

circumambulatio

anna bella geiger

MAC USP



Heloisa Espada Curator

In Latin, *Circumambulatio* means “to walk around” This was the title of the work that Anna Bella Geiger developed in 1972 with a group of students from the Cultural Integration Sector of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro. Classified as an environment or installation, *Circumambulatio* is what is known in art history as a processual work—, i.e. a living work that emerges from an action that is open-ended and can undergo changes and additions over time. The installation shown here brings together the parts (slides, sound recordings, photographs and handwritten papers) that made up the original version of the installation, which was first shown at the MAM RJ in 1972. The following year, on the initiative of Walter Zanini, then director of MAC USP, the work was exhibited and acquired by the institution. This is the first time the museum has reassembled the installation since 1973.

Circumambulatio brings together texts and images about the human need to organize oneself (on a social and psychological level) around a reference point identified as the center. The work was carried out in two phases. First, Geiger and the group, consisting of Abelardo Santos, Eduardo Escobar, Lígia Ribeiro and Suzana Geyerhahn, left the MAM RJ art studios to work outdoors. For three months, they occupied an inhospitable area around the *Lagoa de Marapendi* in the *Barra da Tijuca* neighborhood, where they made drawings directly on the sand with the help of hoes, a tractor or their own bodies. Their fleeting, abstract and ritualistic actions were recorded by photographer Thomas Lewinsohn. This material was used to create an audiovisual work consisting of 109 slides and an audio recording with texts by Carl Jung and the team, accompanied by the most experimental contemporary music - the English trio *Emerson, Lake and Palmer*, which stands for progressive rock, and the band *Can*, the pioneers of German Krautrock.



Part of the installation
Circumambulatio, 1972-73

Black-and-white photography,
silver gelatin on paper,
MAC USP acquisition



The group then immersed themselves in intensive bibliographical and iconographical research into the idea of the center, looking for references in art, literature, philosophy, the history of religions, anthropology, architecture and the natural sciences. Carl Jung and Mircea Eliade are the most cited authors.

In addition, Geiger's students took to the streets of Rio to ask passers-by which region of the city they considered to be a center. The research results were compiled in a set of 24 A1-sized sheets with quotes from various authors and 20 black-and-white photographs (reproductions of works of art, scientific images, architectural works and city maps). The installation *Circumambulatio* consists of this material, which can be understood as a large notebook to be shared with the public, in combination with the audiovisual material with photos of *Lagoa de Marapendi*.



The work marks a turning point in the career of Anna Bella Geiger, who had devoted herself to abstractionism until the mid-1960s. The result of highly experimental research and experience, *Circumambulatio* also reflects the changes in art from the 1960s onwards, a time when artistic languages, museum institutions, the idea of authorship and the very concept of art itself were profoundly questioned. Although with new themes, these debates are still urgent.



Órgão na bacia, 1969

Aquatint, etching,
relief on paper
Artist collection

In the 1950s and mid-1960s, artistic production in Brazil was strongly linked to abstractionism. Anna Bella Geiger began her career in the 1950s and devoted herself to drawing, printmaking and informal abstract painting. She took part in the exhibitions *I and II Jovem Gravura Nacional* at MAC USP in 1964 and 1966 respectively, where two of her works were incorporated into the museum's collection. During this time, however, Geiger began to question her own artistic practice. In 1966, she created *Viscerais*, a series of drawings and prints that presented a unique vision of human organs. The return of figuration in her work is also seen as an indirect allusion to the political violence the country was experiencing under the military dictatorship.

Circumambulatio marks the beginning of Geiger's reflections on the places, concepts and functions of art. It is also the moment when the artist begins to work with audiovisual techniques, performance and the appropriation of images.

In the late 1960s, Anna Bella Geiger visited the United States Consulate in Rio de Janeiro in search of photographs of the lunar surface taken by NASA. These photographs were incorporated into the audiovisual component of *Circumambulatio*. Subsequently, the artist continued to work with lunar images and the concept of the center in the print series *Polaridades Lunares* (1973).

