

of solitude and stillness. Her body of works consists primarily of interior and landscape paintings, the latter often incorporating simplified architectural and natural features. In London, her extensive research on colour, domestic themes and rigorous composition found echoes in the work of such British contemporaries associated with the emerging Pop movement as Patrick Caulfield and David Hockney.

Like Volpi, Koch also returned to the same motifs, each time using different colour variations that were diligently tested beforehand in numerous studies on paper that are reminiscent of Albers' *Homage to the Square*. A typical example of this methodology is *Sheet of Paper, Blotter and Crumpled Paper* (1997), where the objects listed in the title seem to float against a brown background, sometimes blending into it (the sheet of paper rendered in a slightly colder shade of brown), sometimes almost jumping out of the pictorial plane (the ultramarine blue of the crumpled paper or the pale pink of the blotter). Some of the works included in the exhibition were produced during her time in London, the earliest of which being a remarkable study in pastel from a series focusing on the garden at St John's Lodge, in Regents Park. In this drawing, Koch manages to skillfully replicate the intricate texture of her tempera backgrounds, creating an almost dream-like landscape populated only by a cluster of neoclassical garden features on the right-hand side of the picture which is reminiscent of metaphysical painting.

While it is true that Volpi's work cannot be considered strictly Concrete or Neoconcrete -let alone naive-, his motifs and formal solutions seem to relate both to the aesthetic principles valued by his artistic milieu and to daily life in São Paulo in the second half of the 20th century. Koch, on the other hand, had always felt a sense of inadequacy within this same milieu, choosing to move away from the São Paulo art circuit in order to focus on the development of her own practice. Eleonore Koch and Alfredo Volpi are undoubtedly among the most original modern painters in Brazil; therefore, the exhibition at Sicardi | Ayers | Bacino provides an invaluable opportunity to see their work side by side in the U.S. for the first time.

Cecilia Brunson  
Gallerist and Curator

1. Interview with Olívio Tavares Araújo, Revista Istoé, 30/10/1985.
2. Pedrosa, Mário. "Volpi, 1924-1957". In: Arantes, Otilia (org.). *Acadêmicos e modernos*. São Paulo: Edusp, 1998, pp. 264, 268 (Originally published on the catalogue of the survey exhibition at MAM-RJ, June 1957).
3. Naves, Rodrigo. 'A complexidade de Volpi: notas sobre o diálogo do artista com concretistas e neoconcretistas'. São Paulo: Novos Estudos CEBRAP, 2008.
4. Tavares de Araújo, Olívio. 'Com os olhos da história'. In: Volpi: 90 anos. São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1986, p. 3-12. Catalogue.



Alfredo Volpi  
*Untitled [Ogiva]*, 1970  
Tempera on canvas  
28 5/16 × 18 7/8 in.

Sicardi |  
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Alfredo Volpi and Eleonore Koch  
September 2 to  
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Alfredo Volpi  
*Untitled [Green fachada]*, 1970s  
Tempera on canvas  
33 7/16 × 23 15/16 in.

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## Alfredo Volpi – Eleonore Koch

Although belonging to different generations -in fact they were born and died exactly 30 years apart-, in 1953 the artists Eleonore Koch (Berlin, 1926 - São Paulo, 2018) and Alfredo Volpi (Lucca, 1896 - São Paulo, 1988) were mutually introduced by psychoanalyst and collector Theon Spanudis after Koch expressed her interest in continuing her studies at Volpi's studio. Working during the rise of Concrete Art in Brazil, both artists resisted any kind of official affiliation to the movement. While, to a certain degree, Koch and Volpi undoubtedly absorbed some of the guiding principles of geometric abstraction, they never truly adhered to the orthodox approach advocated by the São Paulo group. Instead, each of them has inexhaustibly pursued their own pictorial language to produce some of the most original and unique contributions to modern painting in Brazil in the 20th century.

