

**Provocative and Playful: Cildo Meireles**  
by Cynthia Valdez

**Cildo Meireles**  
Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporaneo (MUAC)  
Insurgentes Sur 3000, Centro Cultural Universitario, CP 04510 Mexico City, Mexico  
July 4, 2009 - January 10, 2010



The trouble with Cildo Meireles is that his work doesn't quite feel like it belongs in a museum.

The Brazilian artist plays with colors, shapes, sounds and environments in a way that hearkens back to jungle gym days, when breaking stuff, losing track of time and going barefoot were acceptable behavior. Luckily I was able to restrain myself long enough to not get kicked out of the retrospective at the MUAC.



For Meireles, perception is the most direct point of access- in *Red Shift I. Impregnation*, the viewer is immersed in a sea of crimson red. The furniture, wall-to-wall carpeting, the paintings, all are red. Around the corner darkness falls and we can barely make out a dripping faucet. But something is somehow amiss, and upon approaching we realize that the sink with faucet is tilted and the water is also blood red. The effect is one of a sudden, violent vertigo, walking away was as if I had just stepped off of a steamer ship, —it took a few seconds to regain my footing.

Stepping onto the shards of glass in *Através (Across)* was visceral. Dangerous. Even without the various barricades and obstacles peppered throughout the work the sound and sensation of glass crunching underneath my feet was enough to incite memories of trodding through alleyways in the shady part of some distant town at night. I caught sight of a slightly anxious-looking father clutching tightly onto his toddler's hand as they navigated the space together.

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*Fontes* disorients in a different way; the walls are covered in clocks set at different times. A loud arrhythmic ticking assaults in surround sound. A spiral of tape measures tacked onto the ceiling swallows you up and spits you back out again, unsure whether you still inhabit the same dimension.

*Insertions into ideological circuits: Coca-Cola project*, an earlier work, was Meireles' foray into readymade territory. Attempting to reach as wide an audience as possible, the artist engraved various messages onto glass Coca-Cola bottles, which at the time would be recycled and refilled with the fizzy beverage. Some examples of messages are "How to make a Molotov cocktail," "Yankee go home," and "What is the place of the work of art?"



In a recent interview about his work, Meireles noted that he, as did many artists of his generation, incorporated political messages into his work because he didn't feel he had an option. "In some way you become political when you don't have a chance to be poetic. I think human beings would rather be poetic."

Although Meireles seems to avoid the use of the word "repression," it is worth recalling that Brazil's military regime, which prevented some of Meireles' work from traveling to the Paris Biennale, in turn provoked an international boycott of Sao Paulo's biennale. The countries' art industry was thereby severely stifled. It seems rather logical that in a country whose creative outlets had been effectively blocked by the government, other forms of distribution had to be sought out. *Insertions into ideological circuits* was Meireles' response to a congested market, whose desperate need to breathe provided its creators with the impetus to fabricate new forms of expression.



Despite his purported choice of the critical over the poetic, Cildo Meireles' politics of sensuality manage to make room for both. Never preachy, the micro universes he creates envelop the viewer in a set of sensory cues that compel as much as they convey meaning. The viewer is invited to touch, penetrate, listen and linger. However, participation isn't the focus of Meireles' work; he isn't inviting us to sit down and have a curry with him or pick up an instrument and start riffing. Instead, it's as if the artist were playing a game of Pictionary with us: an enormous tower of haphazardly-placed radios all tuned to different stations, emitting a cacophony of sounds? ...*Babel*? Your guess might then be "The medium is the message."

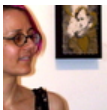
What other artists accomplish by confronting directly, Meireles achieves through playfulness. Perhaps like Hayes code-era American filmmakers who learned the craft of subtly alluding to sexuality, Meireles has learned to understate. Nonetheless, it is a calculated playfulness that at times can seem a bit manipulative; how else to respond when one enters a room barefoot, filled with the smell of gas, a hissing sound and a lit candle in the corner, as in *Volatile*? The heart rate speeds up, the palms become moist and the flight-or-fight response activates itself. But perhaps this is art as it should be, provocative, physical, a little threatening, yet ultimately illuminating.

-Cynthia Valdez

[Images: **Cildo Meireles**, *Babel (detail)*, 200, Fotografia Wilton Montenegro; *Red Shift I: Impregnation (detail)*, 1967-1984, Tate Photography; *Fontes*, 1992-2008, Tate Photography; *Zero Cruceiro Cero Cruceiros*, 1974-1978, Fotografia Wilton Montenegro; *Euroka/Blindhotland*, 1970-1975, Tate, Donación del American Fund for the Tate Galery 2007; Fotografia Wilton Montenegro; Courtesy of the artist and Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporaneo (MUAC)]

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**Childo Meirles art**

His work is stunning and rather overwhelming, and I haven't seen the actual work, but only photos! Truly impressive art! Eva Waldauf - Artist, Writer and Art Instructor

Comment by: [Eva Waldauf](#) on Wednesday 12/09/09 at 04:28 AM

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