

Waltercio Caldas interview with Donna Conwell, *Latinart.com*, (Summer) 2003.

**Waltercio Caldas interview with Donna Conwell for Latinart.com**  
Summer 2003, [www.latinart.com](http://www.latinart.com)

DC: You have said that you create the maximum presence from the least amount of materials. Could you tell us what motivates your selection of materials?

W.C: I don't have a preferred type of material. I have worked with diverse kinds of materials. Materials are not a problem for me. The most important thing for me is the relationship between them.

Each material has its own story and each one has its own usefulness. It depends on the subject that I am dealing with. The material is chosen for a specific situation. I don't begin with a material and then create something. I try to make the works as different from one another as possible. Each time I work it is as though I were beginning from zero all over again. I never try to make a piece that would be exactly the same as something I have done before. They do have a kind of signature though. We are condemned to be ourselves I suppose. (laughs)

D.C: Do you begin with a specific problem to solve as your starting point and then choose your materials on that basis?

W.C: I call it the *symptom*. Yes, sometimes I begin with the symptom. (laughs) I don't know if I can tell you that I choose the materials. The materials choose me. I think the material appears together with the idea because I want the idea and the material to be the same thing.

With *The Yellow Room* for example, I was presented with the problem of the white wall, which was a strong layer that I could not move. I had to think of how I could change the steady quality of the wall without



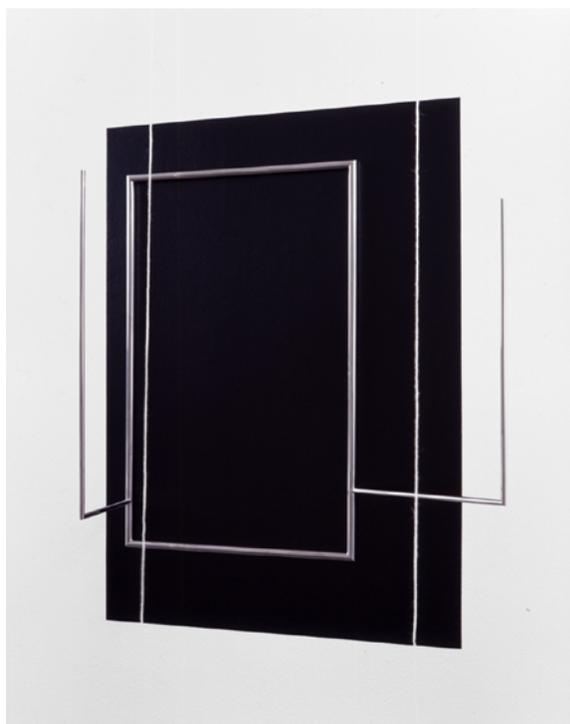
Waltercio Caldas, *The Yellow Room*, 1999  
Acrylic paint and wool yarn, 83 x 79 x 83 inches

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moving it. That was why I used yellow because yellow is a brighter color than white. If you put yellow on a white wall the yellow is no longer on the wall anymore: it is on front of the wall or behind the wall, but never on the white. Furthermore, this kind of pigment is so impregnated that if you look at it for two minutes you'll see that there is a very light blue line around the piece. A complementary color begins to appear which separates the yellow from the wall once again. This is a completely different problem from the one I was dealing with in *Jazz Mirror* with the stainless steel and thread. That was a problem of perspective.

D.C: You have said that you want to give a name to the space between things. Could you talk about your use of empty space in your work?

W.C: I don't like things that are opaque. I like things that are transparent. Sometimes, even when the work is made in metal it is transparent because I use metal in such a way, in such a linear condition, that the light reproduces more than the material. That is to say, that there is more light than material. Light bends the object in a sense.



Waltercio Caldas, *Jazz Mirror*, 2003  
Stainless steel, wool yarn and vinyl, 31-1/2 x 29 x 10 inches

When you look at something you always have the feeling that your sight is going into the object, but with a transparent object your sight passes through the object and returns to your eye. My idea is that you see my work not through the first gaze going in but through the second one coming back.

My work looks as though it is immaterial but this is not true. On the contrary, my work is pure material. The experience of the work is so physical that a photograph of a piece like the *Nearest Air Series* doesn't really exist. The camera has only one eye and we need

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two eyes to see. We have to experiment looking at the work and passing through it. Even a space between lines is a material in the work. In a sense you are inserted into the materiality of the piece.



Waltercio Caldas, *The Nearest Air Series #9*, 1991  
Wool yarn, dimensions variable

Looking at something like the *Nearest Air Series*, which is so problematic in that you never know if the work is here or there, gives you an idea of how difficult it is to establish the correct place for my work. At the same time placement/site is one of my work's key materials. In order to be installed, each element has to be absolutely related to the space in which it is located.

D.C: Do you locate yourself within a particular sculptural tradition?

W.C: Sculpture has two kinds of traditions: a tradition that comes from clay where you add something to the material until you find the shape and the tradition that comes from marble where you subtract material to find the shape you want. So we have two kinds of directions: one going from inside and one from outside. I think that this dramatically changed with modern sculpture beginning with Picasso and Brancusi. If you look at a Brancusi piece for example, the piece doesn't come from outside or from inside. You don't know where it comes from because Brancusi realized that shape should be impregnated with its own form and that you don't have add or subtract in order to find the right moment of the material. In this sense, Brancusi reinforced the idea of the Greeks who had a beautiful idea of how to make sculpture. They thought that making sculpture was to free the material from its own dream. This idea seems to be more related to contemporary sculpture than the other two traditions. My work is more related to this new possibility.

