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| **Your article** |
| **Nery, Ismael (b. 1900, Belém do Pará, Brazil – d. 1934, Rio de Janeiro)** |
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| Ismael Nery was the mystical artist of Brazilian modernism. For him, 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. The androgyny that appears in his art represents the notion of divine androgyny: the idea that in the beginning males and females were one, and that perfection arises from such totality of being. |
| Ismael Nery was one on the most remarkable artists of Brazilian modernism, but was little known during his lifetime. By rejecting the representational canons used during the early twentieth century to give visibility to national themes, Nery produced mystic and visionary art, impregnated by the wave of spirituality of the fin-de siècle. In philosophical terms, Nery saw the artist a creator deity, judging his/her work in a spiritual hierarchy, in resonance, perhaps, with the principles outlined by Kandinsky in his *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912). Nery’s ideas and art, however, have more connections with the concepts of radical catholic renovation that were present in the first decades of the twentieth century, which preached a return to primitive and medieval Christianity, inspired mainly by the new Thomism of Jacques Maritain.  Nery visited 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. During 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. Compositions with fractured and juxtaposed human figures in repeated physiognomic styles were the main subjects of his art.  Art, for Nery, whose aesthetic language was unique in the Brazilian context, served as a means to express own visionary and mystic ideas. He narrowed ties between art and religion, aesthetics and mysticism; he viewed the body as a template for the soul; and based on Thomism, believed in a divine unity in which all of humanity was contained and constantly confronted with the Creator. For Nery, every man potentially contains divinity.  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.  Nery often used himself as a model, as well as his wife, the poet Adalgisa Nery. At times his friend Murilo Mendes (the poet) 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 expresses temporal and spatial simultaneity.  File: Nery\_Self-Portrait\_1927.jpg  Figure 1: 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. In *Self-Portrait Christ* (1923) the painter transposes his own physiognomy into an image of an androgynous Christ. Present in Nery’s portrayal of genderless universality is the notion of divine androgyny: the idea that in the beginning males and females were one, and that perfection arises from such totality of being.  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. His 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. The religious fervour in Nery’s family circle has become a major source of the questions explored in his art. His best friend, Murilo Mendes, conceived Nery’s work as the manifestation of the philosophical speculations of a religious militant. Not engaged with conservative groups of Catholicism, Nery, with Mendes and Jorge de Lima, made Christianity a theme and an artistic-literary form. 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)  (Barbosa and Rodrigues)  (Bento)  (Cordeiro)  (Kandinsky)  (Mattar)  (Mattar, Ismael Nery )  (Mendes)  (Munari) |