



**DAN GALERIA   ART BASEL MIAMI   2018**

**VOLPI PAINTS VOLTIS — THE NUCLEAR PERIOD: 1950S / 1960S**



## ALFREDO VOLPI PAINTING THE AIR

Notwithstanding the popularity earned by his famous “little flags”, the whole of Alfredo Volpi’s body of work is still relatively unexplored. A number of facts point to the need for a more systematic and profound interpretive basis to approach Volpi’s contribution as a painter: his extraordinarily abundant oeuvre that branched out into multiple directions; the dispersion of his works around hundreds of public and private collections throughout Brazil, and the extreme difficulty found in establishing a wide-ranging and articulate view of the development of his trajectory.

He is, of course, one of the few artists in Brazil whose painting has been quite extensively documented<sup>1</sup>, thus highly favoring research initiatives. However, this fact, as well as the popular resonance of the artist’s name, is in marked contrast with the enormous task of critical analysis and reflection that his work continues to require and the many important aspects it keeps open for discussion. Among the issues requiring comprehensive examination, one might mention, for instance, the stimulating reciprocal emulation in Volpi’s painting between the cultured art tradition and the popular visuality, in a keen and self-conscious play of pictorial means. Perhaps a closer look at this issue would enable us to elucidate Volpi’s fondness for flat surfaces, for a painting pressed into spaces that lack volumetrics and retain just a few structural elements. This would mean confronting his work not only with the modern premise of self-referentiality in painting, but also with the decorative tradition of popular visual culture.

In the end, it is a question of seeing to what extent the make up of this painting of shallow spaces was influenced by sources as diverse as his remarkable interest in Cézanne (whose work he saw at an exhibition of French art in São Paulo, in 1940<sup>2</sup>), or his experience as a young artisan who earned his living doing decorative mural painting for wealthy households in São Paulo; or his familiarity with the simplified panoramic visuality of his friend, the naïf painter Emygdio de Souza; or

<sup>1</sup> This task has been taken up by the Sociedade para a Catalogação da obra de Alfredo Volpi (Society for the Cataloguing of Alfredo Volpi’s Oeuvre), which has focused first the works in painting of this artist and has so far listed 2,249 of his works.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. ZANINI, Walter, *A arte no Brasil nas décadas de 1930-40. O Grupo Santa Helena*, São Paulo: Nobel; Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1991, p. 55.



yet the old Academic masters and Italian artisans, specially those from the Liceu de Artes e Ofícios (School of Arts and Crafts) in São Paulo, with whom he kept in close touch, during the 1920s and 30s, and from whom he inherited a honorable visual tradition and an appreciation of the subtleties of painting as a craft.

Another issue as yet unresolved — also related to Volpi's predilection for flat painting — is the enigmatic presence of finely-honed, pre-perspective formal procedures that remind us of pre-Renaissance painting in Northern Italy, in the work of a self-taught artist, forged in a narrow-minded and provincial environment. But it hardly seems convincing to attribute these procedures to an assumed primitivism, or to a kind of archaism, since Volpi on more than one occasion referred to his admiration for Margaritone d'Arezzo, an artist who was active in the 13th century, and for Giorgio Morandi and Joseph Albers<sup>3</sup>... Another item on this roster of issues would perhaps be the unusual coexistence of Classicism with Expressionism that — from the late 1930s, at least — informed Volpi's painting, even during the bare two-dimensionality of the so-called “Concrete phase,” starting in the late 1950s.

This coexistence of opposites would echo another antagonistic pair that drove his work: the play between Constructive optimism and the discreet skepticism that enervates form in his mature output. In this production, the formal elements that are typically part of Constructive language (elementary geometric figures, lines, and independent colored planes) constantly relativized his strictly two-dimensional surfaces, deceiving any pre-determined order or any unequivocal separation between line and color, form and medium. This is another instigating issue to be examined, since it was precisely this anti-dogmatic approach that lent originality and propositional strength to Volpi's Constructive work. This explains why, in his work, the “Concrete” renditions of the second half of the fifties were succeeded,

smoothly, methodically and organically, by a vaporous and digressive painting, by temperas the surfaces of which boasted bare horizons, arches, and portals, composing subtle metaphysical scenarios.

These are just a few of the many possible approaches to the venture of a more wide-ranging interrogation into Volpi's body of work. What is remarkable, in any case, is the contrast between the relevance of his work's input to the making of a Brazilian modern art and the diffuse knowledge we have of it. After all, this oeuvre witnessed the developments and retreats of this process throughout the first half of the 20th century and — from the 1960s onwards — was constantly influenced by a certain contemporary spirit of rupture. Another revealing indicator of the weak cultural dissemination of the painter's legacy is the fact that most studies about Volpi have been in relatively low-circulation publications, or yet restricted to museum and gallery circles, which are rather inaccessible to the public at large<sup>4</sup> — but this is, of course, the case of innumerable artists who, like Volpi, played referential roles in the history of Brazilian art.

Nevertheless, Volpi's work itself — unlike the resonance that his name has acquired, or the myth built around his “little flags” — has very low visibility in Brazil and has hardly projected itself in a public scale. Except for the University of São Paulo's Museu de Arte Contemporânea, which owns a set of works that illustrates his development as a painter, most Brazilian museums show his trajectory incomplete, lacking significant examples of his production. As a corollary to this situation, the absence of a basic and systematic bibliography of Brazilian modern art erodes any effort to project his work within a soundly-based historical and critical perspective that would enable us to examine it in the light of comparative procedures, and to collate it with works by Volpi's contemporaries and with the cultural constants that impressed the formation of modern thought in Brazilian art.

<sup>3</sup> The association between Volpi's painting and the metaphysical spaces of Giorgio Morandi was originally brought up, as far as we know, by the poet Murilo Mendes; cf. MENDES, Murilo, “Alfredo Volpi”, in MENDES, Murilo; SCHENBERG, Mário, *Galleria d'Arte Roma della “Casa do Brasil”*, Roma, 1963, catalogue. In an informal interview in 2000, this writer learned about Volpi's admiration for Morandi and Joseph Albers from Domingos Giobbi, who had frequent contact with the painter. References to Margaritone d'Arezzo are often found in catalogues and essays on Volpi, such as PEDROSA, Mário, “Volpi, 1924-1957”, in PEDROSA, Mário, *Acadêmicos e modernos: Textos escolhidos III/Mário Pedrosa*; ARANTES, Otilia (org.). São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1998, p. 263-69.

<sup>4</sup> Note however, the study by Lorenzo Mammì, *Alfredo Volpi*, São Paulo: Editora Cosac & Naify, 1999, the only monographic publication on Volpi aimed at the general public.

Rather surprisingly, in looking at his development, one finds that the advent of a formal intelligence propped on the Constructive tradition does not relate, in Volpi's case — at least in the first instance —, to the same sources emulated by the young artists of São Paulo's Concrete movement or Rio's Neo-Concrete movement, which were initially influenced by the Swiss and German schools of Concrete art.

The shallow space in which Volpi landed in 1950 did not represent a turning point or rupture in his painting, or anything that might suggest a sudden transition from "figuration" to "abstraction" — stimulated, perhaps, by the renovation impetus of new generations or the abstractionist vogue ushered by the São Paulo Biennial. On the contrary, this kind of space developed naturally from the previous steps of the work. Since at least the late 1930s, his work had tended toward a simplified space, with little depth, and the vanishing point cunningly drawn as a rather bare horizon, or yet a homogeneous horizontal strip of ocean. In the following decade, this approach gradually became more radical as his figurative elements — streets and row houses — were arranged in ranks of vertically juxtaposed strips, with the entire volumetrics compressed into a thin surface, and submitted to condition of strict frontality.

