

# Iberê Camargo: an exercise in looking

Art, as the Swiss artist Paul Klee observed, does not simply reproduce the visible world. True to its restless and investigatory vocation, it makes visible that which remains hidden under the layer of appearances, the sensitive content of beings and things. In this way something exists that we call real which sometimes escapes us, but from which we, ironically, cannot escape.



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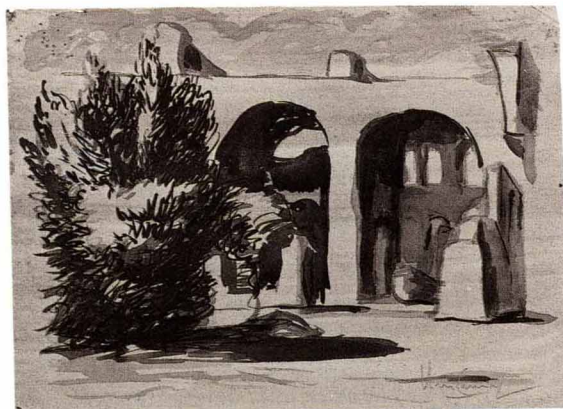


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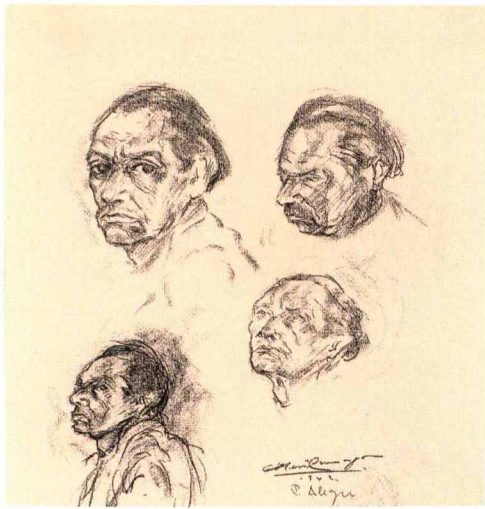
- 1 - Untitled - Rio de Janeiro, 1943 - 38 x 25 cm - crayon on paper
- 2 - Untitled - Rio de Janeiro, 1970s - 32,5 x 24cm - Indian ink and oil pastel on paper
- 3 - Untitled - Santiago, 1942 - 22 x 30,5 cm - crayon on paper
- 4 - Untitled - Rome, 1948 - 24,5 x 33,5cm - Indian ink on paper
5. Untitled - Porto Alegre, 1942 - 42 x 40,5 cm - crayon on paper
6. Untitled - Porto Alegre, 1991 - 31,5 x 21,5cm - ballpoint pen on paper
7. Untitled - Rio de Janeiro 1940s - Indian ink on paper - 20,5 x 19 cm
8. Untitled - Porto Alegre, 1993 - 35x35cm - gouache on paper



03



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07

Iberê Camargo's work is populated by iconography originating from his childhood memories and the life around him. He was an attentive observer of man and the pitfalls he imposes on himself. In his wooden spoons, in the deserted tree-lined streets, in the wandering of people in the street, in the cyclists of Redenção Park or in the empty pretence of shop window mannequins, he could perceive the tragic nature of human existence reflected in a powerlessness in the face of time and the weight of the past. His creative energy was directed towards this challenge of trying to express the singularity of a fact, the sometimes crude purity of a sensation, of a feeling: "The painter is the magician who immobilizes time"<sup>1</sup>, stated the artist, a magician who plays at eternalizing the scenes of a life that proceeds without a master.

