

Exhibitions and International Connections at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro

(1948-1978)

Maria de Fátima Morethy Couto
Moema de Bacelar Alves
(eds.)



Elizabeth Catoia Varela (UFRJ)

This book revisits a significant period in Brazilian history. At the time when Rio de Janeiro was still the federal capital, plans were set in motion for the establishment of a museum of modern art. However, the institution was not founded solely on the basis of art and culture. Politics, soft power, media, education, international influences, and strategic partnerships also shaped this space, which became a landmark of modern architecture, built on newly reclaimed land extending into the waters of Guanabara Bay: the Aterro do Flamengo. The essays collected in this volume reveal how the exhibitions held at MAM Rio engaged with a broad range of interests, becoming arenas where various forces operated and expanded the museum's geopolitical reach. Acting as both a catalyst and a promoter of exchange, the museum fostered and experienced partnerships on both national and international scales. Its history was deeply intertwined with the life of the city itself. After the inauguration of Brasília, the museum faced political marginalization and financial decline, yet it also served as a site of resistance during the military dictatorship. The multiple perspectives presented in this volume allow us to understand the impact of MAM Rio's activities over its first three decades of operation.



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© Maria de Fátima Morethy Couto and Moema de Bacelar Alves (editors)

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School building on the occasion of the Calder exhibition, 1959.

Author: Aertsens Michel

Collection: Research and documentation MAM Rio.

Preface

Ends and Beginnings: MAM Rio against the grain

SABRINA PARRACHO SANT'ANNA

Exposições e conexões internacionais no Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (1948-1978) [International Exhibitions and Connections at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (1948–1978)] is the result of a collaborative research project focused on an institution that played a key role in shaping the Brazilian art system. Alongside other museums founded in the same period, the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio) was instrumental in transforming the landscape of Brazilian modern art in the second half of the 20th century. The research, the result of many hands at work, brings together a range of distinct perspectives on the museum's activities, unified by a focus on the exhibitions it hosted. The decision to concentrate on the three most significant decades of MAM Rio's trajectory enables a long-term view that cuts across the broader history of the country. From the democratic period to the military regime, the studies presented here delve into an institution that is strained by the twists and turns of national politics.

The book's introduction begins by stating the decision to adopt a geopolitical lens as an analytical perspective, which seems appropriate and offers new perspectives on an institution that has already been extensively studied. Looking at MAM Rio through the processes of international political dispute feels particularly relevant today, as nation-states once again position themselves as deliberate actors and revive strategies of cultural warfare and soft power—so central to the period discussed here. If the present serves as a standpoint from which we can reassess historical phenomena, viewing MAM Rio from the perspective of the international relations it promoted and

in which it was involved allows us to reconsider its role in the public sphere and in political activity, drawing attention to the limits of art's autonomy.

Indeed, the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro was created through an international network of relations, evident both in the correspondence with Nelson Rockefeller during its founding and in the network of social actors who enabled its institutionalization. Many of these were connected to the Itamaraty [Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs], to diplomatic work in international cooperation institutions such as the UN and UNESCO, or to the broader network of international capitalism. The actors who played a leading role in the museum's creation belonged to elites committed to the internationalization of Brazilian art and to various national development projects. As Maria Lucia Bueno has already noted, although the process of art internationalization began in the nineteenth century, from the end of World War II onward, it was carried out through a communication system operating from international centers.¹ Even though we rarely associate museum institutions with the dissemination of new media, Andreas Huyssen drew attention to the process of musealization as an explosion of memory brought about by the incorporation of new forms of cultural dissemination.²

In the case of museum institutions, from the postwar period onward, the dissemination of art came to center on a new model of cultural facility—extensively debated by UNESCO—that took the model of North American museums as a successful standard for democratizing access to art. MAM Rio was a pioneer in adopting new museological practices, though the shift became especially tangible starting in the 1960s. Following the seminar “The Museum as a Cultural Centre in the Development of the Community,” held by UNESCO in Tokyo in 1960, the journal *Museum* would extensively debate the new role to be assigned to exhibition institutions.³ From that point on, the expression *cultural center* became widely used in the journal. Associating the image of European museums with mausoleums, as Adorno had already done, the authors published in the journal introduced the idea of the museum as an institution directed toward the general public.

The debates that guided the reconstruction of MAM Rio after the tragic fire of 1978—and that opposed the formation of a permanent collection to the model of a cultural center, embodied in the image of the newly created Centre Georges Pompidou—demonstrate that, over the museum's first three decades, exhibition spaces ceased to focus on building a collection

1. Bueno, 2021.

2. Huyssen, 1997.

3. Griffing, 1963.

and on the figure of the conservator, and instead became multifunctional facilities, oriented toward programming driven by temporary exhibitions and the circulation of international shows, organized by curators. At that moment, alongside the proposal by critic Mario Pedrosa for the creation of the Museu das Origens [Museum of Origins], much of the debate focused on the alternative of a center for cultural dissemination structured around short-term exhibitions. Following the loss of a significant part of the museum's collection, the most feasible path forward was to continue with a project for a permanent cultural facility open to temporary shows.⁴

This model—already present, albeit in a less clearly defined form, in the original project of MAM Rio—enabled the proliferation of traveling exhibitions, the formation of a transnational network of institutions, and, as Allain Quemin has already pointed out, contributed to the widely circulated recognition that the world center of modern and contemporary art shifted from Paris to the poles of Anglo-Saxon culture and, above all, to New York.⁵ The creation of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio—and of other museums in Brazil and around the world, from the second half of the 20th century onward—thus forms part of the development of a global network of museum institutions and was integral to a profound transformation in international geopolitics.

However, a first point I would like to highlight is that the research presented here—based on careful documentary investigation—shows that this process, although closely linked to transnational dynamics of dispute, depends on negotiations intrinsic to the institutions and is embodied in concrete local social relations, giving rise to new forms of art and processes of consecration. Thus, although grounded in geopolitical analysis, this book has the merit of avoiding the pitfalls of interpretations that have often reduced complex processes to their outcomes. While Eva Cockroft circulated well-known interpretations of the militant role played by North American museum institutions during the Cold War,⁶ often overlooking internal divisions and conflicts within the context of McCarthyism, the research assembled here presents, in a sophisticated way, a process that is not predetermined but rather takes shape through concrete disputes and negotiations—through competition among international agents and local actors with specific interests who, ultimately, bring the exhibitions analyzed here into being.

4. Sant'anna, 2014.

5. Quemin, 2002.

6. Cockroft, 1974.

If Vera Beatriz Siqueira's chapter once again revisits the well-known relationship between Rockefeller, Castro Maya, and elite agents from the federal capital, her analysis of the museum's inaugural exhibition—focused on contemporary European art and on loans from early supporters—demonstrates that the creation of MAM Rio relied on feasible negotiations, the collections of local elites, and resources available at the time. Indeed, the web of consensus and controversy that enabled the museum's intense programming during those years recurs throughout the volume and is especially underscored in Dária Jaremtchuk's chapter on the series of American traveling exhibitions that reached MAM Rio in this period. International competition and the limited resources available for the museum's consolidation reveal that long-term processes are not always predictable and depend on a multitude of variables.

Also in this regard, the chapters by Emerson Dionísio—on Portinari's work in Israel—and by Maria Luisa Luz Tavora—on the organization of the *Jovem Gravura Nacional* [Young National Printmaking] exhibition and its relationship with informal abstraction—offer careful analyses of how international geopolitics draws on the specific dynamics of Brazilian art production to take shape and gain resonance. The success of strategies implemented by ministries of foreign affairs, embassies, and diplomatic bodies likewise depends—if not primarily—on how these efforts are interpreted and taken up by local artists.

A second point worth highlighting is the significant body of research assembled here that examines the key role of the São Paulo Biennials in the circulation of exhibitions across the country, and particularly at MAM Rio. As a focus of MoMA's interest—which especially valued the establishment of a Biennial outside Europe capable of challenging the Venice Biennale as a central platform for the dissemination of modern art—the exhibition positioned Brazil as a key node in the international art system's network of circulation. It is worth noting that some exhibitions studied in this volume are the direct result of efforts by embassies located outside the axis of established modern European art to bring visibility to art in their respective countries. On the one hand, the chapter by Maria de Fátima Morethy Couto specifically highlights the exhibition of English artists at the inauguration of the museum's permanent headquarters in the Aterro do Flamengo. Alongside Dária Jaremtchuk's discussion of the American exhibitions at MAM, the case study—by examining the British Council's efforts to bring the United Kingdom's representation at the 4th Biennial to MAM Rio—is emblematic of the broader attempts by Anglo-Saxon countries to consolidate their

art systems internationally, as discussed by Quemim.⁷ On the other hand, Michiko Okano's chapter, on the traveling exhibitions of Japanese art at the Biennials and at the museum, demonstrates how the Biennials, while serving to promote a new geopolitical paradigm, also played a key role in diversifying national narratives and expanding the global landscape of contemporary art.

In turn, in addition to shedding light on an important period in the history of the museum and of the country, Renata Zago's chapter—by addressing the boycott of the 10th São Paulo Biennial during the Military Dictatorship, the debates surrounding the French representation at the event, and the traveling of the tapestry exhibition to MAM Rio—masterfully demonstrates that processes are not linear but depend on a finely woven network of negotiations between the interests of international political agents and local actors. In the political dynamics surrounding the exhibition of French tapestries, both the tensions over the role of art institutions in resisting the authoritarian regime—through the movement led by Pedrosa and Restany—and the negotiations over the image of French art and Brazilian institutions came into play. Within this intricate tangle of consensus and controversy, the exhibition emerges as the possible agreement—one that draws attention, of course, to the country's political moment, but also to the significance of art in the struggle for cultural hegemony.

Finally, if the initial chapters draw attention to Brazil's position in the construction of a hierarchical network of international relations, it is also important to highlight a third point, represented by the final group of texts, which point to alternative forms of agency made possible by the development of the international art network. As the research of Patricia Corrêa, Moema de Bacelar Alves, and Renata Gomes Cardoso demonstrates, beyond the dominant north-south flow, MAM Rio also positioned itself as a significant node in the establishment of relationships among South American artists and institutions—part of a diversification process not always subject to control.

It is true that the notion of Latin American art was coined as a classification imposed from outside the countries it seeks to define. As Maria de Fátima Morethy Couto has shown, regional identity often arises from the interest of hegemonic centers, driven by the “need to feed an expanding art market in search of new products to commercialize in an expanded circuit, increasingly committed to optimizing the circulation of works and exhibitions.”⁸ In fact, as the chapters in the third part of this volume demonstrate, the 1950s and 1960s witnessed the consolidation of exchanges among the countries

7. Quemim, 2002.

8. Couto, 2012, p. 99

of the Southern Cone. The attention given by the press to the speech by Jânio Quadros at the opening of the exhibition *Artistas Contemporaneos da Argentina* [Contemporary Artists of Argentina], studied by Alves, attests to the close connection between the museum's programming and the national and international political contexts.

In a recent text, Maria Lucia Bueno examined the role of Nelson Rockefeller in the consolidation of a regional identity through the formation of MoMA's Latin American art collection and the construction of a cohesive image for the continent.⁹ Indeed, as Patricia Corrêa's chapter aptly observes, the patron's presence at the opening of the Fridl Loos exhibition was hardly accidental, triangulating relations between the United States and its Latin American partners. In fact, Vera Beatriz Siqueira had already noted, from its earliest years, MAM Rio contributed to the circulation of traveling exhibitions that would reinforce MoMA's collecting of Latin American art objects. David Rockefeller's reception of the "ceramic figurines," along with the exhibitions discussed in the final three chapters of this volume, exemplifies this same movement.