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I want to create a precise relationship. I don't want to reduce anything. I am trying to find the specific moment of an object. I once I said that I am trying to make objects that are equal to the place they occupy. This is not minimalism. This is something related to precision. Reduction is a kind of moralistic approach to matter.

D.C: What do you mean by that?

W.C: I don't identify very strongly with minimalism because I think minimalism is quite moralistic about shape. I think that minimalism could only ever have come from a Protestant country. The prophylactic, the process of cleaning and reducing things to make them moralistic, is something that is much more connected to Protestantism than Catholicism. Catholicism is much more baroque. My sculpture does not have this morality of reduction.

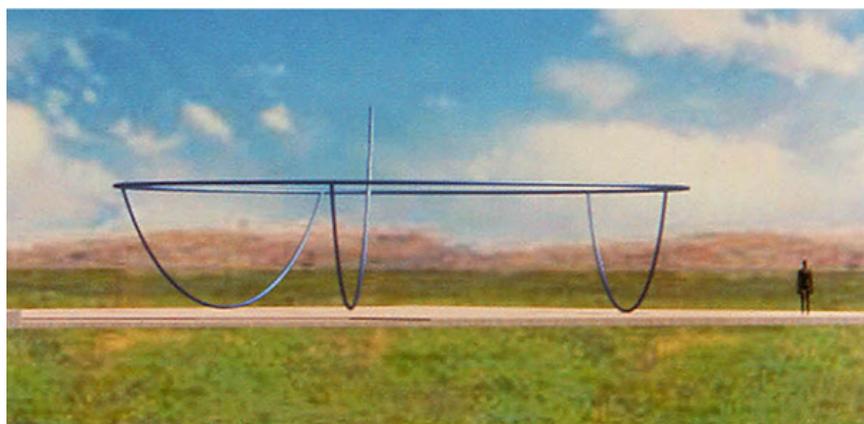
I search for a reciprocal object. What is a reciprocal object? It is an object where all the features of the object have the same value. For example, in *The Nearest Air Series* the line is not less important than the space. The problem is to make the space, the lines and the curve of the wool yarn find a balance with one another. If I move the curving wool half a meter the piece would no longer be there. It's like writing poetry: sometimes a word is not in the right place so you have to move it. At the same time it is different because in poetry you use words that you know and here I produce the words, the syntax, the sentence and the syllable. It's a relationship between parts.

As you can see my work is very much related to pleasure: the pleasure of creating a project, the pleasure of doing, the pleasure of a project being realized. Going back to the idea of the reciprocal object, if you consider that an object has three phases: the project, the realization, and the final made object, I think in my work there is also reciprocity between these three phases. The realized object retains the project and the realization phase as a kind of transparent face so that people can establish a relationship of time between phases of the work. There is no secret because the work is transparent, but I think that a real secret is a transparent one. There is a text by Borges that says that the worse labyrinth is a straight line. (laughs)

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D.C: You frequently use forms, which defy the viewer's sense of volume and perception. These phenomenological games engage and involve the spectator. Could you tell us something about the importance of the spectator in your work?

W.C: It is very difficult to hold an exhibition in a place where people are not used to your work. In my case, I have been working for more than 30 years so my work has a kind of approach related to a field of intentions or a field of meanings that the work always deals with.



Waltercio Caldas, *Memorial to Antonio Carlos Jobim*, work in progress  
Conceived in 1996 for Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon, Rio de Janeiro

The spectator is always part of the whole thing; it always has been ever since the Greeks. However, I'm not interested in "the public." I think "the public" is a very abstract concept. I don't make a work for "the public." I make a work for each individual in particular.

That's why my work is always intimate. Sometimes I create very big pieces but they are always intimate. This may be because I believe that people are always alone when they are in front of objects of art. Art is not like a rock-show where we share our feeling with thousands of people around us. Art is always a solitary process. The more successful a work of art is the greater one's sense of loneliness. This is something that I believe is extremely pleasurable.

DC: What do you think is arts place in society today?

W.C: Godard said that culture was made to kill art because culture is a rule and art is not a rule; it is against the rule. So of course the nature of the rule kills the anti-rule right? You have to resist that.

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Waltercio Caldas, *Serie Veneza*, July 1997  
Installation at the XLVII Venice Biennial Brazilian Pavillion

I think it would be impossible for me to do my work outside of Brazil because I think we [Brazilians] were born modern in a sense. It is quite natural for us to be modern because we are from a very new country. I think we have a sort of freshness and this is very important. I grew up in a community of artists that spoke about art all the time. They weren't in competition with one other. It has been wonderful to be an artist in a place like Rio because we don't have that pragmatic relationship with the market that other places have. We can relate the process of doing to something very pleasant and this is something that I think people are losing because we are transforming a kind of spiritual

inclination into a profession. I think we have to preserve the possibility of the language of art. We have to fight to preserve the freedom of the language of art.

D.C: Finally, your work has received considerable international acclaim and has been included in Documenta 11 and the 47<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennial as well as numerous international shows. What are your thoughts on how Brazilian art is received internationally?

W.C: If I can put it in a sentence: I think we were unknown for a long time but now we have the chance to be misunderstood. (laughs)