, Cícero Alves dos Santos-Véio, GTO, Gilvan Samico, Itamar Julião, João Cosmo Felix-Nino, José Antônio da Silva, José Bezerra, Manuel Graciano, Maria Auxiliadora, Mirian Inês da Silva, Neves Torres, among others.

Currently the gallery has been incorporating to its cast artists belonging to the contemporary artistic circuit whose works interact with non-scholar creation, such as André Ricardo, José Bernnô, Julio Villani, Germana Monte-Mór, Moisés Patrício e Santídio Pereira.

Starting from this rare competence, the space is able to offer a historical and current panorama of a production that went beyond the limits of self-thought art, at the same time as it investigates names that, independently of the formation, work with elements from the same source.

Galeria Estação

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From Monday to Friday, from 11am to 7pm, Saturday from 11am to 3pm

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