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| **Nery, Ismael (b. 1900, Belém do Pará, Brazil – d. 1934, Rio de Janeiro)** |
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| Ismael Nery was one on the most remarkable artists of Brazilian modernism, but was little known during his own lifetime. By rejecting the representational canons used during the early twentieth century to give visibility to national themes, Nery produced mystic and visionary art, more comparable, in philosophical terms, to the principles outlined by Kandinsky in his *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912).  Nery went to Europe twice. In 1921, during his first stay in Paris, he enrolled in the Academie Julian. The contact with the artistic avant-gardes and with the Parisian museums clearly influenced his artistic production. It is possible to identify aspects of the Pre-Raphaelite style in his work, as well as the sinuous lines of Aubrey Beardsley, the premises of Symbolism, and Picasso’s Cubism; there are also references to Magritte’s paradoxes, Matisse’s two-dimensionality, and to the surreal compositions and metaphysical art of De Chirico. In his second trip to Paris (1927), Nery met André Breton and became close to Marc Chagall, a friendship that produced resonances in several of Nery’s aerial and oneiric figures. The main motif present in his paintings is the human figure in fractured, juxtaposed compositions. He uses repeated physiognomies and an iconography ranging from angels to devils, mysticism to eroticism, and, in regards to human anatomy, perfection to distortion.  Ismael Nery, along his short artistic trajectory – which was limited to a little longer than a decade (1920-1933) – was strongly influenced by his mother’s religiosity. Nery’s mother, mentally ill after the premature death of her husband (a brilliant doctor and researcher) and her eldest son at only 18 years of age (a victim of the Spanish flu), became a nun and joined the religious Third Order of San Francisco.  Nery often used himself as a model, as well as his wife, the poet Adalgisa Nery. At times his friend, the poet Murilo Mendes, and his mother also became models in his successive portraits. He often painted people in pairs or sets of three, which were usually made up of one man and two women.  To Nery, art was a means to express his spiritual and philosophical restlessness. His project of the disintegration of the pictorial body arose from the desire to find the essence of the form through the abstraction of time and space. In *IN’s Self-Portrait* (1927), the figure of the artist sitting on an aerial chair divides the room into two spaces: on the right, a Parisian landscape with the Eiffel Tower, and, on the left, the Sugarloaf Mountain representing the scenery of Rio de Janeiro. The juxtaposition of the Eiffel Tower and the Sugarloaf with the artist’s own bodily contours express temporal and spatial simultaneity.  File: Nery\_Self-Portrait\_1927.jpg  Figure : Ismael Nery, *Auto-retrato* (*IN's Self-Portrait*) (1927). Oil on canvas, 51.60 x 33.60 inches. Collection Domingos Giobbi, São Paulo, Brazil. http://www.itaucultural.org.br/aplicExternas/enciclopedia\_IC/index.cfm?fuseaction=artistas\_obras&cd\_verbete=900&cd\_idioma=28555  Another interesting aspect about Nery is the androgynousness that pervades much of his work. In *Self-Portrait* (1925), for example, the artist appears with a white, loose blouse, the right hand resting on his chest and bearing a large, round ring. His long fingers, painted nails, lipstick, and almond-shaped eyes challenge gender assumptions, and his long hair is very much redolent of his wife’s hair in many of his portraits of her. In *Women Sitting with a Bunch of Flowers* (1927) – the most sensual, feminine representation in Nery’s work – the facial physiognomy of his self-portraits is repeated. In *Androgynous* (date unknown), a vertical line divides the contours of the face; the masculine half plays with the appearance of Nery in his self-portraits, the other resembles his wife’s portraits. In these works, the artist uses the androgynous figures as signs of totality to evoke a notion of universal time. Within this notion of universal androgyny as a consequence of the divine androgyny is the conception that perfection arises from unit-totality. Thus, it is not by coincidence that in *Self-Portrait Christ* (1923) the painter transposes his own physiognomy into an image of an androgynous Christ.  At age 30, Nery found out he was suffering from tuberculosis. Influenced by the presence of his illness, the artist produced beautiful works in a surrealist style, depicting disfigured and visceral anatomies that sometimes remind us of mechanic or hydraulic objects, such as in *Internal Vision – Agony* (1931). This later period was the artist’s most productive time, and Nery began to explore narratives both in his writings and drawings; the results are spectacular series such as *Miserabilia* and *Hystory of Ismael Nery*, where Nery prefigures his own death and funeral. As per his dying wish at age 33, Nery was buried with the habit of the Order of San Francisco, the religious order his mother had joined in his youth. List of Selected Works: *Auto-retrato Cristo* [*Self-portrait Christ*] (1923). Oil on canvas glued to wood, 12.70 x 9.80 inches. Collection Chaim José Hamer, São Paulo (SP), Brazil.  *Mulher sentada com ramos de flores* [*Women sitting with a bunch of flowers*](1927). Oil on card, 24.64 x 21.32 inches. Collection Cosette Alves.  *Visão interna – agonia* [*Internal vision – Agony*] (1931). Oil on card, 27.65 X 18.65 inches. Collection Chaim José Hamer, São Paulo (SP), Brazil.    *Andrógino* [*Androgynous*], undated. Watercolour on paper, 10.90 x 8.30 inches. Collection Luís Fernando Nazarian, São Paulo, Brazil.  *Auto-retrato* [*Self-portrait*] (1925). Gouache on paper, 6.2 x 3.7 cm. Collection Gilberto Chateaubriand, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. |
| Further reading:  (Amaral)  (Bento)  (Cordeiro)  (Kandinsky)  (Mattar)  (Mattar, Ismael Nery )  (Munari) |