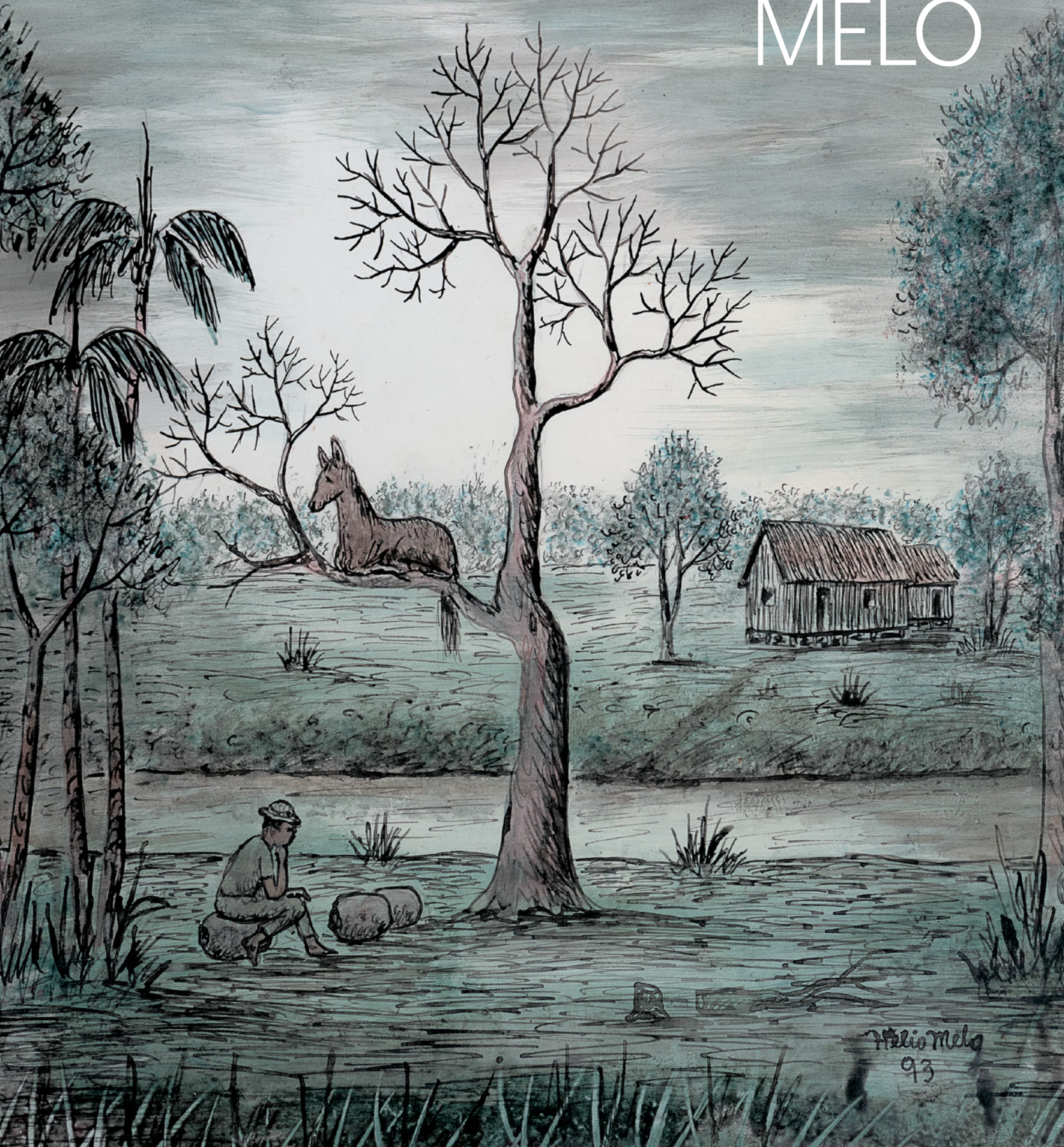


HÉLIO MELO



Hélio Melo
93



HÉLIO
MELO



© LAGO [THE LAKE], 1996



SERINGUEIRA [RUBBER TREE], 1987

12

HÉLIO MELO

JACOPO CRIVELLI VISCONTI

46

HÉLIO MELO'S WORLD

TONY GROSS

156

THE UNTIMELY CONTEMPORARINESS OF HÉLIO MELO

LISETTE LAGNADO

254

HÉLIO MELO: THE ARTIST OF THE FOREST

FLÁVIA BURLAMAQUI

CAMPO ABERTO [OPEN FIELD], 1997





COLHENDO LÁTEX [COLLECTING LATEX], 1980



O BARRAÇÃO I
[THE COMPANY STORE I], 1985

HÉLIO MELO

JACOPO CRIVELLI VISCONTI

SERINGUEIRAS [RUBBER TREES], 1989



To open up the path in the forest we have the *mateiro*, and the *toqueiro*, the helper. Some *mateiros* are curious and trust their machetes. Some go by the sun, and there are also the ones born with the gift. They come and go anytime, as if they were holding a compass.

Hélio Melo. *O caucho, a seringueira e seus mistérios* [The Caucho, The Rubber Tree and Their Mysteries] (1986)

As has been already observed, despite the apparent simplicity or even innocence of his work, what really matters in Hélio Melo's drawings and paintings cannot be found on the surface, "the artist's main work is behind what he paints or makes".¹ In the majority of his works, the structure of the scene is conventional, with a foreground close to the floor, formed by low plants or tall grasses, and vertical elements (mainly trees) that close the scene on both sides. And it is in the space delimited by these two axes that we see the characters. The works are theatrical or cinematic constructions of space, which suggest a staging or a *mise-en-scène*, rather than a flat, direct and naïve reproduction of reality. Additionally, several themes in which these characters appear are recurrent, repeated with little change, years later, which reinforces the analogy of theatrical representation. Evidently, these considerations are not accessories for the understanding of the artist's work, given that they reveal a full mastery of pictorial and iconographic resources, very far from the simplicity mentioned above. But there is another aspect that must be mentioned about his work, where we must look to what lies behind, to the background. The real protagonist is almost always, in fact, in the background rather than the foreground. In most works we see human beings and animals, sometimes alone, at other times in more or less numerous groups. His works feature, with the same degree of naturalness, rubber tappers busy with the many tasks of harvesting; Indigenous people going back to their villages after hunting; women and children play-



ing or working near their houses; animals of all kinds moving around the forest, hunting or being hunted; mythical beings from the forest such as the *Mapinguari*, the *Curupira* and the Mother of the Forest; and also hybrid creatures, emerging from the artist's imagination, such as the man-donkey and the bull-tree, close relatives of the donkeys that ride on horses or trees, indolently looking at the men and women working for them. Even in the works where the emphasis is on the stories that these characters are telling, like actors in a theater play, there is always another presence, that antecedes them, that contains and conjures their own existence and the unfolding of the narrative: the forest. The forest is the real protagonist. And we can say that the forest is the protagonist, rather than only a character, or even less so only the stage where the narrative unfolds, because the forest is as alive as the rest of the characters. In this sense, it is not by chance that Melo's practice abounds with drawings and paintings where the aim is to "only" portray the forest in different moments of the day, with its endless changes of color, atmosphere and tonality. Even if in a non-conventional or non-linear way, these works also tell a story because the forest portrayed by the artist is a living and conscious organism.

¹ Dalmir Ferreira, *Hélio Melo: apenas um simples homem da Amazônia*. Acre Federal University, 22 March, 2001, available at <www2.ufac.br/site/noticias/ufac-na-imprensa/edicoes-2001/marco/helio-melo-apanas-um-homem-da-amazonia> Last access on January 9th, 2023.

The side to which the rubber tree tilts indicates where the next one is. There is also another mystery: each rubber tree has an indent, that is, the place where the cut begins, that gives more latex than the other—it is the place where the sun rises.

Hélio Melo. *O caucho, a seringueira e seus mistérios* [The Caucho, The Rubber Tree and Their Mysteries] (1986)

The forest portrayed by Melo is, at the same time, ancestral, mythical and fabulous, but it is also extremely current, especially when we think that in the more than twenty years that separate us from the artist's death, the understanding of the plant kingdom as having feelings and thoughts comparable to those of the animal kingdom has become something widely accepted. In the recent writings by North American anthropologist Eduardo Kohn, for instance, we see the emergence of the image of a forest *that thinks*, to cite the title of his most well-known book:² a forest in which there is no physical or clear separation between plants and animals, and where other languages and other forms of communication are present and organize collective life; a collectiveness that transcends specific groups (humans, jaguars, plants, monkeys, etc.) and is indefinitely expanded with no borders. In an analogous way, the forest painted by Melo is an organism that feeds and is fed, which manifests many forms of violence and destruction, which cries with the animals, which feels, suffers and talks in its own way. The forest is, therefore, not only thinking but also sentient, a living and reactive universe in which everything is closely linked. The breath of every living being is, in its genesis, the breath of plants, as stated by the Italian philosopher Emanuele Coccia.³ The air that we breathe, produced by plants, is the invisible element which all living beings feed off and in which they move, live and die.

² Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. London, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013.

³ This thought appears in a direct or indirect way in most of Coccia's writing, in particular in Emanuele Coccia, *La vita delle piante: Metafisica della mescolanza*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2018.





The green, which is predominant in all Melo's works (with the significant and devastating exception of the few drawings that portray the city or forest devastation scenes) is the most visual translation of this theory: all creatures, literally, feed off the forest. And it is suggestive to think that the most precise, and at the same time the most poetic, image to represent this thought is not the image of the hunter coming back from hunting, or the jaguar ready to pounce, but of the rubber tapper, alone in the immense forest, filling his small cup with latex oozing from a gigantic rubber tree, literally extracting his sustenance from the great mother tree. And the liquid is extracted consciously and respectfully so the tree can always survive and prosper, differently from what happens when the extraction is done not with the aim of co-existing but exploitation. "These people from the South bleed the rubber tree from top to bottom, in a single go; they don't respect the forest, they destroy the chestnut tree to plant bananas and they kill the manatee for fun".⁴ Directly or indirectly, several drawings and paintings by Melo suggest that things are organized and articulated based on the forest, revealing the comparability between the characters that appear in the scene. His work has often been perceived as a large-scale historical fresco representing the saga of rubber tappers, and this interpretation is certainly accurate and fundamental to understanding the artist's conception of his own work. However, it is also important to highlight that in the filigree of this saga, he is suggesting a view of the world, or at least a view of an ecosystem in which there is no hierarchy between species. In one of his drawings, for instance, a man in the bottom right corner, in the foreground, is pointing his gun at a monkey perched on a tree in the top left corner; in another one, a man occupies the place of the monkey, while a jaguar takes the place where the man was before. It is difficult to think of a more suggestive iconography for the perspectivist conception of many Amerindians populations, which has been described and analyzed, amongst others, by the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro:⁵ All the animals move in an imaginary potentially endless line, in which they are sometimes the prey and at other times the hunter, depending on the perspective from where they are looking and from where they are being looked at. At the same time, each animal considers themselves human, seeing in themselves qualities and characteristics that distinguish them from (other) animals.

⁴ Statement to Tereza Moreira, in "A travessia de um seringueiro", *Revista Brasil Agrícola* (1987), p.38. Melo's sentence sums up the exploitation and destruction rationale that the *paulistas* (people from São Paulo) took to Acre in the 1970s, described with great precision by Tony Gross in his text included in the present publication.

⁵ See, amongst many other fundamental works: Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Metafísicas canibais: elementos para uma antropologia pós-estrutural*. São Paulo: Ubu Editora, 2018.

O CAÇADOR III [THE HUNTER III], 1994



O CAÇADOR E A ONÇA PÉ DE BOI [THE HUNTER AND THE OBSTINATE JAGUAR], 1996



The Indigenous people are still saying “our land”,
but they should be saying “this land that is not ours”.

Hélio Melo. *História da Amazônia* [History of the Amazon] (1984)



To place the work of Hélio Melo in tension or resonance with the thought and writing of Viveiros de Castro and other contemporary authors is a way of reaffirming its topicality, its urgency and the need to look at his work again or, to a certain extent, to finally start looking at his work without the limitation of a superficial reading that seeks to limit the scope and depth of his practice with the use of concepts such as naivety and simplicity. In a text written for this publication, Lisette Lagnado analyzes the reason behind Melo’s invitation to take part in the 27th Bienal de São Paulo, curated by her in 2006, subtly suggesting the need to trace other genealogies and to identify other links in contemporary art for this oeuvre and poetics. Lagnado underlines, for instance, affinities with the work of Hélio Oiticica, whose closeness to the marginalized fringes of Brazilian society fully justify the link with Melo’s empathic representation of the tragedy of rubber cycles. In this sense, the absence of his work from the 20th century Brazilian art canon can be considered paradigmatic of a recurrent strategy to disregard or consciously erase artistic and cultural practices that condemn or attempt to bring to the agenda historical processes of exploitation and annihilation that afflict huge portions of the Brazilian population. This erasure and absence connect Melo’s practice—if we opt to remain only in the expanded and organic field of forest peoples—to the numerous exponents of Indigenous contemporary art (in line with Jaider Esbell’s definition), not only to Brazilian art, with which his work can also be associated for the naturality typical of many artists with an Indigenous background who manage to produce artworks that are ontologically, rather than superficially, political and engaged.

TERRA INDÍGENA [INDIGENOUS LAND], 1992



INDÍGENA [INDIGENOUS PERSON], 1989



TAPIRÍ [SHACK], 1994

The ethical dimension of denunciation and protest against the physical violence to which the rubber tappers, Indigenous people and the forest itself are subjected to is, in the work of these artists, indissociable from the reaffirmation of respect for the potentially uncontrollable power of nature. In the work of Indigenous artists from different parts of the world, it is also recurrent to revisit myths of origin that can and should be understood, today more than ever, as symbolic of our current reality. Cataclysmic events, fires, deluges, floods, the *falling sky*,⁶ are episodes hanging between fables from a mythical time and premonitions whose fulfillment the (self-) destructive attitude of the Anthropocene seem to be yearning for. In these myths, we often find creatures never seen before, metamorphoses and fusions between men, animals and plants. Their existence is proof of the exceptionality of the times, it helps to situate the moment of the narrative both within history (as the characters are, in their majority, perfectly recognizable and familiar, if not historically identifiable) and outside history (as the existence of the mythical being is, by definition, impossible to confirm). It is in this metahistorical, symbolical, political, poetical and allegorical dimension, in which the frontiers between the possible and the impossible, life and death, memory and oblivion, are abolished, that the works of major Indigenous contemporary artists are situated, as well as some of the most powerful novels of Latin American magic realism. In an absolutely instinctive way, almost by osmosis, Melo seems to have positioned himself in an analogous place, the place of the creator of a universe that is at the same time mythical and precisely metaphorical, that allows him to describe through symbols a moment of transition, of irreversible and tragic transformation, marking the end of one world and the beginning of another, and, like any other event of this proportion in the history of humanity, it is accompanied by the cataclysm of destruction (of the forest) and the presence of mythical beings (those of Indigenous cosmogony but also those stemming from the artist's own imagination). Melo's forest has the same allegorical power as Gabriel García Márquez's Macondo: it is a place where violence, sorrow, humiliation and suffering is conjured, but also, despite it all, a place where there is room for poetry, love and beauty. In other words, it is a place where life in its most pure and direct form manifests.

6 See Bruce Albert and Davi Kopenawa, *A queda do céu: palavras de um xamã yanomami*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2015.



The Jaguar has such power in its gaze that it attracts the prey by looking at it. For example, the Monkey: it begins to scream as if it was anesthetized and gradually starts to come down to where the Jaguar can reach it. The same happens with the Guan, the Curassow and other animals.

Hélio Melo. *Os mistérios da caça* [The Mysteries of Hunting] (1985)



CORTANDO SERINGA
[TAPPING RUBBER], 1995

Even if we reaffirm the need to draw parallels and resonances with so many contemporary artists, writers and thinkers—a task that is only drafted in this book and in this essay—it is incontestable that Hélio Melo's life trajectory and themes make him an artist who is difficult to categorize in the Brazilian and international art panorama of the 20th century. Firstly, because his work, even though not autobiographical, is constituted both by a precise and poetic portray of his life experiences, as well as by the lives of thousands of rubber tapping families, and, more widely, the lives of millions of vulnerable Brazilian men and women, which the Brazilian state has subjected, either by omission, convenience or even deliberate planning, to centuries of genocidal necropolitics. The illuminating essay by Tony Gross, included in this book, describes how several historical episodes that took place between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 21st contributed to turning Acre, in general, and more specifically the microcosm of rubber plantations, into a sort of laboratory of violence and abuse that the precarious existence of many people makes possible. However, Melo is different from the majority of contemporary artists who use art as an instrument of criticism and militancy because he transcends the tone of explicit denunciation of the exploitation of an unprepared and uncared for labor force and enters the mythical and the fantastical by convening beings and fables from ancestral forest cultures, with images and allegories that symbolize and sum up the violent transformation of society and the landscape. The presence of this fantastical and symbolical element must be understood in its role of precise allegory of identifiable historical processes and characters: the glass-wearing man-donkey sitting on a chair with his incomprehensible papers, while everyone else is working represents, for example, the *Paulista* (man from São Paulo), who arrives to

take possession of the land and the labor force in the Amazon, backed up by a supposed legality. The cow-tree personifies the transformation of the forest landscape into pasture, a shift promoted by the same *Paulistas* and by a profoundly mistaken idea of progress that drove the military government at the time. The work of Hélio Melo does not become less explicit or more distant from reality because of the presence of these fantastical elements. Conversely, it can and must be read as a brave and vehement denunciation of a sequence of ecological crimes, tacitly allowed or carefully organized by the Brazilian state, which the artist experienced first-hand throughout his life and that, in the last decades, have become increasingly more blatant, aggressive and challenging for those who fight against them. Beyond his oeuvre itself, this interpretation of his practice is corroborated by the several booklets that the artist published throughout his life, which exude a sense of injustice in relation to all sorts of offenses and crimes (environmental, social, political), which must be condemned and remedied, as well as by the numerous interviews he gave, mainly to local newspapers, in which Melo explains his extremely critical view of life in Acre and the living conditions of rubber tappers. The artist manages to merge, in paintings and drawings that are apparently unassuming, a faithful portrayal of the methodical and ignorant destruction of the forest and the promotion of the need to create other alliances amongst its true custodians, something which was proposed at the time by activists and environmentalists such as Chico Mendes, who also worked and fought for the legal acknowledgment of the revolutionary concept of an extractive reserve.⁷

7 Tony Gross' essay published in this book contextualizes with great precision these struggles and their pioneering nature.





TEMPO DOS CORONÉIS II
[TIME OF THE COLONELS II], 1994

All prey have their own time. The Deer, in a new moon, has very little judgment, so to kill it you must use a trap or waiting. When the moon is full, the Deer's judgment is big, so it is the best time to kill it, even on the move, that is, without waiting.

Hélio Melo. *Os mistérios da caça* [The Mysteries of Hunting] (1985)

[The *Tiranabóia*] is a Butterfly of 13 centimeters more or less that eats oil. Its perfect home is the *copaiba*, which is a tree with lots of oil. When it lands on a tree that has no oil, the tree soon begins to die.

Hélio Melo. *Os mistérios da caça* [The Mysteries of Hunting] (1985)

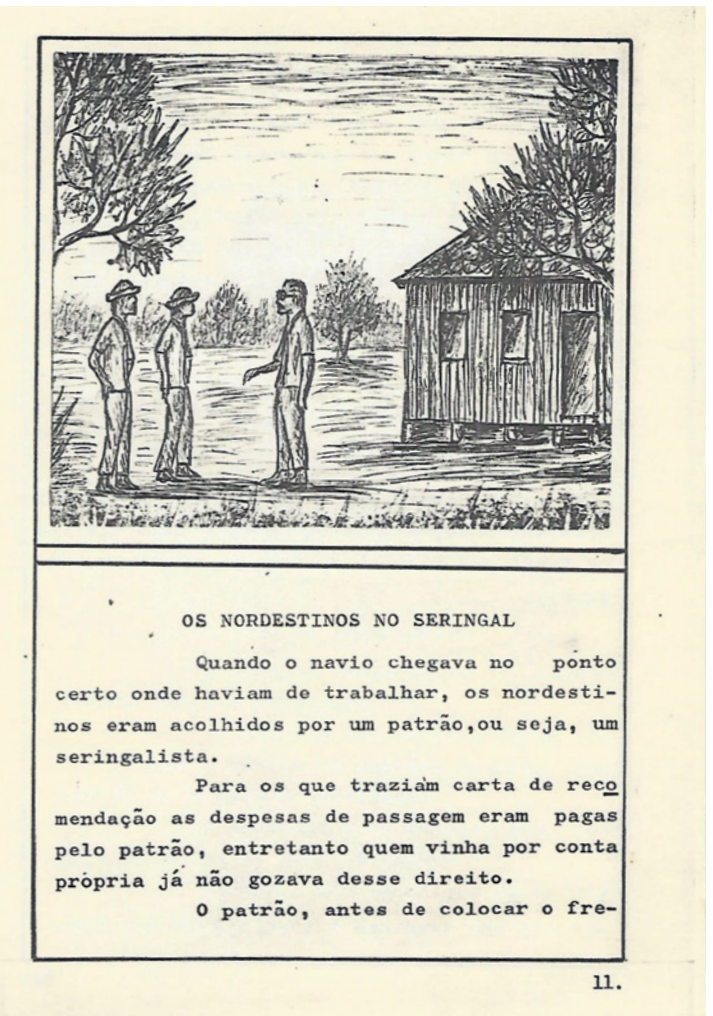
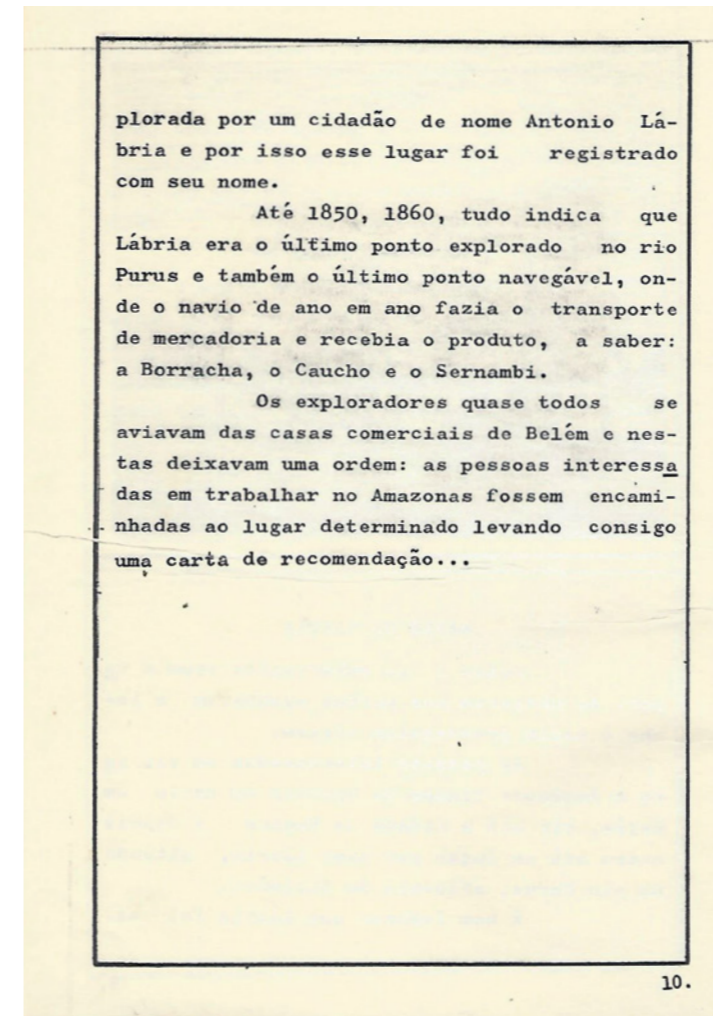
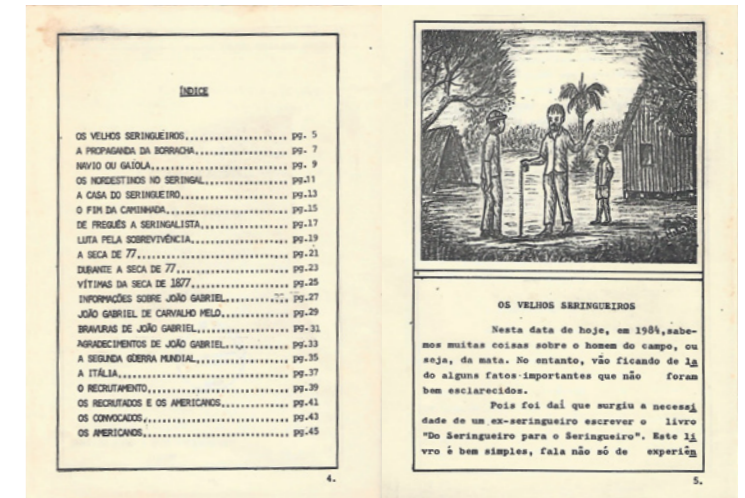
In the work of Hélio Melo, both in his drawings and paintings, and the booklets cited throughout this text as a poetic counterpoint, anchoring us to the forest, the mentions and allusions to an organic and osmotic thought of the forest and all its beings are frequent. This is a physical, corporeal, instinctive type of thought, which is, nonetheless, filled with wit, insight, knowledge and mystery, like the titles of most of his booklets. Something which cannot be reduced to a form of Enlightened, allegedly rational, thought, which, mainly in regions of the world such as the Amazon, has been applied to promote and justify all kinds of atrocities and destruction. In this sense, his work is a portrait of violence but also of the sublime beauty and immensity of the forest, its silent, deep existence. An existence that no one today can pretend not to know, that is precarious, fragile and irreplaceable. Hélio Melo's work is, like all truly powerful bodies of work, both a scream and a whisper, an elegy and a call to every one of us, no exceptions made, so we can do our part before it is too late.

HISTÓRIA DA AMAZÔNIA—DO SERINGUEIRO PARA O SERINGUEIRO
[HISTORY OF THE AMAZON—FROM ONE SERINGUEIRO TO ANOTHER], 1985

HISTÓRIA DA AMAZÔNIA—DO SERINGUEIRO PARA O SERINGUEIRO
[HISTORY OF THE AMAZON—FROM ONE SERINGUEIRO TO ANOTHER], 1985

“OS NORDESTINOS NO SERINGAL” [“NORTHEASTERNS IN THE SERINGAL”]
HÉLIO MELO, BOOKLET “HISTÓRIA DA AMAZÔNIA” [HISTORY OF THE AMAZON], 1984

NEXT DOUBLE SPREAD:
AMANHECER [DAWN], 1985









SERINGAL II [SERINGAL II], 1991





Helio Melo
9-81



UNTITLED, 1989



UNTITLED, 1980

HÉLIO MELO'S WORLD

TONY GROSS



IVAN DE CASTELA AND HÉLIO MELO
LOADING THE BAGGAGE

SÍLVIO MARGARIDO FILMING HÉLIO MELO
FOR THE DOCUMENTARY "A PELEJA DE HÉLIO MELO
COM O MAPINGUARI DO ANTIMARY"
[HÉLIO MELO'S BATTLE WITH THE MAPINGUARI
OF ANTIMARY], 1997



In April 1959, Hélio Melo, aged 33, arrived with his family in Rio Branco, capital of the then Brazilian federal territory of Acre. He was arriving from the Antimari river, a tributary of the Rio Acre, itself a tributary of the Rio Purus. From the point where it receives the Rio Acre, the Purus flows 1,800 km northwards into the Rio Solimões (as the main Amazon river is known in its upper reaches), which in its turn flows a further 1,800 km eastwards past Manaus to reach Brazil's northern seaboard at Belém. Although the Antimari is by no means the most remote river in the upper Amazon network, it is still the back of beyond—as Brazilians would say, “*onde Judas perdeu as botas*” (where Judas lost his boots).

The world he was leaving behind was that of the *seringal*.¹ He was brought up in a *seringal*—first, his grandfather's Seringal Floresta, then from the age of 12 in the Seringal Senápolis, of which his mother was a part owner. He worked as a *seringueiro* in Senápolis from his teens to his early thirties, became disheartened by a precarious life of grinding, occasionally dangerous work for a meagre living and decided to try his luck in Rio Branco. At one level, this was a case of six of one and half-a-dozen of the other, as he joined an increasing number of ex-*seringueiros* eking out an impoverished existence in this small, isolated, but effervescent city. On another level, it gave him the incentive to develop his artistic talents and a platform to bring the perspectives of the *seringueiro* to wider audiences—first local, then national and ultimately, international.

1 See below and the Glossary for an explanation of this and other terms.

Although he had physically left the world of the forest and the seringal for the city, emotionally and culturally he (and the growing number of urban ex-seringueiros) retained the world of the seringal at the forefront of their imagination, imbuing the life and work of the seringueiro with an importance sometimes hard to appreciate by those unfamiliar with its customs and relations. They followed events in a world being lost to seemingly irresistible economic and political forces and the resulting acts of resistance to their dispossession by an increasingly mobilized network of seringueiros and their supporters.