It would therefore be appropriate to emphasize the complexity of the different roads devised in Volpi's work. One could show that his façades and flags, the elements that eventually won him recognition nationally, do not indicate the culmination of a lineal process, but high points on a course potentially open to multiple directions. An overview of his work reveals that procedures such as serialization, reduction of the figurative field to the nuclear structures of form, and emancipation of color and space were already organically embedded, we might say, in Volpi's paintings of the late 1930s. This fact is brought out in his numerous seascapes of Itanhaém, not to mention the Mogí das Cruzes landscapes done some years previously, which already

suggested his two-dimensional treatment of space and his penchant for transparencies and linear structures on surfaces.

Indeed, it was in the late 1940s, when the roofs of his small back-of-the-suburbs houses became parallelograms and triangles thrown into the foreground of his paintings, that there emerged the central morphogenetic element of all Volpi's subsequent painting. This element gave rise not only to flags and façades, but also to a decisive experiment in spatial perception. From such a viewpoint, this element was much more than a symbolic or affective reference to the Brazilian popular tradition. It was an authentic formal operator, meant to propitiate the advent of repetition and permutational devices applied to modular units. When his work became sufficiently mature to extract all the formal potential of this element — the parallelogram with the triangle within —, it moved onto an audacious terrain of experimentation, a step short of abstraction, but without forsaking painting's narrative structure that surely brought him affective memories and the potential for digressions across the childhood abysses and a pastoral past of humanity.

Although the lyrical polyphony of the flags vanished in Volpi's "Concrete" phase (strictly speaking, close to the Jansenist purism of the Manifesto of Concrete Painting as drafted by Theo Van Doesburg and others in 1930, in Paris, his painting was never Concrete), the formal intelligence of the flags was profoundly incorporated in these divested paintings that reduced experience of space to an essential alternation between 'full' and 'empty,' between crystalline form and the material's sensorial density. In the late 50s, when Volpi returned to his core motif after a brief interregnum marked by exercises of discipline and formal contention, it was obviously no longer the same flags.

Unlike the classical purity they had previously staged, the "new" flags rendered eclectic formal arrangements, permeated with narrative references, saints, ribbons, popular festivals, and

physiognomic details of old architectures from the working-class suburbs of Brazilian cities. Volpi seemed engrossed in a kind of review of his entire career, which allowed him to make use of his earlier accomplishments and to “return” to figuration and the “expressionism” of decades past — while, of course, subordinating these experiences to the tense stance of his façades. Certainly, this painting was saturated with decorative patterns, which apparently refuted his prior “Concrete” enterprise, of formal sophistication. But it was this decompression on the surface — which appeared to be a sudden swerve from the Constructive course of his work — that signaled the opposite: an extraordinary formal maturation that purged the artist’s gesturality of any inhibition and favored a spirit of experimentation. The two-dimensional basis of his painting was not dropped. On the contrary, it had been sharpened so that the artist felt entirely free to arrange elements on pictorial surfaces and structure them as in a mosaic, or as if he were dealing with collage.

Then came the great moment of synthesis. In the mid-60s, Volpi released the lineal structuring of the painting surface, and loosened his serial and rhythmic alignment of elements and frontal ordering to submerge his painting in velvety recesses, imaginary oceans and porches. Yet, even in this period when his work flirted more with the informal, the flags as linguistic instruments were still what intervened discreetly in the ordering of pictorial space. Except that, now, they were at last freed from the demands of syntax and from the task of combining parts between themselves, or from bringing out the supposed integrity and self-sufficiency of a painting assumed in its strict two-dimensional nature. A mist of skepticism began to softly shroud his former Constructive stamina.

Little flags (and an entire formal typology originally associated with them, such as masts, ribbons, sails, eggs) appeared solitary among deep blue velatura layers. The previously homogeneous surfaces

now started to reveal the gesture, which in turn seemed restrained and more hesitant. Somber colors, particularly black, now filtered the “Giottesque” luminosity of his previous works. Volpi somehow experienced the crisis of form and the spur of deconstruction that was galvanizing much of the contemporary art production at that time. His work plunged into a kind of informal abstraction, propped on a phenomenology of color, and a somewhat metaphysical setting, with virtual depths and enigmatic figures floating in space.

A key point to emphasize is that despite bearing a strong Classical substrate and Constructive genealogy, his work was never strictly circumscribed by any school or style. Indeed, much of its power resides precisely in this languid fluctuation between different formal assumptions. If on the one hand Volpi was an artist cultivated in the classic tradition of the purity of the line, and in the quest for the essential and structural order of form, on the other hand he stood out as the painter who — for the first time in the history of Brazilian art — regarded space as an organic and sensorial entity, emancipated color, and infused it with luminous and expressive vibration.

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By the time he painted his first temperas with façades and flags, in the early 1950s, Volpi had been painting for over thirty years. From the Cézannian landscapes of the early twenties, with their impasto and almost sculpted thickness, to the shallow paintings with layers of clear and transparent color, he had accumulated experience of methodical and penetrating sifting of the main movements of renovation in European painting since Impressionism. But there was more: through a particular fusion of learned and popular sources, of the repertoire assimilated at the leading schools of European modernism with the academic learning of technique and craftsmanship, Volpi had

succeeded in radically changing the physiognomy of Brazilian painting and consolidated a local branch of the modern Constructive tradition.

Finally, a particular way of understanding the Constructive legacy was outlined in the artist's work that lent unprecedented sensoriality and a certain digressive undulation of flat and homogeneous surfaces and to the mathematical rationality that were to constitute the core of the Constructive vocabulary. Volpi's temperas of varied texture captured form in unstable situations and, particularly as of the mid-fifties, disclosed color not as the literal element posed by tradition, but as a more labile material made of light and air, which would present itself either involved in corporal density, or in sheer transparency. This rather oblique manifestation of Constructive rational was in no way a provincial phenomenon, restricted to a regional interest.

In this respect, let us bear in mind that Volpi, a self-taught artist, was frequently hailed by his contemporaries as a naive and popular painter<sup>5</sup>. His Constructivism was perceived by some as an eclectic and vernacular compilation from cultivated sources of modern art that merged in his work, strained through the decorative and spontaneous geometry of the popular tradition. This celebration of the lyrical and naive physiognomy of Volpi's paintings is largely responsible for his oeuvre being confined to the context of the national-cum-social issue that so impressed Brazilian art throughout the first half of the 20th century. This fact also tends to inhibit an interrogation of his work within the contemporary context of São Paulo Concrete production and Rio's Neo-Concrete production, and the international scenario of Concrete strands that, as they developed in Latin-America — in Jesus Soto, for instance — showed extraordinary shared features with a large portion of the Brazilian production that attempted to relativize the orthodoxy of Concrete art.

It is important to remember that the originality of Alfredo Volpi's work lies precisely in the tension between the high tradition of modern

art and the popular elements, in the kind of stoic realism to which he submitted the universal truths of the Constructive vocabulary, so the lyricism and simplicity of attitudes inscribed in this painting were not derived from an innocence before the world. On the contrary, they derived from a profound readiness to welcome the contradictions of modern world, to learn tolerance and cultivate frugality in the face of its essentially unfair nature. Thus, on this approach, the sensoriality and formal ambiguity of Volpi's first Constructive works could not be attributed to primitivism, or to a naive and conventional handling of a repertoire that was only apparently related to Constructive art.