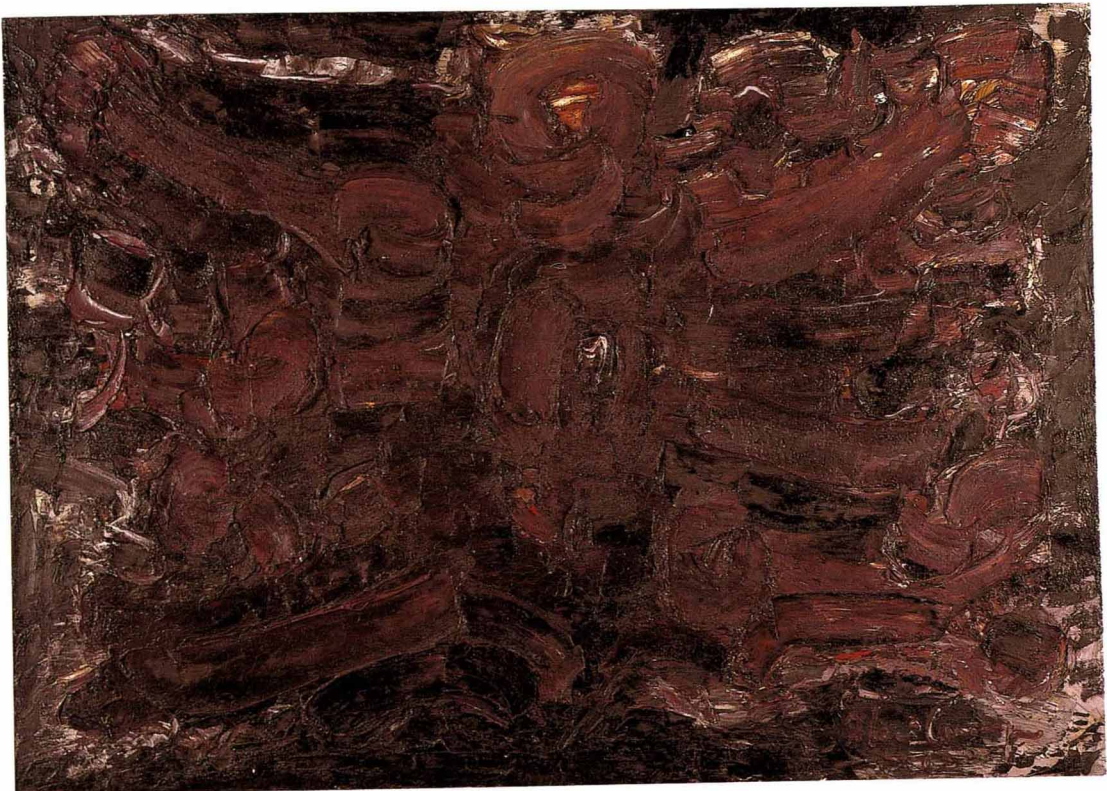
1. All the painter's quotations come from the book "Gaveta de Guardados", by Iberê Camargo, published posthumously in 1998 by Edusp.



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# Training the eye

One day Iberê Camargo re-discovered cotton teels, old acquaintances from his childhood games. Those small wooden objects became one of the main subjects of his work from the 1960s. He revived them with a creative eye in search of the enchantment that enlivened his childhood—an “obscure permanent longing” that brings the act of memory closer to the act of art. Many people have already compared the eye of the artist to the eye of the child who sees the world for the first time, who doesn't have names for things, only perception and sensation. The practice of drawing is largely responsible for the development of this way of looking that forces us to re-examine things in their primordial strangeness.



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Drawing for Iberê was a means of testing his way of looking at the world. A painter par excellence, he always made use of drawing as way of recording his ideas, of catching a scene in the street or of perfecting a painting or printmaking project. As a draughtsman, he mastered the whole academic repertoire that in his time was part of an artist's training: there are landscapes dissected with pencil or brush, figures drawn with an attentive and scrutinous eye.

With the passing of time (and time seems to be the most recurrent subject in his work), Iberê allows the images a faster treatment. A synthesising of the forms that seem to apprehend the model from the inside—one more lesson of drawing. The line in his drawings and gouaches is immersed more and more in the *imprimatura*<sup>2</sup> that bathes the paper in translucent tones: here we foresee the energy of painting in the sensual fluidity of the matter and colour that begins to appear.