This was *seu*² Hélio's world. His paintings, his writings, the music he made—all draw on life in the seringal. He portrayed the art of tapping rubber, the skills involved, the instruments employed, the animals with whom the seringueiro co-existed, and the mythical (or perhaps not so mythical) creatures a seringueiro had to acknowledge or take precautions against when moving about the forest.

Behind the affectionate and seemingly playful images there lay a deep anger at how the ways of the seringal were being lost, at the violence and injustice of the process of its transformation from forest to pasture, and at the impacts on its human and non-human populations.

However, if his art portrays a world being remade, a way of life being lost, with its associated social violence and environmental degradation, like the man himself, the portrait is nuanced and indirect, self-deprecating, gently didactic, and not overtly confrontational. He does not depict the armed stand-offs between seringueiros and ranchers, there are no direct references to companions murdered for resisting dispossession. However, these realities would be understood by the local audience he won from the 1970s on, many of whom would be directly or indirectly involved in or impacted by the issues in one way or another.

To understand *seu* Hélio's world we need to answer a set of basic questions: what was the culture of the seringal and how did it come into being? How did Acre end up in Brazil and not Bolivia? Why is the culture of a remote Amazon region so heavily influenced by that of the semi-arid northeast of Brazil, particularly the state of Ceará? What was the life of a seringueiro, and how did it change over the course of the 20th century? What were the relationships between the indigenous populations, millennial inhabitants of the region, and incoming Brazilians, and how has this played out over the century and a half of contact, conflict, and accommodation? How did this territory, physically and culturally remote even to Brazilians, suddenly emerge at the end of the twentieth century at the epicentre of global environmental politics? What was *seu* Hélio's contribution?

² 'Seu', an abbreviation of 'senhor', is a common usage in everyday Brazilian Portuguese to signify respect, affection, and informality, when used with the man's first name. It tends not to be used in formal situations or when referring to high-status individuals. (The equivalent for women is 'dona'.) In Rio Branco, Hélio Melo was universally addressed/referred to as 'seu Hélio', and this treatment will be used here.



CATRAIA, THE MEANS OF CROSSING THE ACRE RIVER. IN THE BACKGROUND, A VIEW OF THE JUSCELINO KUBITSCHEK BRIDGE (METALLIC BRIDGE) UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN THE 1960S. WITH ITS INAUGURATION IN 1971, ALL THE BOATMEN LOST THEIR LIVELIHOODS. 1969/1970

The term *seringal* (pl. *seringais*) is often translated into English as a ‘rubber estate’, and perhaps that’s the best we can do. But ‘estate’ implies deliberate cultivation, as in a coffee estate, whereas this doesn’t apply to a *seringal*. It is best understood as an area of forest, stretching back from the river frontage (the *margem*), where natural processes have resulted in rubber trees growing at random, and at low densities. The *seringal* is thus an area of forest claimed as private property, on the basis of legal title or de facto occupation, by an entrepreneur seeking to extract latex from its rubber trees and transport the production downstream for export from Manaus or Belém. The boundaries of the river frontage of the *seringal* will be acknowledged by its neighbours and passing river traffic and may be specified in a title deed lodged in a local land registry, but the further its operations expand back from the river into its interior, the more ill-defined its boundaries become. The entrepreneur in question is the *seringalista*. Depending on its size and how the *seringal* is managed, this title may refer to the ultimate owner, a subsidiary operator, or an administrator. The individual worker, settled by the *seringalista* at individual locations in the forest and who taps the rubber trees for their latex and delivers this to the *seringalista*, is the ‘*seringueiro*’. In its classic form, universal from the late 19th century and persisting through much of the 20th (and still in place until recently in the two westernmost watersheds of the three principal north-flowing Amazon tributaries that comprise Acre), the *seringueiro* was tied by an almost permanent debt to the *seringal*. He (very occasionally she, when a widow or abandoned wife took on the role) was obliged to deliver the rubber collected to the *seringal*’s depot (the *barracão*) at the riverfront for a substantially-below market price payment. He was forbidden to plant subsistence crops or keep domestic animals and obliged to buy foodstuffs and other supplies at inflated prices from the *barracão*. He was thus victim to a system of double exploitation: a marked-down calculation of the value of his production and a marked-up price for his subsistence needs. In the early years, prior to the rubber price crash of 1912, some *seringalistas* became fabulously rich.

DEFUMANDO BORRACHA
[CURING RUBBER], 1980

UNTITLED, 1989



The subordination of the *seringueiro* to a system of debt bondage was enforced by a series of practices, rules, and prohibitions. Transactions between the *seringueiro* and the *barracão* were nominal and ledger-based—no cash circulated in the *seringal*. A bookkeeper kept the accounts of the individual *seringueiros*, recording credits for rubber delivered and debits for goods, tools and equipment, and services provided (the latter might include costs of health treatment or marriage registration provided by visiting dentists, medical workers, or priests). An annual statement of account was presented to the *seringueiro* by the bookkeeper each year, but as *seringueiros* were almost universally illiterate and unable to perform the four basic arithmetical operations, the exercise was a charade. Most years, most *seringueiros* would be told that their expenditure at the *barracão* exceeded their credit and that they continued in debt to the *seringal*. Immobilising its labour force through debt was the *seringalista's* objective and if, during the course of the year it looked as though an individual *seringueiro*, by delivering above-average quantities of rubber or being particularly frugal in his purchases, was heading towards a surplus for the year, the *barracão* would be under instruction to press the *seringueiro* into often unwanted and unnecessary consumption so as to bring the account back into deficit. A *seringueiro* was not free to leave the *seringal*, to seek better conditions in another *seringal*, to move to a local urban settlement, or to return to his native state when he was in debt. Runaway *seringueiros* would be denied boarding by riverboat skippers (the only means of transport out of the *seringal*) and would be pursued and returned by other *seringal* employees on the orders of the foreman or by local police. A *seringueiro* seeking work at another *seringal* would be required to provide evidence that he was in credit with his current *seringal* and thus entitled to change employer. It was forbidden to trade with travelling merchants who might tempt the *seringueiro* with better prices for their rubber or on the sale of trade goods. By and large, *seringueiros* were prohibited from planting food crops or raising domestic animals. The *seringalista's* rationale was that these activities constituted a distraction from the business of tapping the rubber trees, but of course it mainly served to lock the *seringueiro* into the *seringal's* system of debt bondage. Obtaining animal protein through hunting was a permitted exception, except of course that shotguns and ammunition could only be obtained from the *barracão*. In this first iteration of the set of economic and labour relations in the *seringal*, *seringueiros* referred to themselves as a *seringueiro cativo*—a captive or trapped rubber tapper.

Over the course of the 20th century, as a consequence of processes that will be described below, many *seringalistas* gave up active management of their *seringais* and withdrew from controlling the annual cycle of the *seringueiros'* activities. Their role as recipients of the rubber produced and Brazil nuts collected and as suppliers of goods and services was taken over by travelling merchants, often Lebanese, known as a *mascate* or *regatão*. Although these *seringalistas* still claimed proprietorship of the *seringal* and would seek to exercise this right when the opportunity arose to sell the property to arriving ranchers, they effectively abandoned the *seringal* and left

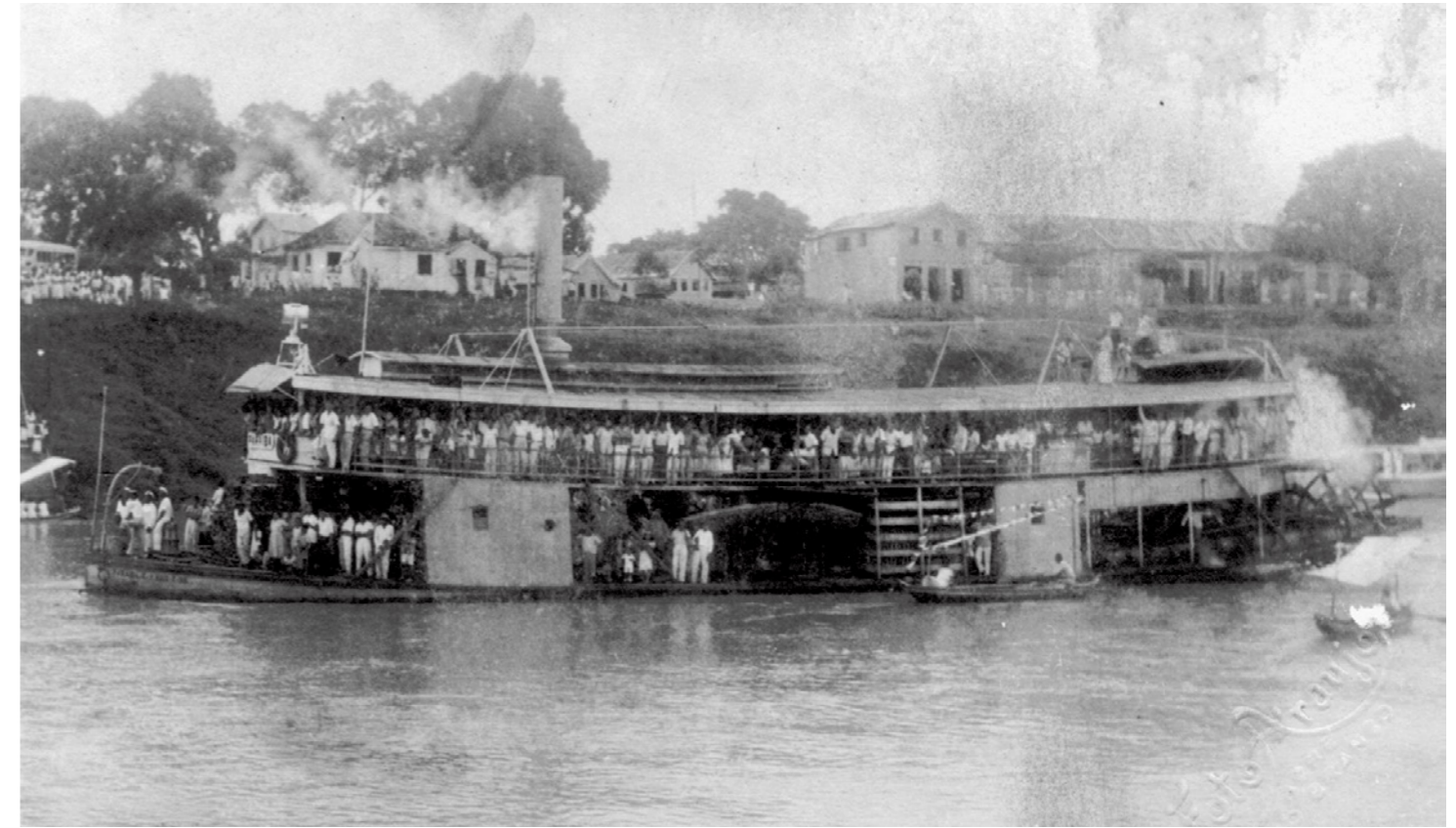


the *seringueiros* to fend for themselves. In some ways, being left to fend for themselves improved the situation of these *seringueiros*. They could plant subsistence crops and raise domestic animals for the pot. They were able, in theory, to sell their rubber and Brazil nuts to whoever they chose. However, their isolation in the forest and distance from any local town, together with the lack of transport to get their produce to the riverbank and from there to market, meant that they were dependent now on the visit of a travelling merchant and, remaining unable to read, write and understand basic arithmetic, their ability to protect their own economic interests in these transactions remained minimal. But recognising that, compared with a *seringueiro cativo*, they had acquired a small measure of agency, *seringueiros* in this position would refer to their situation as being that of a *seringueiro liberto*—a free rubber tapper.

To put the story into focus, we need to go back to the beginning of trading in rubber in the western Amazon. This in turn requires understanding how the region today established as the state of Acre became a constituent part of Brazil rather than of Bolivia; of how early seringalistas and their seringueiros, anxious to confirm their identities as Brazilians and refusing to be subjects of Bolivia, established an independent republic, sought its annexation into Brazil and were initially rejected by the federal government in Rio de Janeiro, which acknowledged the region to be Bolivian territory. A key aspect of the *acreano* self-image is that of a people who fought to be Brazilian, were initially snubbed, then admitted with subordinate status as a federal territory administered by federal appointees, and only granted statehood in 1962 following a sixty year campaign.

When European colonists began settlement of the lower Amazon region in the 17th century—principally Portuguese under the aegis of the colony of Grão-Pará and Maranhão, but also French, English, Irish, Dutch and others—the main Amazon valley and its subsidiaries were populated by multiple nations of indigenous peoples, with differing ethnicities, languages, and economic practices. While a reasonable identification of the individual nations is possible, there is much discussion about the size of the overall population of Amazonia prior to European incursion. Recent research suggests that the accounts of the few 16th century travellers descending the Amazon from the Andes to the Atlantic were accurate when describing substantial complex settlements seen along the river. There now looks to have been a pre-European population of millions and the formerly-held view of a region with low population density is drawn from the demographic collapse following pandemics caused by European microbes.

The process of penetration of the region by European colonists and missionaries and their interactions with its population led to observations of the use made by indigenous peoples of plant resources and assessments of their possible economic value. Interesting products were many, novel and included cacao, Brazil nuts, guaraná, *urucum* (annatto), turtle fat, and a substance, derived from the latex of a number of tree species that when solidified could be used to waterproof clothing, moulded into waterproof footwear, or formed into toy balls that bounced on impact.



RIVERBOAT CROWDED WITH PASSENGERS NAVIGATING THE RIVER ACRE. IN THE BACKGROUND IS THE COMMERCIAL 2ND DISTRICT OF RIO BRANCO IN THE 1940S

During the 17th and 18th centuries there was an incipient trade in these and other *drogas do sertão* (back land remedies). Annual collecting expeditions of traders would travel by boat up an ever expanding range of Amazon tributaries to collect products, returning to Belém or other regional centres to sell them on. Rubber was more of a curiosity than a major export. A sample was sent by the French scientist and traveller de la Condamine to the French Academy of Science in 1736 and in the 1770s the English scientist Joseph Priestley discovered rubber could be used to erase pencil marks. By the 1820s there was an incipient but growing export trade of Amazon rubber to Europe and North America, for erasers, surgical goods, and waterproofing clothing. In 1833 the first rubber processing factory was established in Boston and by 1840 the process of vulcanization had been developed by Goodyear in the United States and Hancock in England. This solved the problem of rubber becoming sticky and soft when warm and enabled its use for hoses, shoe soles and tyres. Demand for rubber increased, propelled by growing sales of bicycles from mid-century. Dunlop's invention of the pneumatic tire in 1888 coincided with the early manufacture of motorcars. Brazilian collectors and exporters of Amazon rubber were able to take advantage of exploding demand and enjoyed a virtual monopoly in supplying rubber to the industrial economies until the eve of the First World War.

In 1850 the province of Amazonas was created, dismembered from Grão-Pará and comprising the middle and upper Amazon region and its tributaries, with Manaus, at the confluence of the Rio Negro with the main Amazon river, as its capital. The provincial government was aware that the volume of rubber collected and traded was growing and that it seemed some collectors were now operating from permanent bases on upper rivers. It was anxious both to locate and monitor this production in order to tax it and to find viable routes up the southern tributaries of the Amazon River to the cattle-producing regions of the Bolivian interior beyond the Amazon, to supply Manaus with meat. In Brazil, these north-flowing tributaries of the Amazon were known at their mouths and some way upstream; in Peru, the major rivers rising in the Andes and flowing east into the Amazon were also known. What was not known was whether they were connected and, if so, which connected with which and whether there were navigable routes from Manaus into Peru and Bolivia. One of the rivers of greatest interest was the Purus and during the 1860s the provincial government supported a number of expeditions to explore and map its course. In 1861, one of these, that of Manoel Urbano, after travelling 1,800 km up the Purus entered one of its tributaries—the Aquiri, later known as the Rio Acre. Three years later the exploration of William Chandless, a former British naval officer contracted by the provincial government, travelled a further thousand kilometres up the Purus and found that it did not connect with any other river rising in the Andes. On his journey he stopped at recently established *feitorias* (“as the shed of anyone who brings up one hundred pounds’ worth or so of goods is pompously styled”³) on the lower and middle Purus—one belonging to João Gabriel, who we shall meet again in connection with Hélio Melo’s family, and another belonging to Manoel Urbano.

Once it became clear to the provincial government in Manaus, to the imperial government in Rio de Janeiro, and to Bolivia that increasing numbers of Brazilians were moving up the Purus and other major right-bank Amazon tributaries, a brewing geopolitical problem was seen to require urgent resolution. The Amazon region boundaries between Brazil and the successor nations to the previous Spanish empire had never been properly established.

In 1494 the Pope had carved up the world between the two Catholic colonising kingdoms of the time. From an imaginary line 370 leagues west of the Cabo Verde islands in the Atlantic, Spain would be entitled to recognition of its claims in all the lands to the west of this line and Portugal in all the lands to the east. This legitimised subsequent Spanish claims to most of South America, to Central America and the Caribbean, to Mexico and California, and to the Philippines, and Portuguese claims to its African, Indian, Japanese, and southeast Asian possessions. The imaginary Tordesillas line, as it was called, was deemed to run up through Portuguese America in a line roughly from the future Rio de Janeiro to Fortaleza. It therefore guaranteed the Portuguese colonies along the Atlantic seaboard, but as the



Portuguese moved westwards and southwards, it was clear that southern and central Brazil and Amazonia should belong to Spain under the terms of the treaty. By the mid-18th century the problem reached a head where the two empires met in the Plate and Paraguay regions. New treaties were negotiated on the basis of *uti possedetis*, the legal notion that lands should be assigned to whichever power effectively held them. This resolved the problem in the southeast of the continent, but not in Amazonia, principally because permanent Spanish and Portuguese presence was so low and because no one was sure of the cartography. The movement of Portuguese merchants and settlers up Amazon rivers by the 1860s forced the successor states—the Empire of Brazil and the Republic of Bolivia—back to the negotiating table. The resulting Treaty of Ayacucho (1867) settled the border between the two countries in the southern part of Amazonia along the Guaporé river, but for the western portion, still unmapped, the two countries drew a straight line on the map—from the confluence of the Madeira and Beni rivers (a known point) to the point where the Javari river rose (wherever that was, no one knew for certain). The line crossed, at unknown points, both the Purus and the Juruá, the other major river in Acre that entered the Amazon and which would also be the location for hundreds of seringais.

3 “Chandless’s Notes on the River Purus”, The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London, Volume 36, John Murray, London, 1866, p.94.

The provisions were overtaken by events on the ground almost before the ink had dried on the treaty. As we saw, Brazilians were present on the Rio Acre in 1861. Demand for rubber in Europe and North America was growing. The provincial government of Amazonas in Manaus was anxious to encourage collection and thus expand its revenue base. A set of circumstances gelled. In 1866, Brazil opened the Amazon system to international shipping. To Manaus this meant that Bolivia could export rubber from the Rio Acre and other upper rivers in non-Brazilian ships, depriving Amazonas of the tax revenue. Whilst latex can be extracted from several tree species, Acre is particularly rich in *Hevea brasiliensis*, which produces high-quality latex and can be repeatedly tapped for years if properly looked after. By contrast, the other main economic species—caucho (*Castilla ulei*)—gives an inferior rubber and the tree has to be felled to extract the latex. Interest and investment thus flowed towards Acre and its stock of *Hevea brasiliensis*. In the 1870s this movement coincided with a major drought in Brazil's semi-arid northeast. Tens of thousands of peasant farmers lost their livelihoods, starved or sought employment outside the region. This offered the new class of proto-seringalistas in Amazonas a solution to their problem of finding a labour force to open up their seringais; and this is the origin of the story of Hélio Melo, seringueiro.

The João Gabriel whose feitoria Chandless had noted in 1864 on the lower Purus was from Uruburetama in the north-eastern state of Ceará. In the 1850s he had begun collecting rubber on the Purus, being one of the first to remain there all year round. Over a twenty year period he accumulated wealth and moved further upstream until, by the mid-1870s he found a particularly promising area way upstream at the mouth of the Rio Antimari on the Rio Acre. He returned to Uruburetama to recruit labour among the victims of the drought and arrived back at the Antimari on 3 February 1878 on the steamer Anajás with sixty recruits—fifty-six natives of Ceará, one each from Amazonas, Pará and Piauí, and one Portuguese. One of the *cearenses* was Hélio Melo's great-grandfather.

The founding of João Gabriel's seringais around the confluence of the Acre and Antimari rivers was repeated by many other seringalistas. Within twenty years there were a reputed hundred seringais in the Acre valley and four hundred in the Juruá; these and the Purus, Iaco and Tarauacá rivers formed the heartland of global rubber production.





RUBBER SOLDIERS REPORTING
FOR DUTY IN FORTALEZA AND
PREPARING TO EMBARK FOR THE
AMAZON, 1940S

By 1887 there were an estimated ten thousand Brazilians in Acre, and by 1898 this had risen to sixty thousand. Both the Brazilian and Bolivian governments realised that these Brazilians had crossed the east-west line from the Madeira to the Javari rivers drawn by the Treaty of Ayacucho and were occupying Bolivian territory. In 1898 Bolivia sent troops to impose its authority over the region, set up a customs post on the Rio Acre, at a site it named Puerto Alonso, and began taxing the rubber moving downstream to Manaus and Belém. There then followed five years of a remarkable episode of military hostilities, diplomacy, and international high finance that is barely remembered outside Acre.

The Acre seringalistas reacted to the Bolivian assertion of its sovereignty and, with the support of the provincial government in Manaus, sought to expel the Bolivian troops and abolish the customs post. Manaus supplied the acreanos with weapons and dispatched a Spaniard—Luis Galvez, usually described as an ‘adventurer’, but actually a journalist and former diplomat—to advise the rebels. Having routed the Bolivians and renamed Puerto Alonso as Porto Acre, in July 1899 the acreanos declared the Independent State of Acre with Galvez as president. In a few short months the revolutionaries established a functioning government with modern institutions, all the more remarkable in light of the distances and logistical difficulties involved. They proposed the state’s annexation by Brazil. Notwithstanding the presence of thousands of Brazilian citizens and the accepted principle of *uti possedetis*, the Brazilian federal government response was to honour the terms of the Treaty of Ayacucho and confirm the area as Bolivian. It sent a gunboat up the Purus to dissolve the government and arrest Galvez. The Bolivians returned to Acre and began again taxing rubber exported from Acre.

The provincial government in Manaus financed another revolutionary expedition, which contemporary critics claimed was composed of Manaus intellectuals and artists and mockingly referred to as the Poets Expedition. Arriving in Acre in November 1900, the expedition proclaimed the second independent republic, but within a month it had been routed by the Bolivian forces at Puerto Alonso and the survivors returned to Manaus.



MAIS BORRACHA PARA A VITÓRIA [MORE RUBBER FOR VICTORY], POSTER BY JEAN-PIERRE CHABLOZ FOR THE SERVIÇO ESPECIAL DE MOBILIZAÇÃO DE TRABALHADORES PARA A AMAZÔNIA (SEMTA) [SPECIAL SERVICE FOR THE MOBILIZATION OF WORKERS FOR THE AMAZON], 1943

NEXT DOUBLE SPREAD: CIVIC MARCH—JOSÉ DE ALENCAR SQUARE, FORTALEZA, 1940S

In London and New York, Bolivia had been planning a solution to the Acre question that would underpin its claim to sovereignty. In 1901 it announced the creation of the Bolivian Syndicate, an international company to colonise Acre. Investors, mainly American, would receive a thirty-year concession to administer Acre, collect taxes, control public security, and provide public services and infrastructure. This time not only the provincial government in Manaus, but also the federal government in Rio de Janeiro reacted. With the support of both, a third Independent State of Acre was proclaimed and seringalistas again armed their workers. Command of this army was given to José Plácido de Castro, a former army major, working as a land surveyor in Acre. There followed a year of armed skirmishes and confrontations, with Plácido de Castro gaining the upper hand over the last months of 1902. The last Bolivian commander surrendered in January 1903 and the federal government sent troops to control its new territory. By the end of 1903 Brazil and Bolivia agreed terms in the Treaty of Petrópolis, under which Acre was incorporated into Brazil and Bolivia compensated.

Acre became a federal territory of Brazil and a distinct sense of having been short-changed entered the acreano worldview. From the perspective of the acreanos, their heroic events of 1899 to 1903 had enabled them to avoid becoming Bolivians, but their desire to become a full part of Brazil had seemingly only grudgingly been accepted by the federal government. They constituted a dynamic economic sector whose export earnings contributed to the Brazilian economy, they had fought to expand the national territory, their taxes paid for the astonishing growth of Manaus from a small riverside entrepôt into the most modern city in South America, and yet they merited only the status of an administered territory. Plácido de Castro continued to advocate an independent state, while the majority—the *autonomistas*—argued for full autonomy as a state within the Brazilian federation. This was the political cause that persisted for sixty years, in the air throughout Hélio Melo's early years and only resolved three years after his move to Rio Branco.

For a few more years, Brazilian seringalistas continued to rake in the money. In 1906 Brazil accounted for 99% of world rubber production and Acre contributed a large part of this. However, in a story that has been told many times elsewhere, the good times came to an end abruptly. In 1876 Henry Wickham, an English explorer, had transported seventy thousand *Hevea brasiliensis* seeds to London. He did so under false pretences in one of the examples of biopiracy with the greatest economic consequences for the country of origin. Seedlings were grown at Kew Gardens and sent to British colonies in Asia where rubber plantations were established. Asian plantation rubber was cheaper and easier to produce and get to market. The price paid for Brazilian rubber collapsed after 1912 and by 1920 Brazilian rubber accounted for only 20% of world production.

By this time, many seringalista families had had several decades in which to diversify their assets, using the wealth obtained from their seringais to invest in property, commerce or industry in Manaus, Belém or Rio de Janeiro. Their descendants no longer lived in or for the family seringais, which were now neglected, but retained as assets and managed by overseers or tenants. For thirty years, production may have declined (its value certainly did), but for the seringueiros life changed little.



The Second World War saw a crisis of rubber supply for the USA and the allies; Japanese troops had occupied the locations of the Asian rubber plantations and shipping links were broken by submarine warfare. The USA and Brazil agreed to revitalise Amazon rubber production to compensate. The agreement coincided with another drought in northeast Brazil, and the government recruited fifty-four thousand workers (thirty thousand from Ceará alone) to work as *seringueiros* in Acre. The operation was known as the *Batalha da Borracha* (the Battle for Rubber), and the workers (*soldados da borracha*) were recruited on combat mobilisation terms—repatriation at the end of the war, a military pension and help with resettlement. A new federal bank—the *Banco de Crédito da Borracha* (Rubber Credit Bank)—was created to channel credit to *seringalistas* to finance their operations.

When the end of the war came, the *soldados da borracha* were predictably forgotten by the Brazilian government, added to the contingent of *seringueiros* subsisting in the once again moribund Amazon rubber industry. Moribund, but not dead since the political weight of the *seringalistas* made it possible for them to lobby for continued provision of subsidised federal credit and a system of minimum prices that enabled them to break even and retain possession of their *seringais* and their workforces for a further twenty years.

In 1965, the military government installed by the 1964 coup ended the minimum price guarantee and *seringalistas* were left holding loss-making enterprises, whose future economic returns would reside in their real estate value rather than the value of the rubber produced. At the time, the market value of the land was close to zero, but this would begin to change in the 1970s.

Let us return to the world of the seringal, the world in which seu Hélio grew up, to see how it operated from the seringueiro's point of view. A migrant, soon to be seringueiro, such as his great-grandfather, brought from the northeast, started his new working life in debt to the seringalista for the costs of his travel to the seringal, a voyage that took several weeks. In the seringal, the seringalista employed two workers to prepare individual areas of forest for each seringueiro. The *mateiro* sought out the rubber trees in the virgin forest and the *toqueiro* would clear a trail from one tree to the next. Between them, they would create a circuit of one hundred to 150 trees, arriving back at the starting point. Each circuit was known as an *estrada de seringa*. Normally, a seringueiro would work three *estradas*, each starting near the others but following a different circuit. Seu Helio's painting *Estrada da floresta* illustrates the design⁴.