They were in fact indicators of a *relativized* assimilation, punctuated with reservations about certain Constructive assumptions, i.e. order and universality of form; the eminently abstract future of art; and the omnipotent logos presumed by the Constructive intelligence. Not by chance, ever since the advent of his façades and little flags, it was clear that Alfredo Volpi was not going to renounce the semantic potential of form. The shallow surface from which the self-sustaining truth of painting emerged could be glimpsed, at the same time, as the profound space of memory, inhabited by a suggestive constellation of images: the rows houses in the back-suburbs, the solidarity of proletarian life, the spiritually elevated simplicity resulting from the expenditure of physical energy, in a life that wagered on the emancipating power of the world of labor, and now was enclosed in the fragmentary spaces of the contemporary metropolis.

**Sônia Salzstein**  
February 2002

10 5 See Ferreira Gullar's comment, refuting this view: "I do not think one would describe this artist as a 'popular painter,' just as one would not say that Picasso was an African painter because he was inspired by the forms of African sculpture in his 'Demoiselles d' Avignon' period." Cf. GULLAR, Ferreira, "Volpi, pintor popular mas não muito", (Volpi, a popular painter, but not really). *Jornal do Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, 30-06-1957, p. 9.

Untitled  
early 1950s  
tempera on cardboard  
28,5 x 14,5 cm









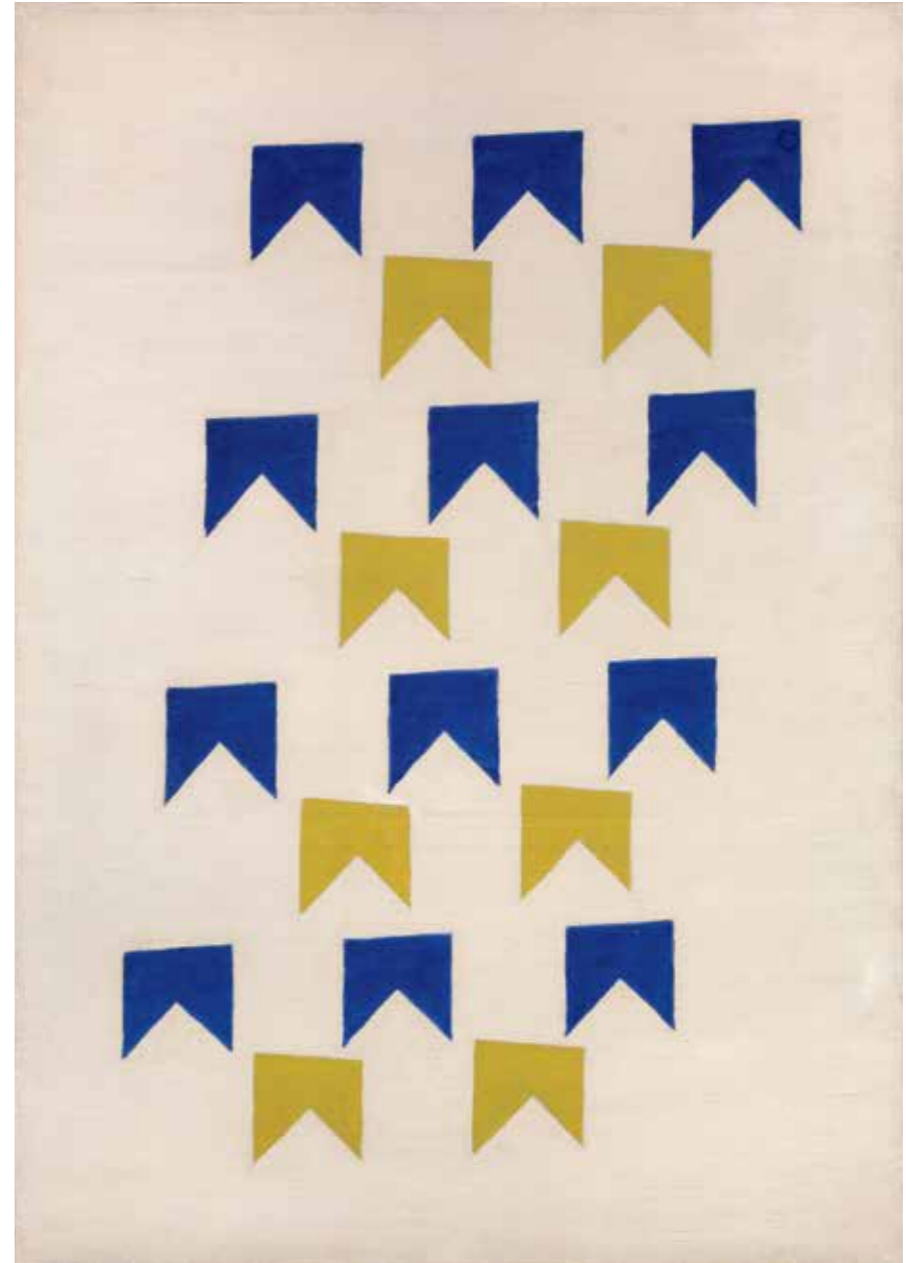
Untitled  
1960s  
tempera on canvas  
73 x 54 cm



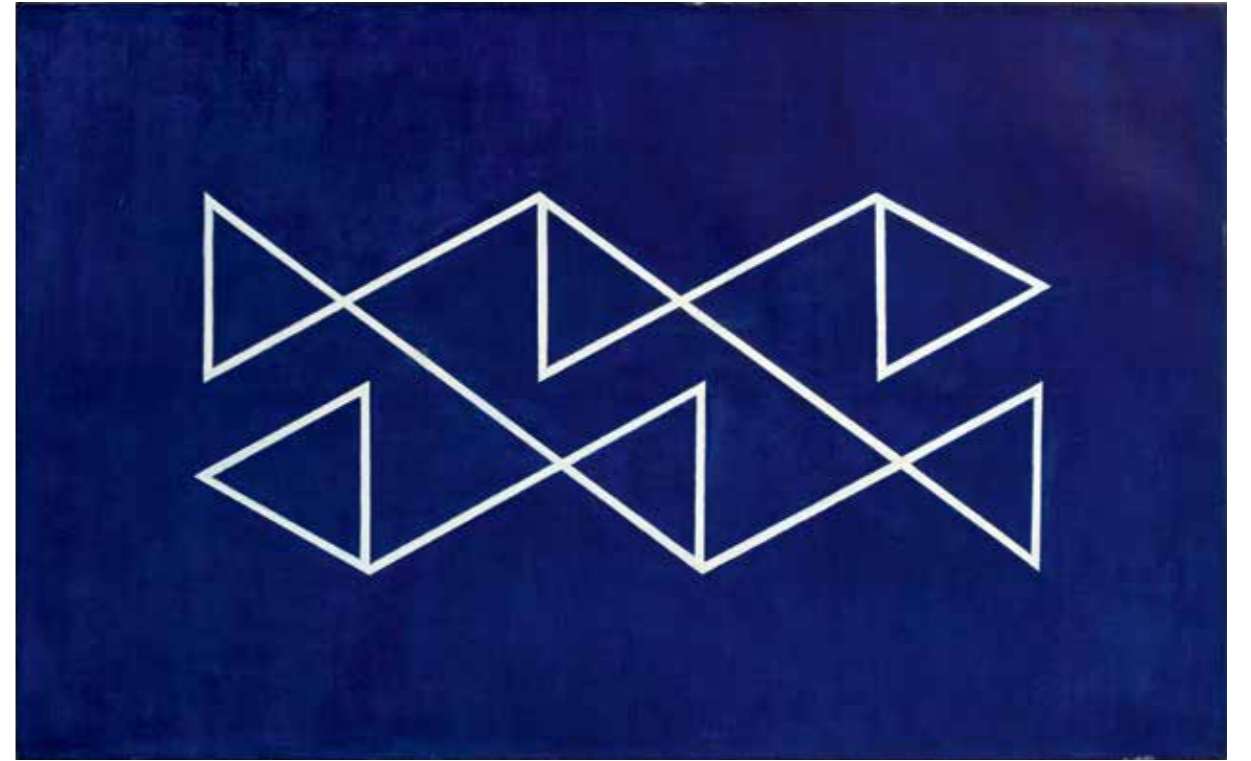
Untitled  
c. 1955  
tempera on cardboard  
33 x 24 cm



