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CLEUSA MARIA

“JORNAL”

(Questions to Sean Scully on the occasion of *Sean Scully: Wall of Light*,
Centro de Arte Heilio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil August-November 2002)

In his text for the catalogue of your exhibition in Rio de Janeiro, the art critic Ronaldo Brito says: "Reinventing painting: this is the simple and impossible task of the modern painter." Do you agree with him?

a) To what extent is it a simple task?

b) To what extent is it an impossible task?

I would say that the transformation of painting is what is taking place right now.

- a. It is simple in the sense that it is simple to say it. Like it is simple to say, "I will walk 400 kilometers in a straight line" It is simple to say, but doing it is another matter.

To be single-minded on one hand and very intuitive on the other, is asking a lot of yourself. But to work with a medium like painting over extensive periods of time, requires a lot of faith, and a strange (personal) relationship with time, a total disregard for fashion, and at the same time a lot of sensitivity.

- b. It is impossible if you are isolated. I have been fortunate in the friends I have had, and the psychological support I have received. Painting is a tree with roots that are 800 years deep. It is very hard to knock it over. Video on the other hand, is a tree with roots that are 40 years deep, and the next time there's a strong change of wind it might simply fall over.

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You are an internationally respected painter. In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge at a time when art has incorporated new medias, supports and materials?

The deepest and most difficult challenge an artist faces today, any artist, is the destructive and selective power of time. The art world is a machine that feeds itself on speculation, sensation and constant change. To stand against that is an issue. For painters it's worse. Because painters, now, since the death of formalism, can only triumph when they have transformed their language through time. To make paintings, in the beginning is much harder. But in the unlikely event that you are successful, it is ultimately more powerful, since it is surrounded by pathos and mystery. A great painting is, in a sense, irreducible.

Is it difficult to be a painter today, in the contemporary world?

Painting has a different place now. It is not part of the technological glamour of video and photography. But neither is it the victim of the ravages of time, as all technologically evolving art forms must be. If you look at an old film, it looks like an old film. Of course it was a sensation in its day, but its glamour is weakened by time. Painting is the reverse. Which is more difficult, is a matter of preference.

***You once said (to R. Eric Davis/Journal of Contemporary Art, 1999)
"... I try to make paintings that everybody can relate to in terms of their drawing, it's a very simple kind of counting. It's based on rhythm or simple architectural structures. You can also relate it to music, rhythmical musical structures or mathematical structures. I'm not making them complicated. They are very simple. Within that the painting of them can be quite emotive."***

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What emotions do you intend to stir up in the viewers of your work?

I think my paintings have a pronounced, built in, sense of morality. The light in my paintings is almost always sad and melancholic, but the surfaces are vital and sensual. I want people to be moved by my paintings. But I want them to find their own place.

What does it mean to have your first one-man show in South America?

To have my first show in South America, in a way, seems normal. My paintings seem sensual and Southern to me. Even though I grew up in London, I am always going south.