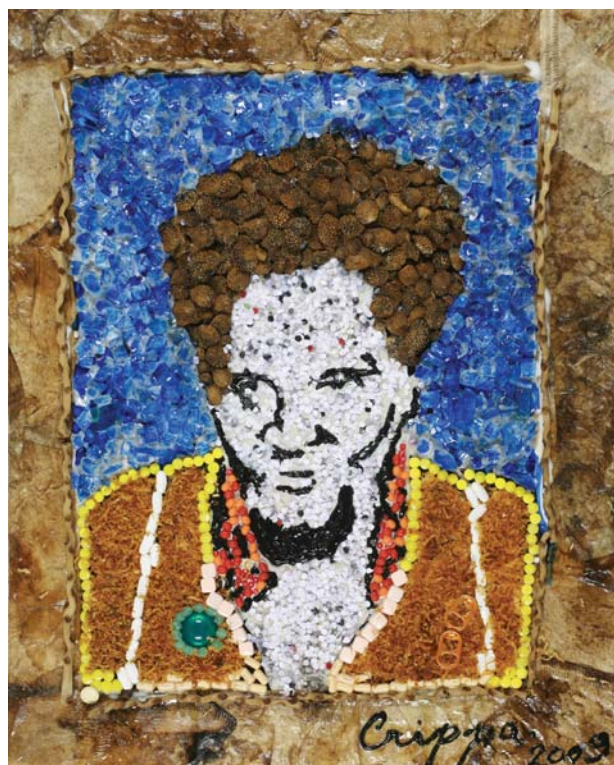


## Arthur Bispo do Rosário (1909?-1989): Insanity and Art



Mentally ill people are like hummingbirds: they never land, floating two meters above the ground.

—Bispo do Rosário

**T**his year (perhaps, since the date is controversial) we celebrate the birth centennial of Arthur Bispo do Rosário, one of the most outstanding and studied contemporary Brazilian artists. He developed all his work throughout the approximately 50 years during which he was hospitalized in the psychiatric colony Juliano Moreira, in the city of Rio de Janeiro. In 1938, Bispo had a psychotic episode in which he believed that he was given the mission of recreating the universe to present it to God on Judgment Day. He was then arrested and afterward hospitalized without recovering, diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia (1).

Deprived of social contact, Bispo do Rosário began a compulsive artistic production out of trash and junk. He had no academic background, being a descendant of slaves who grew cane in a poor region of Brazil and having worked as a marine, boxer, and signaler in the Brazilian Navy. He used hospital linen, blankets, and old uniforms to create textile works, such as banners, ceremonial garments, and sashes, incorporating text by embroidering. His work has been described as “part Surrealist, part magic realist, and part Conceptual,” and it has been compared to that by Marcel Duchamp, who prodded thought about artistic processes and art marketing. For instance, Bispo do Rosário’s *Fortune Wheel*

resembles Duchamp’s *Bicycle Wheel*, an early example of “kinetic art” from the French artist.

The originality of Bispo’s work lies in his transformation of objects from the materialistic society in order to recount the individual’s daily life, elaborated with careful esthetic concerns but unrelated to chronological time. His most famous work is the *Manto da Anunciação* (*Annunciation Garment*), to be used by him on Judgment Day (1).

After his death, several individual exhibitions of his work took place in Brazil, with international representation in exhibitions in Sweden, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other countries. In 1995, Bispo’s work represented Brazil in the 46th Venice Biennale (Italy), regarded as the main art event in the world. The story of his life and work has been the subject of documentaries, movies, books, and theatrical plays, with Bispo’s treasury of 802 works designated as part of Brazil’s national heritage and held by the Bispo do Rosário Museum in Rio de Janeiro.

### Reference

1. Hidalgo L: Arthur Bispo do Rosário, o Senhor do Labirinto. Rio de Janeiro, Rocco, 1996

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