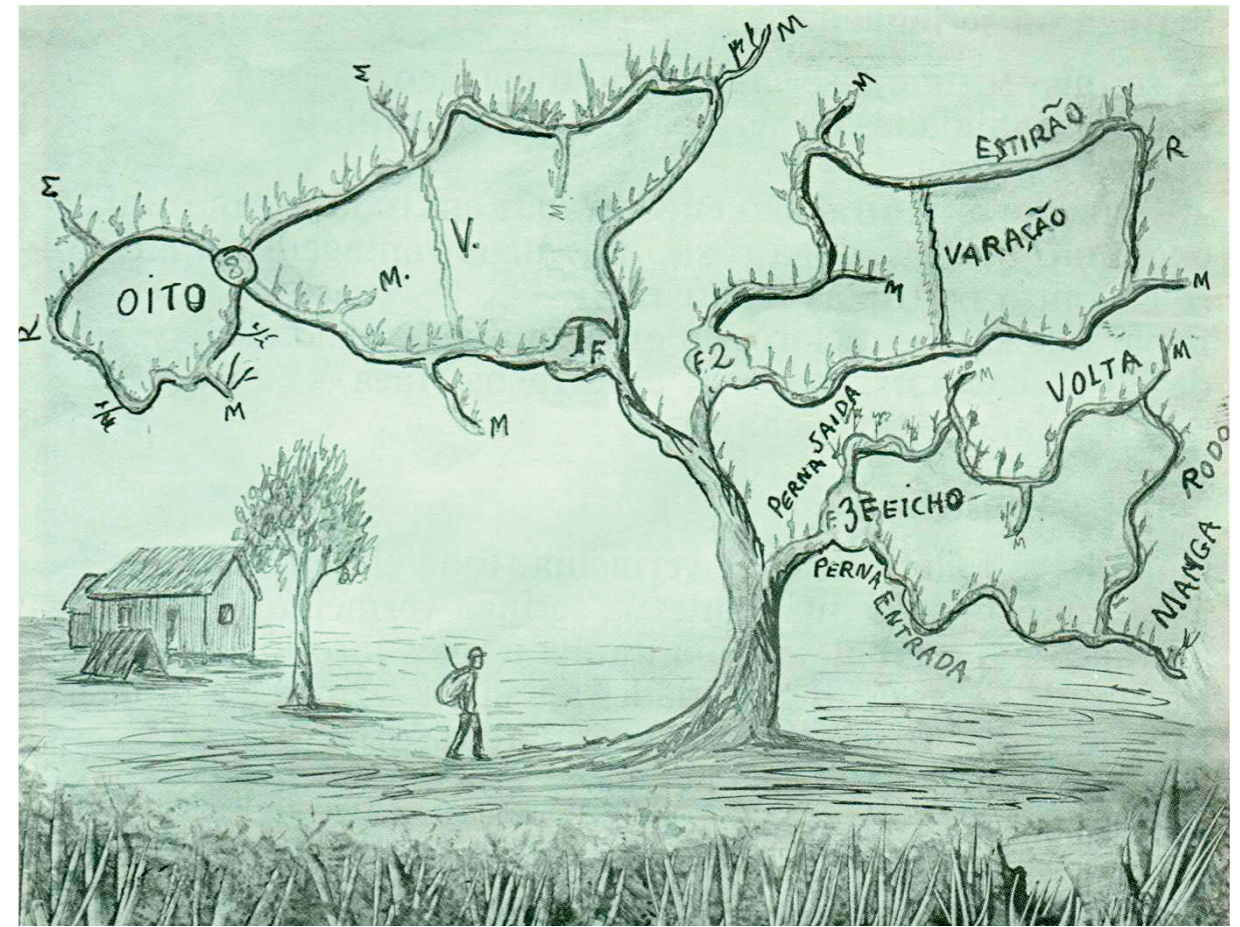
Close to the start of the estradas is the seringueiro's house⁵, raised on stilts and constructed of wood or bamboo with a palm roof. The whole area comprised by the estradas and house is known as a *colocação*—from the verb *colocar* (to place), i.e. where the seringueiro was placed by the seringalista. A seringueiro was relatively isolated in his *colocação*; his nearest neighbours could be anything from five or ten minutes to thirty to forty minutes' walk away. The area covered by an average *colocação* is around five hundred to six hundred hectares.

The working day is long and hard. Starting before dawn, the seringueiro visits each tree on one estrada, making a sloping incision through the bark and placing a metal cup at the end of the incision to catch the latex as it drips out. Arriving back at the starting point, and with luck having had something to eat, he sets off again with a bag into which the liquid latex from the hundreds of incisions is poured. Arriving back for the second time by late afternoon, the third part of the day's work begins. This is the smoking of the liquid latex on a spit over a fire in a structure near the house called a *defumador* (smoke house). This is hot work involving breathing pungent fumes while, over successive days, building up a ball of solidified latex until it reaches forty or fifty kilos, for delivery to the *barracão*.

Successive sloping incisions on the bark form a fishbone pattern, starting at the height of the seringueiro's reach and moving down to the base of the tree. When this area of the tree has been tapped, the seringueiro returns to the starting point and makes his incisions moving upwards. This involves either cutting steps into a length of wood to use as a ladder or building a platform around the tree. Working alone in the forest, both are risky, and many tired and rushed seringueiros climbing a damp improvised structure have fallen and injured themselves.

⁴ The version featured in his book *O Caucho, A Seringueira e Seus Mistérios* (p.41) illustrates in greater detail the names given to the component parts of the estrada—the *varaço* (a shortcut to be taken when rain threatens), the *estirão* (a stretch with no rubber trees), the *manga* (a short, dead-end trail off the main trail to reach a tree), the *oito* (a figure-of-eight stretch) and the *perna de entrada* and *perna de saída* (the start path and the return path).

⁵ Known as a *tapiri*, *palhoça* or *barraco*.



The seringueiro will work each estrada in turn, so that each week he will tap the trees on each estrada twice. Periodically an employee of the seringal will visit the *colocação* with pack animals to collect the rubber and leave the trade goods the seringueiro has ordered. Once a year the book-keeper will show the seringueiro a statement of account. An annual production of a thousand kilos is considered the standard quantity needed to keep the seringueiro's deficit to a manageable level or to achieve a small surplus. A hard-working seringueiro, with productive trees, small families, frugal habits and no breaks for illness, may be able to achieve 1,500 kilos a year. The tapping year corresponds to the dry months (April to September). During the wet winter months, Brazil nuts can be collected.

The routines of rubber tapping are the subject of much of Hélio Melo's art. In his paintings and writings his aim is to demonstrate the skills the seringueiro has to have to operate and survive in a challenging environment, to nurture the trees in such a way as to navigate, in hundreds of daily operations, the fine line between maximising the flow of latex from each incision and cutting carelessly or too deep, and thereby damaging the tree.

ESTRADA DA FLORESTA (TAMBÉM ESTRADA DE SERINGA) [FOREST TRAIL (ALSO RUBBER TRAIL)], REPUBLISHED IN THE BOOK "O CAUCHO, A SERINGUEIRA E SEUS MISTÉRIOS" ["THE CAUCHO, THE RUBBER TREE AND THEIR MYSTERIES"], 1984, WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES



UNTITLED, 1989
UNTITLED, 1989



RUBBER SOLDIERS EXERCISING IN
CEARÁ, IN PREPARATION FOR LIFE IN
THE AMAZON, 1940S

Seu Hélio's great-grandfather, brought to the Antimari from Ceará by João Gabriel, raised his family and his son's (Hélio's grandfather), found success and ended up owning the Seringal Floresta. Seu Hélio recounts that his grandfather made enough money to purchase Floresta by selling timber, both as firewood for steamers sailing on the Antimari River and for construction at Vila Antimari itself and in what would become the municipal headquarters of Boca do Acre downstream, at the confluence of the Acre River with the Purus. The young Hélio spent his earliest years in the Seringal Floresta, then around nine years old moved with his mother to a neighbouring seringal that she had inherited—Seringal Senápolis. Here he completed the first three years of primary education before starting work as a seringueiro. At eighteen he learned to play the guitar, but his ambition was to learn the fiddle. He gained his first fiddle at twenty-two and claimed he learned to play in five months and was soon playing the dance music drawing on north-eastern musical traditions favoured at seringal parties. He also began drawing and painting.

Senápolis, although large in area, was poor in rubber. His mother was one of several heirs and making a living was tough. Seu Hélio would joke that he was a lousy seringueiro—he feared meeting a jaguar or a *mapinguari* when alone in the forest and was worried about slipping on the ladder, falling from the tree and injuring himself. He claimed he couldn't produce the same amount of rubber as everyone else; his *pélas* (balls of rubber) weighed only 15 kilos and not the usual 40 kilos. In 1959, following the death of his mother, he left Senápolis and moved to Rio Branco with his family.

Although the capital of the territory for over fifty years, Rio Branco remained a small and isolated community. In 1960 the population of the municipality—the largest in the territory—was 48,000; but the majority resided in the rural area, and the urban population of Rio Branco was only seventeen thousand.

As a federal territory from 1904 until 1962, Acre played little part in national political life. It was ruled by a political and economic elite of seringalistas, federal administrators, and big *comerciantes*—the wholesalers and retailers, with a marked Lebanese presence, who sold goods to the urban population and to the seringais, and traded the rubber acquired from the latter downstream to Manaus and Belém.

The governor was appointed; and in turn he (it was always a “he”) appointed the municipal administrations. It was only in 1945 that the territory was entitled to send two representatives to the lower house of the federal congress. So, from an initial position as an independent state seeking incorporation into Brazil, Acre spent the next sixty years as a subordinate, unrepresented political territory administered by outsiders or by local seringalistas and comerciantes with the right connections in the federal administration.

In 1962, campaigning by the autonomistas was finally rewarded with the granting of full statehood. This brought the prospect of an elected governor, seats in the federal senate and a greater number of seats in the lower house. However, the military coup of 1964 soon put paid to this, and governance for the following twenty years reverted to administration by military-sanctioned governors and politicians selected from one of two military-approved parties.

For a hundred years, from the 1860s until the 1970s, Acre's connections with the rest of Brazil were, to say the least, complicated. In colonial times, an observer had described the Brazilian population as “clinging crab-like to the beaches”⁶ and, when Acre was annexed to Brazil in 1904, it was still the case that four-fifths of the population lived along the Atlantic coast. To get to Acre required travel by boat—two weeks or more from Manaus and four from Belém, and six weeks or more from the federal capital in Rio de Janeiro. When commercial flights were inaugurated in the 1950s there was one return flight from Rio de Janeiro to Rio Branco a week, a Dakota taking two full days flying each way. With the inauguration in 1960 of a new federal capital, Brasília in central Brazil, a planned road connection to Acre was announced, and by the 1970s it was possible to get to Rio Branco from central and southern Brazil along a three thousand kilometre dirt road, impassable for parts of the year, and regular, reliable bus services only became standard from the mid-1980s. When a new airport was inaugurated in 1973 and baptised *Aeroporto Internacional Presidente Médici* (Médici being the then military president), the local joke was that it was called an international airport because it offered flights to Brazil.

As a market for consumer goods, Rio Branco was also isolated. Domestic appliances and factory-made furniture were expensive and needed to come from southern Brazil by precarious land transport or by river. Locally made wooden furniture and hammocks furnished most houses. Although regional fruit and vegetables, the produce of local small holdings, could be bought in the market and eaten in restaurants, especially Lebanese restaurants, food mostly tended towards the staples of northeast Brazil, via the seringal—rice, beans, *farinha* (manioc flour). Fish was plentiful and beef was increasingly produced on ranches carved out of former seringais near the city. Occasionally enterprising Peruvian air force crews would make money on the side flying in a cargo of tomatoes, and beer was more likely to be Peruvian San Juan or Bolivian Paceaña (or even the Uruguayan Norteña!) than Brazilian Brahma or Antarctica.

Until the 1970s Rio Branco was a city of low rise wooden buildings both residential and commercial, with the exception of the governor's palace and a few administrative buildings. Bricks, masonry and concrete only began to dominate in the 1970s. Culturally it buzzed. It had far more theatre groups, musicians, poets, journalists, cultural entrepreneurs, and political activists than would be expected for a city of its size.

Seu Hélio arrived on 15 April 1959. His brother-in-law found him a job starting the next day as a *catraeiro*, a ferryman rowing passengers in a canoe across the Rio Acre between the two halves of town. The family moved into a house in the Base district, a low-lying neighbourhood on a curve of the river, prone to flooding but convenient for his job. He continued as a *catraeiro* for the next twelve years, until the first bridge over the Rio Acre was inaugurated in 1971. All the *catraeiros* lost their living from one day to



the next, were promised watches and help with new jobs by the governor but received nothing. He then worked as an itinerant barber for the next few years until, in 1975, he became a night watchman at the headquarters of the new state industrial development company—CODISACRE (Companhia de Desenvolvimento Industrial do Acre). His appointment was the result of political patronage—the governor at the time was from a seringalista family, was anxious about the impacts of the policy of his predecessor of encouraging agricultural investments from southern Brazil in the state, and sympathetic in a paternalistic way to the situation of dispossessed seringueiros forced to migrate to Rio Branco. By this time, seu Hélio was becoming known in Rio Branco as an artist of the seringal and got a job at the newly established state company thanks to a relative who held public office. The CODISACRE building was just across the road from the buildings temporarily housing the newly-founded federal university, pending completion of its out of town campus. After fifteen years' residence in Rio Branco, painting when not working, and working in activities (ferryman, barber) where, in a small town, he would meet many people, by this time seu Hélio was becoming known to many as an artist. The university was a meeting point, and he was taken up by academics and journalists who saw the quality of his art and its relevance to the issues beginning to be played out in Rio Branco and the interior.

PICTURE TAKEN DURING FILMING FOR THE DOCUMENTARY “A PELEJA DE HÉLIO MELO COM O MAPINGUARI DO ANTIMARY” [HÉLIO MELO'S BATTLE WITH THE MAPINGUARI OF ANTIMARY], 1997

6 Frei Vicente do Salvador, *History of Brazil: 1500-1627*. [1627]. São Paulo: Companhia Melhoramentos, 1965, unknown page.



After 1964, the military government treated Amazonia as a national security problem. Internal and external enemies were identified, and the fear of outside intervention drove a set of policies and programmes to integrate the region into Brazil so as to avoid, according to the military rationale, its capture by outsiders (*“integrar para não entregar”*—integrate in order not to lose control⁷). All territory within 150 km of a national land boundary was declared a national security zone; this covered the whole of Acre. Extensive road-building across Amazonia was started and colonisation projects, agricultural and urban, were begun through assisted migration from other regions of Brazil. As well as beginning the building of the highway to Rio Branco from central Brazil, a number of roads starting from Rio Branco were also constructed—northwards to Boca do Acre in Amazonas state and southwards to Xapuri, Brasília and the Bolivian and Peruvian borders. Massive financial subsidies were made available for agricultural and industrial investments in Amazonia, at the same time as the support system for rubber production was abolished. There were two consequences of this for Acre. One was the possibility of alternative economic uses for areas of forest previously only accessible by river, but now increasingly by land. The other, a consequence of the first, was to create a market for seringalistas to free themselves of loss-making seringais by selling at suddenly increased prices to incoming ranchers.

The state administration of the early 1970s bought into the military’s strategy for Amazonia wholeheartedly. The governor, Wanderley Dantas, wooed investors from south-eastern Brazil, travelling to São Paulo, hosting investor tours to Acre, offering credit from the state bank for land acquisitions and investments, and mounting a publicity campaign with slogans such as “Acre, the new Promised Land. A North-east without drought. A South without frosts. Invest in Acre and export via the Pacific”.⁸

Investors from São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Paraná and other southern and south-eastern states (all generically referred to by acreanos as *paulistas*) acquired seringais from absent sellers, in many cases families who had not visited their seringais for generations. Titles were confused—often referring to areas smaller than the land effectively claimed and sold. Titles overlapped—they may have been issued independently for the same area by the land registries of the province of Amazonas, Bolivia, the Independent State of Acre or the federal territory. As well as corporate agribusiness and ranching incomers, small farmers and landless families from other regions also migrated spontaneously to Acre.

In the Rio Acre valley, where a road network was forming, the impulse was for cattle ranching. On other rivers where there were no roads, many seringais were acquired by corporate investors for their future land values (‘land banking’) and a façade of deforestation and creation of pasture took place to meet the terms of the credit from the federal Amazon development agency.

7 A slogan launched by Field Marshal Humberto Castelo Branco, the first of Brazil’s military presidents during the 1964-1985 military dictatorship. [Editor’s Note]

8 In Portuguese: “Acre, a nova Canaã. Um Nordeste sem seca, Um Sul sem geadas, Investa no Acre e exporte pelo Pacífico.”

In the midst of this sudden influx of outsiders and changes of purported ownership of the lands they occupied were tens of thousands of *seringueiros*—and the multiple indigenous communities of Acre.

Seringueiros discovered that they had no legal rights to occupation of their *colocações*. In an accelerating process of expulsions, representatives of supposed new owners would arrive and order *seringueiros* and their families to vacate, in a matter of days or hours, the *colocação* they occupied and the *estradas* they had tapped, sometimes for generations. Coerced into doing so, some were given money for the boat or bus to Rio Branco, many were not. As we saw earlier, the population of the municipality of Rio Branco in 1960 was 48,000, of which seventeen thousand resided in the city. Over succeeding decades, the municipal population rose substantially: 85,000 (1970), 150,000 (1980), 197,000 (1991). Most of this increase was in the city of Rio Branco, which grew from 23 neighbourhoods in 1970 to 133 in 1999 and comprised migrants from the interior of the state.

Over the twenty five year period from the mid-1970s to 2000, Acre—in particular Rio Branco and the Rio Acre valley—experienced a substantial and violent transformation from a society with its roots in the *seringal* and a riverine Amazonian culture with a heavy dose of north-eastern habits, speech patterns and worldview, to a society that was brasher, more heterogeneous and divisive, with a marked focus on ranching and on being seen, culturally and behaviourally, as an outpost of the agribusiness heartlands of central, south-eastern and southern Brazil, rather than an Amazonian society.

Seu Hélio explored this moment of confrontation between the world of the *seringal* and the arrival of cattle culture extensively in his paintings. We should not be deceived into thinking that his depictions of *seringueiro* families walking out of their *colocação* while a cow rests on the porch, a cow perched in a rubber tree, of forest animals holding hands and weeping are mere whimsy; they embody a bitter understanding of the significance of the scene and latent anger at its occurrence.

Alongside the ranchers, their lawyers, enforcers and ranch hands, and the poor rural migrants hoping for better days in Acre, Rio Branco filled up with federal officials—planners, economists, land reform officials, indigenous affairs agents, intelligence operatives—and other new actors. The national confederation of rural workers unions sent delegates to kick-start the process of creating rural workers unions of *seringueiros* and small-holders. The catholic church increased the presence and activities of pastoral agents working with rural, urban and indigenous communities. Anthropologists and social scientists, connected to the new federal university or from other institutions, began carrying out fieldwork in *seringais*, indigenous communities and other rural settlements and probing the activities of state and federal agencies and of ranching interests. Most visible perhaps, were journalists—some of them local correspondents of the Rio and São Paulo dailies—placing news of unfolding events in Acre in front of a national audience. Some doubled up as writers for alternative investigative journals focused on local political and social news, particularly rural conflicts involving *seringueiros* and



indigenous people. Most prominent was *Varadouro* (“A Forest Newspaper”⁹) published from 1977 to 1982.

Many evicted *seringueiros* moved to Rio Branco or other smaller towns and learned to survive in an urban environment. Some accepted resettlement as small agriculturalists on federal or state sponsored colonisation projects. The state government that took office in 1974 was alert to the potential for rural conflict and was more sympathetic to the situation of the ex-*seringueiros*. It sought to settle these as small producers, thereby allowing the agribusiness sector to grow while reducing the risks of conflict.

However, some *seringueiros* resisted eviction. Their form of resistance presented challenges not just to the incoming ranchers who wanted their *colocações*, or to public authorities worried about the spread of violence and ‘subversion’, but also to the trade union organisers sent from Brasília to help them protect their interests. Rural workers unions were being established in municipalities in the Acre valley. The unions in Brasília, first, and Xapuri, subsequently, were at the forefront of resisting evictions and thinking through the elements of an alternative model of rural development that protected both their rights and the environment.

These union leaders argued that rubber-tapping was not doomed. It could continue to be a viable activity supplying the internal market with a strategic resource, in such a way as to enable *seringueiros* to improve their livelihoods and share in the benefits of modern society. They argued that it was possible for the state to provide education and health services in the *seringal*; that electric power supply was feasible, thereby enabling

THE “MUTIRÃO CONTRA A JAGUNÇADA”
[“JOINT ACTION AGAINST THE
GUNMEN”] THAT TOOK PLACE ON
THE ROAD TO BOCA DO ACRE (BR 317),
SEPTEMBER 1979

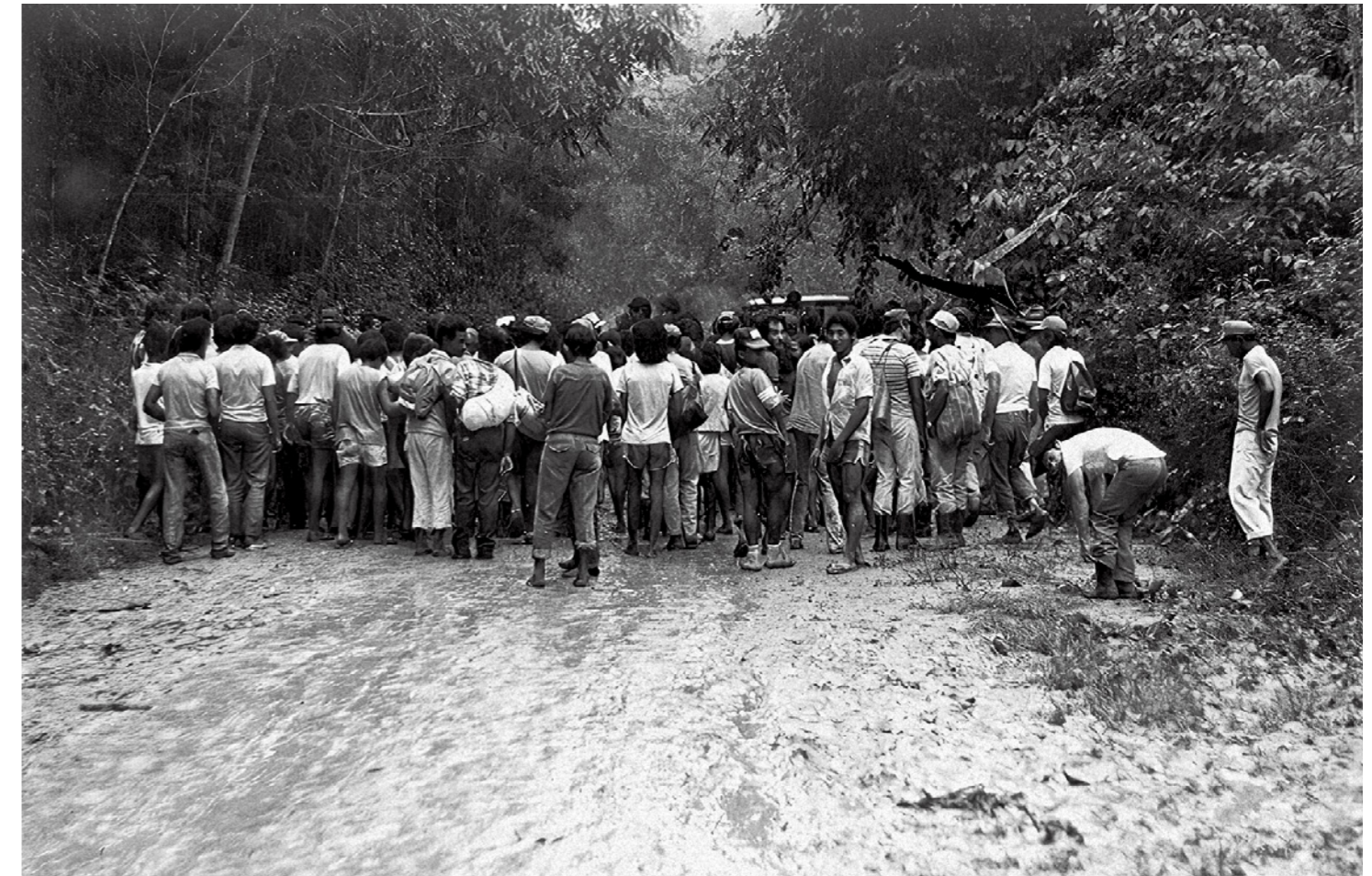
seringueiro households to benefit from labour-saving appliances; and that small investments in trail improvements could enable seringueiros to come and go by motorbike.

The principal novelty in this model lay in the proposed form of territorial occupation. Land reform policy and the logic of the government land reform agencies and of the rural workers' union movement was based on the individual plot and private ownership. There were two basic options. Either the beneficiaries of land reform would be settled on their existing property, the landowner having been expropriated and the property subdivided among the workers; or beneficiaries could be resettled on new colonisation settlements. In either case they would be settled on individual plots with the prospect of gaining individual legal title. However, the seringueiro movement of Brasília and Xapuri proposed a radically different model. They wanted the seringal to continue as a property that produced rubber, Brazil nuts and other forest products through the joint enterprise of its occupants. Individual title to the *colocação* would undermine this possibility, as individual seringueiros would be free to manage their *colocação* as their private property—clearing the forest or selling the *colocação* on the open market, if they chose. In the new alternative model, their collective livelihoods depended on maintaining forest cover and its viability would thus depend on collective decision-making and management.

This radical new model called for the state to expropriate the seringal in question (or confirm it was public land anyway; as we saw earlier, many seringalistas claimed ownership on the basis of partial and legally dubious titles). Communities of seringueiros would then be able to lease the property from the federal government for the implementation of an agreed community development enterprise based on communal management of economic activities involving the marketing of non-timber forest products and environmental management that prohibited deforestation.

Its proponents called this model a *reserva extrativista* (an “extractive reserve”). The name also represents a radical departure. It references the idea of the indigenous reserve (*reserva indígena*) and this identification by seringueiros of a common interest with indigenous communities constitutes an historic rapprochement. The advance of rubber collection along the Amazon river system constituted a cruel and violent encroachment on indigenous communities and their territories. Some communities retreated further upstream in the hope of avoiding the new arrivals or because they lost access to the resources they depended on. Others attempted resisting the incursion and the establishment of seringais by launching attacks. These were subject to punitive raids organised by the seringal using groups of seringueiros to locate and kill, put to flight, or enslave the indigenous communities they came across. Sometimes captives were incorporated into the workforce, but the principal aim of the seringalista would be to drive the community away and prevent further attacks or competition for forest resources. These *correrias* continued into the 20th century, but by late 19th century one of two situations prevailed. In the first, indigenous groups had retreated further upstream to where there were no seringais and rebuilt their communities

SERINGUEIROS GATHERED FOR AN EMPATE AGAINST THE CLEARING OF THEIR SERINGAL BY NEW 'PAULISTA' OWNERS. XAPURI, 1970S



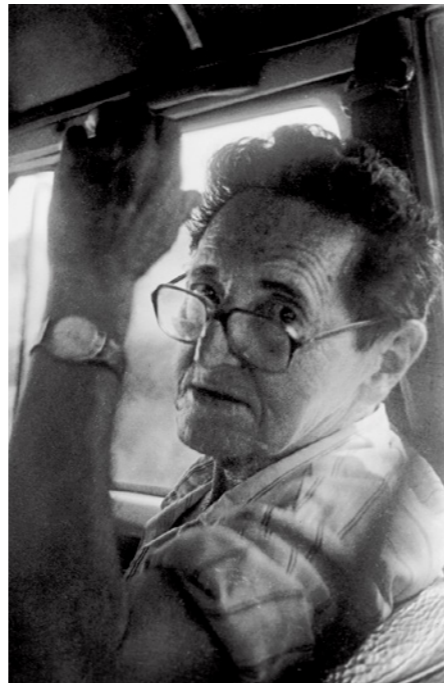
and livelihoods. In the second, communities were incorporated into the seringais and had become superficially indistinguishable from non-indigenous seringueiros, speaking Portuguese and adopting regional lifestyles. For example, the Antimari region where Hélio Melo was born and brought up was the ancestral territory of the Apurinã people. Described by early travellers as a numerous and powerful people, many had spent the 20th century working for local seringais, hidden in plain sight. Only with the breakdown of the seringal system and the growing struggle for indigenous land rights did they re-emerge as Apurinã communities, having retained their language and traditions throughout the period, largely unnoticed by the regional population.

During the last quarter of the 20th century, the struggle of Acre's indigenous peoples ran in parallel to the seringueiros' struggle. Under internal and external pressure, the military regime began a process of identifying and demarcating indigenous lands in Acre. How this process unfolded, with the growing understanding of indigenous communities of their legal rights and their struggle for recognition of these, in particular the demarcation of their lands, is a story in itself and cannot be told here, except to say that through community mobilisation and pressure and with the help of allies, more than thirty lands of thirteen different ethnic groups in the region have now been demarcated.

From a state of mutual indifference or hostility, relationships between indigenous people and seringueiros transmuted into a mutually supportive acknowledgement of their common interests in securing rights and ensuring protection of the forest that forms the basis of the livelihoods of both.

At the height of the wave of conversion of seringais into ranches in the 1970s and 1980s, the seringueiros of Brasília and Xapuri adopted a novel and effective form of non-violent confrontation. When ranch hands showed up to expel seringueiro families and begin clearing the forest for pasture, seringueiros would confront them *en masse* to persuade them not to proceed. The ranch hands were outnumbered. The fact they might be armed was no guarantee of superiority in a fight and, being in many cases ex-seringueiros themselves, they were susceptible to the appeals made to their understanding and solidarity. The result was that these actions (called *empates*¹⁰) often made it difficult for the rancher to deforest and prepare the land to receive cattle. Some of the early corporate investors gave up at this stage, to cut their losses or reputation risks. However, this meant they were often replaced by even less scrupulous individual ranchers. It was in this increasing atmosphere of tension that violence grew. In 1980 the president of the rural workers' union of Brasília, the seringueiro Wilson Pinheiro, was assassinated on the orders of a rancher.

