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Robert Fishko, *Director*

**CLAUDIO BRAVO**

(1936-2011)

Chilean

Claudio Bravo's art is best known for hyper-realistic execution, but upon studying his paintings, his gift for economy and nuance reveals a greater interest in evoking an emotional response to his subjects, rather than merely documenting them. Born in Valparaíso, Chile in 1936, Claudio had prodigious talent in his early years. His only studies were at the studio of Miguel Venegas Cifuentes in Santiago from age 11 to age 20. In 1954 and 1955, the Artist was highly sought as a portrait painter in Concepción, where he obtained and completed many commissions. Anxious to explore the world of art, Bravo booked passage to Europe in 1961, and soon arrived in Madrid, where he immediately became a celebrated society portraitist, even painting the oppressive political figures of the time. His portraits attracted the attention of the Philippine president, Ferdinand Marcos, who invited Bravo to travel to Manila to paint himself and his wife, Imelda. Bravo did paint them, but the frustration caused by the ultraconservative politics of Franco, Marcos and others, together with the intense light and bold colors of the landscape and costumes of the Philippines, set him off onto the artistic journey that would transform his palette and propel the rest of his life as an artist.

Claudio Bravo painted his first painting of colored paper packaging in the early 1960's. He was intrigued by the potential of the abstracted forms, varied textures, and blocks of color he observed in this ordinary material; he stated that the initial impetus to paint wrapped packages and other objects draped in fabric came from looking at Mark Rothko's color field paintings and the compositions of Spanish Informalist Painter Antoni Tàpies, but he had also frequently attended the Museo del Prado in Madrid, where he admired the old Spanish and Italian masters, especially the color and light effects of Diego Velázquez, the cloth studies of Francisco de Zurbarán, and the still lifes of Juan Sánchez Cotán. Bravo went on to achieve great success and acclaim with his own still life paintings of cloth and paper, animal skins and bones, and ordinary everyday objects.

Claudio Bravo moved to the United States in 1969, where he settled on the East Side of Manhattan. He received rave reviews for his exhibition at the Staempfli Gallery in New York a year later, which was exclusively focused on the parcel works. After three years of city life, the Artist decided to spend time in Morocco, where the climate and landscape better suited his temperament. He moved to Tangier in 1972, purchasing a spacious 18<sup>th</sup> Century home with views of both the Atlantic and Mediterranean. Bravo's work became infused with Moroccan culture and took on the spiritual aspects of the Islamic art and architecture in his surroundings. The influence of Surrealism became more prominent in his subjects, noticeably in his juxtaposition of objects, dreamlike compositions, and ethereal backgrounds. Many view his oeuvre as being a hybrid of multiple religions and styles – traditional techniques with contemporary sensibilities. However, the Artist did not seek to merge his work with any particular culture and stayed remarkably true to his own style of painting. Claudio Bravo remained in Morocco for the remainder of his life, where he passed away at his home in Taroudant, at the age of 74.

During his lifetime, Claudio Bravo was recognized with fourteen solo museum exhibitions in the United States, Chile, Mexico and France. His works are found in many prominent public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago; the Ludwig Museum, Cologne, Germany; and the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Netherlands. In 2007, Bravo represented Chile in the Venice Biennale at the Museo Diocesano.

In the monograph *Claudio Bravo: Painting & Drawing* (Rizzoli, 2005), the author and professor Edward J. Sullivan wrote, “While it is certainly true that Bravo has very consciously forged his own path and makes his art with particular attention to the traditions of classicism and academic convention, I always argue that he is, at the same time, a modern painter, and even a radical one. Bravo's intense dedication to the figure, to his own peculiar view of observed reality and his steadfast disregard of any of the artistic fashions of his time have defined him as an artistic individualist.”

Of his practice, Bravo said, “The objects I paint transcend and magnify reality. I use light somewhat in the way Francisco de Zurbarán did. He was one of the few painters that gave true transcendent meanings to objects. This treatment of light makes them appear more as they are. Their essence is greater.”