It seems symptomatic, therefore, that in 1978, a considerable portion of Joaquín Torres García's work was lost in the MAM Rio fire. As the final group of chapters in this volume demonstrates, the international circulation of traveling exhibitions—in which MAM Rio was both a participant and a contributor—also made possible an exhibition agenda organized by neighboring countries, as well as a constellation of relationships between artists and regional institutions. It is no coincidence that the work of the Uruguayan artist was on display at that moment. As several texts in this volume point out, the notion of modernity promoted by MAM Rio was frequently associated with abstract form and, in particular, with the various constructive projects developed across Latin America. Even though Torres García's formal vocabulary differed considerably from the constructive trend that ultimately gained prominence in Brazil, an important group of artists—guided by their own understanding of abstraction and based in the region—were exhibited at the museum, at times challenging the forms consecrated by hegemonic institutions on the international stage.

However, if in 1978 the works of Torres García—as well as a significant part of the collection that embodied the institution's project—were reduced to ashes, the intensity of the debates sparked by the crisis also draws attention to connections that often subverted the expected meaning of regional integration. Mario Pedrosa's proposal for the Museum of Origins,

9. Bueno, 2025.

even if considered at the time an eccentric proposition, reflected a set of debates that emerged from a network of relationships established during his years of exile in Chile¹⁰ and coincided with what Talisson Melo has called a “Latin Americanist turn” in his analysis of Aracy Amaral’s role at the São Paulo Biennial Foundation.¹¹

If the MAM fire can be considered a marker of an ending, that dramatic moment also witnessed the emergence of other forms of art agency. The decision to conclude the book with a trio of chapters on the geopolitics of the South is, therefore, particularly fitting and underscores the idea that endings can also give rise to new beginnings.

10. Sant’anna, 2019.

11. Melo, 2021.

Introduction

This book is the result of a research project supported by CNPq (Process 407548/2021-1), aimed at mapping and analyzing the international exhibitions held at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (hereafter referred to as MAM Rio) between 1948 and 1978. These exhibits originated in countries from Western and Eastern Europe, the Americas, and, to a lesser extent, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. They brought together artists or groups whose work held significant symbolic importance for each exhibition's specific theme or context.

The research unfolded in two phases, aiming to examine the political and ideological dimensions underlying these exhibitions. In the first phase, we selected, from the extensive list of exhibitions held at MAM Rio from 1948 to 1978, those that generated the most debate in the local artistic scene and raised compelling questions for investigation. In the second phase, we examined the political and ideological dimensions underlying these exhibitions, seeking to understand their articulation within their countries and institutions of origin, as well as the role of official agencies and the diplomatic corps in facilitating their international circulation.

The inventory and analysis of this set of international exhibitions provided more profound insight into the proactive roles certain countries played in the Brazilian cultural landscape during this period. This was examined in relation to interactions within the international geopolitical framework and the significance of so-called soft power in South America. Additionally, it enabled the identification of exhibition circulation networks within the local artistic scene and underscored MAM Rio's role as a driving force in fostering artistic circuits across Brazil. Furthermore, it facilitated the recognition of regional

and continental networks, the examination of their specific effects on the art scenes of Brazil and other South American countries, and the development of a modern–contemporary art history written from alternative perspectives.

On the international level, the time frame chosen for this research coincides with the end of World War II and the establishment of the Cold War, concluding with the economic and cultural adjustments brought about by successive international oil crises, which affected global geopolitical relations and had significant repercussions on the arts. Our hypothesis is that, during this period, institutions legitimizing art and culture functioned as crucial spaces for social and political articulation in diplomatic and commercial activities. However, this reality shifted in the globalized contemporary world from the late 1980s onward, when artistic and cultural spaces and events were no longer central to contemporary cultural diplomacy practices. At the domestic level in Brazil, the time frame is justified, first, by the establishment of a network of cultural institutions aimed at promoting contemporary artistic production, particularly in the country's two major metropolises (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo). It concludes with the 1978 fire at MAM Rio and the resulting cultural crisis, which unfolded during the military dictatorship.

The first modern art museums in Brazil, inspired by the model of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York and directly supported by Nelson Rockefeller, sought to establish themselves as dynamic and pedagogical institutions. They aimed to serve as intermediaries between the public and the artwork, breaking disciplinary boundaries. Their goal was to evolve into spaces that promoted both new domestic and international trends, creating a diverse and plural agenda that encompassed not only exhibitions of traditional art forms (painting, sculpture, prints, and drawings) but also showcases of decorative arts, industrial design, tapestries, posters, photography, stage design, and more. Additionally, they established dedicated departments to foster modern practices, such as photography and cinema, alongside ongoing educational activities.

The programming of the new Brazilian museums was shaped through institutional negotiations, in which interpersonal relationships played a significant role, including in the formation of international collaborations. It encompassed both individual and group exhibitions—domestic and international in scope—as well as didactic exhibitions, roundtables, and conferences featuring guests from diverse backgrounds. Museum bulletins and publications, as well as the local and national press, extensively covered these events. Notably, the involvement of art critics, members of the press, and influential newspaper owners—such as Assis Chateaubriand

(MASP) and Niomar Moniz Sodr  (MAM Rio)—who were actively engaged in the institutional life of these new museums, was crucial in promoting and increasing the visibility of these initiatives.

As Sabrina Sant’anna observes, in its early years, MAM Rio sought to establish itself as a dynamic institution—one that “changed its appearance regularly. To this end, it chose to hold a new exhibition almost every month.” According to the author, the decision to make temporary exhibitions its hallmark “highlighted the museum’s desire for movement and its use of innovation as a public draw.”¹²

During Raymundo de Castro Maya’s presidency of MAM Rio (1947-1951), the concept of transience was explored through the use of various venues—one of which was a temporary structure built on the *pilotis* of the Ministry of Education and Health building. This approach, along with the organization of exhibitions in other cultural spaces, helped establish a narrative of modern art that celebrated the fluidity and mobility of its aesthetic values. After his departure and the election of Niomar Moniz Sodr  as executive director, the museum shifted focus toward connecting with the everyday public, working to build its audience by actively promoting its agenda:

In this second phase of the museum’s institutionalization (1951-1958), there was an intense effort to publicize its activities. MAM bulletins were published almost monthly, nearly all exhibitions were accompanied by catalogs, book sales became a priority, and, above all, the institution’s promotional materials were widely disseminated in newspapers. It was, in fact, through the press that the museum sought to make its mission public and bring it to fruition.¹³

Although MAM Rio is a frequent subject of study in the field of visual arts, few studies analyze its role in the domestic and international artistic scene through the lens of international exhibitions and the relationships it forged with institutions, cultural funding agencies, and diplomatic agents. By positioning our research at the intersection of artistic, cultural, and geopolitical interests, this publication aims to contribute to the development of alternative historiographical perspectives on Brazilian art, with a focus on the artistic, cultural, and political dimensions inherent in institutional dynamics.

12. Sant’anna, 2011, p. 116.

13. *Idem*, p. 108. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations originally in Portuguese or Spanish have been translated into English. Quotations that appeared in English in the original text are presented as it is.

Theoretical and Methodological Aspects

For the development of this research, we employed a methodology grounded in the theoretical and conceptual frameworks derived from bibliographic debates on the circulation of artworks and objects after World War II. We understand that this mobility is linked to a form of geopolitics of art that emerged from a new international political and economic configuration. In analyzing this evolving artistic landscape, traditional methodologies in Art History have proven insufficient, as the scope of the debates requires knowledge from various disciplines, such as Cold War Studies, Cultural Diplomacy, and Latin American History. Therefore, it becomes evident that the breadth of perspectives and the need for diversified research strategies in studying international exhibitions during this period have constituted the first challenge faced by the team.

Likewise, archives are at the center of this research, as they serve as the fundamental anchor for constructing our own object of study. It is the archives that preserve the primary sources that enable the survey of international art exhibitions, a theme that, in our view, has not been widely explored by national historiography.

For the most part, these documentary sources, understood here as traces left by the events, are housed in national and foreign institutions that the project team will consult. Among these institutions, we highlight: Arquivo do MAM Rio, Arquivo Castro Maya, Centro de Pesquisa do MASP, Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo da Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Arquivo do Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, Biblioteca Paulo Mendes de Almeida – Centro de Estudos Luís Martins do MAM SP, Arquivo Nacional (Fundo Niomar Moniz Sodré), Fundação Getúlio Vargas – CPDOC (Fundo Flexa Ribeiro), Arquivo Central do Itamaraty (Brasília), Arquivo da Fundação Japão/Tokyo, Arquivo do Museu da Imigração Japonesa, MoMA Archives (NYC), British Council Archive (UK), Tate Archive (UK), Archives Nationales (Paris), Bibliothèque de l'Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art (INHA), Bibliothèque Kandinsky do Musée National d'Art Moderne (Centre Pompidou), Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (Bienal de Veneza), Mobilier National Gobelins Archive (Paris), Archivo de la Fundación IDA – Investigación en Diseño Argentino (Buenos Aires), Archivo del Museo de la Historia del Traje (Buenos Aires), Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de la Argentina (Buenos Aires), Biblioteca Nacional Mariano Moreno (Buenos Aires), International Center for the Arts of the Americas at the Museum of Fine Arts (online), Archivo Digital del Museo de Arte Moderno (Buenos Aires),

Archivo Digital de la Fundación Espigas (Buenos Aires), and the Hemeroteca Digital da Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro.

Among the materials of interest preserved by these institutions are exhibition catalogs, photographs of artworks and exhibitions, brochures, diplomatic correspondence, technical reports, letters, official documents, telegrams, records from private and public institutions, technical specifications for exhibition setups, insurance policies for artworks, event evaluations, conference records, and various publications. Thus, compiling these primary sources enables the research team to refute, refine, or validate the hypotheses developed throughout the project.

Regarding the nature of our research sources, press reviews are crucial for the historical reconstruction of exhibitions and for assessing their impact and reception. During the period covered by this project, cultural journalism held a prominent place in periodicals, not only publishing information about artistic and cultural agendas but also fostering debates and cultivating audiences for the arts. Articles on exhibitions, for instance, provide valuable data on the events, along with references and aesthetic and artistic arguments that resonated within the cultural sphere. After all, these columns were written by art critics and specialized journalists—qualified professionals who were often involved in multiple roles and environments, such as serving on jury panels, sitting on museum committees, writing texts for exhibition catalogs, curating exhibitions at galleries and museums, and organizing or presenting Brazilian art delegations at international events.

The History of Exhibitions has emerged as a distinct field of research over the past two decades, focusing on both historical and often overlooked exhibitions. Theorists such as Jérôme Glicenstein (2009; 2015), Felix Vogel (2014), and Julian Myers (2011) trace the growing interest in past exhibitions to the professionalization of the curator's role in the 1970s and the subsequent establishment of curatorial studies programs within academia. These scholars argue that the field has primarily emphasized the curator's role, curatorial concepts, and exhibit layouts—often at the expense of more in-depth analyses of the artist or artwork itself. As a result, certain exhibitions have been canonized, most of which, with few exceptions, are in Europe and the United States. The reenactment of key exhibitions has further contributed to the fetishization of curatorship, artworks, and objects, reinforcing the current boom in the art market. Moreover, debates about the epistemology of the History of Exhibitions remain unresolved: while some scholars recognize it as

an independent and specialized field, others view it as a subfield within the broader discipline of Art History.¹⁴

Regarding the milestones of this research, we recognize that the History of Exhibitions has broadened narratives about the arts, particularly by shifting the focus away from artworks considered in isolation and from the biographical elements of artists toward a greater interest in the articulation between extra-aesthetic elements. However, this project does not prioritize analyses of curators or curatorial proposals, which are central to the field of the History of Exhibitions. Consequently, our investigations do not fall entirely within this epistemological field, although we draw on key concepts and ideas from it for our research. This methodological distinction is justified because the international exhibitions we examine are linked, as already indicated, to a new geopolitical configuration that turned the art world into a field of disputes of various kinds. More specifically, in the period under study, the ideological, political, economic, and diplomatic contexts are crucial for analyzing the international circulation of art exhibitions.