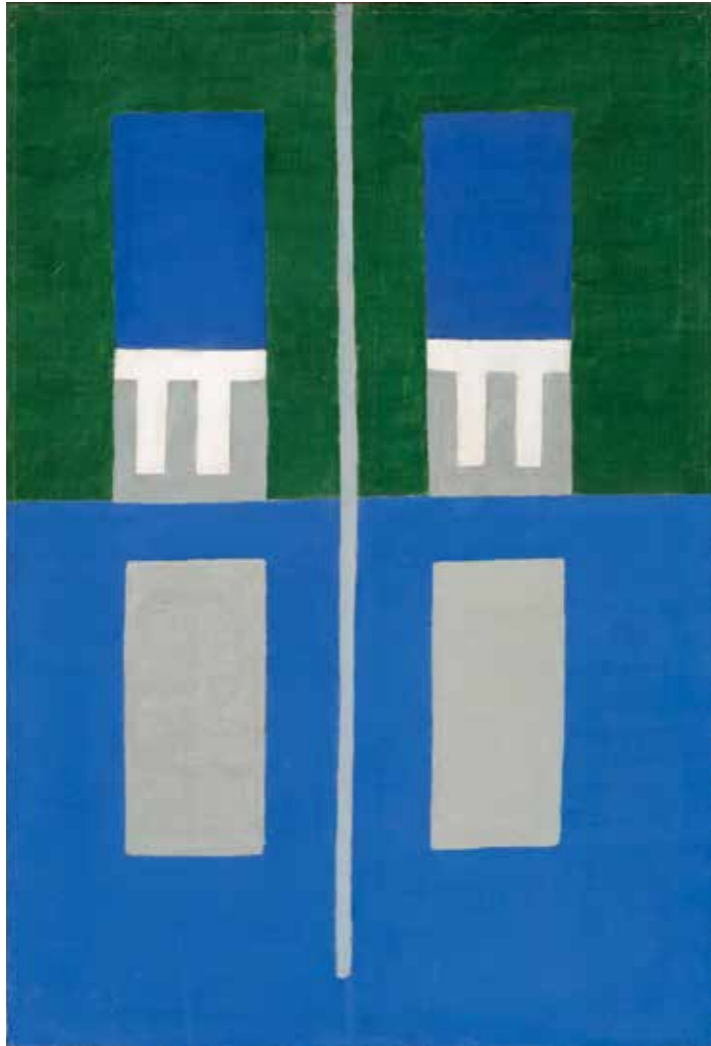
Untitled  
1950s  
tempera on canvas  
92 x 65 cm







Untitled  
mid to late 1950s  
tempera on canvas  
72,8 x 116,2 cm



Untitled  
1950s  
tempera on canvas  
73 x 50.2 cm



Untitled  
1956  
tempera on canvas  
71 x 51.5 cm



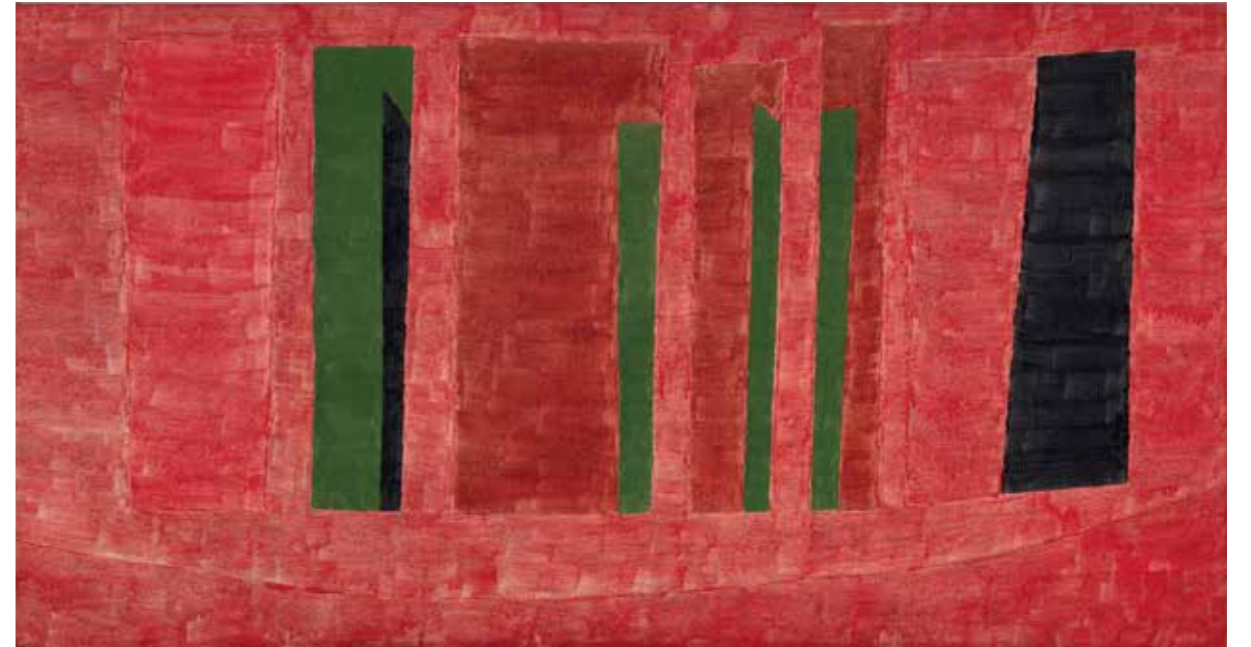
Untitled  
late 1950s  
tempera on paper  
37 x 46 cm





