

I'm very honoured to be asked to open Virginia's exhibition and to pay tribute to her phenomenal achievement. I'm going to be very brief, but I wanted to try to render into words one of the extraordinary features of Virginia's painting.

It is the vibrating quality or liveliness of her work. This liveliness is not what one traditionally expects of geometric abstraction, although the quest to marry this genre of art with a sense of life and vitality is a feature of Brazilian abstraction from the late 1950s. Certainly, the 1959 manifesto of the Brazilian Neo-concretists perfectly accords with the sensibility of Virginia's work. They wrote: "We do not conceive of the work of art as a machine or as an object but as a quasi-body. . . which can only be understood phenomenologically." Virginia's way of embodying this principle is very different to the strategies adopted by the neo-concretists, however the desire to imbue the work of art with a vibrant life of its own is very similar.

Perhaps we could claim this is southern hemisphere geometric abstraction where the glare of the sun makes elements volatile, and where our vast land mass puts pressure on conventional approaches to limits, scale, proportion and rhythm. Southernness, then, might mean breaking free of the grid and the frame in order to create a kind of atmospheric

abstraction, an abstraction that unhinges itself from the wall with dancing, dazzling and moving elements. Alongside this strong evocation of shimmering, hovering or floating there is also a counterveiling force that suggests structure, solidity and groundedness. In other words, a sense of ground and land is co-present with a sense of dazzling light. Virginia has somehow managed to simultaneously condense and etherealise these crucial features of land and landscape.

I ask you to join me in congratulating her on her astounding achievement in this exquisite and rigorous exhibition.

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