It is also important to note that, for the analysis of international exhibitions, a geopolitical perspective has proven valuable in understanding the dynamics of agency, which have been underexplored by monographic studies and works of art. As Catherine Dossin points out, geopolitical analysis “can provide a model to understand the shifts in the power structure of the art worlds by analyzing the way in which the various protagonists—whether countries, institutions, or individuals—constructed their own interpretations of the events, and how their own views, ambitions, and strategies wound up creating and shaping those events.”¹⁵ By examining the circulation of international exhibitions, we aim to reveal the disputes surrounding narratives about the structure of the modern and contemporary art system.

Similarly, cultural diplomacy has become an area of increasing interest among researchers across various fields, including the arts. Various authors have already discussed how the arts and culture have served as important arenas for social engagement in diplomatic activities and how they have become privileged subjects for shaping positive and assertive national

14. Among the authors on these issues debates: see the website: <https://www.britishartstudies.ac.uk/issues/issue-index/issue-13/why-exhibition-histories>, consulted on May 20, 2022; Greenberg, Reesa *et al.* “Introduction.” *In: Thinking about Exhibitions* (1996); Myers, Julian. “On the Value of a History of Exhibitions.” *The Exhibitionist*, n. 4, pp. 2428, 2011; Vidokle, Anton. “Art Without Artists?” *eflux journal* 16 (May 2010): <https://www.eflux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists>.

15. Dossin, 2021, p. 129.

identities. As Edgard Telles Ribeiro notes,¹⁶ “there is nothing transient about cultural relations. [...] On the contrary, they transcend government actions, consolidating and expanding through their own channels. Among other reasons, this is because they are more enduring—and more reliable.”¹⁷

Artistic and cultural events can thus be viewed as a kind of calling card that, within the context of international circulation, often serves to represent national forms and symbols effectively and persistently. As Acir Pimenta Madeira Filho explains, cultural diplomacy is a “foreign policy strategy used by governments as a catalyst for dialogue, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence among peoples [and] can also be considered a prime vehicle for symbolic representations.” It functions as “a tool of action to ensure a country’s influence or expand its presence in the international arena.” He further asserts that cultural diplomacy has become a valuable instrument in foreign relations, essential for “governments in defining their external priorities.”¹⁸

Preliminarily, an examination of the documentation on international exhibitions suggests that diplomats, in addition to representing their countries of origin, played a decisive role in the circulation of national symbolic and cultural goods. While the diplomatic corps typically follows their country’s foreign policy, in many instances, their responsibilities extend beyond this. Well-versed in and integrated into local cultural scenes, diplomats mediated between institutions, facilitated connections between the sending and receiving agents of exhibitions, managed practical aspects such as customs procedures, and even intervened in various stages of exhibition production. In other words, the role of the diplomatic corps in the context of international exhibitions warrants further study and understanding.

Among the objectives of the cases studied in this publication are: understanding the aesthetic debates sparked by international exhibitions and their reverberations in local and national contexts; investigating, from transnational historiographical perspectives, the conception of national art history underlying certain international exhibitions and their possible divergences; understanding the motivations that led the originating institutions to organize such exhibitions and propose them to other countries, highlighting their geopolitical and artistic dimensions; recovering, when possible, the exhibition design projects of the selected exhibitions;

16. Telles Ribeiro, 2011, p. 46.

17. Commercial agreements and political rapprochements, Telles Ribeiro asserts, are by definition transient mechanisms” (*Idem, ibidem*).

18. Madeira Filho, 2016, pp. 27-28.

examining exhibition catalog texts as discursive practices that propagate artistic canons; assessing the impact of the selected exhibitions on local and regional debates and the development of artistic and intellectual networks; and evaluating the influence of the selected exhibitions in promoting artistic poetics and movements, as well as in fostering the formation of new collections in Brazil.

Part I

Modernities on Display

Since its inception, the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro has played a pivotal role in shaping the public sphere for modern art in Brazil. It contributed to the construction of a distinct narrative of modernity that framed key aesthetic debates surrounding the advocacy of artistic and cultural modernization. As part of its ambitious pedagogical mission, the museum aimed to cultivate public perception and encourage the acceptance of modern artists and movements, thereby establishing the foundation for these ongoing artistic and cultural dialogues.

The first section of the book examines, through the study of three specific cases, how the exhibitions held by the museum became integrated into this broader narrative. Vera Beatriz Siqueira analyzes MAM Rio's inaugural exhibition (1949), exploring how the defense of modern art in Brazil involved the intersection of private taste and public institutions, local and international values, and the tension between *avant-garde* and tradition. Emerson Dionisio focuses on Portinari's 1958 exhibition, which showcased a collection of drawings and paintings inspired by his visit to Israel, illustrating the circulation of these works across the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America. Maria Luisa Tavora investigates the second itinerant edition of the *Jovem Gravura Nacional* exhibition, displayed at MAM Rio in 1967. Her primary objective is to expand the narratives surrounding modern printmaking, the "Informal" trend in abstraction, the role of MAM Rio, and the networks that shaped the Brazilian art scene from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Based on these case studies, which cover the first three decades of MAM Rio's activities, the discussion will address several significant themes, including the formation of a network of cultural agents dedicated to promoting artistic

modernity; the establishment of criteria for critically evaluating modern art in Brazil; the conception of the museum as a civilizational presence; the interplay between the Brazilian cultural elite and international agents and values; the definition of a canon that includes both foreign and Brazilian artists (emerging and established); the debate between abstraction and figuration; and the modes of cultural circulation during the periods of the Good Neighbor Policy, the Cold War, and the military dictatorship.

Modern Art at the Crossroads: The Inaugural Exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro

VERA BEATRIZ SIQUEIRA

The inaugural exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), titled *Pintura Européia Contemporânea* [Contemporary European Painting], opened on January 20, 1949, coinciding with the feast day of the city's patron saint, Saint Sebastian [Fig. 1]. At the time, the museum's president, industrialist, and collector Raymundo de Castro Maya was an enthusiastic carioca (though born in Paris). He authored articles on urban issues, participated in the Association of Friends of Rio de Janeiro, supported initiatives to preserve the city's heritage, and coordinated the renovation and restoration of Tijuca Forest in the 1940s. His company, *Gordura de Coco Carioca*, proudly reflected its local roots in its name. Castro Maya also focused much of his collecting efforts on Brasiliana works, particularly those depicting images of Rio.



Fig. 1. Cover of the catalog for the exhibition *Pintura Européia Contemporânea*, Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1949. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

The worship of Saint Sebastian, a 3rd-century martyr from Milan revered as a protector against famine, plagues, and wars, was introduced to Brazil by Portuguese colonizers. Over time, this devotion became deeply rooted in popular culture, intertwining with the identity of the city once named São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro. Therefore, the choice of January 20 for the museum's inaugural exhibition was far from coincidental. The opening represented a landmark event for the city, which was then the federal capital. It held special significance for Castro Maya, particularly within Brazil's evolving cultural geopolitics.

The project to establish MAM Rio emerged within the broader context of ongoing debates about modern art institutions in Brazil. Its official registration took place in 1947, the same year the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP) was founded by newspaper magnate Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand Bandeira de Mello (Assis Chateaubriand) under the direction of Italian art critic and dealer Pietro Maria Bardi. Initially, Chateaubriand considered opening the museum in Rio de Janeiro but ultimately decided that São Paulo offered a more favorable environment for raising the necessary funds for its creation and operation. While MASP's collection encompasses a wide historical range, the museum quickly positioned itself as a counterpoint to the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (São Paulo State Art Gallery), which was then associated with academic art, by incorporating modern works. Chateaubriand himself described MASP as a "museum of ancient and modern art" when inviting Bardi to lead the institution.¹⁹

At the same time, industrialist Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho (Ciccillo Matarazzo) began showcasing modern artworks at the headquarters of Metalma—Metalúrgica Matarazzo, taking the initial steps toward realizing his dream of founding a Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo (MAM SP). Since the mid-1940s, members of São Paulo's elite had been corresponding with Nelson Rockefeller, then director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, to establish institutional connections to support the creation of MAM SP. Rockefeller visited Brazil in 1946, meeting with collectors and intellectuals in both São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro to encourage the establishment of museums dedicated to modern art in the country.

Before returning to the United States, Nelson Rockefeller wrote to Raymundo de Castro Maya to express his gratitude for the hospitality extended at his home. Using stationery from the Copacabana Palace Hotel, he began the letter with effusive praise for Castro Maya's "country house" in

19. Bardi, 1982, p. 10.

Alto da Boa Vista—now the Museu do Açude—whose terrace, with its view of the sea, reminded him of what “Paradise must look like.” Rockefeller then highlighted the charm and appeal of Brazilian estates for Americans interested in colonial art and architecture before returning to the theme of modernity. He emphasized that an appreciation for the art of the past does not diminish the commitment to supporting contemporary creation. He closed the letter by stating:

It was a privilege for me to meet Rubens Borba de Moraes, Oscar Niemeyer, Alcides da Rocha Miranda, Rodrigo de Mello Franco, Aníbal Machado, and others, and to discuss the formation of a Museum of Modern Art here. I brought along some pictures with the idea that, if I gave some of them to this group, it might stimulate the movement. Of course, it is not easy to organize people on behalf of modern art anywhere; however, remembering that your name was among those on the committee to study the possibilities of developing something along this line, I hope you will be able to lend the movement your assistance and help.²⁰

From that point onward, Castro Maya contributed an initial 100,000 cruzeiros to the institution and assumed the role of president of the Organizational Committee of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro. The committee included notable figures such as Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade, Rubens Borba de Moraes, Lélío Landucci, José Queiroz de Lima, and Josias Leão. He also chaired the Publicity Committee, which featured members like Maria do Carmo Nabuco, Antônio de Barros Carvalho, Juscelino Kubitschek, Osório Borba, and Frederico Barata. The official registration of the museum’s trademark in September 1947 succinctly encapsulated its mission: “The Museum of Modern Art is a cultural institution with the sole purpose of disseminating knowledge of all forms of Modern Art.”²¹

The Organizational Committee faced several bureaucratic hurdles in formally establishing the museum. Letters from Maria Barreto, then an employee of the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes [National Museum of Fine Arts, RJ], preserved in Castro Maya’s archives, highlight some challenges in securing MAM’s registration with the Ministry of Labor in 1947²² and,

20. Letter from Nelson Rockefeller to Castro Maya, Nov. 26, 1946. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

21. Registration of MAM Rio’s first trademark, Sept. 24, 1947.

22. Letter from Maria Barreto to Castro Maya, Oct. 18, 1947. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

the following year, fulfilling all the requirements for the definitive approval of the museum's statutes.²³ Once these obstacles were overcome, the minutes of the Constitutive Assembly of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro were published on May 5, 1948. Three months later, León Degand, then director of MAM São Paulo, wrote to Castro Maya proposing a discussion about a "cooperation agreement" between the two museums.²⁴ By September 1948, this partnership was informally established. At that time, MAM Rio, still without a permanent home, collaborated with the Brazil-United States Institute (IBEU) to organize an Alexander Calder exhibition at the Exhibition Hall of the Ministry of Education and Health; the exhibition was later presented at MAM São Paulo. This collaboration highlights how the establishment and operations of the two museums were interconnected, both being part of a broader initiative to build the institutional framework for modern art in Brazil.