Untitled  
early 1960s  
tempera on canvas  
100.2 x 72.3 cm





Untitled  
1960s  
tempera on canvas  
73 x 136.3 cm









Untitled  
1960s  
tempera on canvas  
54 x 71,5 cm



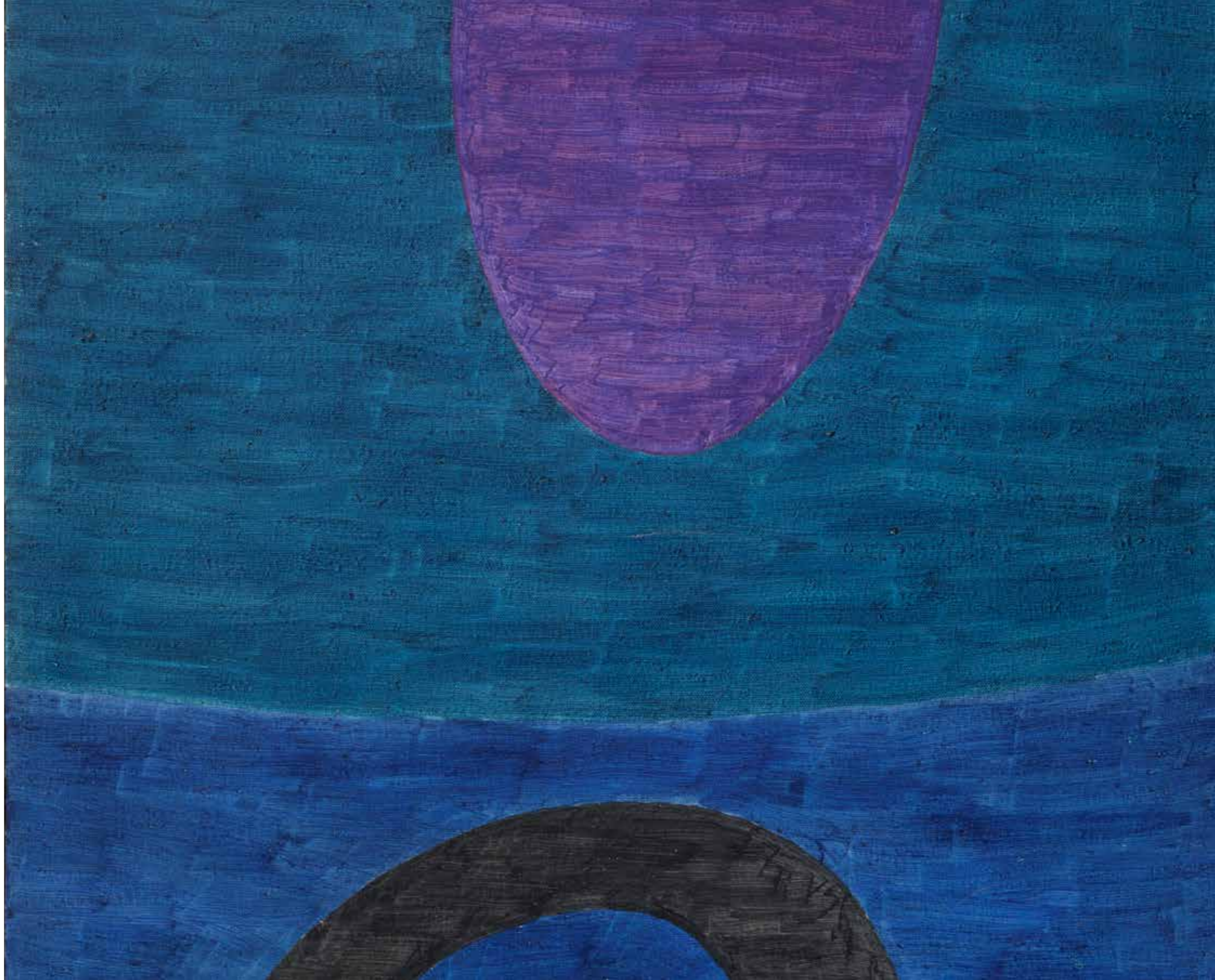


Untitled  
early 1960s  
tempera on paper  
13 x 23 cm

Untitled  
c. 1960  
tempera on cardboard  
33 x 24 cm









Untitled  
1960s  
tempera on canvas  
100,5 x 72 cm



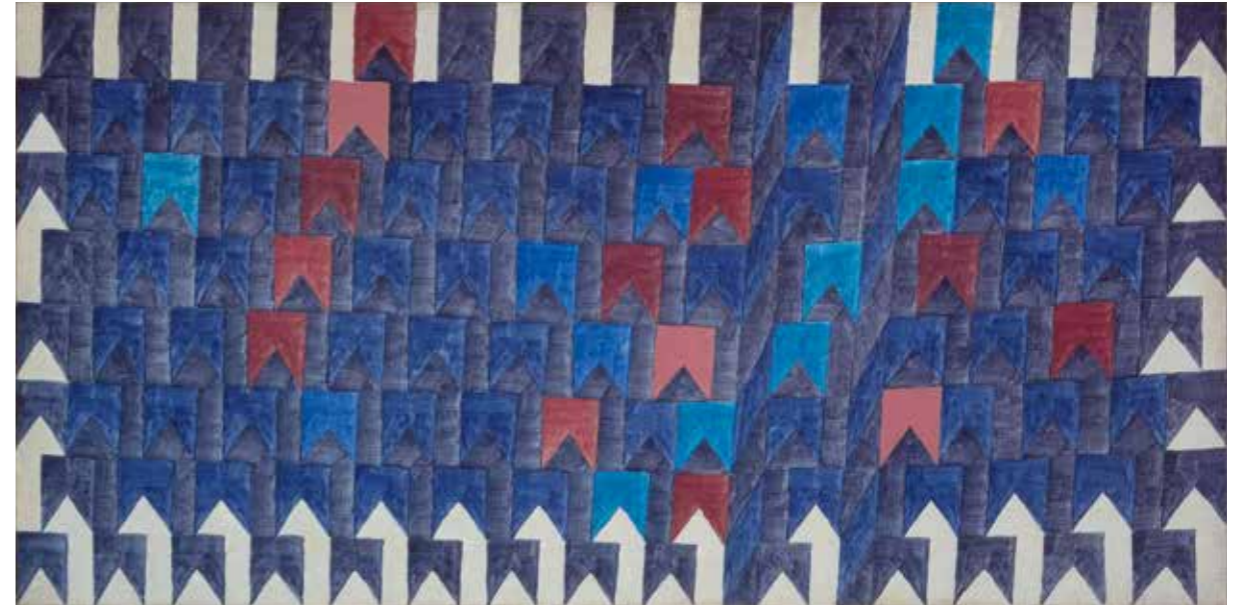


Untitled  
late 1960s  
tempera on canvas  
34 x 47 cm

Untitled  
mid to late 1960s  
tempera on canvas  
108 x 70 cm







Untitled  
late 1960s  
tempera on canvas  
70 x 140 cm

## ALFREDO VOLPI TIMELINE AND SELECTED EXHIBITIONS<sup>1</sup>



Alfredo Volpi

Alfredo Volpi was born in Lucca, Italy, in 1896. In 1898, his family moved to São Paulo, where he later attained his elementary education at an Italian school for the children of immigrants. At age 12, he left school to work as engraver and bookbinder. In his spare time, he drew. In 1912, he became an apprentice of residential decorative painting, an occupation that was to be his means of livelihood until the mid 1930s. In 1914, Volpi executed his first painting, a landscape.

### The 1910s

In 1918, together with painter Orlando Tarquínio, he took up a mural decoration — which was later destroyed — at the Military Hospital, in São Paulo.

*During the following two decades, the artist worked in other commissions for mural painting work, to be done in a more creative manner than the craftwork he had executed in the early days of his career, decorating residential walls according to predetermined styles provided by the home owners themselves.*

### The 1920s

#### 1925

Showed for the first time at the 2<sup>nd</sup> General Exhibition of Fine Arts.

#### 1927

Met Benedita da Conceição, whom he married in 1942.

#### 1928

Was awarded the Gold Medal at the *Muse Italiche* Salon organized by the Sociedade Italiana de Cultura, with the attendance of Italian immigrant artists.

*In the 1920s, Volpi's work began to acquire a more regular pace, as the artist executed works of a more or less academic features, in which he seemingly rendered a painting that focuses lighting and the plasticity of the pictorial medium. The works evoke the trends that had rid European painting from the conventions of studio work, as for example Impressionism or the movements for the renovations of Italian painting at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the pointillism by the Macchiaioli.*

<sup>1</sup> The references on dates and exhibitions included in this timeline were mainly taken from CORDEIRO, Aida, "Cronologia", In SALZSTEIN, Sônia, *Volpi*, Rio de Janeiro: Campos Gerais/Silvia Roesler, 2000, p. 264-295.



