

Sergio Vega

Shamanic Modernism: Parrots, Bossanova and Architecture

30 September - 31 December 2016

The exploration of contemporary Latin American culture, focusing specifically on the post-colonial debate, has been one of the key themes of the gallery's programme for many years. The gallery's 2016-17 season offers a careful collective form of reflection, starting with one of the fundamental critiques of new forms of cultural colonialism.

Sergio Vega has spent much time examining the hybridisation of the rationalist model at the moment of its clash with the power of the south American landscape, planned explicitly for the first time in the 1950s and 1960s. The creation of Novacap Brasilia, a mixed holding company promoted by the Brazilian government, represented the first step towards the foundation of a new capital by Lúcio Costa, Oscar Niemeyer and Roberto Burle Marx. From this moment onwards the modernist aesthetic entered the local imagination as the symbol of well-being and social advancement. However, right from the outset, the new aesthetic carried with it a vague sense of nostalgia and obsolescence and even echoes of the original architectural style.

This newfangled architecture (as the artist refers to it in one of his texts) is a gigantic carnival parade of incredibly tall buildings, constantly competing with the colours and forms of the surrounding environment. In their obsolescence, these high-rise buildings seem to be playing the consoling rhythm of *bossa nova*, amplifying the seduction of the Eden-like dream of the middle classes to whom the upper classes offered an appetising illusion.

Modern and vernacular architecture merge in a crazed and extraordinary overabundance in which the cultural imposition collapses in proportion to the competition engaged with the beauty of the surrounding natural environment, adopting shamanic strategies. "*Parrot color-chart architecture, banana institutional buildings, pineapple churches, crocodilian houses, snake promenades, toucan theaters, orchid subway stations, etc*". The *Tropical Modernism* analysed by Sergio Vega has nothing in common with the avant-garde hiatus of the great cultural revolutions so that, as his research developed, the shantytowns that grew up on the edges of urban centres have become the new antagonists.

Where Modernism constructs, the organic development of the periphery deconstructs, finding empty spaces, slots and gaps which play such an important role in the deconstructionist theories of Jacques Derrida. The precarious apartment blocks are built with urban waste: surplus building materials, advertising hoardings, abandoned furniture, temporary cables...

The power relationship is inverted and the avant-garde drive finds fertile terrain in the unfettered proliferation of the periphery, challenging the moralism of the middle classes. Similarly, the collages also form part of the exhibition, following the predominant aesthetic model according to the artist's vision, juxtaposing objects and photos at random with images taken from the catalogue *Brazil's Modern Architecture* (Phaidon, 2007, a milestone in the study of twentieth century Brazilian architecture) and the colours of *bossa nova* records. The gallery thus becomes a single environmental installation where images, sounds, photography, architecture and nature are organically superimposed.

Nicoletta Daldanise