

# FRANZ WEISSMANN

**emptiness as form**



This is not a retrospective of Franz Weissmann, but rather an anthology in nonchronological format. A professor, artist, participant of the most important movements of Brazilian art in the second half of the 20th century, the winner of various awards, including that of the 4th Bienal de São Paulo (1957), and with a production spanning nearly 60 years, Weissmann played a decisive role in the passage of the modern to the contemporary in the Brazilian visual arts. In a short time, he created a new trajectory for sculpture in the country, insofar as by suppressing its base, he gave it the quality of a drawing in space, and, with a few points of attachment, he made it possible for a work weighing hundreds of kilos to stand firmly in place.

São Paulo has not received an exhibition with so many works by Weissmann for about 10 years. Here the visitor will find his iconic works, but also – and especially – works that have never been shown before, including some pieces from his *Amassados* [Dented] series as well as drawings made in the late 1960s, after his trip to India and Japan.

I would like to highlight some of the vectors this exhibition explores. The first is the way each work beckons for the spectator's participation, even if it is a sculpture not involving any technological resource, without movable joints or kinetic relationships. Upon moving around his sculptures, we find a renewed construction of forms, always through the lens of an economy of gestures. The second vector is the color, aimed at imparting even more expressive and dynamic force to the work, or, as the artist put it, "to communicate it more, to break the silence of geometric pureness." Weissmann was moreover one of the first Brazilian artists to adopt color in sculpture, also affirming that "the natural color of rust is a color."

Finally, along with Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo is where one finds the greater part of Weissmann's public artworks. Visitors are thus invited to consider the exhibition as extending beyond the walls of the galleries, to also include the artist's public artworks along the streets of the city.

**Felipe Scovino**

An artist who visualized the macro in the micro: from scale models he created large-scale sculptures, one of the hallmarks of his work. Interested in having his creations shown on sidewalks and in public squares precisely for the purpose of ensuring broader access to them, Franz Weissmann is now arriving at Itaú Cultural, where the public can have contact with artworks from all the phases of his long career.

Curated by Felipe Scovino, the exhibition Franz Weissmann: o Vazio como Forma [Franz Weissmann: Emptiness as Form] is entering the roster of solo shows featuring important names of visual arts in Brazil held by Itaú Cultural (such as Lygia Clark, Waldemar Cordeiro, Sergio Camargo and Véio). This time, the conception and production are by Itaú Cultural, in partnership with Instituto Franz Weissmann.

The exhibition brings the visitor on a walk through sizes, shapes and colors, showing an extensive survey of Weissmann's oeuvre. Besides sculptures, there are more than 50 never-before-shown drawings, artworks on aluminum sheets from the Amassados [Dented] series and a work in virtual reality simulated in the public space.

**Itaú Cultural**



# MEZZANINE

Each floor of this exhibition corresponds to a way of observing or questioning the work of Franz Weissmann. This floor features the three large-scale works in the show. And beginning the path in this way has a very special meaning. They are works with a pendular-like aspect: on the one hand, their weight and scale are evidently larger than the other pieces shown, but, on the other, what we have is the image of lightness brought about by the implosion of the sculpture's mass, its volume shot through my air.

Due to the twisting of the industrial material and the way the emptiness instills a new condition of volume, the idea of the sculpture's stability is broken, as these works trace virtualities and stipulate territories, revealed as we walk around them. In this first room, the gaze pierces the body of the sculptures, as in the case of Ponte [Bridge] (1957–1979).

The exhibition design results in a chainlike construction for the gaze. We can see a continuous transformation of the cube. Through twistings and foldings of the plane, the geometry takes on organic outlines, beyond the intrinsic dialogue with the architecture. In the transition of a cube that is unfolded, giving rise to structures that break down its original form, the image of a petal arises. Windows, towers and columns are multiplied through the space, problematizing the permanence of the base, one of the defining characteristics of Weissmann's sculpture. Gradually, the base is substituted by a few attachment points, which becomes even more admirable when the sculpture weighs several tons.