Palacete Santa Helena, 1920s



Volpi and his future wife, Judite, 1930s

## The 1930s

### 1933

The artist received the Bronze Medal at the 39<sup>th</sup> General Exhibition of Fine Arts, in Rio de Janeiro.

Met Francisco Rebolo, who was also a painter decorator.

### 1934

Showed in the 1<sup>st</sup> São Paulo Salon of Fine Arts; began to attend live model sessions at the Palacete Santa Helena, a building in the downtown district where other artists including Francisco Rebolo, Mário Zanini, Manoel Martins, Humberto Rosa, and Fúlvio Pennacchi met regularly. Aldo Bonadei and Clóvis Graciano were to join the artistic group that later Sérgio Milliet was to name Grupo Santa Helena. As part of their activities, the group went on outings in the city's outskirts or in the countryside, to paint landscapes.

*Numerous vistas of Mogi das Cruzes clearly reveal Volpi's interest in a flat painting, transparencies and linear structures on surfaces.*

### 1935

Received the Bronze Medal at the 3<sup>rd</sup> São Paulo Salon of Fine Arts.

### 1936

Showed in the exhibition "Small Pictures", organized by the Sociedade Paulista de Belas Artes, and in the 4<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Salon of Fine Arts.

### 1937

Attended the 1<sup>st</sup> São Paulo Artistic Family Salon, which brought together the Grupo Santa Helena and the new generation of São Paulo artists, whose production was to reveal common traits: a social-minded figuration and the appreciation for facture and for art tradition.

Made contact with Italian-German painter and sculptor Ernesto De Fiori, who had recently arrived from Europe.

Volpi's circle of friends included old Italian masters and artisans who either worked at the Liceu de Artes and Ofícios de São Paulo (São Paulo School of Arts and Crafts) or had specialized in decorative painting, like himself.

### 1937-1938

Volpi was commissioned with the painting of a mural for the Chapel at the Monte Alegre Sugar Mill, in Piracicaba (SP), together with Aldorigo Marchetti and Mário Zanini.



Invitation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Artistic Family Salon



São Paulo Artist's Union identification card

### 1938

Showed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> May Salon and at the 4<sup>th</sup> Salon of the Artists' Union, in São Paulo.

### 1939

Showed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> São Paulo Artistic Family Salon and the 5<sup>th</sup> Salon of the Artists' Union; Volpi's attendance of the Artistic Family Salon caught the attention of Mário de Andrade, who mentioned the artist in an article published in *O Estado de S. Paulo* newspaper.

*Beginning in the late 30s, Volpi painted numerous seascapes at Itanhaém, many of which reveal the influence of the fleeting and undulating brushstrokes by painter Ernesto De Fiori, his friend. Another sizable portion of the pictures he painted in Itanhaém — to which the artist was to devote himself in the 1940s — renders a discreetly metaphysical atmosphere, with the village reduced to a few geometric solids dotting the empty spaces.*

*It was also in this town by the sea that Volpi met naïf painter Emygdio de Souza, and for many years, they went out together to paint.*

## The 1940s

### 1940

Attended the 1<sup>st</sup> Art Salon of the National Industry Fair organized by painter Quirino da Silva in São Paulo.

Was awarded the Silver Medal at the 47<sup>th</sup> National Salon of Fine Arts organized by the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes in Rio de Janeiro.

Won the art contest held by the Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico and Artístico Nacional (National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service) to publicize the monuments installed in São Miguel and Embú, in São Paulo; Mário de Andrade integrated the jury panel.

Showed, at the 1<sup>st</sup> Osirarte Salon, the tiles he produced while working together with a group at Osirarte studio, established by Paulo Rossi Osir; throughout the 1940s he contributed other tile designs for the studio.

### 1942

Showed at the 48<sup>th</sup> National Salon of Fine Arts, in Rio de Janeiro, and at the 7<sup>th</sup> Salon of the Artists' Union, in São Paulo.

Met Mário Schenberg, who purchased one of his Itanhaém seascapes.

### 1943

The painter's daughter, Eugênia Maria, was born.





Volpi and Judite

**1944**

Volpi held his first one-person exhibition at Galeria Itá, in São Paulo, and showed at the “Modern Art Exhibition”, in Belo Horizonte.

During a trip to the historical cities of the state of Minas Gerais, he executed numerous works in Ouro Preto.

Attended the 9<sup>th</sup> Salon of the Artists’ Union and Osirarte Studio’s group exhibition. In England, he showed at the “Exhibition of Brazilian Modern Painting” presented in London, and in other galleries.

**1945**

Showed in two group exhibitions in São Paulo, first at Galeria Benedetti and then at Galeria Itapetininga.

Joined his peers Rebolo, Paulo Rossi Osir, Nelson Nóbrega and Mário Zanini in the decorations for a Carnival ball, in São Paulo, the proceeds of which were to be partly destined for the Clube dos Artistas e Amigos da Arte (Artists and Friends of Art Club).

**1946**

Volpi showed solo for the second time, now at Galeria Domus, in São Paulo.

Attended group exhibitions in South America: one in Valparaiso and Santiago, Chile, and the other — “Exposición de Osirarte” — in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

**1947**

Showed in a group exhibition at Galeria Domus and at the 11<sup>th</sup> Salon of the Artists’ Union, in São Paulo.

**1948**

Attended the 12<sup>th</sup> Salon of the Artists’ Union and the group exhibition “Art Club”, held at the Galeria Livros de Arte, in São Paulo.

**1949**

Presented his work in a group exhibition held at the Brazilian Institute of Architects headquarters in São Paulo, and showed at the “Exhibition of São Paulo Painting” at Galeria Domus of Rio de Janeiro. In São Paulo, painted two decorative murals at Hospital São Luiz Gonzaga, with children’s motifs: gazebos, festive maypoles, birds, rocking horses, and kites.

Showed at the 1<sup>st</sup> Bahia Salon of Fine Arts.

*Towards the end of the decade, the artist’s body of work reveals a remarkable formal refinement, with the projection of figurative elements — chiefly roofs*

*and façades — into a space that grew increasingly flatterer, structured by vertical bans.*

**The 1950s**

**1950**

Showed at the 25<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale. Together with Mário Zanini and Paulo Rossi Osir, he traveled to Europe for the first time. Visited Padua repeatedly to see Giotto’s frescoes. In Arezzo, saw Piero Della Francesca’s works and took an interest in Margaritone, a 13<sup>th</sup>-century painter.

*Volpi eliminates the remaining traces of volume on his canvases, and asserts the luminous attendance of colors, giving start to his painting of house façades.*

**1951**

Showed at Osirarte exhibition and at the 1<sup>st</sup> São Paulo Salon of Modern Art. Attended the 1<sup>st</sup> São Paulo Biennial, at which critic Theon Spanudis purchased one of his canvases. From then on, Spanudis was to become a great supporter of the artist’s work.

Volpi executed mural paintings and drawings for the Chapel of Christ the Workman, in São Paulo.

**1952**

Attended the 26<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, at which he received the acquisition Prize for his work.

Showed in the group exhibition “Volpi, Zanini, Rossi” at the Instituto Cultural Ítalo-Brasileiro, in São Paulo, and in the 1<sup>st</sup> Rio de Janeiro Salon of Modern Art, at which he received a Silver Medal and the Hors-Concurs status.

**1953**

Received the Grand Prize for Brazilian Painting at the 2nd São Paulo Biennial, ex aequo with Di Cavalcanti, and the Unesco Acquisition Prize for his painting “Casas” (Houses), which was reproduced into prints in Unesco’s publicity material.

**1954**

Showed at the 27<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale and, in Rome, at the “Brazilian Show” held at the Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Moderna.

Traveled to Bahia with Theon Spanudis.

