**Contributor:** Paulo Kühl

**Di Cavalcanti, Emiliano**

(Emiliano Augusto Cavalcanti de Albuquerque Mello)

Born: 1897 – Rio de Janeiro; Died: 1976 – Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

The works of Emiliano Di Cavalcanti are at the center of modernism and national art in Brazil. Practically a self-taught artist, he attended the workshop of Gaspar Puga Garcia (18??-1914) in Rio de Janeiro, and later, in São Paulo, when he started Law School, the workshop of Georg Fisher Elpons (1865-1939), a German artist who had moved to Brazil. In the first years of his career as an artist, Di Cavalcanti engaged in several activities as an illustrator and cartoonist and his drawings are among the most interesting parts of his artistic production. During his two longer stays in Europe (1923-1925 and 1937-1940), he moved closer to avant-garde artists and their works, especially Picasso, which allowed him to become aligned with various artistic transformations of the first half of the 20th century. On the other hand, his interests in certain subjects, such as Brazilian women – especially the *mulatas* –, and also carnival, some aspects of urban life in Rio de Janeiro, seascapes, and still-lives helped to form him as a national modernist painter. Mário de Andrade (1893-1945), already in 1932, saluted Di Cavalcanti as one of the greatest modernist heroes in the country: one who brought novelties from Europe, without getting lost in them, and who dedicated himself to national topics. Di Cavalcanti participated actively as one of the organizers of the **Semana de Arte Moderna (Modern Art Week) in São Paulo (1922)**, milestone of Modernism in Brazil.

In the debates over national art following the Modern Art Week, authors saw as the determining factor of Brazilian character the engagement with national themes; the fact that Di Cavalcanti dedicated most of his production to subjects perceived as typically Brazilian helped to boost his career as a national artist. The project of national art, of course, had many contradictions and Mário de Andrade later chose another hero, Candido Portinari (1903-1962) as its paladin. But Di Cavalcati kept his central role in the Brazilian art world and among critics. The relevance of his production is attested by several events: he participated in the **I Bienal de São Paulo** (1951), received a special prize in the Second one (1953), represented Brazil in the XXVIII Biennale di Venezia (1956), had a special exhibition room in the VII Bienal de São Paulo (1963) and received another prize in the XI Bienal (1971), besides many other exhibitions and artistic activities in Brazil and abroad. He was also involved with two projects for the new capital, Brasilia: the cartoons designed for tapestries for the Palácio da Alvorada (1958) and the paintings for the Cathedral (*Stations of the Cross*, 1960).

Critics were unanimous throughout his life and his works have been praised and read as key to a nationalist aesthetic, especially the sensual paintings of the *mulatas*, but also his interest in poor people, rarely represented in Brazilian high art until then, and his social concerns. As many other artists and intellectuals in the country, he became a member of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) in 1928, and in his paintings, texts and lectures always manifested his non-conformity regarding social and political injustice in the country.

Despite the constancy in his choice of subjects throughout his long career, Di Cavalcanti experimented various procedures: from saturated colours, with dense materials and exploring contrasts, to paintings conceived as drawings, where colours filled surfaces created a general harmony. The construction of space is always complex and large bodies usually populate his paintings. A major opponent of abstraction, he was always interested in human figure and objects, though not pursuing any kind of realism. The inspiration in German Expressionism appears more clearly until the 1940s and is aligned with his social interests. Later in his life, one can notice a certain standardization in his works, compatible with the public persona he built for himself. The body of his paintings can be seen as a visual celebration of the character he created: a sensuous man, seduced by women and by luxurious landscapes, who wanted to enjoy the allure of life in Rio de Janeiro.

Besides dedicating himself to painting, drawing, caricature, stage design and journalism, he was also a poet and wrote two books of memoirs.

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E. Di Cavalcanti, *Mocinha com gato à janela, em Ouro Preto (Young woman with a cat by the window, in Ouro Preto*), 1946, oil on canvas, 78X62 cm, Pinacoteca do Estado de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo

E. Di Cavalcanti, *Pescadores (Fishermen)*, 1951, oil on canvas, 114,5X162 cm, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, Sao Paulo

E. Di Cavalcanti, *O grande carnaval (Big carnival)*, 1953, oil on canvas, 80,5X100 cm, Acervo Banco Itaú S. A., Sao Paulo

E. Di Cavalcanti, *Mulher deitada e cachorro (Reclined woman and dog)*, 1954, oil on canvas, 50X65 cm, Acervo Banco Itaú S. A., Sao Paulo

E. Di Cavalcanti, *Cena onírica com seis mulheres (Oneiric scene with six women)*, 1971, oil on canvas, 50X60 cm, Simão Mendel Guss Collection