10. Untitled - Jaguari, 1942 - 30,5 x 40,5 cm - oil on canvas mounted on card

“To live is to walk,  
it is to discover, it is to know.  
In my wandering as a  
painter, I catch the image  
that presents itself to me now  
and return to the things that  
are sleeping in the memory,  
that might be hidden in the  
garden of childhood.”

2. *Imprimatura* is a technique used since the Renaissance that consists of the application of a mid tone to the paper onto which the lights and shades can be worked. Iberê would have learned to value the use of this technique with the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico, during his stay in Europe between 1948 and 50.

Iberê Camargo was born in Restinga Seca, Rio Grande do Sul on November 18, 1914. At the age of 14 he began to study painting at the Santa Maria School of Arts and Crafts. In 1942, he held his first one person exhibition in Porto Alegre in the Palácio do Governo and was granted a bursary by the government of Rio Grande do Sul to study painting in Rio de Janeiro.

Aged 27, he moved to Rio, where for a short period he attended the National School of Fine Arts, and later started taking classes in the studio of Guignard. By 1947, he had held three one person exhibitions and participated in many others, importantly the annual Salons of Fine Art in Rio, a show in Buenos Aires and other in Montevideo. The following year, Iberê Camargo and his wife Maria left for a two year stay in Europe, where he studied painting with Giorgio de Chirico and engraving with Petrucci, in Rome. In Paris he attended André Lhote's studio. In 1951, he participated in the 1<sup>st</sup> São Paulo Biennial and in the Spanish-American Art Biennial in Madrid. Having returned to Brazil, he founded the printmaking course in the Fine Art Institute of Rio de Janeiro in 1953.

In the same year, he participated in a group show of Brazilian prints in the Chappelen Gallery, in Oslo, and in the following years in the Guggenheim Museum in New York (1956), in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Spanish-American Biennial in Barcelona and the 5<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial (1959).

He took part in the Tokyo Printmaking Biennial in 1960, and won the printmaking prize in the Mexico Biennial. One year later, he won the Best National Painter award in the 6<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial. He exhibited six canvases and six prints in the 1962 Venice Biennial. In 1966, he carried out a 49 m panel in Geneva, which was offered by Brazil to the World Health Organization. In 1969 and 1970, he conducted intaglio classes at the Federal University of Santa Maria and in the School of Fine Art of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. He was given a Special Room at the 11<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial in 1971. In 1973, he participated in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Brazilian Print show, in the National Museum of Fine Art, Rio de Janeiro, and carried out a printmaking apprenticeship in Atelier Lacourière, Paris. In 1975, he published the book *A gravura*. In 1982, he moved back to Porto Alegre to live, where he received the Municipal Diploma of Cultural Merit. Three years later the Museum of Art of Rio Grande do Sul organized an important retrospective of his work, shown the following year in the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art, in the Rio de Janeiro Museum of Modern Art, and in the National Theatre in Brasília. In 1988, he published the book of stories *No andar do tempo*, and followed this with several exhibitions. In the same year he participated in the exhibition "Modernity – 20<sup>th</sup> Century Brazilian Art, at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the Rio de Janeiro Museum of Fine Art and the Banco Francês e Brasileiro Cultural Space in Porto Alegre, organized a retrospective of his graphic work. In 1992, the City of Rio de Janeiro Museum of Art reopened with the exhibition: "From Debret to Iberê." In 1993, the Iberê Camargo Gallery was opened in the Usina do Gasômetro in Porto Alegre with an exhibition of the artist's gouaches. The following year the exhibition "Iberê Camargo Modern Master", took place in the Banco do Brasil Cultural Centre, in Rio de Janeiro. In the same year, he participated in the "Abstractions" Section, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Brazil Biennial, and he had Special Room in the 17<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial.

Iberê Camargo died on August the 9<sup>th</sup> 1994, in Porto Alegre.

## Schools Programme

The Iberê Camargo Foundation was established in October 1995 with the aim of conserving and publicising the artist's work. Its initial collection, donated by Maria Coussirat Camargo, comprises works from the various phases of Iberê Camargo's production, as well as documents that are records of his career.