Circumambulatio marks the beginning of Anna Bella Geiger's reflections on the meaning of polarities such as center and periphery — an investigation that would take on increasingly political connotations over the course of her career. The graphic works created in 1973 and 1974 are characterized by the appropriation of images from the mass media, the inclusion of texts and the use of mechanical techniques such as photoengraving, screen printing and offset printing.





Originally, the audiovisual component of *Circumambulatio* consisted of 109 color slides synchronized with a 1/4-inch magnetic tape containing a sound recording. Due to the characteristics of the material and the projection technology available at the time, the audiovisual work was shown at specific times during the presentation at MAC USP in 1973. For the installation of the work in 2024, we digitized the original images and sound and combined them into a single file to allow for continuous projection throughout the exhibition.

List of works

Circumambulatio, 1972-1973

black-and-white photography, typewriter ink, and adhesive lettering on paper; 35 mm color slide and 1/4-inch magnetic tape [digital exhibition version: digital video, sound, color, 10']
MAC USP acquisition

Gravura 19, 1964

aquatint and color relief on paper
Acquisition Award I Jovem Gravura Nacional

A um azul profundo, ilimitado..., 1965

aquatint and color relief on paper
MAC USP acquisition

A imaginação é um ato de liberdade, 1974

Series: Situações - limites
scratched offset lithograph on paper
Artist donation

A imaginação é um ato de liberdade, 1974

Series: Situações - limites
scratched offset lithograph on paper
Artist donation

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Series: Situações - limites
scratched offset lithograph on paper
Artist donation

A imaginação é um ato de liberdade, 1974

Series: Situações - limites
scratched offset lithograph on paper
Artist donation

Aqui é o centro, série Polaridades/Lunares, 1973

photogravure on metal, cliché, and screenprint on paper
Artist collection

Garganta, 1967

aquatint, etching
Artist collection

Órgão na bacia, 1969

aquatint, etching, relief on paper
Artist collection

Testimonial of [Anna Bella Geiger], [1973?]

Manuscript, Portuguese, 2 sheets, 3 pages
Medium: Paper
Historical Archive, MAC USP

Examples of devices that are part of the installation *Circumambulatio*, 1972-1973

Exhibition copies - 35 mm slide
Program: May 31, 1973
Printed material, Portuguese, 1 sheet, 1 page
Medium: Paper
Historical Archive, MAC USP

Prospectus “Circumambulatio”, MAC USP 1973

Printed material, Portuguese, 1 sheet, 2 pages
(front and back demonstration)

Medium: Paper

Historical Archive, MAC USP

Newspaper Clipping: “Circumambulatio lá também é o centro do mundo” Sem título do jornal e data

Printed material, Portuguese, 1 sheet, 1 page

Medium: Paper

Historical Archive, MAC USP

Newspaper Clipping: Luiz Ernesto, “No MAC Arte Conceitual, com a carioca Anna Bella Geiger”

A Tribuna, Santos, July 22, 1973

Printed material, Portuguese, 1 sheet, 1 page

Medium: Paper

Historical Archive, MAC USP

MAC USP. Newsletter, nº 197

São Paulo, May 25, 1973. 2 pages

Historical Archive, MAC USP

Circumambulatio (from May 31 to June 17, 1973) Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo

(Catalog)

color offset on paper

Lourival Gomes Machado Library, MAC USP

Exhibition Circumambulatio – Anna Bella Geiger, 1973

(Invitation)

color offset on paper

Historical Archive, MAC USP

Exhibition Circumambulatio – Anna Bella Geiger, 1973

(Folder)

color offset on paper

Historical Archive, MAC USP

Photographic contact sheet highlighting the exhibition at MAC USP “Circumambulatio – Anna Bella Geiger”, 1973

black-and-white photography on paper

Photographer: Gerson Zanini

Artistic Collection Archive, MAC USP

Photographs of the exhibition Circumambulatio – Anna Bella Geiger MAC USP, 1973

black-and-white photography on paper

Photographer: Gerson Zanini

Artistic Collection Archive, MAC USP

Situações – limites. Manuscript by Anna Bella Geiger, julho de 1974

felt-tip pen on ruled paper

Artistic Collection Archive, MAC USP

Program, May 31, 1973

Printed material, Portuguese, 1 sheet, 1 page

Medium: Paper

Historical Archive, MAC USP

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