The Early Years

In 1949, MAM established its first headquarters in the Banco Boavista building on Avenida Presidente Vargas in downtown Rio de Janeiro. This space was generously provided by the third Baron of Saavedra—owner of the bank and a member of the museum's board of directors [Fig. 2]. At that time, the board consisted of the following members: Gustavo Capanema, Honorary President; Raymundo de Castro Maya, President; Manuel Bandeira, 1st Vice President; Marcelo Roberto, 2nd Vice President; Josias Leão and Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade, Executive Directors; Maria Barreto, General Secretary; Antonio Bento, Executive Secretary; the Baron of Saavedra, Treasurer; Quirino Campofiorito, Assistant Treasurer; Lucia Miguel Pereira, Librarian; and the Department Directors: Candido Portinari (Painting), Bruno Giorgi (Sculpture), Alcides da Rocha Miranda (Architecture), Luís Heitor Corrêa de Azevedo (Music), Tomás Santa Rosa Junior (Theater), and Roberto Luís Assunção de Araújo (Cinema).

23. Letter from Maria Barreto to Castro Maya, Mar. 22, 1948. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

24. Letter from León Degand to Castro Maya, Aug. 31, 1948. Castro Maya Museum Archive.



Fig. 2. Photograph of the Banco Boavista building on MAM Rio's inauguration in its new home on the 11th floor. Published in the February 1949 issue of *Sombra* magazine, in the article titled "The Museum of Modern Art."

The Banco Boavista building, designed by Oscar Niemeyer in 1946, is adorned with mosaic panels by Paulo Werneck and features a wavy glass-brick wall on the ground floor. Its glass façade faces the Candelária Church and Guanabara Bay. The mezzanine displayed Candido Portinari's *A Primeira Missa no Brasil* [The First Mass in Brazil], commissioned directly from the artist by the Baron of Saavedra (now housed at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes). This setting was particularly fitting for a museum dedicated to affirming modernity in Brazil.

In its new home, MAM Rio held its inaugural exhibition, *Pintura Européia Contemporânea* [Contemporary European Painting], which we will discuss shortly. However, that was not all. In the same year, 1949, MAM Rio hosted two additional international exhibitions in its modest exhibition spaces: *Exposição de Livros Franceses* [Exhibition of French Books], featuring works by artists such as Arp, Braque, De Chirico, Cocteau, Dalí, Fautrier, Gris, Gromaire, Marchand, Marcoussis, Marquet, Masson, Matisse, Picasso, Schneider, Van Dongen, Villon, and others; and *Pintores de Milão* [Painters of Milan], showcasing works by Tiziana Bonazzola and Roberto Sambonet.

The museum's small collection was also on permanent display, consisting of acquisitions and donations made by its founders, some of which were featured in the inaugural exhibition. These included an oil painting by Tanguy and gouaches by Chagall and Léger, donated by Nelson Rockefeller; a watercolor by Diego Rivera, donated by Lourival Fontes; an oil painting by Torres Garcia and a watercolor by Lhote, donated by Ruth Leão; oil paintings by Francisco Bores and Magnelli, donated by Josias Leão; a gouache by Léger, donated by Oscar Niemeyer; a gouache by Miró, donated by Landolpho Borges da Fonseca; a drawing by Miró, donated by Raul Bopp; and an oil painting by Guignard.

The year following its inauguration, the museum presented a long-term exhibition of *Cerâmica Popular do Nordeste* [Popular Ceramics of the Northeast], featuring works by Mestre Vitalino and other ceramists from Caruaru. Nelson Rockefeller and his wife attended the opening.

The new site was essential for the museum to gain public recognition. In December 1949, Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade, then president of Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional [SPHAN, National Historic and Artistic Heritage Service], wrote to the president of MAM Rio to facilitate an exhibition by Léon Zach, a Russian painter based in Paris, who had expressed interest in showcasing his work at the Rio museum. Andrade emphasized that an exhibition by Zach, who had received praise from European critics, would provide an opportunity to occupy the museum's space during a period without other scheduled exhibitions.²⁵ Although the exhibition ultimately did not take place, the proposal highlights how the museum gained domestic and international recognition.

In a letter from October 1949, Nelson Rockefeller thanks Castro Maya for sending photographs of the *Tiradentes* panel by Portinari, which was exhibited at the Automobile Club of Rio, organized by MAM (in August 1949), and takes the opportunity to reaffirm his support: "This is yet another proof of the important work your Museum is doing."²⁶ In March of the same year, Josias Leão writes to Alfred Barr Jr., director of MoMA, to introduce Gennaro Vidal Leite Ribeiro, whom he describes as "one of the organizers" of MAM Rio. Ribeiro was in New York to learn "new techniques in the organization and operation of museums, especially concerning modern art."²⁷

25. Letter from Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade to Castro Maya, Dec. 22, 1949. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

26. Letter from Nelson Rockefeller to Castro Maya, Oct. 3, 1949. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

27. Letter from Josias Leão to Alfred Barr Jr, Mar. 28, 1949. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

In 1950, correspondence regarding a potential donation of popular ceramics from Northeast Brazil to the New York museum sheds light on the networks of relationships behind MAM Rio. On April 24, 1950, David Rockefeller wrote to Castro Maya, thanking him for the “ceramic figurines” he had received in Brazil and successfully transported to New York. He shared that he had shown the pieces to his brother Nelson and to René d’Harnoncourt, the director of MoMA, both of whom were enthusiastic about including them in the upcoming *Latin American Folk Art* exhibition, which was still in preparation.²⁸ Rockefeller then asked Castro Maya to contact d’Harnoncourt, which he did in a letter dated July 20. In it, Castro Maya thanked MoMA for its interest and informed them that he would be in New York the following February and would bring additional pieces of popular ceramics with him.²⁹ On August 10, d’Harnoncourt replied to Castro Maya, praising the ceramic figures and emphasizing how wonderful it would be to incorporate them into the museum’s “small collection of Latin American folk art.”³⁰

Germain Bazin also wrote to Castro Maya on March 15, 1950, expressing interest in the work of Félix Labisse, whom he described as “the most highly regarded surrealist artist in France today.” Bazin conveyed his desire to organize an exhibition of Labisse’s work in Rio under the auspices of MAM.³¹ Due to its scale, the museum organized the show at the Exhibition Hall of the Ministry of Education and Health in May 1950. It featured 20 paintings by Labisse, as well as stage and costume designs for productions by the Barrault-Renault company, created by Labisse and other artists such as Balthus and Masson. A small catalog containing an unsigned text about the artist and a few black-and-white reproductions accompanied the exhibition.

Like this exhibition, MAM organized some of its shows at other venues, due to its limited space in the Banco Boavista building. At its inauguration, a critic from the newspaper *A Noite* expressed admiration for the museum’s location while acknowledging its limitations. He praised the “bold architectural lines” that, in dialogue with the traditional Candelária Church, transformed the area into “a confluence

28. Letter from David Rockefeller to Castro Maya, Apr. 24, 1950. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

29. Letter from Castro Maya to René d’Harnoncourt, Jul. 20, 1950. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

30. Letter from René d’Harnoncourt to Castro Maya, Aug. 10, 1950. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

31. Letter from Germain Bazin to Castro Maya, Mar. 15, 1950. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

of ages and temperaments.” However, he pointed out the modest size of MAM’s exhibition hall, which could accommodate only “a few dozen canvases distributed across side and central panels,” and noted that its location on an upper floor meant it was “not overrun by crowds.”³² While he acknowledged that these characteristics might create a “serene environment” for engaging with the artworks, he also pointed out some challenges the museum would face in this location.

The physical expansion of the institution became a key priority for Castro Maya, who eventually secured a “promise” from Simões Filho, the Minister of Education and Health, to allocate the *pilotis* space beneath the Exhibition Hall in the Ministry of Education and Health building as a provisional site for MAM.³³ To bring this project to fruition, he wrote to Oscar Niemeyer on February 5, 1951, informing him of the decision to occupy the space and seeking his opinion as one of the building’s architects. On February 23, he followed up with another letter to Niemeyer, this time requesting a formal document approving the museum’s project site.³⁴ That same day, Castro Maya reached out to Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade, director of SPHAN, to seek approval.³⁵ On February 28, he formalized the request to Minister Simões Filho, noting that the necessary consultations had been conducted with the architects responsible for the building’s design and the heritage preservation service.³⁶ On March 1, Niemeyer responded with a letter expressing his “full agreement” with the project.³⁷ Finally, on May 21, Castro Maya sent another letter to the SPHAN director, informing him that the Federal District City Hall had authorized the commencement of construction [Fig. 3].³⁸

32. C. K. “Pintura Européia no Museu de Arte Moderna” [European Painting at the Museum of Modern Art]. *A Noite*, Letras e Artes, Feb. 7, 1949, p. 24.

33. Letter from Castro Maya to Josias Leão, Feb. 28, 1951. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

34. Letter from Castro Maya to Oscar Niemeyer, Feb. 10, 1951, and Feb. 23, 1951. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

35. Letter from Castro Maya to Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade, Feb. 23, 1951. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

36. Letter from Castro Maya to Simões Filho, Feb. 28, 1951. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

37. Letter from Niemeyer to Castro Maya, Mar. 1, 1951. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

38. Letter from Castro Maya to Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade, May 21, 1951. Castro Maya Museum Archive.



Fig. 3. Provisional site of the Museum of Modern Art in the *pilotis* of the Ministry of Education and Health building (now Palácio Capanema), Rio de Janeiro, 1952. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

The inauguration of the new site in 1952, featuring an exhibition of Brazilian and international award-winning artists from the First São Paulo Biennial, marked a new phase for the museum. The previous year, MAM Rio had been officially registered as a civil entity, and on March 21, 1951, a new board of directors was appointed. The board included the following members: Castro Maya as president, San Tiago Dantas as vice president, Niomar Muniz Sodré as executive director, Carmem Portinho as deputy executive director, Walter Moreira Salles as treasurer, Lauro Salazar Rgueira as secretary, and Maria Barreto as curator. Within this newly formed board, which had a notably more professional profile, divergences began to emerge, reflecting broader institutional disputes.

On July 12, everything appeared in order when Castro Maya signed a “Declaration” in French, granting Niomar full authority to manage matters related to the MAM Rio during her trip to Europe. In the typed draft preserved in the Castro Maya Archive, the MAM president, when referring to Niomar, added the surname Bittencourt, which had initially been omitted. This suggests that his relationship with her was closely tied to the influence of her husband, Paulo Bittencourt, owner of the newspaper *Correio da Manhã*. Indeed, Niomar’s connection to the press, particularly through her husband, was likely one of the primary reasons for her appointment as executive director. On the

same day, Castro Maya signed another letter addressed directly to Niomar, also in French, in which he expressed his hope that she would “make numerous contacts in the world of art” and asked her to keep him informed of anything that might be of interest to the museum.³⁹

In a lengthy letter dated July 27, 1951,⁴⁰ Niomar enthusiastically recounted the contacts she had made in France. Writing the early morning hours, her cursive script appeared feverish, as though she could not contain herself in describing everything she had been doing. She mentioned a visit to the Quai d’Orsay, where she spoke with Philippe Erlanger, director of the Department of Art, about developing the project of bringing works from the São Paulo Biennial to MAM. She also narrated her conversation with Jean Cassou, director of the Musée National d’Art Moderne, who would be traveling to Brazil to accompany the First São Paulo Biennial and could give a lecture in Rio. Niomar stated that she was making an “*interesting choix*” of art films for MAM, particularly praising *De Renoir à Picasso* for its beauty, technical quality, and accuracy. She also inquired about the progress of the museum’s installation in the *pilotis* of the Ministry of Education and Health building, asking Castro Maya to mobilize San Tiago Dantas to speed up the work and whether Carmem Portinho was assisting. Finally, she praised Castro Maya’s initiative to gather and support the transportation of works by Brazilian artists who wished to exhibit at the Biennial, signing off with warmth and affection.