*The colonial churches of Salvador catch his attention and influence his*



Paper clipping regarding Volpi's show at Antonio Zorlini's home, 1959

*series of façades featuring volutes, oculi, and curvilinear motifs of Baroque inspiration; he began to paint masts and flags.*

**1955**

Organized his 3<sup>rd</sup> solo exhibition, presented at Galeria Tenreiro in São Paulo. Sent works to be shown at the Carnegie Institute, of Pittsburgh, PA (USA). Showed at the 3<sup>rd</sup> São Paulo Biennial and the 4<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Salon of Modern Art, at which he was awarded the São Paulo Governor Prize.

**1956**

Sent works for showing in the group exhibition “50 Years of Brazilian Landscape”, at Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo. Later on that same year, he showed solo at his same museum.

Presented his work as a guest artist to the 1<sup>st</sup> National Exhibition of Concrete Art, at Museu de Arte de São Paulo. Joined the Concrete group of artists and poets.

*In the late 1950s, his painting attained a heightened two-dimensionality and, at the same time, a reduction in formal elements. Thus, the artist started the Concrete phase of his art production.*

**1957**

Showed at the 1<sup>st</sup> National Exhibition of Concrete Art, presented in Rio de Janeiro at the Ministry of Education and Health building, and at the 4<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial. His works traveled with the exhibition “Arte Moderno del Brazil” (Modern Art of Brazil) to Buenos Aires and Rosario (Argentina), Santiago (Chile) and Lima (Peru). In his honor, the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro organized a first retrospective show that was presented by Mário Pedrosa.

**1958**

Received the Guggenheim National Prize for Brazil; his work was sent to New York along with works by other artists, to be shown at the Guggenheim International Prize. Painted frescoes and designed paramenta for the Our Lady of Fatima Chapel of the Pioneiras Sociais association, in Brasília; the work was not preserved.

*In the late 1950s, Volpi set aside the strictly “Concrete” formal divestment to resume in a free-flowing manner the façades and little flags.*

**1959**

Presented his early works in an exhibition at the home of sculptor Antonio Zorlini; showed in the group exhibition organized at the Guggenheim

Foundation, in New York, and in the 5<sup>th</sup> International Art Show, in Tokyo, Japan.

Organized a one-person exhibition of his works at Galeria Gea, in Rio de Janeiro, and showed at the exhibition “Forty artists of Brazil”, at Galeria de Arte São Luiz, in São Paulo.

**The 1960s**

**1960**

At the end of the year, showed again at Galeria de Arte São Luiz, in São Paulo.

At this turn of decade, the strict frontality of Volpi's painting, with its series of façades and little flags, is gradually replaced by more simple compositions where solitary elements — poles, sails, little flags — hover over virtual backgrounds.

*In the 1960s, Volpi went on sporadic sojourns to Rio de Janeiro, where he kept in close touch with sculptor Bruno Giorgi and painter Décio Vieira.*

**1961**

Showed in Brasília, at the exhibition “Paintings, drawings and engravings of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo Collection” and, in São Paulo, at the show “Artists and Friends of Art Club”.

Presented his works in a special room at the 6<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial.

**1962**

Attended the 31<sup>st</sup> Venice Biennale; showed solo at Petite Galerie, in Rio de Janeiro; presented his work in Argentina, at the 1st American Art Show at the Cordoba museum and, subsequently, in Buenos Aires.

Awarded the Top Brazilian Painter Prize by representatives of art criticism in Rio de Janeiro.

In Rio de Janeiro, painted with the help of Décio Vieira four panels to decorate passenger liners of the Companhia Nacional de Navegação Costeira; two of these panels have been preserved. Commissioned by Rhodia Têxtil, he designed textile prints.

**1963**

Presented his work at the gallery of Studium Generale, in Stuttgart (Germany). Showed at Galeria Seta and at the Brazilian Institute of Architects, in São Paulo. Some of his works were included in the exhibition “Tribute to Portinari,” staged in Brodósqui, in the state of São Paulo.

Showed solo in the “Casa do Brasil” art gallery at Pallazzo Doria Pamphili, the Brazilian embassy building in Rome.

**1964**

Presented his work at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Venice Biennale.

**1965**

Showed in a one-person exhibition at Petite Galerie, of Rio de Janeiro.

**1966**

Volpi was honored with a special room at the 1<sup>st</sup> National Art Biennial in Salvador, BA; he also showed at the exhibition “The Grupo Santa Helena Today,” at Galeria 4 Planetas, in São Paulo.

Painted the fresco “Vision of Don Bosco”, at Palácio Itamaraty, in Brasília.

**1967**

Showed in the group exhibition “The São Paulo Artistic Family: Thirty Years Later,” at the Auditório Itália, in São Paulo.

**1968**

His works are shown as part of the Tamagny Collection of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, shown at the museum.

**1969**

Cosme Velho Galeria de Arte, pf São Paulo, organizes the exhibition “20 years (1948-1968) in the painting of Alfredo Volpi” as a tribute to the artist.

*Along the 1960s, Volpi’s painting veered toward informal abstraction, with great color fields peopled by arcades, sails, poles and ribbons that hover over the surfaces; his gesture makes a more profound imprint. At the same time, his little flags are gradually arranged into dynamic compositions, in which they are juxtaposed so as to create kinetic effects that reveal luminous colors and the intense use of velatura.*

#### **The 1970s**

**1970**

Volpi was awarded the Grand Prize for Painting at the exhibition “Panorama of the Current Brazilian Art: Painting” held at Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo. He also showed at the inaugural exhibition of Galeria Astréia, in São Paulo, and at Petite Galerie, in Rio de Janeiro.

**1971**

Showed at Galeria Ralph Camargo and Galeria Astréia, in São Paulo; was honored by the Museu da Imagem e do Som, of Rio de Janeiro, with the



Alfredo Volpi

Golden Dolphin Prize for the best exhibition of the year.

*In the first half of the 1970s, Volpi’s painting gradually dismissed the narrative elements that had distinguished it in the preceding decades, and drew nearer abstraction. Now the artist concentrated in the creation of optical illusion and kinetic effects obtained with fabrics of little flags traversed by poles and ogives.*

**1972**

Volpi’s wife died.

Presented his works in São Paulo in the exhibition “Week of ‘22. Precedents and consequences,” at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, and in the exhibition “Brazilian Themes,” at Paço das Artes. In São Paulo, Galeria Azulão showed Volpi’s works in the exhibition “Grupo Santa Helena: drawings”; in Rio de Janeiro, Galeria Barcinsky presented the exhibition “Volpi: a few selected works (1925/1972)”.

A major retrospective of the artist was staged at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, organized by Aracy Amaral.

**1973**

Showed at the exhibition “Eight painters of the Grupo Santa Helena” at Galeria Uirapuru, in São Paulo, and at the 1<sup>st</sup> Brazil-Japan Art Show organized by the Fundação Messiânica do Brasil, in São Paulo. Volpi also presented his works in a one-person exhibition at Cosme Velho Galeria de Arte, in São Paulo.

**1974**

Showed at Galeria de Arte Ipanema, in Rio de Janeiro and in the exhibition “Fourteen artists of modern Brazil” organized at the Department of Cultural Affairs, subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Culture, in São Paulo.

**1975**

The Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo organized a major retrospective of Volpi’s oeuvre, featuring more than 300 works produced between 1914 and 1975.

The artist showed at the exhibitions “Forty years of the Grupo Santa Helena”, at Paço das Artes, and “Modernism: from 1917 to 1930,” at the Museu Lasar Segall, in São Paulo.