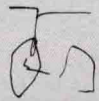
A small part of this collection, including works and unpublished documents, can be seen in the exhibition we are now presenting.

The Foundation also has the important mission of offering new generations knowledge, discussion and criticism of Iberê's work. It is not simple and straightforward work. It is, above all, a challenge to our capacity to perceive the complexity and beauty of the world. In life Iberê was one of those rare people who can be given the title of free thinker, irreverent, permanently challenging the conventional labels of art, its established "truths" and himself. In this sense Iberê was a student, in the best sense of the word, his whole life.

It is with this spirit that in this second semester of 2001, the Iberê Camargo Foundation is continuing the Schools Programme in its third edition. The Programme, which served more than 4.500 students from the public and private teaching sector in 2000/2001, continues this year starting with the beautiful exhibition curated by the Artist and Lecturer Flávio Gonçalves.

Jorge Gerdau Johannpeter

REALIZATION:



Fundação Iberê Camargo

PATRONAGE:

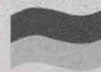


GERDAU

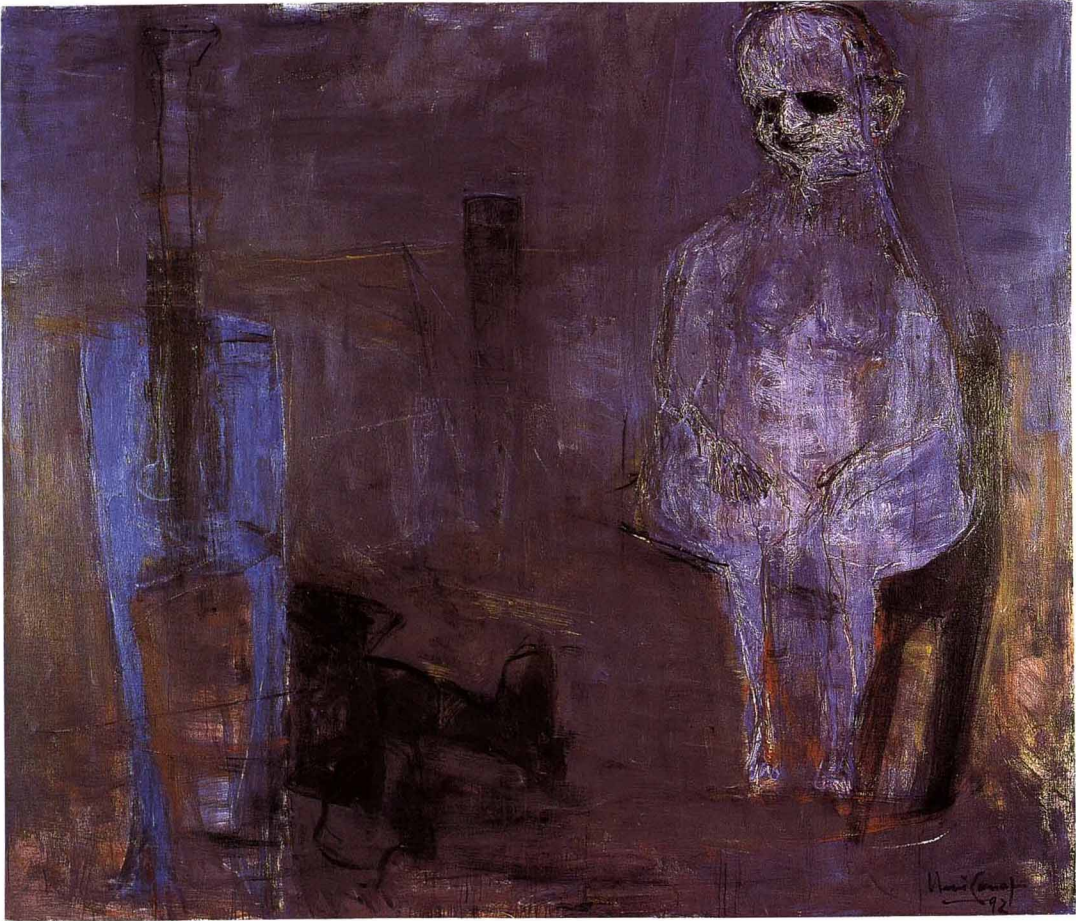
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SUPPORT:



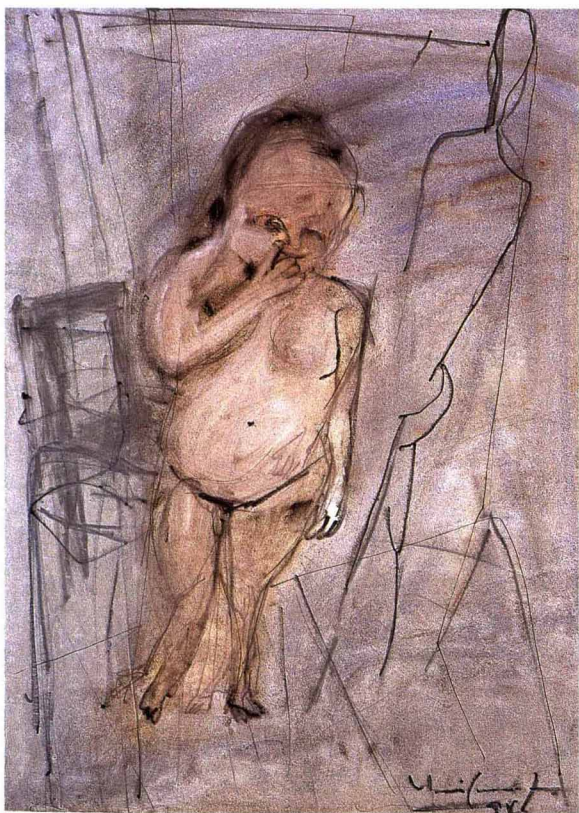
MINISTÉRIO DA CULTURA



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## Matter and gesture

Iberê Camargo usually worked directly from the real, with the model in front of him in a situation of confrontation. The energy and tension employed while working demonstrates the attempt to synchronize intuition and action. It is necessary to act decisively and not lose the spontaneity of gesture; not to let the opportunity that each instant offers of representing life in its course to escape: "In the creative act, I am pulled by impulses that unleash themselves like gales coming from I know not where." This will for precipitance, of seeing the moment formed before it comes, was part of his way of being: "I have always considered myself the same. However I should admit that when I run in the sun in Redenção Park in the mornings, I notice that my shadow doesn't accompany my 'jog', it runs very slowly."



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Iberê's painting is characterized by a dense field of matter deposited layer by layer on the canvas. A nervous sedimentation that allows one to glimpse indications of the painter's passage, the memory of his gestures. Palpable fields of colour project from the plane of the canvas due to the tactile appeal of matter. At times, sweeps of the spatula subtract, they wound those layers digging lines that form the contour of the figures. Thus the memory of the graphic gesture resurfaces, united with the mass of the painting; the result of an expressive urgency that sometimes builds and at other times destroys.

In these lines that "tie" the composition we reencounter the work of Sisyphus<sup>3</sup>, the endless adventure of the act of creation: when Iberê scratches out layers of paint, he ends up revealing the white of the canvas, the starting point of the work. Past and present are found in this metaphor: "As we see, creation occurs with the now and with receding time."

- 11 - Everything is false and useless to you - Porto Alegre, 1992 - 200x 236 cm - oil on canvas
- 12 - Untitled - Porto Alegre, 1994 - 77 x 56cm - gouache and stabilotone pencil on paper.
- 13 - Untitled - Porto Alegre, 1980s - 23 x 34cm - ballpoint pen on paper
- 14 - Untitled - Porto Alegre, 1993 - 25 x 35 cm - gouache on paper

3.Sisyphus is a character from Greek mythology, who cheated death. He was condemned by the gods to carry an enormous stone to the top of a mountain. The rock then rolled to the bottom of the mountain and Sisyphus resumed his work eternally.

Flávio Gonçalves, August 2001.

Artist and lecturer of the Institute of Arts / UFRGS



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