Less than a month later, the tone of another letter from Niomar to Castro Maya was entirely different. Writing from the Normandy Hotel in Deauville, Niomar, still in Europe, expressed her deep dissatisfaction with an interview given by Castro Maya, the museum’s president, to Yvonne Jean of *Correio da Manhã*—an interview that had been arranged by Niomar and her husband, Paulo Bittencourt. She described it as “not only ineffective but also very discourteous.” Niomar warned that MAM’s challenges extended beyond the lack of a permanent home and dismissed its earlier achievements as mere “past weaknesses.” She accused Castro Maya of being stuck in the past and criticized him for failing to acknowledge the support he had received from her and from others, such as Carmen Portinho and San Tiago Dantas. She emphasized that “the Museum of Rio is not Castro Maya’s property” and urged him to move forward, stating, “Only in this way can we continue together in a cause that was already important to you and has now become important to me.”⁴¹

39. Letter from Castro Maya to Niomar Moniz Sodré, Jul. 12, 1951. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

40. Letter from Niomar Moniz Sodré to Castro Maya, Jul. 27, 1951. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

41. Letter from Niomar Moniz Sodré Bittencourt to Castro Maya, Aug. 22, 1951.

The fateful interview was published on August 12. Niomar's accusations seem exaggerated, as the president of MAM Rio focused primarily—taking up much of the article—on the museum's future endeavors, particularly its planned collaboration with the São Paulo Biennial, which the executive director was personally negotiating in Paris. Yvonne Jean made a point of emphasizing the start of a new chapter for MAM, with a new board and a new headquarters. Castro Maya raised a series of concerns about the lack of visibility at the museum's previous location in the Banco Boavista building and spoke highly of the provisional solution of occupying the *pilotis* of the Ministry of Education and Health building. In the concluding section, the interviewer invited him to reflect on the museum's past achievements, "to remind the public that some exhibitions they attended and enjoyed were actually museum initiatives, even if they were unaware of it."⁴²

The real issue at stake appears to be the struggle for leadership at MAM Rio—not only within its new headquarters but also within the institutional geopolitics of modern art in Brazil. Since the inauguration of the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo (MAM SP), just a few months after the opening of MAM Rio, newspapers and critics in Rio began to highlight this new situation, in which the federal capital was gradually losing its centrality. Antonio Bento firmly stated that "in the field of visual arts, the cultural axis is shifting from here [Rio] to São Paulo" due to the activities of MASP and, especially, MAM SP, which was inaugurated "with greater resources and cultural possibilities than that of Rio de Janeiro."⁴³

Two months before the interview was published, Yvonne Jean herself authored a major article titled "O Desenvolvimento dos Museus de Arte no Brasil" [The Development of Art Museums in Brazil]. This piece was part of the *Cultura Brasileira* [Brazilian Culture] series, which celebrated *Correio da Manhã's* fiftieth anniversary by highlighting the country's cultural and artistic movements from 1901 to 1951. In the article, Jean spoke with Assis Chateaubriand and Ciccillo Matarazzo about MASP and MAM SP. She praised the former's collection but expressed particular admiration for the latter, describing it as "more modest" and "charming." She also mentioned the Rezende Museum of Modern Art as an offshoot of the broader cultural transformation initiated by modern art in São Paulo. MAM Rio was featured in the article through reproductions of Miró and Léger pieces from its collection and Jean's reference to the São Paulo institution's goal of maintaining "close and collaborative ties" with its counterpart in Rio. Jean

42. Yvonne Jean. "O Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio: Raymundo de Castro Maya fala no futuro do Museu e relembra atividades passadas" [The Museum of Modern Art in Rio: Raymundo de Castro Maya Discusses the Museum's Future and Recalls Past Activities], *Correio da Manhã*, Aug. 12, 1951, p. 12.

43. Antonio Bento. "As Artes: Fatos do dia" [The Arts: Daily Events]. *Diário Carioca*, Mar. 9, 1949, p. 6.

emphasized the importance of this partnership, particularly as MAM Rio was entering a new phase: “Now, its president, Raymundo de Castro Maya, and its director, Niomar Moniz Sodré, are determined to promote numerous activities so that, soon, the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro can, like São Paulo, claim to have attracted 3,000 members.”⁴⁴

Castro Maya’s interview aimed at countering every argument that favored the superiority of the São Paulo museum. He carefully highlighted past achievements, including the successful organization of Portinari’s *Tiradentes* panel and the Félix Labisse exhibition—both of which were widely acclaimed at MAM São Paulo but were first organized and hosted by MAM Rio. He also recalled other successful exhibitions, such as the modern French painting exhibit *De Manet à nos jours*, which MAM Rio organized in collaboration with the French Embassy and under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. This exhibition took place at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes in Rio and was accompanied by a series of lectures by Germain Bazin. Castro Maya further emphasized the quality of the new location, calling it an “excellent location” that would attract the public. He added, “By generating interest, we will gain members, and with members, we will move forward.”⁴⁵

Why Niomar found the interview ineffective and discourteous remains unclear. Not even her closest friends could understand. San Tiago Dantas, a mutual friend of both Niomar and Paulo Bittencourt, wrote to her on September 10, 1951, referring to the “unjustified grievance” and urging her to resolve the situation with Castro Maya. He pointed out that, in her eagerness to clarify certain matters, Niomar had committed injustices.⁴⁶ However, the atmosphere of mistrust between the two only intensified. Niomar gradually positioned herself as the institution’s *avant-garde* figure, in contrast to Castro Maya, whom she qualified as traditionalist and outdated.

On January 31, 1952, Niomar sent a telegram from New York to Castro Maya, stating, “I earnestly ask that nothing be changed at the museum. I sent a letter via Zazi explaining ST [San Tiago]. Please read it. Best regards.”⁴⁷ The response came the same day, also via telegram: “Not intending to change

44. Yvonne Jean. “O desenvolvimento dos museus de arte no Brasil” [The Development of Art Museums in Brazil]. *Correio da Manhã*, Jun. 15, 1951, p. 15.

45. Yvonne Jean. “O Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio: Raymundo de Castro Maya fala no futuro do Museu e relembra atividades passadas” [The Museum of Modern Art in Rio: Raymundo de Castro Maya Discusses the Museum’s Future and Recalls Past Activities]. *Op. cit.*

46. Letter from San Tiago Dantas to Niomar Moniz Sodré Bittencourt, Sept. 10, 1951. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

47. Telegram from Niomar Moniz Sodré Bittencourt to Raymundo de Castro Maya, Jan. 31, 1952. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

anything at the museum. Following Maria's suggestion, I am gathering opinions on free admission on Saturdays."⁴⁸ At that time, the exhibition of artists awarded at the First São Paulo Biennial, along with works from MAM Rio's collection, had been set up, an effort to which the executive director had devoted significant attention. An article in *Sombra* magazine about the inauguration of the new location shows Minister of Education Simões Lopes cutting the symbolic ribbon, flanked by Castro Maya and Niomar, described as the "eminent figures" who took the museum initiative upon themselves [Fig. 4].⁴⁹ The telegram was accompanied by a lengthy typed letter sent to members of the museum's board and secretariat, with a copy to Castro Maya, beginning with the underlined phrase, "Nothing can be changed before my return."



Fig. 4. The Minister of Education and Health, Simões Filho, cuts the symbolic ribbon at the inauguration of MAM Rio's provisional site, flanked by Raymundo de Castro Maya and Niomar Moniz Sodré. Photograph published in the January 1952 issue of *Sombra* magazine.

48. Telegram from Raymundo de Castro Maya to Niomar Moniz Sodré Bittencourt, Jan. 31, 1952. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

49. "Inauguração do Museu de Arte Moderna no Ministério da Educação e Saúde" [Inauguration of the Museum of Modern Art at the Ministry of Education and Health]. *Revista Sombra*, n. 117, Year XII, Jan.-Feb. 1952, pp. 54-57.

Niomar grew impatient upon hearing reports that the museum planned to remain closed on Sundays due to low attendance, was considering offering free admission on Saturdays, required renovations in the Secretariat that might disturb visitors, and intended to change the displayed artworks. Drawing on what she referred to as her experience with “internships at the museum here” in New York, she firmly asserted, “An exhibition cannot be altered midway. It must run its course exactly as planned until the end. Otherwise, it creates an impression of disorganization and disharmony, which can only harm the museum and undermine its credibility.”

In other parts of the letter, she returns to this argument, presenting herself as someone capable of steering the institution in the right direction while portraying Castro Maya as backward-looking, ineffective, and easily influenced:

I got involved in this museum to make it succeed, to keep it from slipping away like the other one. Raymundo is president to receive the honors, whereas I wanted to be director to take on the work, the annoyances, and the criticism. If he allows himself to be influenced by someone like Campofiorito, I do not. On the contrary, it only strengthens my resolve and makes me more confident.

[...]

Is it because some Saavedra thought it would be better another way that Raymundo wants to make changes? It’s time to let go of past influences.⁵⁰

Raymundo de Castro Maya even went as far as to type up a letter of resignation from his position as president of MAM Rio on February 7, 1952. In the letter, he cited his impending indefinite absence from the country as the primary reason for his resignation and revealed that his original intention had been to “step down from the presidency shortly after the inauguration of the new site.”⁵¹ The letter was written the day after he received a recommendation from Secretary Salazar for his name to be granted the title of honorary member, along with thanks for his collaboration and generous contributions to MAM.⁵² In addition to his initial donation, Castro Maya made another financial contribution of 200,000 cruzeiros in 1951 to support the construction of the new museum site.

50. Letter from Niomar Moniz Sodré Bittencourt to Zazi (Josias Leão), Jan. 30, 1952. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

51. Letter from Raymundo de Castro Maya to the Board of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, Feb. 7, 1952. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

52. Letter from Lauro Salazar Regueira to Raymundo de Castro Maya, Feb. 6, 1952. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

The handwritten note “was withdrawn” on the document indicates that he never sent it. However, Castro Maya requested a leave of absence from his position in a letter dated April 13, 1952. San Tiago Dantas assumed the role of interim president until December 26, when Castro Maya submitted his official letter of resignation. In this letter, he made his reasons explicit: “I have held the position of president since its founding in 1947, and the time has come for me to step aside, leaving the position to others, as I believe it is through the renewal of leadership that great initiatives like this can truly thrive.”⁵³ The following day, his “colleagues on the board” replied with a letter signed by San Tiago Dantas. Expressing “infinite regret” over the departure of someone who “was its founder, its constant driving force, and who shaped the museum’s direction with his artistic vision,” they invited him to join the Advisory Council. They assured him, “The Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro is and will always be your home, where we will strive to carry forward the work we began together to renew Brazilian artistic culture.”⁵⁴

With Castro Maya’s departure from the presidency, Niomar assumed the role. This event might have been just a brief episode in the institution’s leadership, unworthy of our attention, if not for the fact that it gave rise to a version of MAM Rio’s history that openly dismisses its formative years, which have been labeled as “past weaknesses.” Even the documents from this early phase of the museum’s history must now be sought in the current Castro Maya Museums’ archives, as they are absent from MAM’s collection. Clarifying these facts does not mean taking sides with one individual or another. On the contrary, it helps illuminate how institutional disputes led to new proposals for integrating modern art into Brazilian culture and fostered new narratives about artistic and cultural modernity. To better understand this issue, an analysis of the inaugural 1949 exhibition may offer valuable insights.

The Inaugural Exhibition

The exhibition *Pintura Européia Contemporânea*, conceived for the inauguration of MAM Rio in 1949 at its initial location in the Banco Boavista building, showcased works from the collections of several Brazilian collectors, including Josias Leão, Raymundo de Castro Maya, Roberto Marinho, Raul Bopp, R. A. Lacroze, Paulo Bittencourt, Niomar Moniz Sodré, Landulfo Borges

53. Letter from Raymundo de Castro Maya to the Board of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, Dec. 26, 1952. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

54. Letter from F. C. de San Tiago Dantas to Raymundo de Castro Maya, Dec. 27, 1952. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

da Fonseca, and Marques Rabelo—some of which were later donated to the museum. It introduced Rio's audience to works by Braque, Picasso, Matisse, Miró, Chagall, Derain, Léger, Seurat, and other artists broadly associated with the so-called *School of Paris*. The event featured lectures by Mario Pedrosa and was accompanied by the publication of a catalog described as having “educational value.” The exhibition was open to the public Monday through Saturday, from 2 to 7 p.m., with free admission [Fig. 5].



