

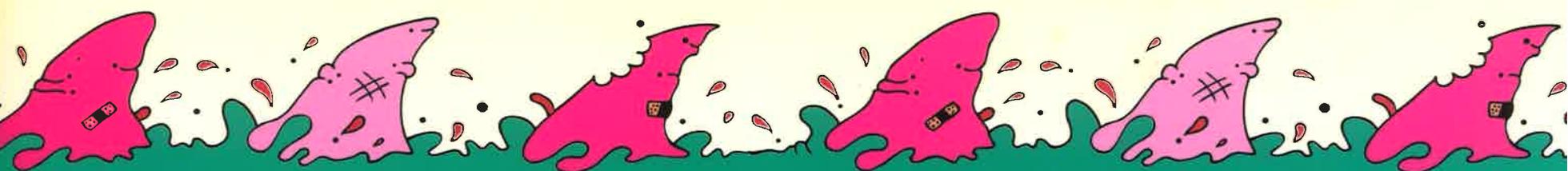
# whitewall

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THE ART ISSUE



TRACEY EMIN - ERIK PARKER - THEASTER GATES - SOPHIE CALLE

# OLGA DE AMARAL

ARTIST

BY KATY DONOGHUE



Olga de Amaral is one of the most important artists living and working in Colombia today. Last fall an exhibition of selected works by the artist (who graduated from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan during the sixties) was on view at the Louise Blouin Foundation in London. Her two- and three-dimensional sculptural and installation works, often incorporating fabric and gold, will be on view in a show curated by Inhotim's Rodrigo Moura at this year's SP Arte in Brazil, thanks to gallerist Agnès Monplaisir.

**WHITEWALL:** *Can you tell us about your recent show with Agnès Monplaisir at the Louise Blouin Foundation?*

**OLGA DE AMARAL:** This exhibition was a milestone in my life because it appeared at a point when my work was growing in my mind. Agnès is a quite unique person for her sensibility and for the tenacity with which she does her work. Her generosity and organization captivated me. I find in her a kindred spirit because of her devotion and commitment to her work, which leads her to extraordinary things such as this exhibition. Louise Blouin is also an extraordinary woman, creator and sponsor of the arts. I was very thankful and honored to work with so many passionate people.

**WW:** *Of note was one installation where you used painted fibers. What was the idea behind that work?*

**ODA:** The idea was kind of a painting in space. I like painting the thread instead of dyeing it because it is a much more controlled and intimate process. I was thinking about how to create a painting with all the elements characteristic of my work, like structure, movement, and color, and it ended up extending into the space. You can actually inhabit the color and perceive its transparency as it interacts with the space around it. It is also about the relationship between colors and how they change and influence each other. I also like that it exposes itself; it shows its construction. This was the second one I did of this type and my dream is to explode it, make like a forest out of color.

**WW:** *Growing up in Colombia, what experiences did you have with the arts early on?*

**ODA:** Growing up, I would go to artisanal fairs with my mother. I cherished these occasions. I was struck by the power of color and the beautiful craftsmanship of the objects. My father had many books on ancient Egypt and publications in the vein of *National Geographic*. We frequently visited colonial churches and cathedrals. Their golden altars lit by candles had a big impact on me.

**WW:** *And gold is something you keep revisiting in your work. Is that why?*

**ODA:** The mystical element, the idea of entering

a holy place, a separate space, and the idea of devotion is something that I subconsciously connect with my use of gold.

My decision to work with gold was a subconscious process. I remember when I had a certain epiphany about it. I had the great pleasure of spending an afternoon with ceramist Lucy Rie in London. Her home was full of her ceramics and those of Hans Coper. I was interested in purchasing one of her vases and realized it was broken. She said the broken ones are those she most cherished because they have been repaired with gold in the custom of Japanese *Kintsukuroi*. I understood that the piece was more beautiful for having been broken but most importantly, I was awed by the possibilities of gold.

One year later I bought a packet of gold leaf and began to experiment with the material and textiles. I was intrigued by gold as a color at first. It had a certain mystery, an attraction. I wanted to explore it, discover it. I thought about large gold surfaces. I wanted to apply it to a flexible surface, not a solid one like wood. I wanted a gold to be fluid.

After experimenting and exploring I discovered that with a small, primary element I could create a composite structure. I started this one-by-two-centimeter rectangle of woven linen, and through the union and interaction of these particles I could deepen my exploration of the characteristics of gold. I continue to search for the mystery that gold contains as a color, as a material, and as a spiritual force.



Top:  
Olga de Amaral with Agnès Monplaisir,  
photo by © David Atlan,  
courtesy of Galerie Agnès Monplaisir.

Bottom:  
Installation view of Olga de Amaral at the Louise Blouin  
Foundation, photo by © David Atlan  
courtesy of Galerie Agnès Monplaisir.