The movement of seringueiro resistance and the campaign to protect the Amazon forest were on convergent trajectories. In 1985 seringueiros from Acre with the help of allies organised the first national meeting of rubber tappers. It was held in Brasilia and was an eye-opener. Hundreds of representatives from all corners of the Amazon region arrived in Brasilia having spent days and in



HÉLIO MELO IN A TOYOTA
RETURNING TO RIO BRANCO FROM
BOCA DO ACRE

some cases a week or more travelling by foot, boat, and bus to get to the meeting. The meeting established a new organisation—the *Conselho Nacional dos Seringueiros* (National Council of Rubber Tappers)—and endorsed the concept of the reserva extrativista. Hélio Melo was a participant, selling his paintings and playing his music. The poster for the meeting used one of his paintings.

Over the next couple of years an alliance was built between seringueiros from Acre, in particular through the rural workers' union of Xapuri, and environmental organisations in Brazil and overseas, particularly in the United States, campaigning against Amazon deforestation. This alliance focused especially on the loan provided to the Brazilian government by the Inter-American Development Bank to pave the final leg of the incoming highway from central Brazil between Porto Velho, capital of Rondônia, and Acre. In light of the experience of a previous loan to pave the stretch of the road from Cuiabá to Porto Velho, which had resulted in a wave of uncontrolled deforestation and migration, the new loan included strict environmental and indigenous peoples' protection safeguards. It was becoming increasingly clear that neither the federal nor the state governments involved had the intention, capacity or will to abide by the loan contract. The president of the Xapuri union, the seringueiro Chico Mendes, became the spokesperson for demands for the bank to suspend disbursement of the loan until the safeguards were enacted. Given the critical assessments of non-compliance provided by this novel direct connection between Xapuri and Washington, the loan was suspended. Suddenly the stakes were raised as the state and federal governments were forced to reckon with the implications of the power of international citizens' networks. By the same token, environmental activists were obliged to acknowledge that, under the right circumstances, workers making economic use of the forest not only had an interest similar to or greater than theirs in conserving forest resources but could be the best guardians of forest biodiversity. Trade unionists were forced to acknowledge that, as well as questions of land and labour rights, protecting and improving workers' rights and livelihoods involved fighting for environmental protection. This coming together of formerly distinct actors, concerns, and campaigns, with Acre being one of the first locations where this occurred, had consequences in Brazil and globally and put the *movimento dos seringueiros*¹¹ at the heart of the concept of socio-environmentalism.

In 1988 Chico Mendes was assassinated by ranchers just as Wilson Pinheiro had been eight years previously. He was not the first seringueiro activist to be murdered in Xapuri that year and, on the date just before Christmas when he was murdered, Chico Mendes became the ninetieth rural worker to be assassinated in Brazil that year. Stunned by the international storm of condemnation that followed, the Brazilian government revamped federal environmental agencies and adopted the concept of the reserva extrativista, which in time was applied not just to seringueiros but to other categories of collectors and gatherers of natural resources. To improve its international environment credentials, Brazil also offered to host the United Nations Earth Summit in 1992.

10 A term usually meaning a draw (as in football) but used by the seringueiros in the regional sense of blocking or barring someone or something.

GLOSSARY

Seu Hélio was involved in all of this. Like most people in Rio Branco at the time, he followed events as they unfolded and were discussed at places of work, in homes and in Rio Branco's social and cultural life. He agreed to run for city councillor in Rio Branco for the Workers' Party in the 1988 municipal elections, but was not elected. He had a job as a night watchman, his free time was given to his art, and he was no longer a seringueiro so his was not necessarily a direct involvement in the day to day of the movimento dos seringueiros. But with his local reputation as an artist consolidated, he participated in the circles of journalists, researchers, cultural agents, and other artists who formed an urban rear-guard to events in the interior. The seringal had been his world, and continued to be the mainspring of his art.

Hélio Melo lived to see the first years of a state government that claimed to embody the ideals of the seringueiros and sought to implant a new model of development appropriate to the social and environmental realities of an Amazon state. It called itself the *Governo da Floresta*¹² and the development model *Florestania*. It took seu Hélio's art as the emblem of *Florestania*, republishing his books and using his drawings to illustrate its publications. When it inaugurated a civic arts centre next to the governor's palace in the centre of town, it named it the 'Memorial dos Autonomistas' in acknowledgement of the campaign for statehood; the auditorium within the centre it named the Teatro Hélio Melo. The use of the archaic form 'theatro' (rather than the current 'teatro') is an evocation of the period of the *Estado Independente do Acre* and the campaign of the autonomistas. But it is also a fitting evocation of Hélio Melo, for in many ways he embodies the ways of a previous era: courteous, reserved but sociable, self-deprecating and sardonic while confident in his gaze through the oversize glasses perched on the end of his nose. He knew the seringal—it was his world and he knew its value. His mission was to record this and show the world its importance.

12 Government of the Forest.



HÉLIO MELO GIVING
AN INTERVIEW ON THE BANKS
OF THE ANTIMARY RIVER

Barracão: Seringal store and office, stocks rubber collected from the seringueiro for onward shipment, receives and stores trade goods for sale to the seringueiro.
Cativo: Seringueiro subject to the restrictive labour practices imposed by the seringalista (see *Liberto*).
Catraia/catraeiro: small passenger ferry, canoe/ferryman.
Colocação: area of the seringal occupied by a seringueiro, comprising the house, associated estradas, and defumador, comprising possibly several hundred hectares and relatively isolated from neighbouring colocações; derived from the word colocar (to place). i.e., where a seringueiro was placed by the seringalista.
Correria: raiding party organised by a seringalista to kill, enslave or drive away the Indigenous inhabitants of areas so as to establish and subsequently protect a seringal.
Defumador: smoke house, structure where the seringueiro smokes the daily collection of liquid latex to form a solid ball (the 'pêla') to be delivered to the barracão.
Empate: stand-off, peaceful confrontation between seringueiros and the labourers hired by a fazendeiro to clear forest to create pasture.
Estrada: circuitous trail linking 100-150 rubber trees in the forest starting and ending at the seringueiro's house. A seringueiro typically has three estradas, works one a day, in rotation, completing two circuits a day—the first to make an incision on each tree and the second to collect the latex.
Fazenda/Fazendeiro: ranch/rancher.
Feitoria: trading post, entrepôt.
Liberto: Seringueiro no longer subject to the restrictive labour practices imposed by the seringalista (see *Cativo*).
Mapinguari: a mythical being said to inhabit the Amazon forests—a hairy human cyclops with a gaping mouth on its abdomen—, said to resemble the giant ground sloth (*Megatherium americanum*) which became extinct around twelve thousand years ago. This extinction coincided with the arrival of the first humans in the Americas and some suggest the mapinguari to be a cultural memory of *M. americanum*; others argue for the survival of the giant ground sloth in remote forest refugia.
Margem: the riverbank, headquarters of the seringal and site of the barracão.

Mascate: travelling merchant, selling trade goods and buying rubber and brazil nuts from the seringueiro, independently of the seringalista (also known as a regatão).
Mateiro: employee of the seringalista whose task is to locate rubber trees in the forest.
Regatão: see Mascate above.
Reserva extrativista: area of public land ceded by the federal government to its traditional residents whose livelihoods are based on extractive activities (rubber tapping, brazil nut collecting and similar activities) for the protection of the livelihoods and cultural practices of such communities and the sustainable use of natural resources. The concession is community based and the reserve is managed according to a management plan developed and implemented by a deliberative council comprising public bodies, civil society organisations and the resident population.
Seringal: an area of forest, stretching back from the river frontage (the 'margem'), where natural processes have resulted in rubber trees growing at random, and at low densities, claimed as private property, on the basis of legal title or de facto occupation, by an entrepreneur seeking to extract latex from its rubber trees and transport the production downstream for export.
Seringalista: the 'boss', depending on its size and how the seringal is managed, this title may refer to the ultimate owner, a subsidiary operator, or an administrator.
Seringueiro: a rubber tapper, residing in a colocação, subject to the rules and procedures established by the seringalista (*cativo*) or working individually or as part of a self-organising group (*liberto*).
Toqueiro: employee of the seringalista who opens a trail linking the trees identified by the mateiro to form the estrada.



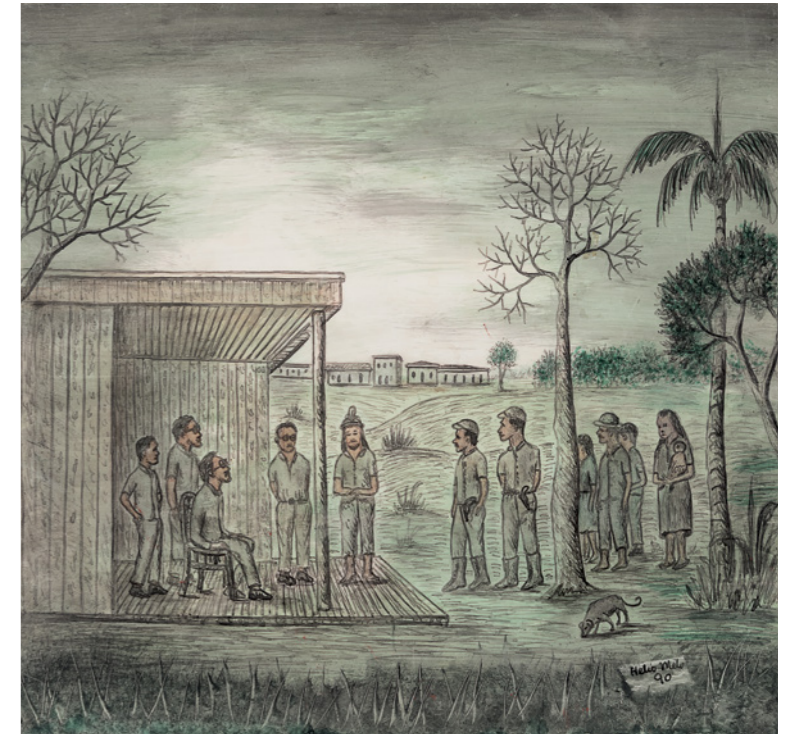
O EMPATE [THE STAND-OFF], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS
OF THE CROSS] SERIES



TRANSPORTANDO ENFERMO [TRANSPORTING THE SICK], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES



A CAMINHADA II [THE JOURNEY II], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES



A CAMINHADA I [THE JOURNEY I], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES

ACOLHIMENTO [RECEPTION], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES

JOGO DA SORTE [GAME OF CHANCE], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES

COMUNIDADE DE BASE [GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES



A RESSURREIÇÃO [THE RESURRECTION], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES

DEFUMANDO BORRACHA [CURING RUBBER], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES

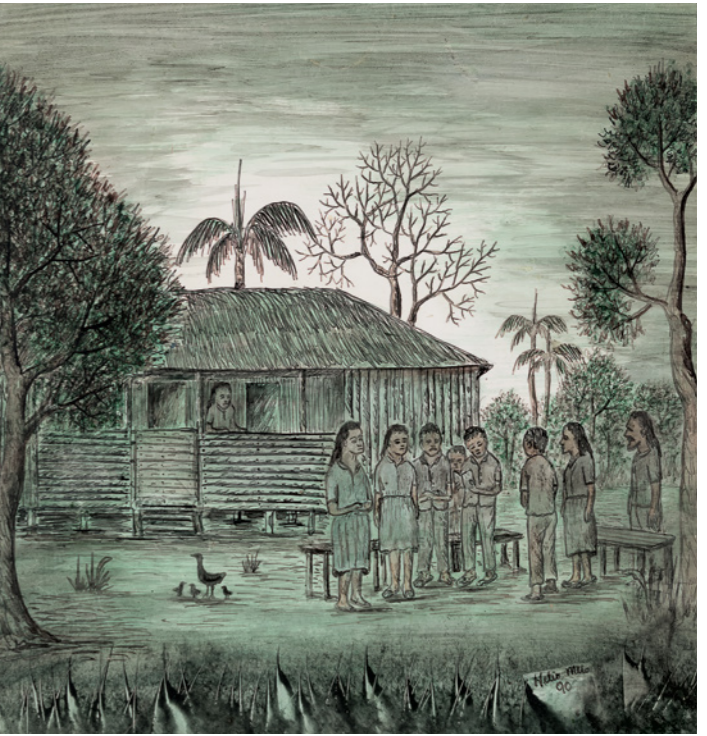
EXPULSÃO I [EXPULSION I], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES



O PESO DA CRUZ [THE WEIGHT OF THE CROSS], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES



DESMATAMENTO [DEFORESTATION], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES



REUNIÃO [MEETING], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES

ORAÇÃO [PRAYER], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES



VELHOS SERINGUEIROS [OLD RUBBER TAPPERS], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES



EXPULSÃO II [EXPULSION II], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES



SERINGUEIRO CRUCIFICADO [CRUCIFIED RUBBER TAPPER], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES



UNTITLED, 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES



HORA DA MORTE [HOUR OF DEATH], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZONIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES



BALSA DE BORRACHA I [RUBBER RAFT I], 1997



BALSA DE BORRACHA II [RUBBER RAFT II], 1997





Helio Melo
97



DEFUMANDO BORRACHA I [CURING RUBBER I], 1988



DEFUMANDO BORRACHA II [CURING RUBBER II], 1994





UNTITLED, 1980



UNTITLED, 1980



UNTITLED, 1981



PAISAGEM AMAZÔNICA [AMAZON LANDSCAPE], 1994



O IGARAPÉ [THE CREEK], 1994



CORTANDO LÁTEX [TAPPING RUBBER], 1980

CORTANDO SERINGA NO JIRAU
[TAPPING RUBBER USING A FRAME], 1980S





COLHENDO LÁTEX II [COLLECTING LATEX II], 1995



SERINGUEIRO TRANSPORTANDO BORRACHA
[RUBBER TAPPER TRANSPORTING RUBBER], 1998

NEXT DOUBLE SPREAD:
TEMPO DOS CORONÉIS I [TIME OF THE COLONELS I], 1983



Helio Melo
1-83



CORTANDO SERINGA [TAPPING RUBBER], 1996

UNTITLED, 1982



MAPA DA ESTRADA DE SERINGA [MAP OF THE ESTRADA DE SERINGA], 1998



CAMINHO DO SERINGUEIRO E/OU ESTRADA DA SERINGA
[THE RUBBER TAPPER'S PATH AND/OR THE ESTRADA DE SERINGA], 1996





O HOMEM E O BURRO I
[THE MAN AND THE DONKEY I], 1984





Heitor Melo



O MAPINGUARI [THE MAPINGUARI], 1996
O MAPINGUARI [THE MAPINGUARI], 1996



MAPINGUARI I, 1998



MAPINGUARI II, 1998
MAPINGUARI, 1995





UNTITLED, 1999

UNTITLED, 2000





O HOMEM E O BURRO IV [THE MAN AND THE DONKEY IV], 1992



O HOMEM E O BURRO V [THE MAN AND THE DONKEY V], 1993



UNTITLED, 1982





UNTITLED, 1982



UNTITLED, 1983



TEMPO DOS CORONÉIS IV [TIME OF THE COLONELS IV], 1995





THE UNTIMELY CONTEMPORARINESS OF HÉLIO MELO

LISETTE LAGNADO



A VISITA DA VACA II [THE VISIT OF THE COW II], 1994

...the rubber tree is a sensitive tree and full of mysteries

Hélio Melo, *História da Amazônia* (1984)



A TRANSFORMAÇÃO DA SERINGUEIRA II [THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RUBBER TREE II], 1984

INTRODUCTION

Over fifteen years stand between the writing of this text on the artist Hélio Melo (1926-2001) and his participation in the 27th São Paulo Biennial in 2006.¹ My aim here is to analyze the biennial's curatorial process as a way of shedding light on how the Amazon forest played a symbolic role in the exhibition that took place in the modernist pavilion known by the name *Ibirapuera*, meaning “rotten tree” or “rotten wood” in the Tupi language.

In the framework of that exhibition, which marked the official dissolution of national representations from the institution's regulations, the invite to “Seo Melo” or Hélio Melo, former rubber tapper, as well as musician and storyteller, allowed us to challenge the political separations that define the designing of maps, demarcation of land, of areas of knowledge and social identities. Furthermore, the “How to Live Together”² Biennial proposed to examine the coexistence of different rhythms within “contemporariness” and paid special attention to the eruption of collective and community-based resistance movements.³

With this in mind, the 27th São Paulo Biennial opted to highlight the self-representation of a self-taught artist who lived off his work as a rubber tapper in Seringais.⁴ In some way, the figure of Hélio Melo catalyzes the slow process of bridging the gap between the most prestigious art event amongst traditional elites in four-century-old São Paulo and the Brazilian pluri-ethnic social fabric—subverting the centrality of São Paulo and embracing the country's cultural diversity. To bring the “Acre experience” to the core of an art biennial that was breaking with “national representations” was a way of reinforcing the desire to withdraw from the conventional route of such exhibitions, of aspirations shaped by the Biennale di Venezia model, “entirely aimed at educated, erudite and sophisticated visitors”.⁵

¹ Lisette Lagnado, General Curator of the 27th São Paulo Biennial (2006), put together a curatorial team with Adriano Pedrosa, Cristina Freire, José Roca, Rosa Martínez and Jochen Volz (invited curator).

² Title borrowed from one of Roland Barthes' seminars. *Comment vivre ensemble. Simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens. Notes de cours et de séminaire au Collège de France, 1976-1977*, Claude Coste (dir.), Paris: Seuil, IMEC, 2002, p.36: “De qui suis-je le contemporain? Avec qui est-ce que je vis? Le calendrier ne répond pas bien. [...] On débouchera peut-être sur ce paradoxe: un rapport insoupçonné entre le contemporain et l'intempestif [...]”.

³ Amongst the collectives, it is worth mentioning: Eloísa Cartonera, Maria Galindo (Mujeres Creando), JAMAC (Jardim Miriam Arte Clube), Long March Project, pages, Tadej Pogacar (DASPU), Taller Popular de Serigrafía and Paula Trope with the “meninos do Morrinho” [boys from the little hill].

⁴ This and other terms pertaining to the rubber tapping practice are explained in the glossary on p.87. [E.N.]

⁵ Barbara Weinstein, *A cor da Modernidade. A branquitude e a formação da identidade paulista*. São Paulo: Edusp, 2022.

The state of Acre was given the strategic function to critically review Brazilian modernity within the educational scope of an international exhibition. Since its inauguration in 1951, the biennial had its course established by the critic Lourival Gomes Machado and reinforced at each new edition: “to put Brazilian modern art not simply in confrontation but in live contact with international art, whilst turning São Paulo into an international art hub”.⁶ Needless to say that the foundation of Acre itself betrays the artificiality and arbitrariness of geographical borders, given that the region was annexed to Brazil in 1903 after a series of conflicts with Peru and Bolivia. And yet, how could we avoid Europeanizing forms, that is, how could we work with such a distant reality without emulating the position of superiority typical of 18th and 19th century travelers?

Since 2006, the number of documentaries and dissertations on Hélio Melo have multiplied. They often introduce the usual biographical information: a modest existence marked by moving between the states of Amazon and Acre with his family, who relied on small jobs here and there to secure their subsistence. The available written material on his drawing and painting practice is always confronted with the contextualization of the three extraction cycles in the history of (the propaganda of) rubber in Brazil. It is not my aim here to carry out a sociological study on the end of the 19th century—which would narrate the tragedy-filled saga of North-Eastern workers who migrated to escape from recurrent droughts; the construction of the (abandoned) railway Madeira-Marmoré, known as the Devil’s Railway; the US interests during the Second World War and the loss of Brazil’s position in the international rubber market to Asia. As written by José Roca, “the tree of Hélio is, thus, a map; but it is also a chronicle.”⁷

By all means, from the 1970s onwards, the artist turned the devastation of the original forest and its biomes into the main theme of a practice that traverses many layers of memory, calling upon the peoples of the forest, mainly the figure of the environmentalist leader Chico Mendes, murdered in 1988. It is possible to find a whole repertoire of texts and images on a website based on Professor Rossini de Araujo Castro’s dissertation, which emphasizes Melo’s environmental struggle and the fight against foreign capital, which has decimated many Indigenous populations.⁸ The painting *O Homem e o Cavalo* [The Man and the Horse] (1996) operates as a sort of allegory for the penetration of agribusiness into the Amazon, an unsettling imbalance that the artist denounces in his short educational booklets published in the 1980s. This devastation is not new, but it has been dramatically intensified under the auspices of the National Congress, particularly the group known as the “BBB bench” (bullet, bullock and bible), representing the arms trade, agribusiness and Evangelical churches,

6 Lourival Gomes Machado, *Apresentação*, I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1951.

7 Lisette Lagnado and Adriano Pedrosa (ed.), *27ª Bienal de São Paulo: Como Viver Junto* (catalog). São Paulo: Fundação Bienal, 2008.

8 “Resistência armada e estratégias pacificadoras no repertório telúrico do artista da floresta Hélio Melo”, available at <<https://rossini-castro.github.io/Mapinguari/hma.html>> Last access on 01/09/2023.



UNTITLED, 1980

UNTITLED, 1980





through the action of environmental infractors, largely loggers and miners. Many years before the emergence of the concept of the “point of no return”,⁹ Melo’s paintings anticipated the current planetary climate crisis.

How could one remove the São Paulo Biennial from its subaltern historical condition, which depended on a selection of artists unilaterally decided by the cultural departments of the embassies of the richest countries in the world? And what could be offered in place of that?

From January to December 2006, in parallel to the Biennial exhibition, a cycle of themed seminars¹⁰ promoted public debates on the meaning of “beyond art”. The last one of them raised discussions around the extractive industry and biodiversity, land conflicts, public policies regarding the level of contact with Indigenous people and their decision to be “isolated”, and the dialogue between the science of white people and the culture of people with no written language. With the mediation of co-curator José Roca, it featured six speakers: David Harvey, Francisco Foot Hardman, José Carlos Meirelles, Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, Marina Silva and Thierry de Duve. The artist Jimmie Durham, who had spoken in favor of boycotting that year’s biennial, accepted the invitation then declined it at the last minute.¹¹

From today’s perspective, the lack of Indigenous people on the three discussion tables is an inadmissible failure, a symptom of a problem that is still ongoing in the field of representativeness, linked to a historical disrespect towards original populations. As a rule, white people are self-invested with the mission of “giving visibility” to the social injustices that inflict vulnerable and marginalized populations, without questioning the monopoly of their own voices—a situation that in fact led the Cherokees to contest the supposed legitimacy of Durham’s identity. However, the theoretical framework of “decolonial trans-modernity”¹² was already taking its first steps towards self-representation. In Brazil, the collective project “VÍdeo nas aldeias” [Video in the Villages], a pioneering work by the French-Brazilian activist and documentary filmmaker Vincent Carelli, has given, since 1996, unprecedented opportunities for Indigenous filmmakers to take the camera and produce *their own* images. Such a simple operation like this, a gesture that seems trivial but with monumental repercussions, has been able to move audiovisual creation away from the paternalistic sphere of ethnographic films.

⁹ Expression coined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to designate the moment at which climate change will be irreversible.

¹⁰ The 27th São Paulo Biennial organized six themed seminars: Marcel Broodthaers, Architecture, Reconstruction, Collective Life, Exchanges and Acre.

¹¹ Máira das Neves, “Jimmie Durham and the Strange Brazilian Normalcy”. In: *Masp Afterall*, 2020, available at <<https://afterall.org/article/jimmie-durham-and-the-strange-brazilian-normalcy>> Last access on 01/09/2021.

¹² The Decolonial Aesthetics Manifest signed by several thinkers, including Alanna Lockward and Walter Mignolo, is from 2011. Available at <<https://transnationaldecolonialinstitute.wordpress.com/decolonial-aesthetics/>> Last access on 01/09/2023.

1. HÉLIO OITICICA'S "ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM" AT THE 27TH SÃO PAULO BIENNIAL

The 27th Biennial adopted a speculative approach based on Hélio Oiticica's (1937-1980) "Programa ambiental" [Environmental Program], a text written in 1996, which provided the exhibition with its conceptual tone. Many spheres of action were articulated, acknowledging the artist's formulations as indispensable for the emancipation of an art event still struggling with an intellectual inferiority complex.¹³ Despite its ecological echoes, the term *Ambiental* (environmental, ambient) in the title of Oiticica's "project and program" does not lead in that kind of direction. The translation of the term into the English "environmental" also erroneously associates him with 1960s and 1970s Land Art from the USA.¹⁴ It is worth remembering that Oiticica's mention of the *Ambiental* goes beyond the strictly aesthetic field. In his own words: "Currently in Brazil there is the need to take a stance in relation to political, social and ethical issues. This need is increasing by the day, demanding urgent formulations, and it is the key point for approaching issues in the creative field [...]."¹⁵

¹³ This analysis was defended by Paulo Herkenhoff when reviewing, on its 10th anniversary, the so-called "Anthropophagy Biennial" in: *marcelina*, Faculdade Santa Marcelina Masters in Visual Arts magazine, Year 1, no. 1, São Paulo, 2008. Available at <https://desarquivo.org/sites/default/files/marcelina_01.pdf>. Last access on 01/09/2023.

¹⁴ Zizette Lagnado Dwek, "Hélio Oiticica: o mapa do Programa ambiental" (v. 1) and "Glossário do Programa ambiental de Hélio Oiticica". PhD thesis. Faculdade de Filosofia da Universidade de São Paulo, 2003. Unpublished.

¹⁵ Hélio Oiticica, *Esquema Geral da Nova Objetividade*, 1967. Free translation.

Oiticica aimed to establish a Brazilian front line. His work *Tropicália*, which later fed the Tropicalist Movement, summarized the search for a *New Brazilian Objectivity*, the title of an exhibition that brought together—at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro—35 artists engaged in an ample discussion around the theme of cultural colonialism. This was the year of 1967, under the military dictatorship, and the episode made history. It is worth mentioning that the censorship he suffered at the time was institutional (not military, for instance), that is, it was of a classist and racist nature: the participants from Mangueira were stopped from entering the museum. They had to perform outside the venue, at the Flamengo Embankment. To blur the frontiers between "high culture" and popular expression was no longer an artistic performance but a form of infiltrating the marginalized community from the morros of Rio de Janeiro into the protected precinct of the museum. It is important to highlight that Oiticica was radically challenging the idea of pure structures ("purity is a myth" is *Tropicália's* motto-verse), bringing the crises of Kantian aesthetic categories to a boiling point. In this operation, the artist is inscribing both desire and making within a larger commitment which he defines as ethical, as it implicates the Other beyond the position of a passive recipient of the artwork.¹⁶ Very briefly, this is what Oiticica's *Ambiental* is about.

How can we then invoke the vital breath of the "Ambiental Manifestation" and test experiential propositions taken from a Constructivism-inspired artistic program? What would happen if this body of ideas was tested within the scope of one of the most relevant biennials in the Southern Hemisphere?

In his notes, Oiticica left a promise to write¹⁷ his "theory of the *Parangolé*" (1964), an ambitious strategy to rethink the relationship between art and society. With the aim of criticizing the transformation of the art object into a commodity, it was necessary, according to the artist, to "say goodbye to aestheticism", to leave elitist and institutional venues behind, and to adopt a committed vision towards life pulsating outside privileged spaces, in the periphery, in the "hoods", something that only popular manifestations could provide as they were able to simultaneously mobilize poetic and educational meanings inherent to collective participation. Inversely, up until then, in the academic field, criticism against turning culture into a commodity drew on the *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Theodor Adorno's posthumous book, an indispensable part of the canon in Marxist studies.

¹⁶ We find links with this artistic-political subjectivity in Félix Guattari's reflection in *The Three Ecologies* (1989).

¹⁷ A "theory of the *Parangolé*" was never written as such.





