

WHAT IS YOUR PARANGOLE? COLOR, BODY AND MOVEMENT

The Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica (Rio de Janeiro, 1937-1980) expanded the boundaries of art by creating artworks that were neither paintings nor sculptures, but alternative ways to give form and body to color in the 3-dimensional space. In the 1960s, he began a series of works called *Parangolés*: capes, mantles, and flags that had to be worn or carried, preferably while dancing to the rhythm of *samba* music, one of the most popular music genres in Brazil. *Parangolés* were built with layers of different ephemeral materials such as spared fabrics, jute and plastic bags, and sometimes included texts and drawings. Oiticica took inspiration from the favelas (shantytowns) in Rio de Janeiro, where, despite the difficult circumstances, the inhabitants are able to build houses with simple, recycled materials. *Parangolés*, in fact, can be thought also as flexible architectural devices, houses or tents that can be worn. Therefore, *Parangolés* demonstrate the potential of creativity to find unusual solutions with simple means. Transforming discarded materials into artworks, they symbolize the power of resilience.



Helio Oiticica with a *Parangolé*

EXERCISE: BUILD YOUR OWN PARANGOLE!

1. Collect recyclable materials that you can find at home: newspapers, magazines, plastic bags, old fabrics, tree leaves...
2. Build your own *Parangolé*!

You can personalize it with texts, messages and poems.

You can also decorate it with cutouts, stickers and beads.



After you have built it, start moving: you can swing, you can turn around... feel the *Parangolé* on your body, listen to it!

3. Now, put some samba music on and transform your *Parangolé* into a work of art!



SOME POINTS OF REFLECTION

According to Helio Oiticica, the *Parangolé* becomes an artwork only if activated by a person through movement. Therefore, the spectator should not simply stand and look, but is called to be an active participant. This process is a ritual of transformation, not only of the cape into an artwork, but also of the participant, who becomes color in motion. Oiticica would often invite members of the famous Mangueira Samba School, located in the Morro da Mangueira, one of Rio de Janeiro's favelas, to wear the *Parangolés* while dancing, both inside and outside the museum. In this way he was able to bring art to a larger audience, outside the institutional walls.

Samba is a Brazilian music genre and dance style with African roots that developed in Brazil in the early twentieth century. Indeed, the Portuguese colony of Brazil forced to slavery the largest number of Africans in the Americas (over 4 million, versus the almost 400.000 who were brought to the United States). Brazil was also the very last country in the Americas to abolish slavery in 1888. Hence, Brazilian culture owns much to the African heritage, which mixed with the cultures of indigenous people and immigrants coming from all over the world (Europe, the Middle East, Japan, etc.).

The very word *Parangolé* has African origins. It is a slang expression that means: "a sudden agitation and confusion between people", "a ruffle", but also "a jumble of words" and "idle chatter".

This is exactly what the *Parangolés* are: a sudden burst of energy and color!