Presented his works at the “2<sup>nd</sup> Brazil-Japan Art Show” organized by Fundação Messiânica in São Paulo and in Rio de Janeiro.





Volpi painting, 1970s

#### 1976

Showed in a one-person exhibition at Cosme Velho Galeria de Arte and in the exhibition “Artists and Olivetti” at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, in São Paulo. The Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Campinas José Pancetti organized the retrospective “Volpi: a visão essencial” [Volpi: the essential vision], curated by Olívio Tavares de Araújo. Presented his work at a solo exhibition at the Porto Alegre offices of the Brazilian Institute of Architects.

Showed in the group exhibitions “Brazilian Art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: paths and trends,” at Galeria de Arte Global, in São Paulo, and in “Brazil: artists of the 20th century” at Centre d’Art Plastique Contemporain, in Paris, France.

Attended the following exhibitions in São Paulo: “Panorama of the Current Brazilian Art: Painting,” at the Museu de Arte Moderna; “Collection Theon Spanudis”, at the University of São Paulo’s Museu de Arte Contemporânea; “The Salons: São Paulo Artistic Family, May, and São Paulo Artists’ Union,” at the Museu Lasar Segall, and “Santeiros Imaginários” [Imaginary Makers of Saint Images], at Paço das Artes.

#### 1977

Showed in the exhibition “Grupo Santa Helena. Grupo Seibi,” at Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado, in São Paulo.

Presented his works at the exhibition “Brazilian Constructive Project in Art (1950-1962),” at Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo and the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro. Volpi’s works also integrated the exhibitions “Colecionadores nas arcadas” [Collectors at the Arcades], at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo and the “3<sup>rd</sup> Brazil-Japan Art Show” organized by Fundação Messiânica do Brasil, in São Paulo.

#### 1978

Presented works in the exhibition “The biennials and abstraction: the 1950s,” at the Museu Lasar Segall, as well as in the exhibition “Alfredo Volpi: constructivism. Temperas,” staged at Cosme Velho Galeria de Arte, both in São Paulo.

Showed in Rio de Janeiro in the exhibition “Constructivist and figurative works in the Collection Theon Spanudis” held at Centro de Artes Porto Seguro, and in the exhibition “Art Now III — América Latina: a sensible geometry,” at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro.

#### 1979

Presented his work at the 15<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial; showed at the Galeria Ipanema, in Rio de Janeiro. The University of São Paulo’s Museu de Arte Contemporânea staged an important set of Volpi’s works in the exhibition “Collection Theon Spanudis”; his production was also shown in two group shows organized in São Paulo, “Four colorists: Volpi, Boese, Barsotti, Thomaz,” at Christina Faria de Paula Galeria de Arte, and “Drawings in the 1940s”, at the Mário de Andrade Municipal Library.

#### The 1980s

##### 1980

Showed solo at Galeria Oswaldo Goeldi, at the Fundação Nacional de Arte, in Brasília; in São Paulo, Galeria A Ponte organized the exhibition “Volpi’s little big works: three decades of painting” in the artist’s honor, and in Rio de Janeiro, Acervo Galeria de Arte presented “Temperas by Alfredo Volpi.”

##### 1981

The Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo displayed Volpi’s works in the exhibition “Arte Transcendente” [Transcendent Art]; the artist’s training period was revisited in the show “The early years and the 1920s” at Cosme Velho Galeria de Arte, in São Paulo. The exhibition “Volpi metafísico” [A metaphysical Volpi] was shown at the Operations Control Center of the São Paulo subway company. The artist’s works were presented at the exhibitions “From modern to contemporary in the Gilberto Chateaubriand Collection,” at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, and “Brazilian artists from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” at Fundação Pierre Chalita, in Maceió. In São Paulo, his work was present in the group shows “Rebolo and the painters of the Santa Helena”, at Dan Galeria, and the “5<sup>th</sup> Brazil-Japan Art Show” organized by Fundação Messiânica do Brasil.

##### 1982

Showed at Galeria Ipanema, in Rio de Janeiro, and at the exhibitions “Seascapes and River Scenes,” at the Museu Lasar Segall, and “From Modernism to the Biennial,” at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo.

##### 1984

Presented his works at the exhibition “Portrait and self-portrait of Brazilian art. Collection Gilberto Chateaubriand,” held at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo. Showed solo at Oscar Seráfico Galeria

de Arte, in Brasília. In São Paulo, his works integrated the exhibitions “Tradição e ruptura” [Tradition and rupture], at Fundação Bienal, and “The great masters of Brazilian abstract art,” organized by the Sociedade de Amigos dos Museus do Brasil [Friends of Brazilian Museums Society] in several European cities, and in New York and Washington, D.C.

**1985**

Dan Galeria, of São Paulo, honored the artist with the exhibition “Volpi: 89 anos” [Volpi: 89 years]; in Rio de Janeiro, Galeria Bonino presented the exhibition “Alfredo Volpi: 1960-1985.” His works were shown in Curitiba, in the exhibition “Barsotti, Ianelli, Tomie, Volpi,” at Simões de Assis Galeria de Arte. The exhibition “Osirarte” at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo featured tiles painted by Volpi. His works are shown in a special room at the 7<sup>th</sup> National Art Salon, in Rio de Janeiro.

**1986**

The exhibition “Alfredo Volpi: 90 anos. Um registro documental por Calixto” [Alfredo Volpi: 90 years. A documental record by Calixto] was organized at the University of São Paulo’s Museu de Arte Contemporânea as a tribute to the artist. The Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo presented works from 1914 to 1982 in the retrospective “Volpi: 90 anos” curated by Olívio Tavares de Araújo.

Showed in the exhibition “Seven decades of Italian presence in Brazilian art,” at the Paço Imperial, in Rio de Janeiro.

**1987**

Contorno Galeria de Arte, of Rio de Janeiro, presented “A. Volpi. Obras de diferentes décadas” [A. Volpi: Works from Different Decades]; his works were shown in the exhibition “Modernité: Art Brésilien du 20<sup>ème</sup> Siècle” [Modernity: 20<sup>th</sup>-century Brazilian Art] staged at the Musée D’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and brought to São Paulo in 1988, to be shown at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo.

**1988**

His works were shown in São Paulo in the exhibition “Brasíliana: o homem e a terra” [Braziliana: man and the land] presented at the Pinacoteca do Estado, and at Cosme Velho Galeria de Arte, in the exhibition “Volpi: 90 anos. Homenagem de amigos” [Volpi: 90 years. A tribute from his friends] organized in his honor.

Alfredo Volpi died in May, in São Paulo.



Alfredo Volpi in his studio

From 1988 to date, small and large exhibitions were organized in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília in honor of Alfredo Volpi. Some among them are particularly noteworthy: “Volpi: projetos e estudos. Em retrospectiva: décadas 40/70” [Volpi: designs and studies. In retrospective: the 1940s-70s] shown at the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, in 1993; “Volpi,” at the Museu do Banco Central, in Brasília, and at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, in Rio de Janeiro, in 1996; and the special room organized at the 24<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial, presenting a significant set of works by the painter.

The principal publications on Alfredo Volpi published as from 1988 include: ARAÚJO, Olívio Tavares de. Volpi: projetos e estudos. En retrospectiva: décadas 40/70. São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado-Raízes, 1993; KLINTOWITZ, Jacob. Volpi: noventa anos. São Paulo: Sesc, 1989; MAMMÌ, Lorenzo. Volpi. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify Edições, 1999. (Série Espaços da Arte Brasileira); SALZSTEIN, Sônia. Volpi. Rio de Janeiro: Campos Gerais/Sílvia Roesler, 2000.

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