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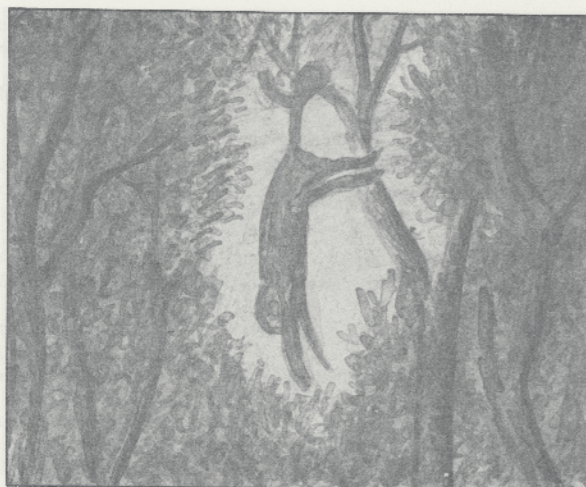
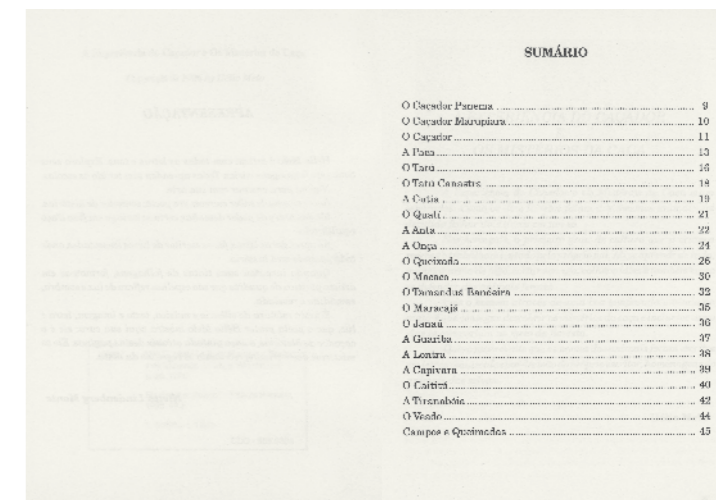
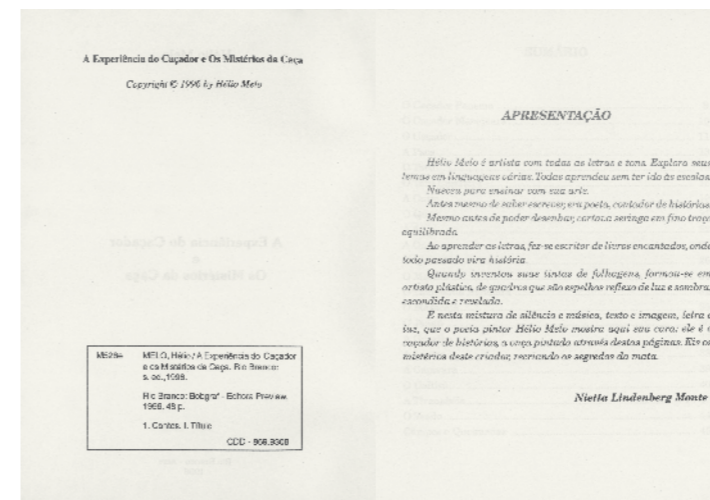
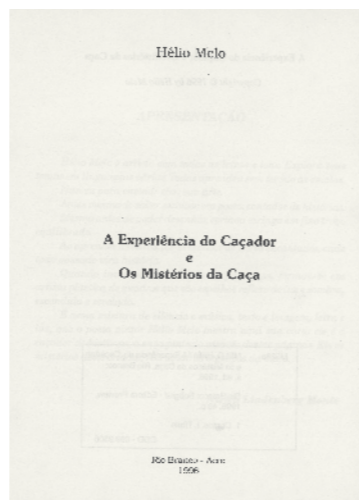
2. HÉLIO MELO, THE STORYTELLER

I am endorsing here something which has already been said by many authors: Hélio Melo was a mythologist. The collection of ancestral memories, added to the ecological defense of “Mother Earth” are evidence of an interest in both a material and immaterial heritage. His legacy is visual, but essentially influenced by the ability of oral tradition to engender visions and apparitions. Malcontent with drawing on tree bark and handling paints he produced himself, the artist sought to capture the legends circulating amongst those inhabiting the forest. And here “to capture” is used in the sense familiar to the hunter who must immobilize his prey to extract sustenance from it, and, in the case of the narrator, to extract the truth. There is some sort of additional seasoning in the transcribed orality of his leaflets, which are similar to *cordéis*,¹⁸ something between criticism and humor, reaching us from far away, from times prior to any inscription. Sustenance, an economy of subsistence, regulates hunting as a way of avoiding animal extinction. Even killing prey requires an ethical lesson, a code transmitted between generations that protects the integrity of living beings. Because “not every day is hunting day”, as the artist explains: “The old man said:— My son, if you need to kill prey, do it in transit rather than by ambush. It is very harmful to kill hungry prey looking for food”. Thus, there is no room for betrayal and cowardice here. In other words: the position of vulnerability requires composure and respect for the dignity of others.

Contrary to the moralist approach of the fables delivered by Esopus and La Fontaine, the same is not repeated in *Os mistérios da caça* [The Mysteries of Prey] (1985) and *A experiência do caçador* [The Experience of the Hunter] (1996), booklets that bring together a series of homages to forest animals. As the result of patient and constant observation, they are documentary records describing rare animals, such as the Tiranabóia, a type of Butterfly that can often be poisonous, the tactics used by Pacas or Agoutis¹⁹ to escape predators, the aggressiveness of *Queixadas*, wild Boars that move in increasingly smaller groups, the enigma of the Dog’s intolerance to Armadillo meat, and some superstitions (“They say that when a Canastra Armadillo is killed, someone in the family will die within days”).

¹⁸ Popular literary genre often written in verse, containing rhymes, originating in oral accounts and later printed and distributed in pamphlets. [E.N.]

¹⁹ We are following Hélio Melo’s recommendation to capitalize animal names.



O MACACO

Existem várias espécies de Macacos, a saber: o Prego, o Cairara, o de Cheiro, o Preto, o Barrigudo, o Sonhim, o da Noite, o Guariba, o Paruacú, o Taboca e outros.

Quando criados em casa, os mais peraltas são os Macacos Prego, o Cairara e o de Cheiro.

Na mata, eles não se misturam. Vivem cada um no seu bando. Quando encontram alimentos, espalham-se e cada qual que faça por si. Nessa hora, em que estão pegando orango, tem um Macaco escalado para proteger o bando e, quando alguém se aproxima, ele dá o sinal e a macacada dá no pé. Também acontece de o caçador atirar em um bando sem o vigia ter alertado a turma. Então o vigia vai sofrer, pois os seus companheiros metem-lhe peia, para que tenha mais atenção no serviço.

Se o Macaco for baleado, ele procura mastigar folhas das árvores e colar em cima do ferimento.

Interessante: o Macaco preto e o Barrigudo, quando avistam o caçador sobre as árvores mais altas e de lá jogam reboladas com pedaços



de paus para afugentá-los.

Esses tipos de Macacos têm o rabo bem comprido.

Quando vai dar um salto distante, o rabo já vai na frente. Caso eles não alcancem o lugar onde desejam ir, não há perigo de cair, porque o rabo em qualquer galho se segura. De maneira que suas caldas são para eles seu melhor pára-quadras. A Macaca, quando está de Macaquinho, às vezes o tira das costas e deixa em um lugar bem seguro. Depois ela sobe para os galhos finos em busca de frutos. Isso nos dá a impressão de que ela não leva o filho devido aos galhos finos serem fechados de folhas e talvez corre o risco do Macaquinho de soltar de suas costas. Assim, são estas e outras coisas que um Macaco imita o ser humano. Exemplo: o homem quebra o ouriço de castanha com terçado e o Macaco quebra com pancadas nas sacopembas.

Dos animais criados na floresta, o Macaco parece ser o mais inteligente, não deveria ser perseguido pelo homem.

O Macaco pequeno pouco sofre perseguição, mas o grande, ou seja, o Macaco Prego, o Preto e outros. São procurados na mira do caçador.



O TAMANDUÁ BANDEIRA

Chama-se Tamanduá Bandeira, porque sua calda parece com uma bandeira. Ela é grande e quando vem chuva ela joga por cima de seu corpo para não se molhar. As vezes, o caçador por brincadeira, corta uma palha de uricuri, balança perto do Tamanduá e o mesmo, pensando ser chuva, se cobre com a calda. Esta também serve para proteger o filhote que o Tamanduá Bandeira carrega nas costas, até que ele possa caminhar sozinho.

O Tamanduá se alimenta de formigas. Onde encontra um Cupim, ele põe a língua e quando está cheia de formiga ele engole.

Um caçador conta que certa vez encontrou um Tamanduá abraçado com uma Onça, os dois estavam mortos.

Ele é assim: quando abraça, dá o primeiro arrocho para segurar. Dentro de alguns segundos, ele dá o outro que mata. No terceiro ele une unha com unha e depois não pode tirar.

É importante falar do Tamanduá Bandeira, porque nem todo mundo conhece seus mistérios. O Tamanduá Bandeira não procura briga,



mas exige muito respeito. Se ele for atravessar uma estrada, quem estiver em sua frente que se arrede, porque ele não torce caminho pra ninguém.

O Tamanduá é um animal de muita resistência. No entanto seu lugar mortal é no focinho. Neste local, qualquer pancadinha, com um pedaço de pau, o mata na hora. O que mais impressiona, diz o caçador é que não se conhece o macho do Tamanduá Bandeira.

Houve um certo seringalista que fez uma proposta aos seringueiros: quem matasse um Tamanduá Bandeira macho que o levasse até o barracão que ganharia um prêmio. O patrão falou assim porque na verdade ninguém nunca viu um Tamanduá Bandeira macho.

Foi com essa brincadeira que um seringueiro ia perdendo a vida. O Tamanduá seguia seu caminho. O seringueiro, esperando que ele virasse de frente, começou a cutucá-lo com uma vara. Quando o animal ficou de pé o seringueiro errou a paulada, e por um nada ia levando aquele abraço do Tamanduá.

O Tamanduá é perigoso. De frente a frente, ele tem pouca destreza,



A LONTRA

Existem duas espécies de Lontras: a Lontra preta e a Ariranha.

Elas não têm moradia certa. Vivem na terra e na água, tendo preferência por lagos e igarapés.

Alimenta-se de peixes e vivem sozinhas. Nos rios e lagos, algumas vezes se encontra a Lontra em bandos e aí é perigoso passar de canoa por perto, porque quando estão reunidas, são valentes. Conta um pescador que um dia estava pescando, quando duas Lontras se aproximaram de sua canoa e ele, para se ver livre, teve de abrir fora, para não ser devorado.



A CAPIVARA

A Capivara é do tamanho de um Porco, é parecida com uma Anta.

Ela se alimenta de canarana e outras ervas. Gosta de invadir canaviais. Quando acerta um roçado de milho, bota para acabar. O agricultor para afugentá-la tem que esperá-la à noite ou colocar numa armadilha. Este é o único apelo.

Só à noite sai à procura de alimentos. Passa o dia escondida não se sabe onde, porque nunca se encontra uma casa de Capivara. Sabe-se que vive nas costas do rio, em lagos e queimadas. Quer dizer, lagos cobertos de capim.

Andam em bandos, tanto na terra, como na água. Seu fôlego é tanto que chega a atravessar o rio num só mergulho.

To believe in the transformative power of his stories makes Hélio Melo a writer-educator who does not succumb to the Anthropocene, nor abdicates from his human essence. There is a whole effort to collect popular memories, a form of ancestry passed down from generation to generation, that cultivates old sayings (“Everyone is born with luck, but luck is not for everyone”), whilst also risking new sentences bearing particular forms of knowledge (“When a bored person falls asleep, they forget the world exists”).

A rubber tapper himself, Hélio Melo’s life unfolded alongside the history of capitalist extractivism. Having systematically denounced the exploitation of labor by rubber tapping colonels, his activities were performed while coexisting with the forest’s first owners. He never spared the white invader from criticism: “[...] I remember that Indigenous people are used to saying: ‘this land of ours’ but they should say instead ‘our land that is not ours’”.²⁰ In the company of Indigenous cultures, he learned how to perceive the ecosystem as an “inhabited” entity (also in the spiritual sense), whose function is more than just providing natural resources. The ecosystem is also a body, a surface to be respected if we want its sap to nurture us. The cuts made in the tree follow rules and norms so the tree can remain alive. Beyond the rubber plantations, rivers and constructions, humans and legendary beings feature in the landscape in a movement of symbiosis with these spirits. The most emblematic works merge vegetal and animal forms (the rubber tree is replaced by cattle), opening up ample clearings, emptied of its original bush, butchered trunks, melancholic witnesses of irremediably obtuse governments.

Without a practiced effort in listening, these drawings would not have reached the vaporous atmosphere that bathes humans and nonhumans, particularly hybrid creatures. It is purposefully to honor the wealth of the forest that Hélio Melo ignores the Manicheism of dichotomies, a legacy that the Western world has erected in its “civilizing” tragedy. The bush, the animals and the day to day of the rubber tapper, with his house (*taipiri*, shack or hut) and utensils, compose a repertoire of words and things that transit from the text to the image and vice-versa: the “syringe” tree, the scraper, the blade, the cutter, the bucket, the bowl, the sack, the rubber belt, the bag, the lamp, the rifle, the leather strap, the defense knife, the bullet bag, the backpack, the rack, the post, the latex ball, the digger, the crane, the chopping block, the basin, the furnace, the gourd... and of course, the Dog, an inseparable companion. Aligning artistic discipline and the orality of a narrator, and thanks to a strong link with local populations, Hélio Melo rubs a sort of balsam on the wounds of capitalism, of modernity and of wild industrialization. His work is a patrimony, in the best geographical sense of the term. It is present in several official and public institutions in the capital of Acre, Rio Branco, allowing the community to see themselves in each painting, in each fable, a fragment of a neighboring and common life.

20 Hélio Melo, *Como salvar nossa floresta: do seringueiro para o seringueiro*. Rio Branco: INPECA, 1999.



Mistaken are those who insist on a superficial reading of the humbleness that surrounds the work of Hélio Melo. His life was modest but his ambition was tremendous. Holding a rigorous sense of self-criticism, a feature exclusive to those who can see the line separating dawn from dusk, the artist gave interviews—which are available on the internet—that undo any simplistic and insensitive interpretation of the intentionality of his brushstrokes. Fully aware that to adopt someone else’s methodology is far from knowing, he invented his own technique to avoid being dominated by borrowed rules. Filled with light—a light admired by so many artists who crossed his path—his images translate, via the impregnation of local legends, an Indigenous cosmivision. As the grandparents of the artist Denilson Baniwa would say: “It was all people”.²¹

21 <<https://www.behance.net/gallery/110533365/tudo-gente>>. Last access on 01/09/2023. “My grandparents say that in the old days/ Before me, you or any other homo sapiens ruled the planet/ It was all people: forest, humans and nonhumans were people/ There were people-jaguar, people-parrot, people-tree, people-rock, and people-people/ And we all spoke the same language, we understood each other. [...]”. Free translation.



TIRANDO AÇAÍ
[HARVESTING AÇAÍ], 1984



MÃE DA MATA [MOTHER OF THE FOREST], 1996

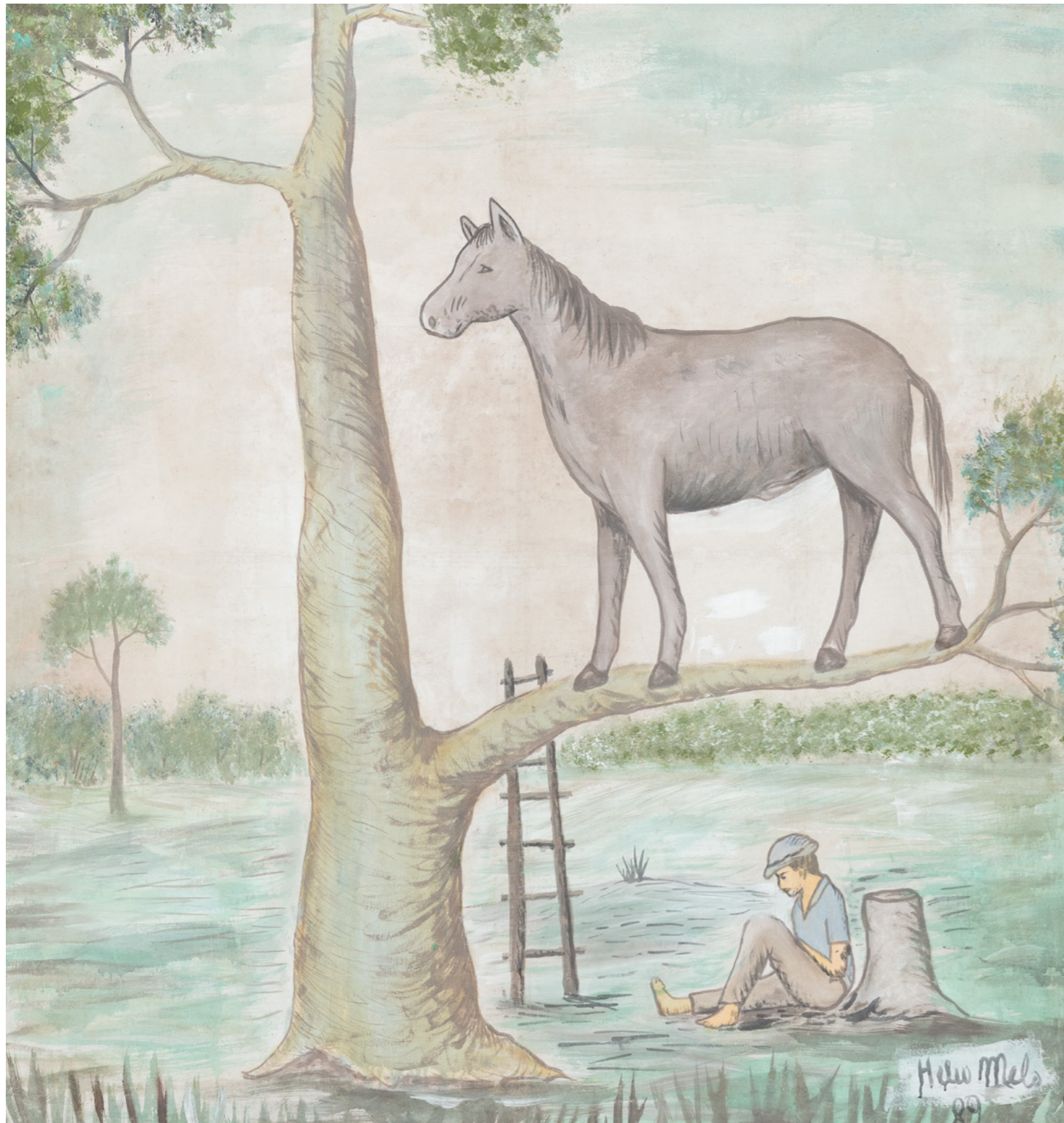
POSTSCRIPTUM

With their luminous greenish halo, Hélio Melo's paintings radiated in the São Paulo Biennial Pavilion, embraced by a constellation of artists from many corners of the world: Claudia Andujar with her Brazilian Yanomami family; the expedition of Jarbas Lopes, conceived in Nova Iguaçu with Roosevelt with the aim of navigating from Manaus to Belém; Mantilla & Chaves, from Lima; Alberto Baraya, from Bogotá; Marjetica Potrc, from Ljubljana; Susan Turcot, from Montreal; and Zafos Xagoraris, from Athens. They were all contemporary, with no hierarchy between them, softly outlining the segment dedicated to the Amazon. More refined links were threaded through the transversal theme of a larger section nicknamed "programs for life". It departed from the understanding that Oiticica, after actively participating in the Brazilian constructivist project known as Neo-Concretism, and, mostly during the years he lived in New York City, experimenting on the streets and subway lines, radicalized his position, faced with a sense of urgency for change. Perhaps he would embody today the phenomenon known as the "activist-artist" or "artist".

In what ways do neoliberal economic politics act on the planet? This question became even more pressing when the so-called "climate crisis" moved beyond the stronghold of green activists and militants. However, the issue of patents was already permeating the practices of Minerva Cuevas and Superflex. Ana Mendieta, also exhibiting in the 27th São Paulo Biennial, reverberated the violence against the female body and its ancestral connection with the land. It was only *a posteriori* that these affinities, which were not formal or literal juxtapositions, were able to challenge the present.

This is what I call the "lines of solidarity". In this sense, the provision of affect and rituals to the dimension of existence found a link in the performance photographs of the artist María Teresa Hincapié. Like Melo's, Hincapié's life was guided through long walks, both urban and in the middle of the jungle. For those who do not remember the exhibition *Arte/Cidade II*, curated by Nelson Brissac Peixoto, an installation by Hincapié brought together hundreds of used shoes collected from the streets,²² bringing together the act of walking without a map, exploring the city, and the act of exploring the forest.

Like dreams, artistic expression provides a vessel between past and future. All symbolic operations that can be deemed as relevant ignore such distances, or such frontiers. Marc Chagall, frequently remembered in the history of Western art for the visual incongruence of the bestiary that constitutes his paintings (Birds, Goat, Horse), was able to combine narrative and sacred symbolism, the oneiric and the conscious, mysticism and sublime light. For some, it was about exposing the misery of war, whilst, for others, it was about protesting against the annihilation of lives. The struggle against barbarism and forgetting is never ending.



UNTITLED, 1989



UNTITLED, 1989



CURUPIRA, 1996



CABOCLINHO DA MATA [CABOCLINHO OF THE FOREST], 1996



MAPINGUARI, 1996



MATINTA PEREIRA, 1996



Helio Melo
2000





PESCANDO [FISHING], 1981



© EMPATE [THE STAND-OFF], 1989



UNTITLED, N.D.





Helio Melo
94



UNTITLED, N.D.



UNTITLED, 1986



FESTA NO SERINGAL II
[PARTY IN THE SERINGAL II], 1993



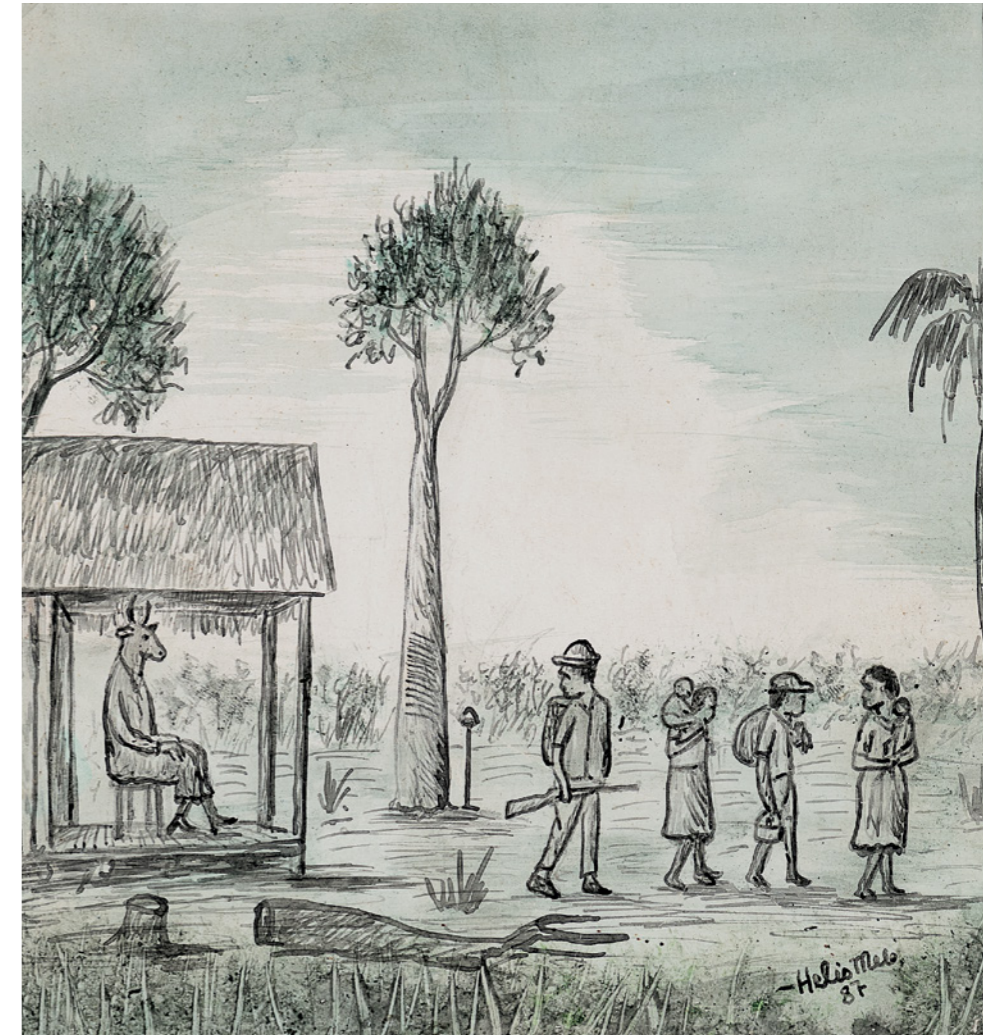
O CACHORRO DO DEPUTADO ANTES E DEPOIS DA ELEIÇÃO
[THE CONGRESSMAN'S DOG BEFORE AND AFTER THE ELECTION], 1994



A CHEGADA DO PALHAÇO RUFINO NO SERINGAL
[THE ARRIVAL OF RUFINO THE CLOWN IN THE SERINGAL], 1994



A VISITA DA VACA I [THE VISIT OF THE COW I], 1989



CAMINHO SEM DESTINO I [ROAD TO NOWHERE I], 1987



O CAÇADOR E A ONÇA II
[THE HUNTER AND THE JAGUAR II], 1992



Helio Melo
94



CIPÓ DO SANTO DAIME [AYAHUASCA VINE], 1996



O SERRADOR IV [THE SAWYER IV], 1996



PESCARIA [FISHING], 1994



QUEBRANDO CASTANHA [SHELLING BRAZIL NUTS], 1995



CAMINHO SEM DESTINO IV
[ROAD TO NOWHERE IV], 1995



UNTITLED, 1989





UNTITLED, 1987



QUEBRANDO CASTANHA [SHELLING BRAZIL NUTS], 1995



SERINGUEIROS NA CIDADE
[RUBBER TAPPERS IN THE CITY], 1996
IMIGRANTES CHEGANDO NA CIDADE
[NEWCOMERS ARRIVING IN THE CITY], 1996

PROPAGANDA DA BORRACHA
[RUBBER PROPAGANDA], 1996
CONFLITO NO SERINGAL ARAPIXÍ
[CONFLICT IN THE SERINGAL ARAPIXÍ], 1996



O SERINGUEIRO
[THE RUBBER TAPPER], 1997



O CAÇADOR E A ONÇA I
[THE HUNTER AND THE JAGUAR I], 1996



CAÇADOR ASSUSTADO
[FEARFUL HUNTER], 1996



CACHORRO DO DEPUTADO I [THE CONGRESSMAN'S DOG I], 1997



CACHORRO DO DEPUTADO II [THE CONGRESSMAN'S DOG II], 1997





PORTO DE CATRAIAS I [FERRY BOAT LANDING I], 1998



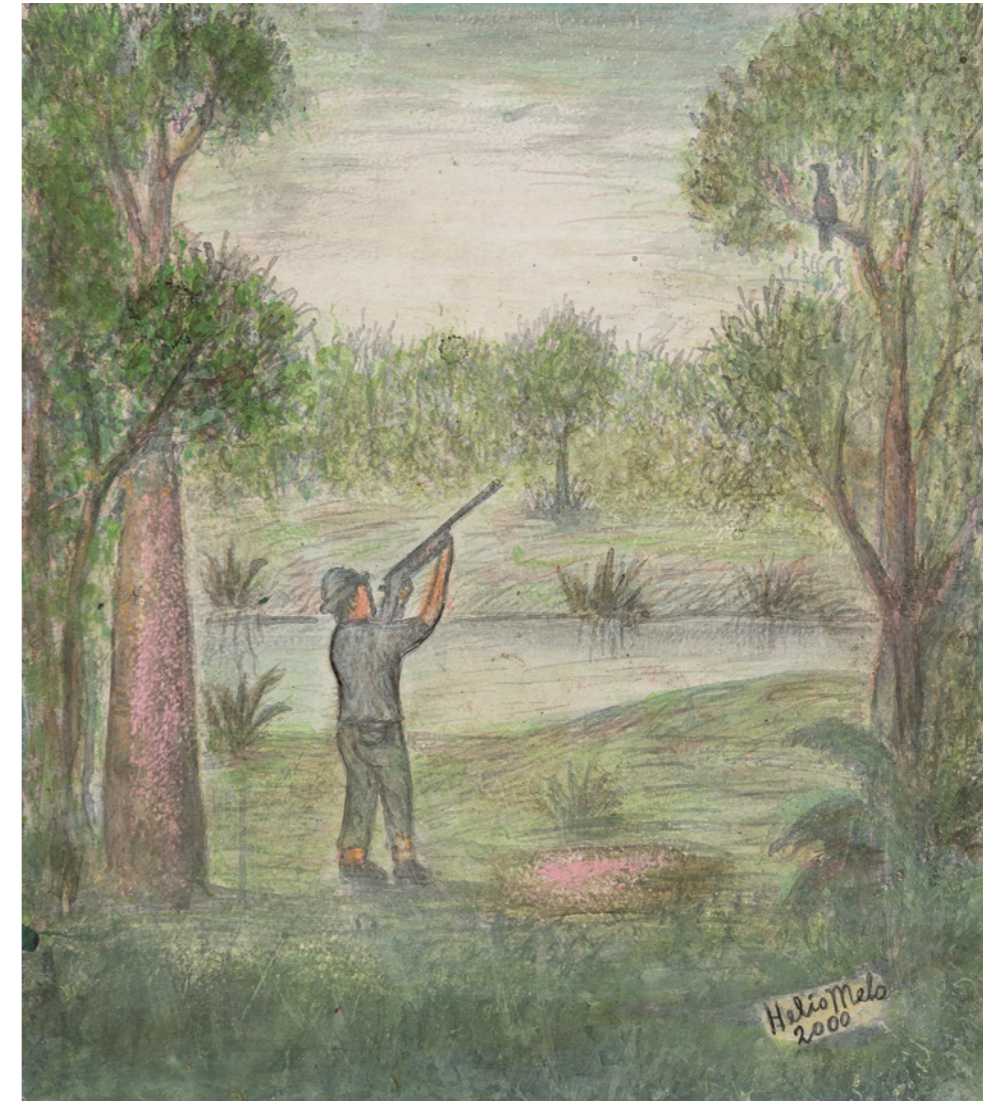


BEBEDEIRA [DRUNKENNESS], 1998





UNTITLED, 1986



O CAÇADOR II [THE HUNTER II], 2000





MAPINGUARI, N.D.