However, because their work doesn't easily fit into the main artistic currents of their time, Koch and Volpi still remain largely unknown to international audiences. In Brazil, Volpi has long enjoyed widespread recognition as one of the country's great modern masters, having received numerous important accolades during his lifetime and featured in some of the country's most prominent public and private collections, as well as being the object of several scholarly studies and publications. Koch, on the other hand, despite being actively involved in the São Paulo art scene in the 1950s and 1960s, never achieved the same level of recog-

nition, something which certainly contributed to her move to London in 1968, where she would remain until the late 1990s. As a consequence, her work has remained largely under the radar even in Brazil, having only started to gain renewed critical attention in the past few years.

From 1953 to 1956, Koch frequented Volpi's studio every Saturday, an experience she once described as learning 'through observation and being together, eating together, washing the dishes, observing his work rhythm, how he prepared the canvas, lived his fate as an artist and had the courage to destroy works that were not up to the mark'.<sup>1</sup> Importantly, with Volpi she also learned to work with egg tempera, a technique which she would embrace thereafter. If it is true that the use of this artisanal, fast-drying painting medium, combined with a shared interest in experimenting with a wide variety of pigments and colour chromatic variations, suggests an approximation between Koch's and Volpi's work -Koch is often referred to as 'Volpi's only disciple'-, the present exhibition is above all an opportunity to observe how each artist has consistently explored different pictorial problems in their work.

The child of working-class Italian immigrants, Volpi arrived in São Paulo at two years-old and after finishing primary school, started working as a bookbinder and later as a painter-decorator. As a self-taught artist of humble origins who always maintained a mod-



Alfredo Volpi  
Sem titulo, 1970s  
Tempera on canvas  
26 11/16 × 53 1/2 in.



Eleonore Koch  
Interior with yellow chair and green, 1987  
Tempera on canvas  
25 9/16 × 36 3/16 in.



Eleonore Koch  
Untitled, 1981  
Tempera on canvas  
35 × 42 1/8 in.

est lifestyle, his public image has mainly been that of a naive genius, a myth reinforced even by such prominent critics as Mario Pedrosa. In 1957, when Volpi had a major survey exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, Pedrosa wrote in his catalogue essay: 'Surely he has never even opened a foreign art magazine to study reproductions of Picasso, Matisse, Renoir, Van Gogh or Gauguin. This is because he never had to search for solutions in the work of other artists (he is not pretentious), but did so in his own environment, in the simple beings that surround him, in children (...), in daily things and chores'.<sup>2</sup>

In reality, in spite of his lack of academic training, Volpi maintained close relationships with several artists and intellectuals during his lifetime and had the opportunity to see the work of many European masters in exhibitions that took place in São Paulo from the 1930s onwards. It seems fair to suppose that Volpi's reputation as a naive or outsider artist still weighs heavily against his recognition on an international level, as if his highly sophisticated contribution to modern painting were the result of a purely intuitive mind. More recently, such contemporary commentators of Volpi's work as São Paulo critic Rodrigo Naves have attempted to demonstrate how 'Volpi's persona masks' the fact that the combination of artisanal making and geometric structure in his work was achieved 'through a very peculiar incorporation of the whole of the modern tradition'.<sup>3</sup>

Dating from between the 1950s and 1970s, the works presented in this exhibition include some examples of Volpi's most celebrated series: the provincial house façades, which appeared from the end of the 1940s, where a popular motif is structured by one-dimensional geometry; or the buntings that cover the whole surface of the canvas in paintings that 'play only with colour and form, from spatial relations abstractedly structured'.<sup>4</sup> Also presented here are a few examples of paintings dating from the late 1950s, when Volpi's work became more closely aligned to Concrete art. These paintings represent a noticeable departure from the artist's trademark style of blending in the different structural blocs of the pictorial plane through the use of subtle and ingenious colour transitions and transparency. Instead, in these paintings abstract shapes are rendered as flat areas of colour against a solid background in works that seem to follow the rigorous formal principles of Concrete art.

Unlike the Volpi of the late 1950s, Koch never abandoned figuration. Although working with the same medium and sharing similar preoccupations with space and colour, the solutions each found in the field of painting are quite distinct. In Koch's work, viewers are usually faced with vast areas of colours populated by scarce elements which are clearly outlined and demarcated by vibrant and often contrasting shades. In comparison to Volpi's fluid and harmonious pictorial surfaces, Koch's paintings seem to convey a sense