

# Presentation

The challenges of art and aesthetics in the 21st century can be perceived from a simpler and less pretentious challenge: that of editing a volume of a periodical like *Quadranti* about such challenges. For the art and aesthetics of the 21st century there is no common denominator, apart from this strange number that appears (at least in Portuguese) in Roman numerals like XXI – by itself an anachronism worthy of note, a challenge for us, since it replaces the usual 21. There is no way, however, to give the challenges of art and aesthetics in the 21st century a word as strong as those which during the 20th century have so often claimed to bring them together: Futurism, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Constructivism, Expressionism, Tropicalism. For our contemporaneity, there is only this: a number, XXI. No one is the absolute holder. No one will cry out to represent it. No one is its spokesperson. There is a lot of confusion and a lot of transformation at the same time, although our categories for understanding what is going on seem to age as soon as we try to master them.

In this sense, perhaps the challenges of art and the aesthetics of the 21st century arose in the late 20th century. In the final decades of the last century, art and aesthetics were no longer expressed primarily through organized and collective movements of the avant-garde. There were already no words of this kind that would give the adequate keys to open the doors – for the production of works and critical understanding – of a different era that appeared on the horizon. Take, for example, the plastic arts in Brazil of the 1980s. There was talk of a "Generation 80". Notice: there was no longer a single name capable of pointing out the common style of the different works and the convergent proposal of those poetic projects. It was just a number. Similarly, now what we have is only the number XXI. At that time, the singer Caetano Veloso wrote, in a music: "and I, less foreigner in the place than at the moment". It was not the country or the place that seemed strange. It was the age: the moment. The challenges of the brief

20th century were succeeded by those of the strange 21st century. In it, we are all strangers in some way.

The challenges of the art and aesthetics of this century, therefore, are varied and very different from each other. The organization of this volume of *Quadranti* did not attempt to correct or conceal this openness, at the same time bewildering and libertarian; on the contrary, what was sought was to explore it, in a tantalizing and essay-est way. It could be that by the subjects, sealed by the authors, there is a mosaic to be found here, more than a portrait. It was not the case of exhausting or mapping out all the challenges, but of an effort that understands how much the very ideas of exhaustion and map may not be relevant to the way in which the challenges of 21st century art and aesthetics are shaped. They seem more like labyrinths, recalling those of tales by Jorge Luis Borges, or invisible cities, like those of the novelist Italo Calvino. It is up to us to find the courage to lose ourselves for them, rather than to seek a quick exit. If for no other reason, because the century has just begun, we hardly know what will become of it and what will become of us in it.

The 21st century sometimes seems to be just the cipher to say: the present, the today, our time. How it can be understood and the extent to which we can become its contemporaries is what appears throughout the various articles that follow, each in its own way, with its styles and its marks. If there is no possible abstract for them, there is the common appreciation that is left here to each of the authors who have been willing to contribute to this volume of *Quadranti*. I am also grateful to the director of the periodical, Rossano Pecoraro, who invited me to organize this issue, and to the entire technical team of *Quadranti*, whose work made this publication possible.

Along with my thanks to them, there is here an invitation to you that now look at those words. In the midst of the use and abuse of them in our daily lives, perhaps here may arise paths in which its habitual excess of emptiness finds, instead, some thought.

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