Fig. 5. Mrs. Charles Barrènné and her daughters at the inauguration of MAM Rio's first location with the exhibition *Pintura Européia Contemporânea* (Contemporary European Painting). Photograph featured in an article from the February 1949 issue of *Sombra* magazine.

The introduction to the catalog, signed by Castro Maya, emphasizes the institution's educational mission, stating, “This museum represents a necessity for us, to instill in the public a taste for modern art, or rather, to educate them to understand—or at least accept—that today's artists are not impostors but are seeking to express in their works what they truly feel.”⁵⁵ This sentiment was widely shared by critics, artists, and cultural agents of the time, who collectively recognized the museum's role in fostering an appreciation for modern art. Two key themes emerge from this discourse: the historical necessity of a museum of modern art as a catalyst for the country's cultural progress and the crucial role of certain individuals in shaping new tastes among an audience often perceived as unfamiliar with the freedoms of modern artistic expression.

An article signed by C. K. in the column *Letras e Artes* of the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *A Noite* reinforces this narrative, emphasizing that “the idea for

55. Castro Maya, 1949, n. p.

this museum belongs to many people.” It highlights the efforts of painter Gilberto Trompowski, who collaborated with the *Associação dos Artistas Brasileiros* [Association of Brazilian Artists] in an unsuccessful attempt to create such an institution, as well as those of Foreign Minister João Neves da Fontoura, who reportedly sought to establish a modern art museum using the extensive collection assembled in Europe for the *Fundação Rio Branco* at the *Itamaraty Palace* [Rio Branco Foundation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs]. The columnist extends a “cordial reception” to the proposal for MAM Rio, expressing hope that it would become “a concrete achievement, worthy of its potential and in line with what is being accomplished in other centers, including São Paulo.” The article underscores that the museum’s primary function is “to inform and guide the public,” which, in Brazil’s case, “is far removed from knowledge of modern trends in painting”:

There is a group that rejects modern art after attempting to study it, but another, much larger group, which dismisses it without making any such effort, purely out of stubbornness or intransigence. There are also the fervent enthusiasts—those who know, and those who know absolutely nothing, about what modern art is or even what art itself is...⁵⁶

The columnist views the inaugural exhibition as a foundational step in educating the public. He observes that, while it is not “an exhibition composed of essential pieces, whether in terms of the artists themselves or the phases and works of these artists,” it includes works that serve as “living documents for the reflection of those interested.” Readers are advised that a meaningful visit requires reading the catalog. The columnist also suggests that the museum acquire high-quality reproductions of seminal works to enhance its collection, thereby reconciling “our poverty with the most justified scruples of culture.”⁵⁷

It is certain that, in general, the idea of modern museums with a clear didactic purpose was being widely disseminated at the time—a vision that reached Brazil and became commonplace. However, the emphasis on the educational role of MAM Rio (and Brazilian museums more broadly) reinforces the conviction that it was the responsibility of intellectuals and members of the elite to lead this education, presenting unprepared audiences with the works to be appreciated—or at least admitted, as Castro Maya states in

56. C. K. “Museu, um grande empreendimento” [Museum, a Grand Undertaking]. *A Noite, Letras e Artes*, Jan. 20, 1949, p. 8.

57. C. K. “Pintura Européia no Museu de Arte Moderna” [European Painting at the Museum of Modern Art]. *Op. cit.*

the exhibition catalog—as well as the methods by which such appreciation should take place.

The photograph accompanying the *Correio da Manhã* article on the inauguration provides clues to the close relationship between the institutionalization of modern art in Brazil and the role of the elites. It captures Ruth Leão—the wife of Josias Leão—standing in front of Raymundo de Castro Maya, with another couple in the background attentively observing works by Dufy and Pascin.⁵⁸ The elaborately gilded frames of the artworks that once adorned private collectors' walls, the hats, gloves, and handbags of the women, and the understated elegance of the men's suits—all evoke a particular vision of modernity that oscillates between private taste and public institution [Fig. 6].⁵⁹



Fig. 6. Photograph from the inauguration of the *Pintura Européia Contemporânea* (*Contemporary European Painting*) exhibition, published in *Correio da Manhã* on January 20, 1949.

In another article published in *O Jornal*, one of the photographs from the inauguration of the exhibition captures Baron de Saavedra and Raul Bopp's wife attempting to "scrutinize," according to the caption, Picasso's work, one of the most discussed pieces in the critical reviews.⁶⁰ The baron's focused gaze at *Cara de Mulher* (*Woman's Face*), described by Rubem Braga

58. A remarkably similar photo appears in the article "Brilhante a inauguração do Museu de Arte Moderna" [Brilliant Inauguration of the Museum of Modern Art]. *Diário Carioca*, Jan. 21, 1949.

59. "A inauguração, ontem, do Museu de Arte Moderna" [The Inauguration, Yesterday, of the Museum of Modern Art]. *Correio da Manhã*, Jan. 21, 1949, p. 12.

60. "Inaugurado ontem nesta capital o Museu de Arte Moderna" [Inaugurated Yesterday in this Capital, the Museum of Modern Art]. *O Jornal*, Jan. 21, 1949, pp. 1-2.

in *Diário de Notícias* on January 30, 1949, as featuring “a yellow hat and two noses against a white background, which fails to convince,” and Mrs. Bopp’s knowing smile, seemingly amused by her friend’s reaction, reveal the subtle discomfort provoked by the work of this key artist in understanding modernity, even among the more educated audience.

The magazine *Sombra* also published a series of photographs featuring prominent figures observing artworks in the museum, which appeared both in the magazine itself and in *Diário Carioca* over several months. In its coverage of MAM’s inauguration, it included images of Mrs. Joel Monteiro viewing Segonzac’s landscape, the wives of Bernardo Muller and Alberto Proença de Faria alongside Baron de Saavedra admiring *Arrivée au Marché* [Arrival at the Market] by Bouchant, Maluh de Ouro Preto contemplating *Jeune fille* by Jean Marchant, and Maria Julieta Drummond de Andrade and Maria Ethel Machado in front of Chagall’s painting, among other photos capturing well-known members of Rio de Janeiro’s high society. The article praised the inauguration of the new museum, highlighting the “solid support of our social classes” and their “broad understanding of their responsibilities toward the country’s artistic culture, of which they are faithful representatives.”⁶¹

Castro Maya personally took charge, alongside Josias Leão, of selecting the artworks and coordinating with collectors for their loans. In a letter dated January 19, 1949, the president of MAM Rio formalized the loan of six paintings by Mrs. R. A. Lacroze for the exhibition scheduled to open the following day. He also stated that the works were insured and would be returned to the collector on February 24.⁶² Maya’s personal dedication did not go unnoticed by the media. In his social column titled “*Arte X Caixa Forte*” [Art x Strongbox] in *Diário Carioca* on January 19, 1949, Jacinto de Thormes highlighted how much the inaugural exhibition “owes to Mr. Raymundo de Castro Maya, who committed himself—body and soul—to the challenging endeavor of achieving something truly significant for modern art in the capital of the Republic.” He also praised Baron de Saavedra, described as an “extraordinarily progressive man,” who even financed the panel *A primeira missa* [The First Mass] by Portinari, a modernist and communist painter.⁶³

Two days after the exhibition’s opening, the same columnist remarked on the presence of an unusual crowd at the bank building. He described “young

61. “O Museu de Arte Moderna” [The Museum of Modern Art]. *Revista Sombra*. Rio de Janeiro, n. 87, Year 9, Feb. 1949, pp. 34-37.

62. Letter from Raymundo de Castro Maya to R.A. Lacroze, Jan. 19, 1949. Castro Maya Museum Archive.

63. Jacinto de Thormes. A Sociedade: “Arte x Caixa forte” [Society: Art x Strongbox]. *Diário Carioca*, Jan. 19, 1949, p. 6.

men in glasses, wearing shirt sleeves, some sportingly indifferent to others' elegance," ascending to the 11th floor via elevator. They were "a public that came to see, observe, and comment on some paintings displayed thanks to the goodwill of a few gentlemen with modern ideas." According to Thormes, MAM Rio was born "amid a mix of technicians and laypeople, sophisticates and artists, journalists, businessmen, and opportunists," all united in their own way to "help the child grow." The artists were the most invested; the sophisticated with *avant-garde* ideas were committed to "spreading a mix of opinions, snobbish or otherwise"; the journalists would write; and the businessmen would contribute "a few well-endowed checks."⁶⁴ The columnist also provided an extensive list of attendees, including artists, poets, architects, journalists, ambassadors, politicians, and members of high society, illustrating the network forming in Rio de Janeiro to promote modern art.

The article covering the exhibition's inauguration in *Diário Carioca* also highlights Castro Maya, Baron de Saavedra, Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade, and Josias Leão as the "key figures driving the Museum," who "received congratulations from all those present."⁶⁵ The success of the exhibition inspired new collectors to support the initiative. One of them, Paulo Boavista, donated the painting *Fleurs* [Flowers] by André Bauchant to the new museum. Bauchant, who was already represented with another work at the exhibition, is described in the catalog as an artist who draws on cubist and surrealist experiences to create a "highly personal" art, characterized by "vague and gentle forms, slender and schematic figures."⁶⁶

The catalog text is unsigned, but in an article published in *Diário de Notícias* on January 30, 1949, Rubem Braga states that the critical essay, titled *Espírito da Arte Moderna* [Spirit of Modern Art], was authored by Santa Rosa, while Josias Leão wrote the biographical notes on the artists. However, the presence of preparatory typewritten documents with various handwritten annotations in the archives of collector Castro Maya suggests that the formulation of the idea of artistic modernity codified in the text was not the work of a single individual. The text begins with the idea that the

64. Jacinto de Thormes. A Sociedade: "O bebê nasceu" [Society: The Baby is Born]. *Diário Carioca*, Jan. 22, 1949, p. 6.

65. "Brilhante a inauguração do Museu de Arte Moderna" [Brilliant inauguration of the Museum of Modern Art]. *Diário Carioca*, Jan. 21, 1949, p. 3.

66. "Doação ao Museu de Arte Moderna" [Donation to the Museum of Modern Art]. *O Jornal, Artes e Espetáculos*, Feb. 2, 1949, p. 7.

public must shed their “formal prejudices” toward modern art, “dictated in the name of Beauty.”⁶⁷

The catalog discusses the relativity of the concept of beauty, describing it as “difficult to define, as it is shaped by individual emotions and established personal standards.” It reminds readers that “for Rubens, feminine beauty is characterized by ample flesh, while the Middle Ages artists spiritualized it, giving it an ascetic slenderness. What seems ugly to us may appear beautiful to others.” Drawing on the Italian art historian Lionello Venturi, it highlights the “moral beauty” of modern artists, who perceive things “from the inside out, rather than through their superficial appearance.” In this way, modern art aligns with that of any period, as it expresses the taste of its time: “Good art is always modern. Giotto, Botticelli, or Rembrandt are as current as Picasso, Matisse, or Portinari.”⁶⁸

On the other hand, the text acknowledges the public’s difficulty with modern painting and seeks to explain (and mitigate) this challenge by recognizing “its essential logic, its concrete reason for existing” in the “search for new forms, a new expression that would define the limits of a fading era and the clamorous years emerging.” It attributes much of the rejection of modern art to a lack of understanding that it seeks “to affirm and reveal the spirit of the time, to inscribe, in the density of its symbols, one of the most tragic periods in human history.” This contradiction gives rise to a modern paradox: while a work of art offers speculative elements for interpreting the “social milieu that produces it,” it is simultaneously condemned “for having gone too far”:

Modern Art, therefore, reflects the disconnection of contemporary life, the maladjustment of humanity with the social environment, and the tragic human conflict during a period of grave transition. It is a heroic era in which the artist struggles amidst constantly contradictory forces and, through their sacrifice, ensures the continuity of culture.⁶⁹

The text also observed the paradox on a personal level, criticizing individuals who “live in ultra-modern houses and always travel in the latest model Cadillac each year offers,” yet reject modern art, exposing a “lack of inner unity” and a “consistently arbitrary judgment of all things and facts in the realm of art.” It appeals to all audiences, whether those of limited

67. “Espírito da Arte Moderna” [Spirit of Modern Art]. *Pintura Européia Contemporânea*. Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1949, n.p.

