Décio Noviello

Pop Subversion

5 February – 28 March 2025

PV: 5 February, 6 – 8pm

Décio Noviello, (b. 1929 São Gonçalo do Sapucaí, MG, Brazil - d. 2019 Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil) a key figure in Brazil's pop art and avant-garde movements, stands as a testament to the transformative power of art in addressing political, cultural, and societal issues. This will be the first exhibition of his in London and will coincide with the Royal Academy's 'Brazil! Brazil!' spring exhibition along with the current renewed interest in South American art.

A self-taught artist, Noviello began his practice whilst enrolled as a cadet during the period of the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964 to 1985). Characterised by political repression, censorship, and widespread human rights abuses, the government gained sweeping powers to dissolve Congress, censor media, and silence critics. Despite the repression, resistance movements emerged, including artists, intellectuals, and activists who used their platforms to challenge the regime and advocate for democracy risking arrest, torture, exile and death. Two pivotal movements—the neo-avant-garde and pop art—redefined Brazilian contemporary art in response to this oppressive climate.

Décio Noviello's work is embodied by his bold use of colour and playful yet subversive imagery. While he embraced the aesthetics of pop art, he infused his work with a distinctly Brazilian sensibility, incorporating elements of local culture,

history and politics, as a celebration of Brazil's cultural identity whilst critiquing the military regime. He gained recognition by winning several prestigious awards at art salons across the country, his breakthrough came with his participation in the 10th São Paulo Biennial in 1969.

A multi-disciplinary artist, his work extended to conceptual and performance art, carnival decorations, and theatrical costume and set designs cemented his reputation as a multifaceted artist capable of bridging diverse artistic disciplines. With his ability to merge high art with popular traditions, he and other artist contemporaries such as Hélio Oiticica and Antônio Dias were able to bring politically charged art into the public sphere energising local communities.

In 1970 during the Semana de Arte de Vanguarda (Avant-Garde Art Week) Noviello detonated coloured grenades in Belo Horizonte's Municipal Park filling the green park with bursts of colour which was not only a striking visual spectacle but also a powerful commentary on disruption and transformation. Noviello later described the act as an "intervention in the landscape," emphasising his intention to challenge the monotony of everyday life and inspire new ways of seeing.

Noviello's interdisciplinary approach also extended to education. As an army officer between 1950-1960 and as a professor at the Escola de Belas Artes and the University of Minas Gerais, he mentored countless students, sharing his innovative techniques and encouraging them to explore art as a tool for social commentary. His influence as an educator ensured that his legacy would endure through the work of younger generations by the time of his retrospective at the Museu Mineiro in 2016, Noviello had become a defining figure in Brazilian contemporary art.

His works, celebrated in institutions like São Paulo's Museum of Modern Art, and the Walker Art Center's 2015 'International Pop' exhibition which travelled to Dallas Museum of Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, encapsulate the avant-garde and pop art movements' defiance of Brazil's dictatorship. Artists like Noviello and Oiticica proved the power of creative expression to confront political oppression and shape cultural identity, leaving a legacy of enduring impact on art and activism.

Image: Decio Noviello, *3 Horizante (Detail)*, 1969, Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100 cm

High-res images available on request

Opening times: Monday – Friday, 10 am – 5.30 pm
Press enquiries: Amy Baker: amy@mayorgallery.com

THE MAYOR GALLERY

9 Bury Street, St James's, London, SW1Y 6AB
+ 44 (0) 20 7734 3558   mayorgallery.com