PORTO DE CATRAIA
[FERRY BOAT LANDING], C. 1981



FESTA NO SERINGAL [PARTY IN THE SERINGAL], C. 1987



247



O CAÇADOR E O VIADO
[THE HUNTER
AND THE DEER], C. 1987

Helio Melo
87



O CAÇADOR I [THE HUNTER I], 1994



A MÃE DA MATA [THE MOTHER OF THE FOREST], 1995





Helio Melo
90

TRACAJA NA Pousada
[TURTLE AT THE LODGE], 1990



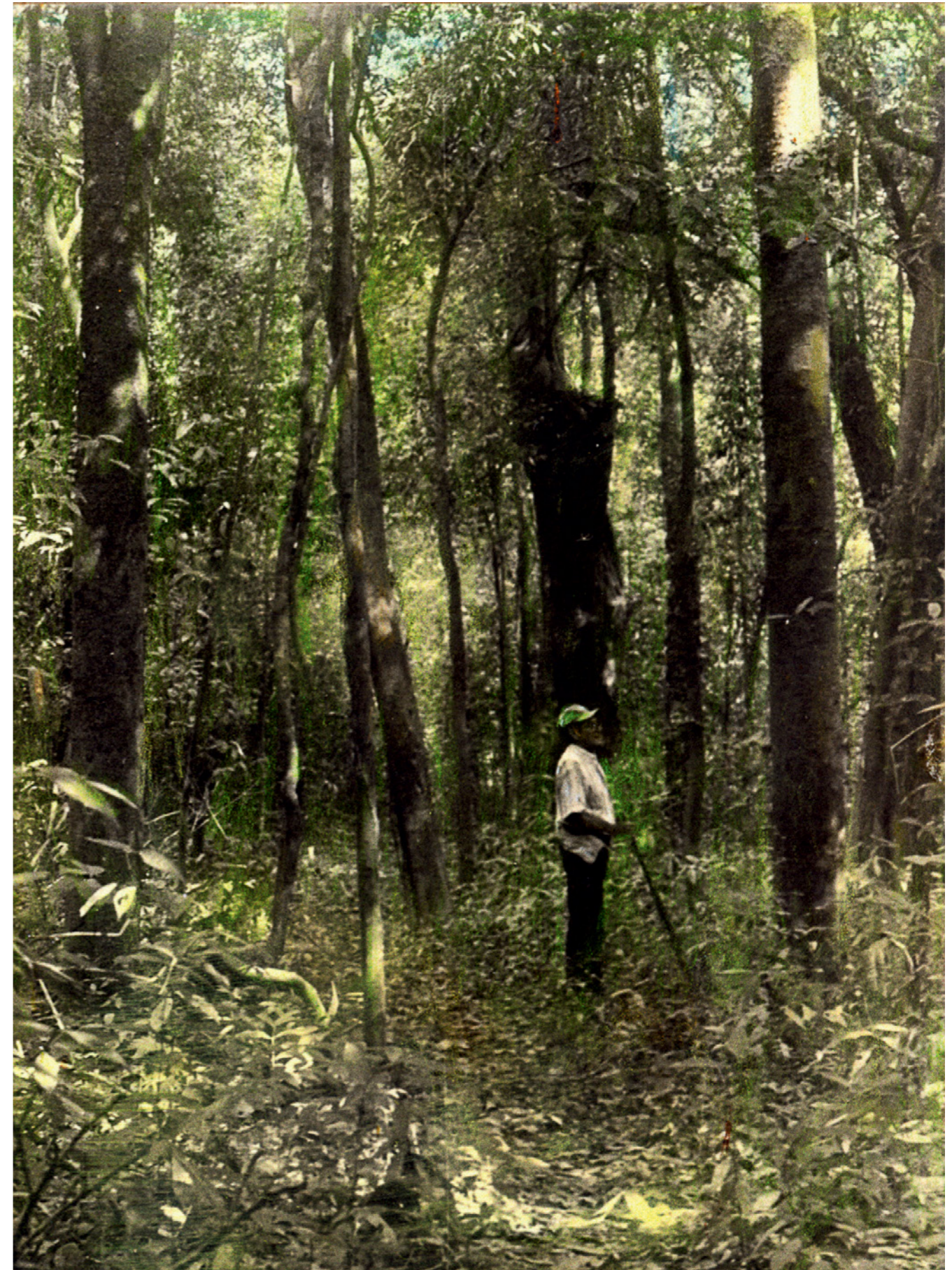
UNTITLED, 1984



PÁSSARO [BIRD], N.D.

HÉLIO MELO: THE ARTIST OF THE FOREST

FLÁVIA BURLAMAQUI



HÉLIO MELO IN THE FOREST, ANTIMARY, 1997



FIM DE TARDE [LATE AFTERNOON], 1987

“You go after stories about rubber tappers in libraries and you can’t find them. I went further; I went after the *caucho*, which was our first rubber. I wrote that story. Later I began to paint for real; I began to portray the rural man in every detail. And, because I have learned without a teacher, you can call me the painter of the forest.”

Hélio Melo, an interview with the magazine *Outraspalavras* (2001)

Painter, writer, composer, storyteller, musician... A plural artist, considered a major representative of the origins and cultural identities of the state of Acre, which emerged from and is rooted in the forest. When we think about Hélio Holanda Melo and his work, the Amazon Forest is not a contingency but a significant and central context. His inspiration was his experience of everyday life: the routine of the forest, vessels crossing the rivers, roads to and from rubber plantations, the contact with the fauna and flora, the Matinguari and other legendary beings... and, especially, the many tonalities and lights that he saw in the Amazon. And, always following the thread of history, with his critical and sharp gaze, the eviction of rubber tappers from the forest, pushed away by extensive livestock farming and pressured to migrate to urban centers. This is the social, cultural and economic environment that marked the life and, consequently, the work of this artist.

The origins of Hélio Melo’s family is closely linked to the history of migration from Northeast Brazil to the Amazon, as a consequence of a period of severe drought that took place at the end of the 1880s alongside the emergence of the rubber industry. From a simple “hinterland drug”, rubber became an industrial-scale product, mainly feeding the North American and European markets. According to Hélio himself, it was in this scenario that his great-grandparents, originally from the state of Ceará, ventured to the Amazon rivers attracted by the promise of a better quality of life and wealth, a promise that was widely present in the imagination of Northeastern people at the time.

The so-called First Rubber Cycle, which happened between 1880 and 1920, promoted a large-scale human

migration to the Amazon, taking thousands of people into the forest to interact with the native people who already lived there. The *seringais*—rubber plantations—dominated the regional reality. It was through them, and based on their operations, customs and traditions, that the everyday life of the Amazonian population was articulated. It was on one of them that Hélio Melo was raised and lived through the experiences that he would later express in his work.

Hélio Melo was born in Vila Antimari on July 20, 1926. The region is situated in the state of Amazonas, geographically marked by the confluence between the rivers Acre and Purus. According to historical accounts, from 1878, the region was explored by the crew of Commander João Gabriel de Carvalho e Melo, a man from Ceará who had already made a fortune on the local rubber plantations¹. This region is currently home to the municipality of Boca do Acre, with a population of approximately 30,000 inhabitants and a close interdependent link with the capital of the state of Acre, Rio Branco, even though it belongs to the state of Amazonas.

It was in this region that Hélio Melo’s paternal grandfather worked in the extraction of not only rubber but also wood to fuel steam vessels. However, in contrast to the majority of rubber tappers, he managed, through a lot of hard work, to overcome the limitations imposed by

¹ Castro described in detail the activities of João Gabriel de Carvalho e Melo in the Amazon, as well as the current status of the research that seeks indications of the relationship between the family of Hélio Melo and the aforementioned commendador. Rossini de Araújo Castro, *Ambiente Amazônico: a arte vivencial do artista Hélio Melo*. Rio Branco: Edição do Autor, 2013, pp. 141-148.

the system of goodwill credit², which imprisoned people in debt and prevented the advancement of the great majority of workers in the region. Throughout his life, he acquired a few rubber plantations, including Seringal Floresta. The parents of Hélio Melo, Alberto Alves de Melo and Rita Holanda Melo, were married there then moved to Vila Antimari, where the artist was born. Hélio's father was a civil servant, but due to health problems—a gradual loss of hearing—he went back with his family to the rubber plantation when Hélio was still only a few months old.

In Seringal Floresta, Hélio spent part of his childhood like most children did on rubber plantations: in direct contact with nature, living and playing with live-stock animals, in the woods and rivers. It was also common that children, from a very early age, had contact with the activities performed by their relatives.

When Hélio was nine years old, he moved to the rubber plantation called Seringal Senápolis, which his mother had inherited. According to family accounts, Hélio Melo's mother—Rita Holanda Melo—was a strong, determined, religious woman concerned with the social aspects of the place where she lived. She taught many of the rubber tappers how to read and write. As a result of her husband's limitations, Rita Holanda was mainly in charge of the work, relying on the help of Hélio, who studied only until the third year of primary school. At 12 years old, Hélio began to work on the cutting of rubber trees, and he experienced life with Indigenous peoples, other rubber tappers, animals, plants and legends. It was then that he began to gather, with no real plan, a great many of the themes that he later expressed in his oeuvre. He followed the rubber roads and footpaths, experiencing the daily life of the rubber tapper. The solitary walking brought him confidence as he listened to the stories about the Mapinguari, the Mother of the Forest, the “angry” Indigenous peoples and the jaguars that followed the tracks of rubber tappers. The fear of the jaguar was always present and it was recurrently mentioned in his stories and tales. However, the feeling of fear was also merged with a sense of fascination triggered by the jungle. At the same time that he was terrified by the jungle, he was also captivated by the Amazonian diversity.

² For a deeper understanding of how rubber plantations work, see Tony Gross' text published in this book.

His artistic spirit emerged in childhood. Inspired by his mother, who, according to accounts from Hélio himself, knew how to perfectly draw faces and mystical characters, he began to make his first scratches. Hélio Melo began to trace the landscape he knew so well, extracting from it not only its beauty but its real history. Even though, initially, he only had pencil and paper, his concern with expressing the luminosity he saw in the forest was latent. For this reason, he scraped his drawings with razors to achieve this effect.

It was at this time on the rubber plantation that he had his first contact with music. Hélio used to say that, since childhood, he wanted to play an instrument, but that his mother was against it. But when he turned 18, he managed to buy his first guitar and later a cavaquinho. But the passion for music, which he enjoyed until the end of his life, emerged a bit later, when he was 22 years old. He bought a violin that he tuned himself and learned how to play with his brother Melinho. In no time, he was entertaining local parties.

In 1949, the death of his mother, Rita Holanda, heavily affected the family. It had always been his wish that the family leave the rubber plantation in search of new opportunities in the city. In a wider context, the new rubber boom, triggered by the Second World War and the so-called Battle of the Rubber, brought, from 1942, a new batch of workers to the Amazonian rubber plantations. Recruiters convinced people to enlist as rubber soldiers and many Northeastern young people had only two options: the rubber plantations or the frontlines in Europe. With the end of the war, the supply contracts signed by the United States were interrupted and the rubber tappers were left to their own devices.³ Faced with this new conjecture, Hélio's family already anticipated that the rubber plantation would no longer give them any profit. The first to leave were his two sisters, Mariinha and Terezinha, and they took their father, Alberto Melo, with them. Hélio Melo and his brother, Melinho, took over the management of the plantation, which was already facing many problems, which, aggravated by the international context, confirmed the steady decline of the economic relevance of latex extraction as a commercial activity, configuring

³ Pedro Martinello, *A Batalha da Borracha na Segunda Guerra Mundial*. Rio Branco: Edufac, 2004, pg. 398.



HÉLIO MELO APPEARING ON THE BANDSTAND, 1997



HÉLIO MELO PLAYING HIS RABECA, 1997



a serious financial crisis. There were many attempts to fight back, but the reality was that the rubber plantation was no longer sustainable. In 1952, he married Lucilia Cuidado da Costa, with whom he had seven children, four of which were born at the rubber plantation and three in Rio Branco. The death of one of his daughters added to the struggle to provide for his family and sped up their relocation to the city.

In 1959, he left the rubber plantation Seringal Senápolis to go with his family to Rio Branco, which then became the capital of the Federal Territory of Acre, in line with a 1920 administrative reform. The city acquired such a status due to the political hegemony warranted by its economic significance in relation to former Departments.⁴ The River Acre Valley, where Rio Branco is located, had been the first valley to be populated, and it contained the largest production of rubber. Given that it had been the stage of the Acrean Revolution, it was also home to several important political leaders. As a capital, throughout the years, the city enjoyed a flow of investment, great public works, the preeminence of retail and businesses, as well as social movements and the availability of state education.⁵ These were aspects that made the city very attractive, bringing new horizons and possibilities to the Melo family, and greatly influencing Hélio's decision to move there. It is important to highlight that the migration from rubber plantations to urban centers in Acre was intensified in the 1960s, led by people that had been expropriated from the rubber plantations and families like Hélio's who, due to difficult subsistence conditions, were forced to move to the city to survive.

Initially, he lived in the house of one of his sisters in the neighborhood of Base. He spent some time in a different neighborhood called Bosque, but later returned to Base, where he settled in his own house, where he lived until the end of his life. At the time, Base was a peripheral

working-class neighborhood. Built up in a disorderly way, it was often affected by river floods, and it was largely inhabited by low-income populations. The close link Hélio had with the place and its inhabitants meant that despite the harsh conditions, he maintained an affectionate relationship with the neighborhood and opted to stay there until the end of his life.

He had to adapt to life in the city, given that, at first sight, his knowledge of life in the forest served no or little purpose there. He witnessed and experienced a series of changes—political, social, cultural and economic, which he followed with great attention, as a keen consumer of news, both printed and broadcasted. In 1962, Acre ceased to be a Federal Territory and was elevated to the category of Federal State, securing the autonomy dreamed of by the defenders of the cause for at least ten years.

His first work in Rio Branco was as a crewman in a small traditional boat called a *catraia*, which was part of the everyday life of dwellers who wanted to travel across the river Acre, which crossed the city of Rio Branco. The *catraieiros* played an indispensable role in the daily life of the population, interacting directly with people and their stories.

For eleven years, Hélio Melo transported passengers from one bank to the other in his *catraia*. An interesting event at the time was the organization of an onboard newspaper with illustrations and texts, which featured current news about the recently created State of Acre. "Any interesting fact became news, accompanied by a drawing", he explained.⁶ This material, produced as a single publication, circulated every Tuesday between the passengers, and for many it was their main channel of information. Through his work as a *catraieiro*, he bought two properties, one for himself and another one for his brother Melinho. In 1973, he experienced the death of another child, who was 19 years old at the time.

While the 1960s were marked by the aggravation of the rubber crisis in Acre, in the 1970s, the military government promoted a profound modification to the Amazonian economic axis. The developmentalist policy was aimed at the region's "progress", stimulating a new type of occupation, with large-scale timber and agricultural business enterprises and the arrival of new migrants, mainly from

4 After the official annexation of Acre to Brazil, with the signing of the Petropolis Treaty in 1903, the Federal Government, with the aim of maintaining the political and economic control of the region, divided Acre into three independent Departments: the High Acre Department, the High Purus Department and the High Juruá Department. See Marcos Vinícius Neves, *Histórias Acreanas no Miolo de Pote*. Rio Branco: Fundação Elias Mansour, 2018, P.126.

5 Rio Branco Municipality and the Office of Senator Jorge Viana, *A Rio Branco que vivemos. Registro histórico dos 100 anos de Prefeitura*. Rio Branco, 2013. pg. 62-83.

6 *Amazônia Nossa Magazine, Do Seringal às telas*, n.24, unknown date.



UNTITLED, 1985



UNTITLED, 1983



O AMANHECER NO SERINGAL [DAWN IN THE SERINGAL], N.D.



the south of the country. With the progressive decline of the rubber industry, many rubber plantations went bankrupt and were offered for sale at very low prices. There were severe consequences for traditional forest populations, including Indigenous, riverside and rubber tapping communities, who had their lands invaded and devastated by a sharp increase in the presence of livestock⁷. Therefore, the solution was migrating to the outskirts of urban areas.

Hélio observed and felt the changes with the arrival of big companies from the South. Large numbers of rubber tappers, who, in most cases, had to live in stilt houses on the outskirts of Acrean cities and towns, were subjected to underemployment as they tried to adapt to new living conditions, removed from their cultural roots. This new form of relating to the forest and the fate relegated to its inhabitants caused Hélio Melo's outrage. "With the deforestation that is taking place, many rubber tappers, many family men are expelled from their lands and have to leave with no next destination, (...) they are humiliated, sentenced, and many of them were killed. My drawings bring a message; they are a way of denouncing the toppling of the forest",⁸ he said. He was fully aware of the destruction of the forest and rubber tappers, and this is why his work is so clear and direct.

Amongst the modernization projects that took place in the capital, it is worth highlighting the opening of the

7 Marcos Vinícius Neves, *Histórias Acreanas no Miolo de Pote*. Rio Branco: Fundação Elias Mansour.

8 Jucá Badaró, *Hélio Melo, o sábio da floresta*. Rio Branco, 2016.



first metallic bridge over the river Acre in 1971, during the government of Jorge Kalume, which had a direct impact on Hélio's life. The river transport by *catraia* in the city center of Rio Branco, where Hélio worked, became dispensable once the bridge began to be used. The *catraieiros* lost their trade and did not receive any government support. Hélio, once again, had to reinvent himself and find a new form of livelihood. It was also at this time that his father Alberto died at 84 years of age.

His new occupation was that of a traveling barber. He walked the streets of the Base neighborhood and surrounding areas, looking for clients, mostly neighbors, friends and acquaintances. People say he was not the greatest barber, but it was with this trade that he supported his family for some time.

In 1975, through the intervention of a friend, he was employed as a security guard at the Acre Industrial Development Company (CODISACRE). Even though the expectation of his employers was that he would be guarding the government department, in fact, Hélio was drawing, painting and furthering his art. Amidst these several occupations, he always kept his artistic spirit alive. His nights were dedicated to drawing. Through experiments, mixing ink and raw materials available in the forest, he developed a permanent research in search of materials that would allow him to portray the natural lights and colors he saw in the forest. These experiments, whose real composition has never been revealed, have their roots in his experiences in the rubber plantations. Throughout his life, Hélio Melo created and improved pigments that were meant to



defend the forest and its colors. In a continuous exercise aimed at improvement, he practiced traces and transferred to paper stories from the rubber plantation, both stories from memory and current ones, which expressed his critical and political view of a new reality.

With the news of the promotion of a drawing course by the Department of Cultural Action (DAC), Hélio saw the opportunity to enhance his techniques and disseminate his practice. He met the visual artist Genésio Fernandes from Pernambuco, who was the lecturer in charge, and he immediately showed great appreciation for Hélio's work. Even though the methodology and techniques shared in the course had not awakened Hélio's interest, this was, without a doubt, his greatest opportunity to leave anonymity behind.⁹

In 1978, invited by Genésio and the then DAC Coordinator, Francisco Gregório Filho, he participated in a group show featuring the work of several civil servants. The drawings exhibited by Hélio Melo immediately stood out, giving him visibility and earning him an official photograph with the Governor of Acre at the time, Geraldo Mesquita.¹⁰ Subsequently, he participated in an art fair called Feira dos Estados in Brasília, as part of the Acre stand next to other regional artists, such as Garibaldi Brasil, Hélio Cardoni, Raul Velasquez and Genésio Fernandes himself. At this point, Hélio Melo's art—produced from a combination of India ink and resins extracted from Amazonian plants, which portrayed the forest, with its wonders and sorrows—gained visibility in the national art circuit. As a result, the exhibited works were all sold by the end of the fair.

In 1979, via the intervention of the regional delegate of the Social Service of Commerce (SESC Acre), Pedro Vicente da Costa Sobrinho, Hélio became an artist at the disposal of the institution. Through this professional channel, a new and major opportunity opened up in the form of an exhibition at SESC Tijuca in Rio de Janeiro in 1980. On this occasion, the artist Sérgio Camargo from Rio saw the work of Hélio for the first time. Hélio's atypical luminosity, the power of his palette and his forest motifs, all approached with a lot of sentiment, impressed the *carrioca* artist, who commented that "the drawings have such a

9 *Hélio, o artista autêntico*, O Jornal, June 19, 1978.

10 *Mesquita aprecia exposição artística*, O Jornal, January 15, 1979.

well-calculated intuitive sensitivity to capture luminosity, that it outweighs the iconography".¹¹ After this first contact, Camargo wrote in a newspaper:

A case of aesthetic symbiosis with the jungle where he lived? This is how you can naturally explain this phenomenon, without realizing, however, his profound motivation to get to know, through the work of art, the luminous meanders that he has managed to notice, such as, for example, the complex immanence of a sumptuous light curiously and precisely defined in drawings of a wise naturality.¹²

Sérgio Camargo not only bought 17 works but also promoted Hélio's practice to journalists and art critics, inviting the artist to take part in a new exhibition at Galeria Sérgio Millet in 1981, also in Rio de Janeiro. Reputable critics, such as Frederico de Moraes and Walmir Ayala, attended the exhibition and commented on it, opening up an important space for Hélio in the national media.

Through SESC Acre, he finally had the opportunity to "work like an artist",¹³ which he always wanted. It is worth highlighting here the role that SESC played for the culture of Acre at the time. Its first Regional Department was opened in Acre at the end of the 1970s and played a fundamental role in fomenting Acrean culture. Through resources that were available to Acre, there were investments in local culture, both in terms of bringing important national names to Acre and the promotion of local artists. As well as painting, at SESC, Hélio developed other artistic skills: music, storytelling and literature. He began to narrate the stories he heard from Indigenous people and rubber tappers, sitting around the fire on the rubber plantations. It was also at this point that he began to write systematically. He spoke about the Amazon forest like no one else, with the gaze of someone who was an insider. His literary practice cherished collective and traditional orality and imagery, conjuring a real manual about the Amazon, in which he organized years of observation and experience in the forest, using a simple language, "from rubber tapper to rubber tapper", like he used to say. Regarding Hélio

11 *Sérgio Camargo em arte impressa*, Jornal do Brasil, October 17, 1990; *Coluna Wilson Coutinho*, Jornal do Brasil, unknown date.

12 *Sérgio Camargo, A propósito de Hélio Melo ou a beleza da luz*, Dec 8, 1983.

13 *Dificuldades e sonhos do artista popular*. Jornal do Brasil, unknown date.

Melo's literary work, the artist started to systematize his stories from his work at Sesc Acre, in the 1980s. The book *História da Amazônia* [History of the Amazon], for example, was first published in 1984, almost by hand: the presentation was handwritten, the content was typed and the illustrations were originally made in color. Throughout his artistic career, he published nine books in booklet format: *História da Amazônia* [History of the Amazon] (1984), *O caucho, a seringueira e seus mistérios* [The Caucho, The Rubber Tree and Their Mysteries] (1986), *Os mistérios da mata* [The Mysteries of the Jungle] (1987), *Experiência do caçador e os mistérios da caça* [The Experience of the Hunter and the Mysteries of Hunting] (1986), *Legendas fotográficas* [Photographic Legends] (2000), *Como salvar a floresta?* [How to Save the Forest], *Os mistérios dos Répteis e dos Peixes* [The Mysteries of Reptiles and Fish], *Os mistérios dos Pássaros* [The Mystery of Birds] e *Via Sacra na Amazônia* [Amazon Stations of the Cross].¹⁴

Another consequence of his work at Sesc Acre was the creation, at the beginning of the 1980s, of a musical ensemble called "Sempre Serve" [Always Works], which accompanied him in his presentations. The repertoire comprised songs played at forest parties and some of his own compositions.

At the end of the 1980s, due to the authenticity and, most of all, the urgency of his work, Hélio Melo conquered Brazil and the world. Until today, we have no exact dimension of the size of his oeuvre. We know of more than 70 exhibitions in Brazilian state capitals, such as Rio Branco, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Bahia, Ceará, Goiânia, Minas Gerais, Pernambuco, Paraná, Amazonas and Belo Horizonte,¹⁵ as well as in the Federal District, and countries such as Italy, France, England and the United States. And some of them were both remarkable and significant.

¹⁴ It is difficult to pinpoint the dates of the first editions of all the titles that Hélio Melo released in his career, some relying only on the artist's own resources and efforts, others counting on the partial support of the culture foundations and other public agencies and of Sesc Acre. In 2000, the Elias Mansour Foundation published a collection of seven books by Hélio Melo. His latest book, *Legendas fotográficas* [Photographic Legends], in bilingual edition, was released in the same year.

¹⁵ *Hélio Melo traz cotidiano amazonense em exposição*, O Povo, Fortaleza, December 1, 1992; *Hélio Melo expõe na Bahia*, Untitled, Bahia, October 24, 1992; *Desenhos da memória e dos mistérios*, Jornal de Brasília, Brasília, April 27, 1995; *As cores e as sombras da Amazônia*, Jornal do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, July 22, 1992.

From the end of the 1980s, he began to exhibit internationally. The first of which was in 1986 at the Nouveau Salon de Paris in France.¹⁶ In 1988, he exhibited in Washington in the US, by taking part in an Amazon-themed show called *Tropical Rainforests: A Disappearing Treasure* at the Smithsonian Institute, with paintings, songs and stories.¹⁷ In 1989, he went to Italy, fulfilling his dream to visit the Vatican and exhibiting in cities such as Luca, Florence, Verona and Pisa.¹⁸ He returned to the country in 1990, this time with the exhibition *The Passion of Christ in Acre*. The 19 drawings represented a contemporary view of Christ through Liberation Theology,¹⁹ looking at the Amazonian reality of the marginalization and exploitation of Indigenous people and rubber tappers.²⁰ In 1992, he was part of the Acre Cultural Caravan at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (ECO-92), invited by Alex Shankland from The Gaia Foundation. The artist took 40 paintings, four books and his inseparable violin.

He came back from these trips full of ideas and plans and, as usual, he sold all the material he took, so he arrived back in Rio Branco ready to start working again. His studio, which functioned at the back of his house, in the neighborhood of Base, was already getting too small for the artist, not only in terms of physical space but also in terms of the visibility his work was receiving outside. From March 1990, he established a work link with the State Cultural Foundation. Immediately after, he began to work at the Hélio Melo Room, an annex of Casa do Seringueiro (House of the Rubber Tapper), a public space in the center of Rio Branco, managed by the government and holding an archive for the purposes of research, documentation and the dissemination of rubber tapping culture.²¹ To see Hélio all you had to do was to visit the place. There you would find the artist, always surround-

¹⁶ *A arte fantástica de Hélio Melo*, Gazeta do Acre, March 2, 1986.

¹⁷ *Do seringal a Washington, Hélio Melo leva a sua arte até os Estados Unidos*, Untitled, July 23, 1988; *Hélio Melo homenageado em exposição em Paris*, O Rio Branco, Rio Branco, August 21, 1986.

¹⁸ Hélio Holanda Melo, *A arte acreana rumo à Itália*, O Rio Branco, Rio Branco, September 20, 1989.

¹⁹ Social-ecclesiastic movement within the Catholic Church that focuses on the teachings of Jesus Christ as a tool to free the oppressed.

²⁰ *Hélio Melo faz sua Via Sacra com o Cristo seringueiro*, A Gazeta, September 14, 1990.

²¹ *Um espaço para difundir a vida do seringueiro*, A Gazeta, March 20, 1991.



ed by his paintings, producing and exhibiting his works, playing his violin, telling stories and always welcoming the public. Those were Hélio's days. He painted, or wrote, but also ended the day with the sound of the violin, which was his passion. For the artist, who always expressed a certain disappointment with the little support he received from local governmental bodies, this space finally represented the acknowledgment of his practice.

In 1997, he embarked once again on another artistic experience, this time using an audiovisual language. He was turned into the protagonist of a biographical film, whose script, direction and photography was undertaken by a filmmaker from Acre, Silvio Margarido, and supported by a team of artists, also from Acre, including Dalmir Ferreira, Ivan de Castela, Danilo D' Sacre, Assis Freire and Jorge Nazaré.²² Despite relying on minimal resources for its production, *A peleja de Hélio Melo com o Mapinguari do Antimari* [Hélio Melo's Encounter with Mapinguari from Antimari] is an important record of Hélio Melo's life. It reveals to the public a relationship that overarches the entirety of the artist's life: his proximity to the Mapinguari. Of all the Amazonian legends, this was the one that Hélio told, played and painted most. He talked about a big, strong, stinky animal with one eye in the middle of its forehead. He related several events in which the Mapinguari was the protagonist. "Even though I never saw it, I am certain it exists because I know people who have seen it",²³ he explained. In the popular imagery of Acre, many people used to say that the Mapinguari was the artist's close friend or even his personification in the jungle.