68. *Idem, ibidem*.

69. *Idem, ibidem*.

education and culture or those with the means to understand modern art but who fail to do so. This underscores the importance of positioning the exhibition and its organizers as an intellectual elite, capable of guiding cultural modernization. The continuity of culture is framed as a concentric expansion of their private values to broader society.

Castro Maya's introduction to the catalog underscores the need for the public to renounce "certain principles" and "allow themselves to be guided by feelings" to embark on the "luminous path of freedom."⁷⁰ From this point, the text develops an essential connection between modern art and expression. It makes clear that, although 20th-century art is "rejected, unpopular, and opposed by the majority" and disrupts "the stability of traditional canons," it expresses sincerity, in contrast to the decadent art of the previous century, described as "inexpressive, narrative, affected, and literary." After all, for the organizers of MAM's exhibition, "art is always expressive, in its deepest sense, in opposition to the imitative."⁷¹

The emphasis on the expressive dimension of modern art naturally leads to the evocation of emotion as a direct means of engaging with modern works—an idea reiterated in several other articles about the exhibition's opening, as we will see, and one that plays a significant role in shaping the emerging narrative of modernity. The exhibition organizers, along with many critics and newspaper columnists, sought to prepare the public for modern visuality and to rally informed individuals to embrace the new forms proposed by contemporary painting. Armed with their sensitivity, visitors—whether wearing gloves, hats, and ties, or "in glasses and shirt sleeves," as described by social columnist Jacinto Thormes—could connect directly with the works, bypassing the need for historical-artistic understanding or more complex theoretical debates.

Rubem Braga, for instance, focuses on describing several of the exhibited works in a way that bridges them with the common visitor's sensibility. He uses imagery such as "a charming seaside landscape" by Kisling, "a small and delightful Derain," "a very curious painting by André Bauchant and another very gentle one by Eugène Bernan," "a small and extremely delicate nude by Marie Laurencin," "one of those enchanting little nude women by Pascin," and "a pleasant Yves Tanguy," among many others.⁷² In doing so, he aims to

70. Castro Maya, 1949.

71. "Espírito da Arte Moderna" [Spirit of Modern Art], 1949, n.p.

72. Rubem Braga. "Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro" [Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro]. *Diário de Notícias*, Jan. 30, 1949, p. 27.

provide some basic and thoughtful guidance, helping to prepare the visiting public and assist them in engaging with artistic modernity.

In this process, the critic cannot help but reveal his personal sensibility. He acknowledges that the catalog includes greater works by renowned painters compared to those featured in the inaugural exhibition. He notes a *Head of a Woman* by Picasso reproduced in the catalog, far superior to the artist's sole piece in the exhibition. He also praises the reproduction of Matisse's reclining female nude, which he considers better than the artist's drawing on display and his *Jardin du Luxembourg* landscape. Braga continues by addressing the uneven representation of modern artists, such as Braque, whose works include a fine *Still Life* and a brightly colored landscape. Meanwhile, Chagall shines with his painting, as does Dufy, whose works he describes as "light and joyful, a balm for the soul."

In his article for the newspaper *Correio Paulistano*, Rubem Braga reiterates his critiques of the works by Picasso and Matisse, as well as the absence of an oil painting by Braque from Mrs. Lacroze's collection. The text conveys to the São Paulo audience his sensitive praise for modern artists and describes the visit to the 11th floor of the bank building as "essential to see these things," while also lamenting the lack of labels for the artworks for the "convenience of the public" and the absence of a poster on the ground floor to promote the exhibition. He concludes that this exhibition, combined with the upcoming inauguration of MAM SP, marks "a new era in the history of modern art dissemination among us."⁷³

The anonymous report on the exhibition's opening, published in *O Jornal* on January 20, 1949, lists the artists featured and includes a reproduction of Braque's still life from the collection of Niomar Moniz Sodré, describing him as "the most acclaimed French painter in Europe recently, who, alongside Picasso, created the first Cubist compositions." It announces the exhibition as part of the activities of the newly inaugurated Museum of Modern Art, which would also include lectures, courses, and films, "thus fully expanding the promotion of modern arts."⁷⁴ The day after the inauguration, the same newspaper dedicates considerable space to commenting on the "small exhibition of the School of Paris on the 11th floor of Banco Boavista." The article imbues cultural significance to the "parade of Rio's *grand monde*" before the modern paintings, emphasizing how these prominent figures were

73. Rubem Braga. "Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro" [Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro]. *Correio Paulistano*, Feb. 2, 1949, p. 6.

74. "Pintura Européia Contemporânea" [Contemporary European Painting]. *O Jornal*, Artes e Espetáculos, Jan. 20, 1949, p. 7.

there solely to “feel, understand, and immerse themselves in the strange and different world of modern art.”⁷⁵

The reporter is keen to observe and document the varied emotions of spectators when faced with the artworks, noting that “the visual impression of a modern art piece varies from person to person.” He writes that “many eyes were dazzled by Max Ernst and his painting *Old Man Carrying a Bundle of Clouds on His Back*, yet many, many gazes remained expressionless and vacant before the same work, failing to grasp its subjectivity.” He concludes that in a Museum of Modern Art, there can be no silent contemplation, as this art “challenges interpretation—first as an undefined and violent shock to our sensory faculties, and then as an intoxicating fluid, carrying us, dazed and yearning for light, into the artist’s very feeling when creating the painting.”⁷⁶

Jacinto de Thormes is less sympathetic toward the public’s struggles with modern art and expresses frustration upon witnessing a lady and a gentleman burst into laughter in front of “a marvelous Chirico.” The social columnist adopts an educational tone, recounting how the woman uttered “a string of nonsense commonly spoken by unprepared individuals,” while the man remained “silent and smiling, perhaps afraid of seeming unintelligent.” He characterizes the couple’s ignorance and ill will as a “truly impenetrable and medieval wall.” Though acknowledging his status as a layperson in the subject, he underscores that the fundamentals of art can be learned with a bit of patience and a willingness to understand. He recommends that the Museum employ “well-mannered and kind” guides to present the artworks in accessible language.⁷⁷

The columnist for *Correio da Manhã*, writing on January 21, 1949, notes the “artificial attitude of the vast majority of people” when confronted with modern painting—whether it is the stubborn refusal to “assimilate the new” or the uncritical acceptance of it simply “because it is new.” He expresses satisfaction at not having heard any negative remarks about De Chirico’s painting *Horses in Front of the Sea*, whose depiction of a small horse with a “reddish, earthy body and blonde mane” challenges traditional figuration. However, he is astonished by the reaction of a young man who, standing

75. “Inaugurado ontem nesta capital o Museu de Arte Moderna” [Inaugurated Yesterday in This Capital, the Museum of Modern Art]. *Op. cit.*

76. *Idem, ibidem.*

77. Jacinto de Thormes. A Sociedade: “Bate-papo” [Society: Chat]. *Diário Carioca*, Feb. 15, 1949, p. 6.

before Braque's still life, takes an opposing stance, exclaiming, "This is positively academic."

To avoid such polarized attitudes, the columnist suggests a pathway through the exhibited works, guiding the public toward an appreciation of modern abstractions. He begins with *Clowns* by Camille Bombois, noting that no one could claim they "aren't truly clowns," even though "in the cheerful, bold colors, the daring style of painting, and the simplification of everything unrelated to the clowns, the suggestive spirit of modern art is active, convincing, and alive." From there, he recommends moving on to *Portrait* by Chaim Soutine, whose woman is "perfectly recognizable" yet conveys "truths that, while palpable and physical, would not appear in a photograph."

The route takes a brief pause at *Marine* by Picabia and *Fish* by Dufy. The "transparent, impossible sail" of the former and the fish that are simultaneously in the sea and in a casserole in the latter prepare the visitor's eye for *Village* by Marc Chagall and the works of Picasso and Tanguy. The next step of the journey is "still human abstraction" of Miró and *Portrait of a Woman* by Metzinger. By this point, visitors find themselves acclimated to "those metaphysical pears by De Chirico delightful and normal." The path concludes with a mention of Kandinsky's *Composition*, which represents "the pinnacle of sensitivity and technique in modern art," leading us to question, "What lies behind those fine tweeds, those convent-grille-like lattices, those brightly colored spheres, that frozen geometry, those insistent lines?" This question opens up to the future perspective of MAM as the place from which, "in due time, the answer, the new path, the synthesis of all that is anguished and questioning in today's art" might emerge.⁷⁸

The art critics of the period adopt a slightly different tone in their articles about the exhibition, without significantly altering the discourse on the need to educate the public and preserve cultural continuity. On January 23, 1949, Antonio Bento begins his critique in *Diário Carioca* by explaining the historical significance of the School of Paris. He highlights the efforts of the diverse group of artists associated with this movement to "renew the visual arts," an achievement he compares only to "the feat accomplished by the Italians of the Renaissance." He also notes that, despite having been a fierce critic of the School of Paris, De Chirico is included in the exhibition precisely because of his influence on modern visual arts, particularly during his metaphysical phase.

78. "A inauguração, ontem, do Museu de Arte Moderna" [Yesterday's Inauguration of the Museum of Modern Art]. *Op. cit.*

Bento then analyzes De Chirico's still life, acknowledging his effort to "return to the austere standards of the old Italian masters." Finally, he describes Lhote's landscape, reproduced in the newspaper, as a work particularly representative of the School of Paris, for it combines the structure inherited from Cézanne and the Cubists with the linear and chromatic rhythm found in 12th-century frescoes, in the compositions of Botticelli, Tintoretto, or El Greco, and in Van Gogh's swirling landscapes.⁷⁹ In this way, Bento aims to educate the public, offering a pantheon of references he deems essential for understanding the historical genealogy of the exhibited works [Fig. 7].



Fig. 7. Antonio Bento's article on the inaugural exhibition of MAM Rio in the newspaper *Diário Carioca*, January 23, 1949.