Last but not least, color plays a significant role. Weissmann was one of the first Brazilian artists to color the sculpture and to affirm that "the natural color of rust is a color." This requires the observer to understand, metaphorically, that the sculpture is a body and the rust precisely represents the passage of time.

The first room of this floor reveals the first years of Franz Weissmann's production. His figurative sculptures and drawings already possessed the modern sign of abstraction. We see the influence of Matisse's weightless line or a cubist accent. Based on live models, nude drawing was important for Weissmann to understand the outlines of the body as a line. Little by little, he removed the volume from his sculptures; emptiness began to play a more frequent role and the drawings reflect the same posture. Two extensive geometric drawings, along with the sculptures of the Carambolas series (c. 1949), definitively evinced the artist's interest in abstraction and paved the way for the production of *Cubo Vazado* [Emptied Cube], which "watches over" the room of the figurative works.

Weissmann participated in two important movements for Brazilian art, both based in Rio de Janeiro (RJ). In 1955 and 1956 he was a member of Grupo Frente, together with Abraham Palatnik, Hélio Oiticica, Ivan Serpa, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, and others. And from 1959 to 1961 he participated in the exhibitions of the Grupo Neoconcreto, consisting of many of the artists of Grupo Frente together with visual poets. Although all uniquely different, the researches of these artists shared some characteristics in common: they involved the spectator sensorially, they transformed the work allegorically into a body, they folded and twisted the plane to make the artwork incorporate the surrounding space, and they outstripped the conservative ideas about the nature of painting and sculpture. *Escultura Linear* [Linear Sculpture] and *Escultura em Fio* [Wire Sculpture] are examples of artworks by Weissmann from this period, shown on this floor.

For their part, the sculptures of the *Amassados* [Dented] series, made when the artist was living in Europe, in the early 1960s, reveal a proximity with the gestural economy of ideograms – which is why they are shown near the drawings made by the artist after his trip to the Orient. Produced by hammering the backs of aluminum sheets, the drawings demonstrate the incidence of lines that wind up creating expressive areas. At the beginning of his career, Weissmann wanted to be a painter, and, in a certain way, this always marked his work.

The table with the cubes underscores the field of expansion and vibration of geometry. By opening the cube and removing its mass, we begin to explore volume as emptiness. Moreover, a game is created between the artwork and the spectator, who is invited to participate in this continuous and virtual expansion of the form.

On this floor we make contact with one of the most intense and poetic dialectical processes in Weissmann's oeuvre. The stands present part of the hundreds of scale models, multiples, prototypes and studies for his sculptures, his paintings and his projects destined for the public space. Also featured in this space are pictures of the artist's studios that focus on the concise gestuality for the realization of those studies, while also recording the presence of the machines that made the cuts in the sheets of metal. Between 1956 and 1982, the artist worked in the district of Ramos, in Rio de Janeiro (RJ), in a workshop inside the Ciferal bus body factory owned by his brother. The artist would first produce the prototype by hand, in his home studio in Ipanema, to then increase the scale of his sculptures, at his factory workshop in Ramos, with the aid of industrial cutting processes. And not only did they become larger, but they also entered the public space.

We see that his work began on a minimal and intimist scale. His studies were displayed on countless stands, in studios, always within his sight. By means of these works – working with materials that ranged from aluminum and iron to wood, laminated paper and others – he tested on a daily basis the next challenges they would be put to. To get an idea of the degree of inventiveness and of the tiny scale, the laminated paper that wrapped processed cheese served in a study for a work of the Amassados series.

What this segment explores is the way in which the artist advanced from the micro to the macro, from the production of the hand-made prototype to the industrial scale, transforming it into sculpture by the cutting of sheets of steel aluminum or iron. Thus, to reach the final phase of the production of a large-scale sculpture for public spaces, it was necessary to start with a simple but decisive gesture: beginning with a material identified with the industrial field and twisting the rigid material with his hands, making it more pliable. This segment does not intend to simulate the artist's studio, but rather to evidence how much his work was guided by delicateness, expressive gestures and an economy of methods.