As such, he lived his life as an artist: he told and wrote stories, he painted everyday images from the forest and played songs about life on the rubber plantation. In a simple manner, he expressed the complexity of the Amazon: the beauty, the color and the light of the jungle. The rubber tapper carrying out their daily routines of cutting rubber trees; parties on the rubber plantation; forest paths seen from above but rooted to the ground; the windy paths in the cuts of rubber trees; donkeys delivering *MOBRAL* cer-

tificates,²⁴ contrasting with rubber tappers walking to a school called *Escolinha Esperança* [Hope School]; trees and animals crying because of the devastation; the arrival of *paulistas* (people from São Paulo), which feature as donkeys or cows, evicting rubber tappers, pushing them down a rudderless path; donkeys and horses on treetops; and the politician's dog, among many other themes around the history of the Brazilian Amazon.

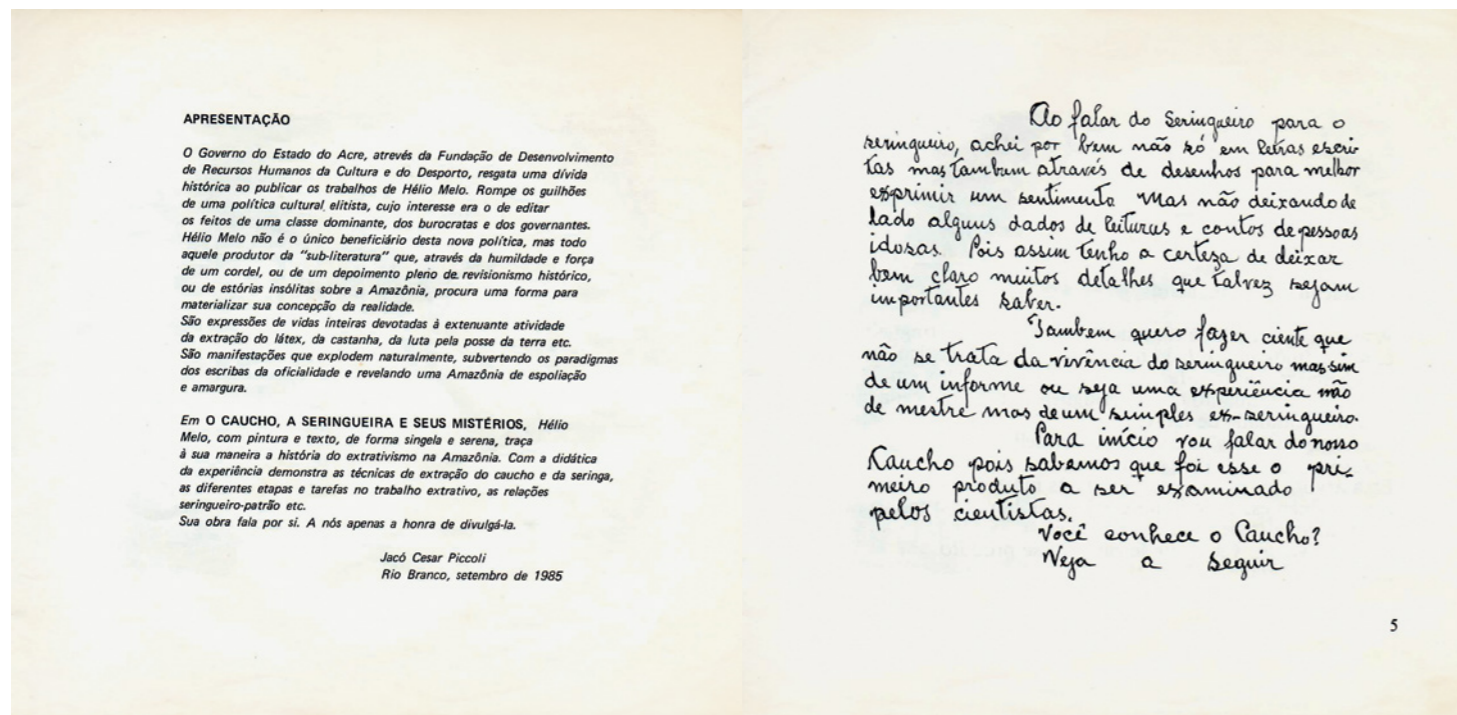
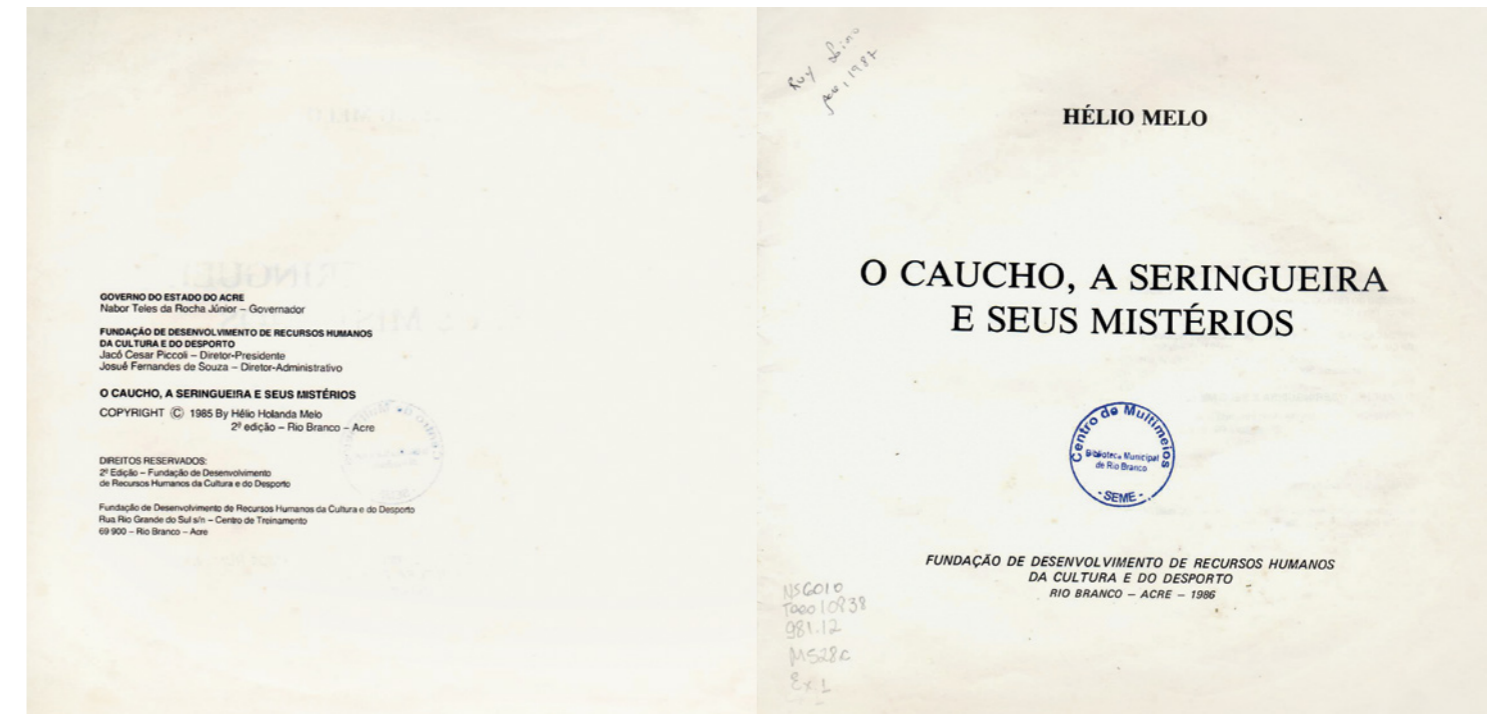
He died on March 20, 2001 in Goiania. He received several significant posthumous tributes. In 2001, the Mayor of Rio Branco opened the Hélio Melo Primary School, which was refurbished in 2018. In 2003, the State Government of Acre opened the Hélio Melo Theater, located in the city center of Rio Branco. In 2006, he was one of the highlights of the 27th São Paulo Biennial, with a posthumous exhibition of his work. In 2011, the Garibaldi Brasil Foundation organized the Municipal Conference of Culture, whose theme was Hélio Melo's oeuvre, under the title of *A peleja do Hélio Melo com o Mapinguari*. On this occasion, a publication was launched as a tribute to the artist. In 2013, the National Historical and Artistic Legacy Institute (IPHAN) produced an inventory of his visual art works, featuring 137 pieces. In 2016, the exhibition *Hélio Melo: o sábio da floresta* [Hélio Melo: the wiseman of the forest] was organized to commemorate the artist's 90th birthday. In 2018, he was the theme of a contemporary dance performance called *Origens* [Origins], put together by the group *Nóis de Casa*, among many other well-deserved tributes.

Hélio Melo was an artist who was passionate about revealing the reality of his region through a solitary and self-taught process of learning, without many technical resources available but with a relentless practice of luminous drawings, songs and storybooks. He spoke of his experience in a critical way, as someone who could see beyond it. In this way, the Amazon forest was eternalized in the work of this "chronicler of the forest", through a vision that was applicable not only to the time in which the work was produced but also to the current day.

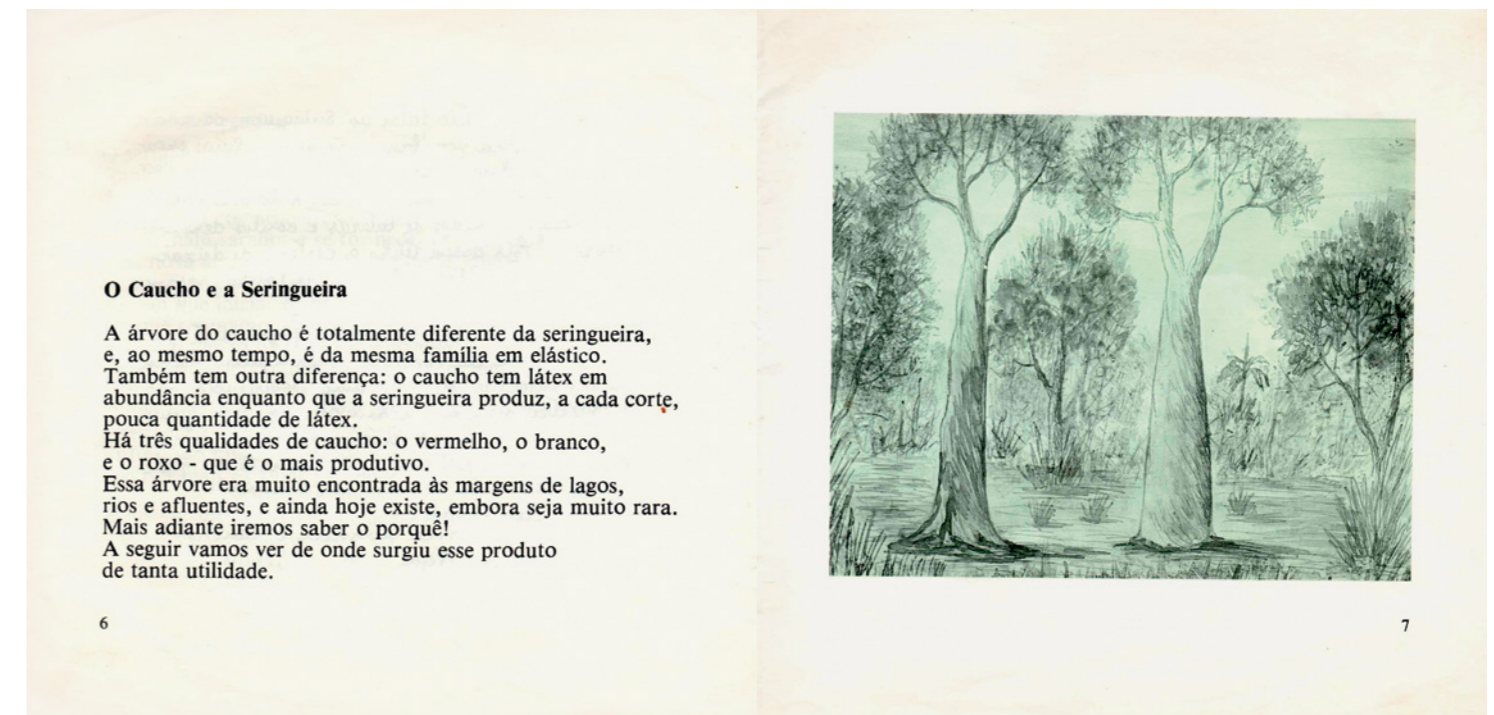
22 *A peleja de Hélio Melo com o Mapinguari do Antimari*, Dalmir Ferreira and Silvio Margarido. Rio Branco, 1997 (38 min).
 23 *Revista Amazônia Nossa, Do Seringal às telas*, n. 24, unknown date.

ENCERRAMENTO DO MOBRAL
 [GRADUATION DAY, MOBRAL (GOVERNMENT LITERACY CAMPAIGN)], 1996





Ao falar do Seringueiro para o
 seringueiro, achei por bem não só em letras escri-
 tas mas também através de desenhos para melhor
 exprimir um sentimento. Mas não deixando de
 lado alguns dados de culturas e contos de pessoas
 idosas. Pois assim tenho a certeza de deixar
 bem claro muitos detalhes que talvez sejam
 importantes saber.
 Também quero fazer ciente que
 não se trata da vivência do seringueiro mas sim
 de um informe ou seja uma experiência não
 de mestre mas de um simples seringueiro.
 Para início vou falar do nosso
 Caucho pois sabemos que foi esse o prin-
 cipal produto a ser examinado
 pelos cientistas.
 Você conhece o Caucho?
 Veja a seguir



O Caucho e a Seringueira

A árvore do caucho é totalmente diferente da seringueira, e, ao mesmo tempo, é da mesma família em elástico. Também tem outra diferença: o caucho tem látex em abundância enquanto que a seringueira produz, a cada corte, pouca quantidade de látex.

Há três qualidades de caucho: o vermelho, o branco, e o roxo - que é o mais produtivo.

Essa árvore era muito encontrada às margens de lagos, rios e afluentes, e ainda hoje existe, embora seja muito rara. Mais adiante iremos saber o porquê!

A seguir vamos ver de onde surgiu esse produto de tanta utilidade.

- 1 a **raspadeira**, para raspar a seringueira
- 2 a **lâmina**, faca que serve para fazer o corte
- 3 a **cabrita**, para encastoar a lâmina da faca
- 4 o **balde**, para carregar o látex
- 5 a **tigelinha**, para apanhar o látex
- 6 o **saco**, onde se guarda o látex depois de colhido
- 7 a **tubiba**, tira de borracha para amarrar o saco
- 8 o **bornal**, para juntar o sernambi carregado a tira-colo
- 9 a **poronga**, lamparina para o seringueiro alumiar seu caminho
- 10 a **espingarda**, para se proteger das feras
- 11 a **bandoleira**, cinto que se amarra na coronha para o coice da espingarda
- 12 a **faca de defesa**
- 13 a **capanga** ou **bosoroca**, para carregar os cartuchos da espingarda
- 14 a **estoupa** ou **sarrapilha**, serve para carregar os utensílios conforme vemos nas costas do seringueiro.



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- Hélio Holanda Melo. A arte acreana rumo à Itália*. O Rio Branco, September 20, 1989.
- Hélio Melo expõe na Bahia*, October 24, 1992.
- Hélio Melo faz sua Via Sacra com o Cristo seringueiro*. A Gazeta, September 14, 1990.
- Hélio Melo homenageado em exposição em Paris*. O Rio Branco, August 21, 1986.
- Hélio Melo traz cotidiano amazonense em exposição*. O Povo, Fortaleza, December 1, 1992.
- Hélio Melo vai levar suas telas*. A Gazeta, April 21, 1992.
- Hélio, o artista autêntico*. O Jornal, June 19, 1978.
- Mesquita aprecia exposição artística*. O Jornal, January 15, 1979.
- Sérgio Camargo em arte impressa*. Jornal do Brasil, October 17, 1990.
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Interview

- MELO, Fátima. Interview granted to the author at the interviewee's residence on October 6, 2022. Audio recording.



SÍLVIO MARGARIDO FILMING HÉLIO MELO FOR THE DOCUMENTARY "A PELEJA DE HÉLIO MELO COM O MAPINGUARI DO ANTIMARY" [HÉLIO MELO'S BATTLE WITH THE MAPINGUARI OF ANTIMARY], 1997

JACOPO CRIVELLI VISCONTI is an independent critic and curator, author of *Novas derivas* [New Drifts] (WMF Martins Fontes, São Paulo, 2014; Ediciones Metales Pesados, Santiago, Chile, 2016). In addition to curating numerous exhibitions by contemporary artists at institutions in Brazil, the Americas and Europe, he was head curator of the 34th São Paulo Biennial (2020-21), the 12th Cuenca Biennial, in Ecuador (2014) and of the Brazilian participation at the Biennale di Venezia in 2022 (Brazil), in Cyprus (2019), and Brazil, (2007). He is a regular contributor to contemporary art, architecture and design magazines, in addition to writing for exhibition catalogs and artist monographs.

TONY GROSS is a political scientist with postgraduate study at Cambridge and Oxford universities. He has lived between Brasília, Rio Branco and Oxford since the 1970s, and has followed indigenous and rubber tapper movements in Acre since then. He is co-author, with Chico Mendes, of *Fight for the Forest: Chico Mendes in his own words* and was awarded the Chico Mendes Floresta Prize. He has been a special advisor to the Ministry of the Environment and to the Government of Acre, a United Nations official and is a founding member of the Instituto Socioambiental.

LISETTE LAGNADO is an art critic and independent curator. She coordinated the Leonilson Project, which resulted in the publication *Leonilson. São tantas verdades* [There are so many truths] (Sesi, 1996). She has a PhD in Philosophy from the University of São Paulo (USP), and was responsible for cataloging the manuscripts by Hélio Oiticica for the online platform hosted by Itaú Cultural. She was director of the Parque Lage School of Visual Arts (Rio de Janeiro, 2014-2017), and curator of the 27th São Paulo Biennial (2006) and co-curator of the 11th Berlin Biennial (2019-2020).

FLÁVIA BURLAMAQUI holds a Master's degree in Social History from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. She is a teacher in the public schools of Acre and Rio Branco, and works as a researcher and president of the Acre State Council of Culture.



HÉLIO MELO BEING INTERVIEWED
BY THE ANTIMARY RIVER, 1997

WORKS

O CAÇADOR E A ONÇA PÉ DE BOI [THE HUNTER AND THE OBSTINATE JAGUAR], 1996

PP. 2-3
O LAGO [THE LAKE], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
19,5 × 25 CM [7​ 5⁄8 × 9​ 7⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 4-5
SERINGUEIRA [RUBBER TREE], 1987
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
21 × 25 CM [8​ 1⁄4 × 9​ 7⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

CAMPO ABERTO [OPEN FIELD], 1997

P. 7
CAMPO ABERTO [OPEN FIELD], 1997
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
20,6 × 27,5 CM [8​ 1⁄8 × 10​ 7⁄8 IN]
DANILO DE S'ACRE COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

COLHENDO LÁTEX [COLLECTING LATEX], 1980

PP. 8-9
COLHENDO LÁTEX [COLLECTING LATEX], 1980
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
30 × 37 CM [11​ 3⁄4 × 14​ 5⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

O BARRACÃO I [THE COMPANY STORE I], 1985

PP. 10-11
O BARRACÃO I [THE COMPANY STORE I], 1985
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
32 × 48,5 CM [12​ 5⁄8 × 19​ 7⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

SERINGUEIRAS [RUBBER TREES], 1989

P. 13
SERINGUEIRAS [RUBBER TREES], 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
38,1 × 26,7 CM [15 × 10​ 1⁄2 IN]
LUCIANA LUCIANI CIANCARELA COLLECTION, LUCCA (ITALY)

P. 15
MATA [FOREST], 1985
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
22,1 × 29,3 CM [8​ 3⁄4 × 11​ 1⁄2 IN]
DINHO GONÇALVES COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

O PRANTO DOS ANIMAIS I [THE LAMENT OF THE ANIMALS I], 1980

PP. 16-17
O PRANTO DOS ANIMAIS I [THE LAMENT OF THE ANIMALS I], 1980
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
21,5 × 33 CM [8​ 1⁄2 × 13 IN]
HEES FAMILY COLLECTION, CHICAGO (UNITES STATES OF AMERICA)

P. 18
CORTANDO SERINGA NO JIRAU [TAPPING RUBBER USING A FRAME], 1983
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
35,5 × 28,8 CM [14 × 11​ 3⁄8 IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 20
O CAÇADOR III [THE HUNTER III], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON CANVAS
161 × 138,3 CM [63​ 3⁄8 × 54​ 1⁄2 IN]
GARIBALDI BRASIL FOUNDATION COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 21
O CAÇADOR E A ONÇA PÉ DE BOI [THE HUNTER AND THE OBSTINATE JAGUAR], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
15,6 × 15,8 CM [6​ 1⁄8 × 6​ 1⁄4 IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 22
TERRA INDÍGENA [INDIGENOUS LAND], 1992
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
25,5 × 30 CM [10 × 11​ 3⁄4 IN]
PENSATÓRIO STUDIO MUSEUM COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 24
INDÍGENA [INDIGENOUS PERSON], 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON FABRIC
148 × 138 CM [58​ 1⁄4 × 54​ 3⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 25
TAPIRÍ [SHACK], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
28,2 × 33,5 CM [11​ 1⁄8 × 13​ 1⁄4 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 27
O HOMEM E O BURRO IV [THE MAN AND THE DONKEY IV], 1992
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
60 × 53 CM [23​ 5⁄8 × 20​ 7⁄8 IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 28
CORTANDO SERINGA [TAPPING RUBBER], 1995
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
34,4 × 28,7 CM [13​ 1⁄2 × 11​ 1⁄4 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 30-31
TEMPO DOS CORONÉIS III [TIME OF THE COLONELS III], 1995
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
59,2 × 79 CM [23​ 1⁄4 × 31​ 1⁄8 IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

PP. 32-33
TEMPO DOS CORONÉIS II [TIME OF THE COLONELS II], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
44,2 × 61,7 CM [17​ 3⁄8 × 24​ 1⁄4 IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

PP. 36-37
AMANHECER [DAWN], 1985
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
27,5 × 45 CM [10​ 7⁄8 × 17​ 3⁄4 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 38
AMANHECER [DAWN], 1984
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
33 × 49 CM [13 × 19​ 1⁄4 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

ENTARDECER [DUSK], 1980
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
20,5 × 27 CM [8​ 1⁄8 × 10​ 5⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 39
O SERRADOR [THE SAWYER], 1982
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON COLORED PAPERBOARD

30 × 44,6 CM [11​ 3⁄4 × 17​ 1⁄2 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 40
SERINGAL II [SERINGAL II], 1991
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
16,5 × 16,5 CM [6​ 1⁄2 × 6​ 1⁄2 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 41
ENTARDECER [DUSK], 1985
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON COLORED PAPERBOARD
27,6 × 43,2 CM [10​ 7⁄8 × 17 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 42-43
SERINGAL I [SERINGAL I], 1981
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
20 × 27,9 CM [7​ 7⁄8 × 11 IN]
ACRE SOCIAL SERVICE OF COMMERCE COLLECTION–SESC ACRE, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 44
UNTITLED, 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON FABRIC
144,5 × 141,5 CM [56​ 7⁄8 × 55​ 3⁄4 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 45
UNTITLED, 1980
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
22,8 × 34,5 CM [9 × 13​ 5⁄8 IN]
ACRE SOCIAL SERVICE OF COMMERCE COLLECTION–SESC ACRE, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 48
COLHENDO LÁTEX I [COLLECTING LATEX I], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
24,2 × 18,2 CM [9​ 1⁄2 × 7​ 1⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 53
DEFUMANDO BORRACHA [CURING RUBBER], 1980
INK ON CARDBOARD
22,5 × 32,8 CM [8​ 7⁄8 × 12​ 7⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

UNTITLED, 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON FABRIC
148 × 191,5 CM [58​ 1⁄4 × 75​ 3⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 55
BARCO À VAREJÃO [PUNT], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
30,5 × 41,5 CM [12 × 16​ 3⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 59
RIACHO [STREAM], 1997
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
21,4 × 28,2 CM [8​ 3⁄8 × 11​ 1⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 60-61
SERINGUEIRO [RUBBER TAPPER], 1990
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
16 × 15,8 CM [6​ 1⁄4 × 6​ 1⁄4 IN]

FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 72
UNTITLED, 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON FABRIC
145 × 113,5 CM [57​ 1⁄8 × 44​ 3⁄4 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

UNTITLED, 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON FABRIC
140 × 141,5 CM [55​ 1⁄8 × 55​ 3⁄4 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 73
UNTITLED, 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON FABRIC
141,5 × 144,5 CM [55​ 3⁄4 × 56​ 7⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 89
O EMPATE [THE STAND-OFF], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
35,5 × 43 CM [14 × 16​ 7⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 90
TRANSPORTANDO ENFERMO [TRANSPORTING THE SICK], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
32,6 × 31 CM [12​ 7⁄8 × 12​ 1⁄4 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 91
A CAMINHADA II [THE JOURNEY II], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
28,5 × 28 CM [11​ 1⁄4 × 11 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 92
A CAMINHADA I [THE JOURNEY I], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
28,5 × 25 CM [11​ 1⁄4 × 9​ 7⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

ACOLHIMENTO [WELCOMING], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
30 × 26,3 CM [11​ 3⁄4 × 10​ 3⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 93
JOGO DA SORTE [GAME OF CHANCE], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
29 × 24,5 CM [11​ 3⁄8 × 9​ 5⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

COMUNIDADE DE BASE [GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
31,7 × 32,5 CM [12​ 1⁄2 × 12​ 3⁄4 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 94
A RESSURREIÇÃO [THE RESURRECTION], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
32,7 × 25 CM [12​ 7⁄8 × 9​ 7⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 95
DEFUMANDO BORRACHA [CURING RUBBER], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
30,5 × 29,5 CM [12 × 11​ 5⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

EXPULSÃO I [EXPULSION I], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
29,3 × 25,5 CM [11​ 1⁄2 × 10 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 96
O PESO DA CRUZ [THE WEIGHT OF THE CROSS], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
28,4 × 26,8 CM [11​ 1⁄8 × 10​ 1⁄2 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

DESMATAMENTO [DEFORESTATION], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
33 × 27 CM [13 × 10​ 5⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 97
REUNIÃO [MEETING], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
32,3 × 30 CM [12​ 3⁄4 × 11​ 3⁄4 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

ORAÇÃO [PRAYER], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
30,6 × 29,3 CM [12 × 11​ 1⁄2 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 98
VELHOS SERINGUEIROS [OLD RUBBER TAPPERS], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
32,4 × 31,4 CM [12​ 3⁄4 × 12​ 3⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 99
EXPULSÃO II [EXPULSION II], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
29,8 × 28,8 [11​ 3⁄4 × 11​ 3⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 100
SERINGUEIRO CRUCIFICADO [CRUCIFIED RUBBER TAPPER], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
26 × 31,5 CM [10​ 1⁄4 × 12​ 3⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 101
UNTITLED, 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
26,2 × 31,1 CM [10​ 1⁄4 × 12​ 1⁄4 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 102-103
HORA DA MORTE [HOUR OF DEATH], 1990
VIA SACRA DA AMAZÔNIA [AMAZON STATIONS OF THE CROSS] SERIES
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
23,2 × 27 CM [9​ 1⁄8 × 10​ 5⁄8 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 104
BALSA DE BORRACHA I [RUBBER RAFT I], 1997
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
39,6 × 54,2 CM [15​ 5⁄8 × 21​ 3⁄8 IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 105
BALSA DE BORRACHA II [RUBBER RAFT II], 1997
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
33 × 40,6 CM [13 × 16 IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 107
UNTITLED, 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
32 × 43,5 CM [12 ⁵/₈ × 17 ¹/₈ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 108-109
NAVIO OU GAIOLA [SHIP OR RIVERBOAT], 1997
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
22 × 36 CM [8 ⁵/₈ × 14 ¹/₈ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 110
DEFUMANDO BORRACHA I
[CURING RUBBER I], 1988
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
34,5 × 42,5 CM [13 ³/₈ × 16 ³/₄ IN]
LUCIANA LUCIANI CIANCARELA COLLECTION,
LUCCA (ITALY)

P. 111
DEFUMANDO BORRACHA II
[CURING RUBBER II], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
29,5 × 35 CM [11 ⁵/₈ × 13 ³/₄ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

SERINGAL [SERINGAL], N.D.
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
19 × 28,5 CM [7 ¹/₂ × 11 ¹/₄ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 113
SERINGAL, 1997
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON CARDBOARD
26,8 × 31,1 CM [10 ¹/₂ × 12 ¹/₄ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 114
UNTITLED, 1980
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
18,7 × 25,5 CM [7 ³/₈ × 10 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 115
UNTITLED, 1980
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
17,5 × 25 CM [6 ⁷/₈ × 9 ⁷/₈ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 116-117
UNTITLED, 1981
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
38 × 45,5 CM [15 × 17 ⁷/₈ IN]
ACRE SOCIAL SERVICE OF COMMERCE
COLLECTION–SESC ACRE, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 118
PAISAGEM AMAZÔNICA
[AMAZON LANDSCAPE], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
22,2 × 28 CM [8 ³/₄ × 11 IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 119
O IGARAPÉ [THE CREEK], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
26,5 × 33,9 CM [10 ³/₈ × 13 ³/₈ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 120
CORTANDO LÁTEX [TAPPING RUBBER], 1980
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON CANVAS
145 × 129 CM [57 ¹/₈ × 50 ³/₄ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 121
CORTANDO SERINGA NO JIRAU
[TAPPING RUBBER USING A FRAME], 1980S
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
55,1 × 43,9 CM [21 ³/₄ × 17 ¹/₄ IN]
GARIBALDI BRASIL FOUNDATION COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 122
COLHENDO LÁTEX II
[COLLECTING LATEX II], 1995
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON CANVAS
160 × 140 CM [63 × 55 ¹/₈ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 123
SERINGUEIRO TRANSPORTANDO BORRACHA
[RUBBER TAPPER TRANSPORTING RUBBER], 1998
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
37,2 × 45,8 CM [14 ³/₈ × 18 IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

PP. 124-125
TEMPO DOS CORONÉIS I
[TIME OF THE COLONELS I], 1983
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
27,3 × 45,2 CM [10 ³/₄ × 17 ³/₄ IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 126
CORTANDO SERINGA [TAPPING RUBBER], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
28,2 × 20,5 CM [11 ¹/₈ × 8 ¹/₈ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 127
UNTITLED, 1982
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
44 × 57,5 CM [17 ³/₈ × 22 ⁵/₈ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 128
MAPA DA ESTRADA DE SERINGA
[MAP OF THE ESTRADA DA SERINGA], 1998
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
40 × 53 CM [15 ³/₄ × 20 ⁷/₈ IN]
PINACOTECA DO ESTADO DE SÃO PAULO
COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 129
CAMINHO DO SERINGUEIRO E/OU ESTRADA
DA SERINGA [THE RUBBER TAPPER'S PATH
AND/OR THE ESTRADA DA SERINGA], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
39,8 × 54 CM [15 ⁵/₈ × 21 ¹/₄ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 131
COLHENDO LÁTEX [COLLECTING LATEX], 1998
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
36,4 × 28 CM [14 ³/₈ × 11 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 132-133
O HOMEM E O BURRO I
[THE MAN AND THE DONKEY I], 1984
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
36,5 × 51.4 CM [14 ³/₈ × 20 ¹/₄ IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 135
O HOMEM E O BURRO II
[THE MAN AND THE DONKEY II], 1988
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
43,3 × 32,2 CM [17 × 12 ⁵/₈ IN]
LUCIANA LUCIANI CIANCARELA COLLECTION,
LUCCA (ITALY)

PP. 136-137
CAMINHO SEM DESTINO II
[ROAD TO NOWHERE II], 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON FABRIC
148,5 × 203 CM [58 ¹/₂ × 79 ⁷/₈ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 138
O MAPINGUARI [THE MAPINGUARI], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
16 × 15,9 CM [6 ¹/₂ × 6 ¹/₄ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

O MAPINGUARI [THE MAPINGUARI], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
15,5 × 15,8 CM [6 ¹/₈ × 6 ¹/₄ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 139
MAPINGUARI I, 1998
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON FABRIC
152 × 82 CM [59 ⁷/₈ × 32 ¹/₄ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 140
MAPINGUARI II, 1998
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON WOOD
CHIPBOARD
101 × 46 CM [39 ³/₄ × 18 ¹/₈ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 141
MAPINGUARI, 1995
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
94,7 × 62 CM [37 ¹/₄ × 24 ³/₈ IN]
MARIA MAIA COLLECTION, DF (BRAZIL)

P. 142
UNTITLED, 1999
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
23,6 × 20 CM [9 ¹/₄ × 7 ⁷/₈ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 143
UNTITLED, 2000
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
31 × 39,5 CM [12 ¹/₄ × 15 ¹/₂ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 144-145
A TRANSFORMAÇÃO DA SERINGUEIRA I [THE
TRANSFORMATION OF THE RUBBER TREE I], 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON FABRIC
147 × 141 CM [57 ⁷/₈ × 55 ¹/₂ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 146
O HOMEM E O BURRO IV
[THE MAN AND THE DONKEY IV], 1992
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
60 × 53 CM [23 ⁵/₈ × 20 ⁷/₈ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 147
O HOMEM E O BURRO V
[THE MAN AND THE DONKEY V], 1993
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
27,6 × 23,7 CM [10 ⁷/₈ × 9 ³/₈ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 148
UNTITLED, 1982
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
27,5 × 41 CM [10 ⁷/₈ × 16 ¹/₈ IN]
ASPASIA CAMARGO COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 149
O PRANTO DOS ANIMAIS III
[THE LAMENTATION OF THE ANIMALS III], 1993
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PLYWOOD
25 × 31 CM [9 ⁷/₈ × 12 ¹/₄ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 150
UNTITLED, 1982
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
27 × 41 CM [10 ⁵/₈ × 16 ¹/₈ IN]
ASPASIA CAMARGO COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 151
UNTITLED, 1983
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
25,5 × 40,7 CM [10 × 16 IN]
ASPASIA CAMARGO COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 152
TEMPO DOS CORONÉIS IV
[TIME OF THE COLONELS IV], 1995
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
35,7 × 32,8 CM [14 × 12 ⁷/₈ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 153
UNTITLED, 1985
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
28,5 × 39 CM [11 ¹/₄ × 15 ³/₈ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

PP. 154-155
O PRANTO DOS ANIMAIS II [THE LAMENTATION
OF THE ANIMALS II], 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON FABRIC
141,5 × 141,5 CM [55 ³/₄ × 55 ³/₄ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 156-157
A VISITA DA VACA II
[THE VISIT OF THE COW II], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
47 × 61,7 CM [18 ¹/₂ × 24 ¹/₄ IN]
GARIBALDI BRASIL FOUNDATION COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

PP. 158-159
A TRANSFORMAÇÃO DA SERINGUEIRA II
[THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RUBBER
TREE II], 1984
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
30,5 × 45,7 CM [12 × 18 IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 161
UNTITLED, 1980
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
22,3 × 29,6 CM [8 ³/₄ × 11 ⁵/₈ IN]
ACRE SOCIAL SERVICE OF COMMERCE
COLLECTION–SESC ACRE, AC (BRAZIL)

UNTITLED, 1980
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
22,7 × 33,2 CM [9 × 13 ¹/₈ IN]
ACRE SOCIAL SERVICE OF COMMERCE
COLLECTION–SESC ACRE, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 162
A TRANSFORMAÇÃO DA SERINGUEIRA III
[THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RUBBER
TREE III], 1997
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
20,6 × 27,2 CM [8 ¹/₈ × 10 ³/₄ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 166-167
O MAPA DA ESTRADA I
[THE MAP OF THE ESTRADA I], 1983
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON WOOD
108,5 × 203,5 CM [42 ³/₄ × 80 ¹/₈ IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 168
UNTITLED, N.D.
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
39,5 × 35 CM [15 ¹/₂ × 13 ³/₄ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 169
O CAÇADOR DE ONÇA
[THE JAGUAR HUNTER], 1983
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
29,6 × 42,6 CM [11 ⁵/₈ × 16 ³/₄ IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 170
SOBREVIVENDO [SURVIVING], N.D.
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
47,8 × 48,2 CM [18 ⁷/₈ × 19 IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 177
UM PEDAÇO DE MATA
[A PIECE OF THE FOREST], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
25,5 × 34 CM [10 × 13 ³/₈ IN]
CENTRE GEORGES POMPIDOU COLLECTION,
PARIS (FRANCE)

PP. 178-179
TIRANDO AÇAÍ [HARVESTING AÇAÍ], 1984
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
31,2 × 46 CM [12 ¹/₄ × 18 ¹/₈ IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 180
MÃE DA MATA [MOTHER OF THE FOREST], 1996
OIL ON METAL SHEET
150 × 121 CM [59 × 47 ⁵/₈ IN]
GARIBALDI BRASIL FOUNDATION COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 182
UNTITLED, 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON FABRIC
143 × 138 CM [56 ¹/₄ × 54 ³/₈ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 183
UNTITLED, 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON FABRIC
142 × 133 CM [55 ⁷/₈ × 52 ³/₈ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 184
CURUPIRA, 1996
OIL ON METAL SHEET
150 × 121 CM [59 × 47 ⁵/₈ IN]
GARIBALDI BRASIL FOUNDATION COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 185
CABOCLINHO DA MATA
[CABOCLINHO OF THE FOREST], 1996
OIL ON METAL SHEET
150 × 121 CM [59 × 47 ⁵/₈ IN]
GARIBALDI BRASIL FOUNDATION
COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 186
MAPINGUARI, 1996
OIL ON METAL SHEET
200 × 121 CM [78 ³/₄ × 47 ⁵/₈ IN]
GARIBALDI BRASIL FOUNDATION COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 187
MATINTA PEREIRA, 1996
OIL ON METAL SHEET
150 × 122 CM [59 × 48 IN]
GARIBALDI BRASIL FOUNDATION COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

PP. 188-189
A VISITA DA VACA III
[THE VISIT OF THE COW III], 2000
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
51,5 × 70 CM [20 ¹/₄ × 27 ¹/₂ IN]
CENTRE GEORGES POMPIDOU COLLECTION,
PARIS (FRANCE)

P. 190
UNTITLED, 1989
ACRYLIC AND VEGETABLE SUBSTANCES
ON CANVAS
1,4 X 2,05 M
PRIVATE COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 191
O HOMEM E O BURRO VII
[THE MAN AND THE DONKEY VII], 1999
OIL ON CANVAS
92,8 × 73,8 CM [36½ × 29 IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

PP. 192-193
PESCANDO [FISHING], 1981
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
30 × 44 CM [11¾ × 17⅝ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 195
O EMPATE [THE STAND-OFF], 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
35,4 × 28,9 CM [14 × 11⅜ IN]
LUCIANA LUCIANI CIANCARELA COLLECTION,
LUCCA (ITALY)

P. 196
UNTITLED, N.D.
INK ON CARDBOARD
18,3 × 23 CM [7¼ × 9 IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 197
TAPIRI [SHACK], 1984
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
27 × 40 CM [10⅜ × 15¾ IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

PP. 198-199
UNTITLED, 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
26 × 35,2 CM [10¼ × 13⅞ IN]
MARIA MAIA COLLECTION, DF (BRAZIL)

P. 200
UNTITLED, N.D.
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
21 × 31,5 CM [8¼ × 12⅜ IN]
ASPASIA CAMARGO COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 201
UNTITLED, 1986
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
32,5 × 44,5 CM [12¾ × 17½ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

PP. 202-203
FESTA NO SERINGAL II
[PARTY IN THE SERINGAL II], 1993
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
29 × 40,5 CM [11⅜ × 16 IN]
PINACOTECA DO ESTADO DE SÃO PAULO
COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 204
O CACHORRO DO DEPUTADO ANTES
E DEPOIS DA ELEIÇÃO [THE CONGRESSMAN'S
DOG BEFORE AND AFTER THE ELECTION], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON CANVAS
138 × 159,5 CM [54⅜ × 62¾ IN]
SÃO PAULO MUSEUM OF ART | DONATED BY
ANA DALE, CARLOS DALE JÚNIOR,
ANTONIO ALMEIDA (2020), SP (BRAZIL)

P. 205
A CHEGADA DO PALHAÇO RUFINO
NO SERINGAL [THE ARRIVAL OF RUFINO
THE CLOWN IN THE SERINGAL], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON CANVAS
101,8 × 118,5 CM [40⅞ × 46⅜ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 206
A VISITA DA VACA I
[THE VISIT OF THE COW I], 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
35 × 31,8 CM [13¾ × 12½ IN]
LUCIANA LUCIANI CIANCARELA COLLECTION,
LUCCA (ITALY)

P. 207
CAMINHO SEM DESTINO I
[ROAD TO NOWHERE I], 1987
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
13 × 12 CM [5⅞ × 4¾ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 208-209
O CAÇADOR E A ONÇA II
[THE HUNTER AND THE JAGUAR II], 1992
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
24,5 × 31 CM [9⅜ × 12¼ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 210-211
O NAVIO GAIOLA [RIVER BOAT], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
29,5 × 41,6 CM [11⅞ × 16⅜ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 212
CIPÓ DO SANTO DAIME
[AYAHUASCA VINE], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
16,3 × 15,9 CM [6⅜ × 6¼ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 213
O SERRADOR IV [THE SAWYER IV], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
28,9 × 35,8 CM [11⅜ × 14⅞ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 214
PESCARIA [FISHING], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
32,5 × 44,4 CM [12¾ × 17½ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 215
QUEBRANDO CASTANHA [SHELLING BRAZIL
NUTS], 1995
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
37 × 30 CM [14⅜ × 11¾ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 216-217
CAMINHO SEM DESTINO IV
[ROAD TO NOWHERE IV], 1995
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
58,5 × 86,6 CM [23 × 34⅞ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 218
UNTITLED, 1989
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
36 × 32 CM [14⅞ × 12⅝ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 219
UNTITLED, 1982
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
34,5 × 52 CM [13⅜ × 20½ IN]
MARIANA CAMARGO COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 220
UNTITLED, 1987
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON COLORFUL
CARDBOARD
30 × 32 CM [11¾ × 12⅝ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 221
QUEBRANDO CASTANHA [SHELLING BRAZIL
NUTS], 1995
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
37,5 × 33 CM [14¾ × 13 IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 222
SERINGUEIROS NA CIDADE
[RUBBER TAPPERS IN THE CITY], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
12,6 × 14,1 CM [5 × 5½ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

IMIGRANTES CHEGANDO NA CIDADE
[NEWCOMERS ARRIVING IN THE CITY], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
14,3 × 15,8 CM [5⅝ × 6¼ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 223
PROPAGANDA DA BORRACHA
[RUBBER PROPAGANDA], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
13,9 × 14,6 CM [5½ × 5¾ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

CONFLITO NO SERINGAL ARAPIXÍ
[CONFLICT IN THE SERINGAL ARAPIXÍ], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
17,2 × 18,7 CM [6¾ × 7⅜ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 224
O SERINGUEIRO [THE RUBBER TAPPER], 1997
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
21,2 × 27,7 CM [8⅜ × 10⅞ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 225
O CAÇADOR E A ONÇA I
[THE HUNTER AND THE JAGUAR I], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
15,7 × 16 CM [6⅞ × 6¼ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

CAÇADOR ASSUSTADO
[FEARFUL HUNTER], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
15,3 × 15,8 CM [6 × 6¼ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 226
CACHORRO DO DEPUTADO I [THE
CONGRESSMAN'S DOG I], 1997
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
32,2 × 40,4 CM [12⅝ × 15⅞ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 227
CACHORRO DO DEPUTADO II
[THE CONGRESSMAN'S DOG II], 1997
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON WOOD
CHIPBOARD
32,2 × 39,4 CM [12⅝ × 15½ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 229
ESCOLHINHA DA ESPERANÇA SERINGAL
[SCHOOL ROOM OF HOPE, SERINGAL], 1998
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
35 × 50,5 CM [13¾ × 19⅞ IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 230
PORTO DE CATRAIAS I
[FERRY BOAT LANDING I], 1998
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
37 × 51,6 CM [14⅜ × 20¼ IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 231
2º DISTRITO EM 1962
[2ND DISTRICT IN 1962], 2000
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON CANVAS
78,8 × 98,7 CM [31 × 38⅞ IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 232
BEBEDEIRA [DRUNKENNESS], 1998
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
37,9 × 48,8 CM [14⅞ × 19¼ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 233
RESENHA [SUMMARY], N.D.
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON WOOD
81,5 × 78,5 CM [32⅞ × 30⅞ IN]
ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 234
UNTITLED, 1986
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
33,5 × 26 CM [13¼ × 10¼ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 235
O CAÇADOR II [THE HUNTER II], 2000
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
21,7 × 19,1 CM [8½ × 7½ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 237
O HOMEM RATO [THE RAT MAN], N.D.
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
56,1 × 82,6 CM [22⅞ × 32½ IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 238
MAPINGUARI, N.D.
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
50,2 × 66 CM [19¾ × 26 IN]
PENSATÓRIO STUDIO MUSEUM COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

P. 239
SERINGAL, N.D.
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON CANVAS
55,5 × 71 CM [21⅞ × 28 IN]
PENSATÓRIO STUDIO MUSEUM COLLECTION,
AC (BRAZIL)

PP. 240-241
PORTO DE CATRAIA
[FERRY BOAT LANDING], C. 1981
INK ON PAPER
18 × 27 CM [7⅞ × 10⅝ IN]
SÃO PAULO MUSEUM OF ART |DONATED
BY NIETTA LINDENBERG DO MONTE, IN THE
CONTEXT OF THE EXHIBITION HISTORIES
OF ECOLOGY (2021-25), SP (BRAZIL)

P. 242
FESTA NO SERINGAL
[PARTY IN THE SERINGAL], C. 1987
INK ON PAPER
23,5 × 32,5 CM [9¼ × 12¾ IN]
SÃO PAULO MUSEUM OF ART |DONATED
BY NIETTA LINDENBERG DO MONTE, IN THE
CONTEXT OF THE EXHIBITION HISTORIES
OF ECOLOGY (2021-25), SP (BRAZIL)

P. 243
O SERRADOR [THE SAWYER], 1983
INK ON PAPER
30,5 × 30,5 CM [12 × 12 IN]
SÃO PAULO MUSEUM OF ART | DONATED
BY PIETRO MARIA BARDI (1983), SP (BRAZIL)

PP. 244-245
O CAÇADOR E O VIADO
[THE HUNTER AND THE DEER], C. 1987
INK ON PAPER
26 × 40 CM [10¼ × 15¾ IN]
SÃO PAULO MUSEUM OF ART |DONATED
BY NIETTA LINDENBERG DO MONTE, IN THE
CONTEXT OF THE EXHIBITION HISTORIES
OF ECOLOGY (2021-25), SP (BRAZIL)

P. 246
O CAÇADOR I [THE HUNTER I], 1994
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
29,5 × 24,5 CM [11⅝ × 9⅝ IN]
PAULO BETTI COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 247
A MÃE DA MATA [THE MOTHER OF
THE FOREST], 1995
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
40 × 30 CM [15¾ × 11¾ IN]
PAULO BETTI COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 249
O HOMEM E O BURRO III
[THE MAN AND THE DONKEY III], 1990
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
39 × 30 CM [15⅜ × 11¾ IN]
PAULO BETTI COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

PP. 250-251
TRACAJA NA POUSADA
[TURTLE AT THE LODGE], 1990
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
25,5 × 33 CM [10 × 13 IN]
PAULO BETTI COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 252
UNTITLED, 1984
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
30,6 × 43,5 CM [12 × 17⅞ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 253
PÁSSARO [BIRD], N.D.
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
15,4 × 15,3 CM [6 × 6 IN]
FÁTIMA MELO COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 256
FIM DE TARDE [LATE AFTERNOON], 1987
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
28,5 × 21,5 CM [11¼ × 8½ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 260
CAMINHO SEM DESTINO III [ROAD TO
NOWHERE III], 1980
INK ON PAPER
21 × 27,5 CM [8¼ × 10⅞ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 262
UNTITLED, 1985
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
26,5 × 41,5 CM [10⅜ × 16⅜ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 263
UNTITLED, 1983
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
31 × 47,5 CM [12¼ × 18¾ IN]
MARIANA CAMARGO COLLECTION,
RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 264
O AMANHECER NO SERINGAL
[DAWN IN THE SERINGAL], N.D.
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
23 × 26 CM [9 × 10¼ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, SP (BRAZIL)

P. 265
UNTITLED, 1992
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPERBOARD
24,2 × 28,1 CM [9½ × 11 IN]
CRISTINA PAPE COLLECTION, RJ (BRAZIL)

P. 269
PONTE SOBRE O RIO ACRE
[BRIDGE OVER THE ACRE RIVER], N.D.
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON PAPER
20,6 × 29,4 CM [8⅞ × 11⅝ IN]
PRIVATE COLLECTION, AC (BRAZIL)

P. 271
ENCERRAMENTO DO MOBRAL
[GRADUATION DAY, MOBRAL
(BRAZILIAN LITERACY CAMPAIGN)], 1996
INK AND LEAF EXTRACT ON WOOD CHIPBOARD
42,5 × 54 CM [16¾ × 21¼ IN]
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GARIBALDI BRASIL FOUNDATION
COLLECTION

PP. 21, 121, 156-157, 180, 184-187

PENSATÓRIO STUDIO MUSEUM
COLLECTION, AC

PP. 23, 238-239

ACRE SOCIAL SERVICE OF COMMERCE
COLLECTION—SESC ACRE, AC
PP. 42-43, 45, 116-117, 161

DOCUMENTARY “A PELEJA DE HÉLIO MELO
COM O MAPINGUARI DO ANTIMARY”
[HÉLIO MELO’S BATTLE WITH THE MAPINGUARI
OF ANTIMARY], 1997, DIRECTED BY SÍLVIO
MARGARIDO, DANILO D’SACRE, DALMIR
FERREIRA, IVAN DE CASTELA E JORGE NAZARÉ
PP. 47, 77, 84, 86, 259, 276, 278 282-291

ELIAS MANSOUR CULTURAL FOUNDATION
COLLECTION/AUTONOMIST GROUPS MEMORIAL,
HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE
DEPARTMENT DIGITAL ARCHIVE—FEM
P. 51

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE
DEPARTMENT DIGITAL ARCHIVE—FEM
PP. 51, 57, 70, 77-78, 81, 83, 110-111

ELIAS MANSOUR CULTURAL FOUNDATION
COLLECTION / AUTONOMIST GROUPS
MEMORIAL
PP. 56, 81

JEAN PIERRE CHABLOZ COLLECTION |
CEARÁ FEDERAL UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM
PP. 62, 64, 66-69, 74

ACRE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
COLLECTION, AC

PP. 18, 104, 124-125, 132-133, 158, 166-167, 169-170,
178-179, 197, 229-231, 233, 271

PINACOTECA DO ESTADO DE SÃO PAULO
COLLECTION, SP
PP. 128, 202-203

CENTRE GEORGES POMPIDOU COLLECTION
PP. 177, 188-189

SÃO PAULO MUSEUM OF ART | COURTESY
OF ANA DALE, CARLOS DALE JÚNIOR,
ANTONIO ALMEIDA (2020), SP
P. 204

SÃO PAULO MUSEUM OF ART |COURTESY
OF NIETTA LINDENBERG DO MONTE, IN THE
CONTEXT OF THE EXHIBITION HISTORIES
OF ECOLOGY (2021-25), SP
PP. 240-242, 244-245

SÃO PAULO MUSEUM OF ART | COURTESY
OF PIETRO MARIA BARDI (1983), SP
P. 243

VIVER BEM [LIVE WELL] DECORATING
MAGAZINE. YEAR 8. ED. 59
P. 266

PHOTO CREDITS

SERGIO GUERINI
PP. 2-5, 7-11, 15, 17-28, 30-33, 36-45, 48, 53, 55,
59, 61, 72-73, 89-105, 107-109, 111-127, 129,
131-133, 136-147, 149, 152, 154, 156-158, 161-162,
166-170, 177-180, 182-189, 191, 196-197, 199,
202-205, 207-217, 220-227, 229-233, 235, 237-239,
252-253, 256, 260, 264-265, 269, 271

JEAN-PIERRE CHABLOZ
P. 64

SÍLVIO MARGARIDO
PP. 71, 81, 86, 278

ABAFILM
P. 74

ELSON MARTINS
P. 78

LORENZO RATTI
PP. 110, 135, 195, 206

ISABELLA MATHEUS
P. 128

RAFAEL ADORJÁN
PP. 148, 150-151, 152, 200-201, 218-219, 234,
246-247, 249, 250 262-263

FILIPE BERNDT
PP. 192-193

EDUARDO ORTEGA
PP. 240-245

JORGE NAZARÉ
P. 255

JOSÉ DIAZ E SÍLVIO MARGARIDO
P. 259

DANILO DE S’ACRE
PP. 77, 276-277

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1. Arte 2. Artes plásticas - Brasil 3. Artes
plásticas - Exposições - Catálogos 4. Artistas
plásticos - Brasil - Apreciação crítica 5. Artistas
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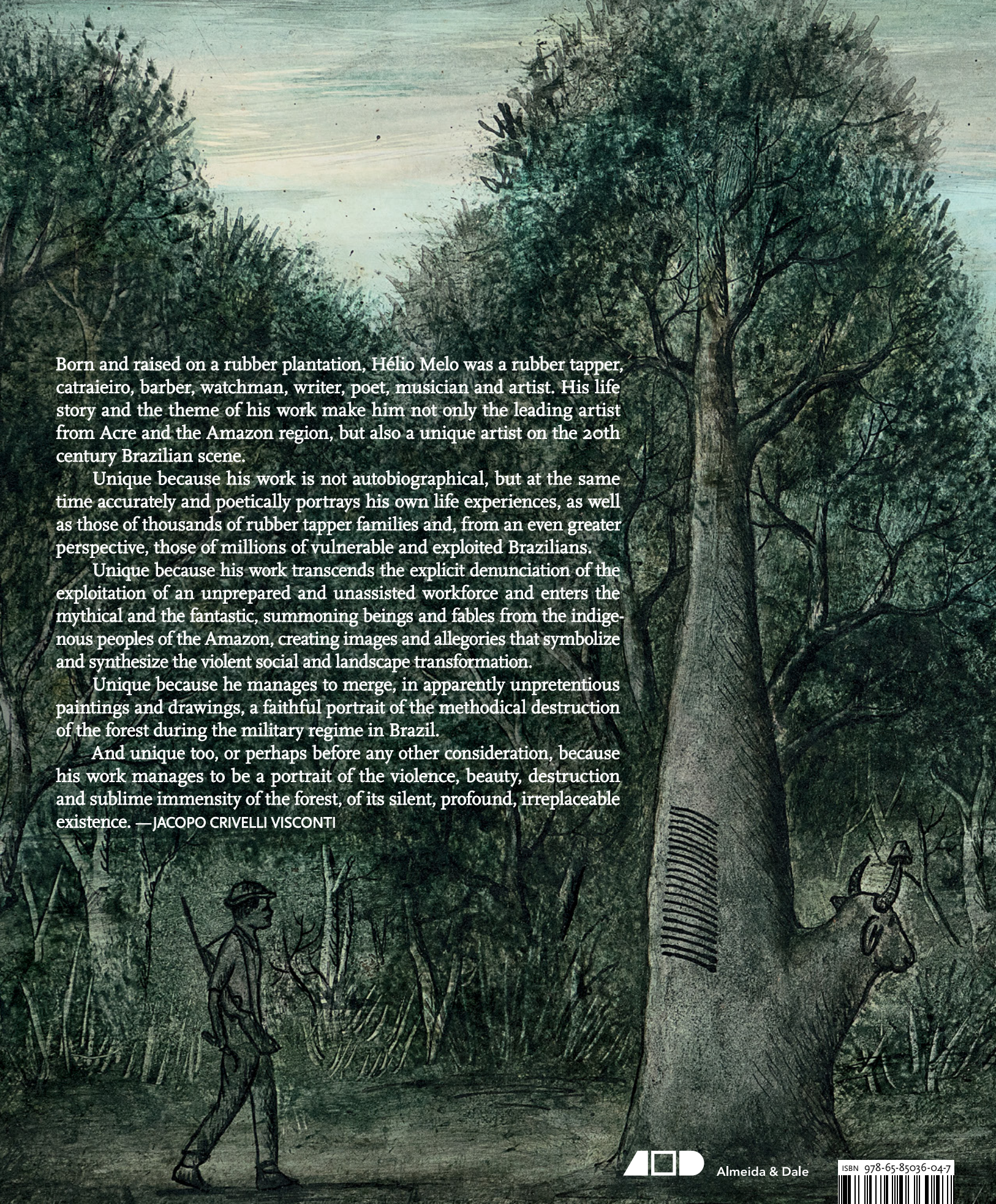
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Índices para catálogo sistemático:

1. Artistas plásticos brasileiros : Apreciação
crítica 730.981





Born and raised on a rubber plantation, Hélio Melo was a rubber tapper, catraieiro, barber, watchman, writer, poet, musician and artist. His life story and the theme of his work make him not only the leading artist from Acre and the Amazon region, but also a unique artist on the 20th century Brazilian scene.

Unique because his work is not autobiographical, but at the same time accurately and poetically portrays his own life experiences, as well as those of thousands of rubber tapper families and, from an even greater perspective, those of millions of vulnerable and exploited Brazilians.

Unique because his work transcends the explicit denunciation of the exploitation of an unprepared and unassisted workforce and enters the mythical and the fantastic, summoning beings and fables from the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, creating images and allegories that symbolize and synthesize the violent social and landscape transformation.

Unique because he manages to merge, in apparently unpretentious paintings and drawings, a faithful portrait of the methodical destruction of the forest during the military regime in Brazil.

And unique too, or perhaps before any other consideration, because his work manages to be a portrait of the violence, beauty, destruction and sublime immensity of the forest, of its silent, profound, irreplaceable existence. —JACOPO CRIVELLI VISCONTI



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