Flávio de Aquino also writes about the exhibition in *Diário de Notícias* on January 30, 1949. He reproduces Picabia's painting *Noturnis* and praises Braque's *Landscape with Still Life* as "one of the highlights" of the exhibition, with its "human fruits" arranged sensually in contrast to the "anguishing ruins" of the classical background. He also highlights *Reclining Nude* by Grommaire and *The Bath of the Nymphs* by Goerg, identifying a "kindred atmosphere"

79. Antonio Bento. "Pintura Européia Contemporânea" [Contemporary European Painting]. *Diário Carioca*, Jan. 23, 1949, Section III, p. 1.

between the two works. Aquino analyzes the two landscapes by Vlaminck, noting how they add literary depth to Cézanne's influence. He extols the "simplicity of means" and the "spontaneity of plastic decorativism" in Dufy, as well as the courage, purity, and intensity of Chagall's "lyrical conception of life." He comments on the "melancholy poetry" and atmosphere of "decay and abandonment" in Pascin's women, the Van Gogh-inspired intentions of Soutine, the cubist-figurative paradox of Léger, and the painting lesson given by Lhote in his use of simultaneous contrasts and abandonment of aerial perspective.⁸⁰

The critic continues his analysis of the exhibition in a new article in the same newspaper, published a week later. In this piece, he reproduces Miró's watercolor *Personnage dans un paysage*, donated to the MAM by Landulfo Borges da Fonseca. He expresses little sympathy for Picasso's *Head of a Woman*, which he identifies as a work from his "simultanist phase," not representative of "the best the master gave us." He is also unimpressed with Utrillo's small painting, which he believes "adds little to the great reputation of the landscapist," or with Yves Tanguy's "mechanical and vicious anti-naturalist surrealism." He understands the value of Braque's Fauvist landscape but condemns the movement as "outdated by most of its former followers." He sees Delaunay's painting as a good example of how the artist adds elements of color and lyrical dynamism to the "dictatorial cubism." Finally, he highlights Metzinger's *Composition* as representative of "the golden phase of Cubism," with its strict agreement of tones, precise geometry of drawing, and economy of contrasts.⁸¹

In the same column where he reports the closing of the inaugural exhibition of MAM Rio and warns of the need to "always have an exhibition, always a buzz" to renew the museum's initial momentum, Aquino publishes the text "Academicism," repeating some arguments from the catalog of *Pintura Européia Contemporânea*. Discussing the meaning of the term "academic," the critic clearly defines what he understands by academic art: "anachronistic painting based on recipes, with imitative purposes, whether of the masters of the past, the masters of the present, nature, or human passions and attitudes." In contrast to this traditional art, he speaks of Picasso, Matisse, and Rouault, all present in the MAM Rio exhibition. In their paintings, no matter how "disordered" they may seem at first glance,

80. Flávio de Aquino. "O Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro" [The Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro]. *Diário de Notícias*, Jan. 30, 1949, p. 3.

81. Flávio de Aquino. "O Museu de Arte Moderna" [The Museum of Modern Art]. *Diário de Notícias*, Feb. 6, 1949, p. 3.

the details merge into a “perfectly solved equation,” in which beauty shines through the arrangement of form and color, far superior to the beauty of nature.⁸²

The exhibition also prompts a series of articles about collectors of modern art, written by Antonio Bento and published in *Diário Carioca*. It begins with the collection of Josias Leão, which brings together modern creations “not accepted by the majority of people” and constitutes the “main core” of the exhibition *Pintura Européia Contemporânea*. The critic states that there are three categories of “defenders of modern art”: those who buy modern paintings out of snobbery, “to gain respect in society circles”; the dealers, who see in modern art a “good investment”; and, finally, those who “understand, applaud, and justify the plastic revolution that has been unfolding for almost half a century.” Josias Leão falls into the latter category, for whom modern art “reflects primarily the disconnection of contemporary life,” quoting a passage from the catalog of the inaugural MAM exhibition.⁸³

The theme of the reception of artistic modernity in Brazil becomes a recurring subject in Bento’s critiques from that point onward. It resurfaces in the columns he dedicates to the inauguration of the Sul América insurance company building—a re-edition of the *Do Figurativismo ao Abstracionismo* [From Figurativism to Abstractionism] exhibition that had opened MAM SP in 1949—in which he discusses the challenging dialogue between “modernism” and the public, as well as the lack of understanding among the Brazilian elites, which hindered support for its development.

All of this shows how MAM Rio, in its early years, and more specifically through its inaugural exhibition, actively participated in the formation of a network of cultural agents—bringing together artists, collectors, journalists, critics, institutions, embassies, and more—involved in shaping the public sphere of modern art in the country. The impact of the announcement of the Museum of Modern Art’s founding in the then federal capital, as well as its opening with the *Pintura Européia Contemporânea* exhibition, led to a series of newspaper articles reinforcing its educational role and its leadership in the process of incorporating modern art into the Brazilian cultural sphere.

As a key player in this network, MAM Rio emerged from a project led by the country’s intellectual and economic elites. It committed itself

82. Flávio de Aquino. “Academismo” [Academicism]. *Diário de Notícias*, Mar. 6, 1949, p. 3.

83. Antonio Bento. “A Coleção Josias Leão” [The Josias Leão Collection]. *Diário Carioca*, Feb. 6, 1949, p. 6.

to aesthetic and cultural values that positioned modern art at a historical crossroads—where private taste and public institutions, local and international values, and *avant-garde* and tradition intersected. In its first five years, MAM Rio achieved significant milestones: what began as a vision supported by MoMA director Nelson Rockefeller evolved into a concrete project and a realization of a network of agents working in the arts and culture sector in Brazil. Throughout its successive temporary locations, the museum occupied architecturally significant spaces—whether the upper floor of the Banco Boavista building or the *pilotis* of the iconic Ministry of Education and Health headquarters.

In 1958, during the inauguration of the first block of MAM Rio's permanent home in the building designed by Affonso Eduardo Reidy, Castro Maya hosted a reception at his newly constructed *Chácara do Céu* [Fig. 8]. However, his house was not merely the venue for the celebration—it had its own story to tell. According to journalist Jayme Maurício, the celebration transcended the partial inauguration of MAM Rio's building; it was also the unveiling of the collector's "new and beautiful property."⁸⁴ Niomar is among the prominent figures documented at the event, alongside William Burden, president of MoMA's Board of Trustees, and his wife and Aloysio de Salles, a doctor and businessman with close ties to artistic and cultural circles. Also photographed at the reception were Cicillo Matarazzo and Yolanda Penteadó, artist Maria Martins, and the British ambassador Geoffrey Harrison. But the photograph reproduced on a larger scale is the one of Juscelino Kubitschek descending the staircase of the residence, accompanied by Castro Maya. In this image, the central figure is the space itself: the bold simplicity of the floating steps, the continuous line of the iron and aluminum handrail, and the white walls that serve as a backdrop for the juxtaposition of modern paintings and antique pieces. A unified and homogeneous setting, capable of materially shaping that sense of continuity—not only between the framed artworks but also between the personal and poetic dimensions of the collection and its cultural significance. In a way, MAM Rio remained his home.

84. Jayme Maurício. Itinerário das Artes Plásticas: "Ecos da inauguração do Museu de Arte Moderna. Festiva reunião oferecida por Raymundo de Castro Maya" [Itinerary of the Visual Arts: Echoes of the Inauguration of the Museum of Modern Art. Festive Reception Offered by Raymundo de Castro Maya]. *Correio da Manhã*, Feb. 1, 1958, p. 14.



Fig. 8. Photograph of the reception hosted by Raymundo de Castro Maya to celebrate the inauguration of MAM Rio's permanent home and his residence, *Chácara do Céu*, in Santa Teresa, Rio de Janeiro. Published in *Sombra* magazine, July/August 1958.

Israel as Seen by Portinari: Politics and Cultural Circulation

EMERSON DIONISIO DE OLIVEIRA

The exhibition *Israel. Desenhos de Portinari* [Israel. Drawings by Portinari] opened at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro on April 23, 1958, remaining on display until May 17, as part of the celebrations marking ten years since the creation of the State of Israel [Fig. 9]. On this occasion, among the 58 works exhibited were drawings and paintings associated with the trip that Portinari and his family took to Israel in June 1956.⁸⁵ The purpose of the trip was to present Portinari's work to the young Middle Eastern nation, leading to the publication of a book and an exhibition in Bologna, at the Galleria del Libraio, which first showcased the works the artist created in Israel.⁸⁶ In this way, the collection of works presented at MAM Rio in April 1958 played a central role in the exhibitions featuring Portinari's work in Israel, Italy, Argentina, Peru, and Brazil—a journey worth revisiting.

85. The numbers in the press varied. We chose to adopt the figure provided by the Israeli Ambassador in a letter to Maria Portinari, See Aroch, 1958. Projeto Portinari, registration n. CO-397.1.

86. Jayme Maurício. "Israel visto por Portinari: um livro e uma exposição" [Israel Seen by Portinari: A Book and an Exhibition]. *Correio da Manhã*, Feb. 26, 1958, 1st Section, p. 12.



Fig. 9. Candido Portinari, Cléa Nogueira, Aloysio Sales, Ambassador J. Arie Aroch, and Herbert Moses at the opening of the exhibition *Israel. Desenhos de Portinari* at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro on April 23, 1958. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

Portinari. Oil Paintings and Drawings 1940-1956

The history of the exhibition at MAM Rio traces back to an invitation for another exhibition in 1955. This earlier event involved the presentation of more than 200 works, including paintings and drawings, as well as reproductions of the *Guerra e Paz* [War and Peace] panels, at the Bezalel National Museum of Art in Jerusalem. The invitation was coordinated by the politician and art collector Eliyahu Dobkin, director of the Unified Zionist Organization of Brazil and one of the 37 signatories of Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948. The invitation for Pedro Calmon and Portinari was first announced in October 1955⁸⁷ but was only officially issued in March 1956. The trip was sponsored by the Centro Cultural Brasil-Israel, Centro Cultural Israel-Brasil,⁸⁸ and Divisão dos Negócios Exteriores [respectively, the Brazil-Israel Cultural Center, the Israel-Brazil Cultural Center, and Israel's Foreign Affairs Division].

87. "Convite de Israel a Portinari e P. Calmon" [Invitation from Israel to Portinari and P. Calmon] *Jornal A Noite*, Oct. 13, 1955.

88. The Israel-Brazil Cultural Center had already sponsored an exhibition on Brazilian architecture at the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem in May 1955; See "Arquitetura Brasileira na Palestina" [Brazilian Architecture in Palestine]. *Correio da Manhã*, May 22, 1955, p. 14.

These institutions also organized the exhibition at MAM Rio upon Portinari's return to Brazil, along with subsequent exhibitions featuring the works he created in Israel, which were later displayed in other South American cities.

The flattering overtures made by Dobkin and other members of the Brazil-Israel Cultural Center were crucial in persuading Portinari to leave Brazil for a brief visit to Israel at a time when his physical and mental health required ongoing treatment and attention. His close relationship with the painter Leo Roth, an Israeli artist living in the Afikim kibbutz near Haifa,⁸⁹ with whom Portinari had been corresponding since 1953,⁹⁰ also played a role. Other factors likely influenced his decision and should not be overlooked: since at least 1954, Portinari had been attending dinners hosted by Israeli ambassadors, as reported by Maria Eugênia Celso in her *Jornal do Brasil* column.⁹¹ At the dinner mentioned by Celso, in addition to the Portinari couple, Heitor Villa-Lobos, José Lins do Rego, Niomar Moniz Sodré, and historian and writer Pedro Calmon also attended. This gathering illustrates the Israeli government's strategy to cultivate the support of cultural and intellectual leaders, particularly amid the country's ongoing territorial conflicts with its neighbors.

Villa-Lobos visited Israel in 1952, during which time he began composing the symphonic poem *Odisseia de uma raça* [Odyssey of a Race], a gift and tribute to the young country. The piece premiered two years later at the opening of the 28th World Music Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Haifa. Meanwhile, Lins do Rego had just returned from a brief trip to Israel in August 1955, which led to a series of texts originally published in the newspaper *O Globo* and compiled that same year in the book *Roteiro de Israel* [Israel Guide],⁹² funded by Edições do Centro Cultural Brasil-Israel [Publications of the Brazil-Israel Cultural Center].⁹³ Moniz Sodré, in turn, would become a crucial figure in transforming MAM Rio into a space for cultural exchange between various institutions and countries. In this regard, it is

89. Carneiro, 2010, p. 32.

90. See Letter from Leor Roth to Candido Portinari, Jun. 24, 1956. Projeto Portinari, registration n. 1832.1.

91. Maria Eugênia Celso. Notas Sociais [Social Notes]. *Jornal do Brasil*, 1st Section, Sept. 29, 1955, p. 8.

92. Lins do Rego, 1955.

93. G.P. Quintão. "José Lins do Rego: um guia brasileiro de Israel" [José Lins do Rego: A Brazilian Guide to Israel]. *Arquivo Maaravi: Revista Digital de Estudos Judaicos da UFMG*. Belo Horizonte, v. 4, n. 6, Mar. 2010.

worth noting that Portinari supported the collective exhibition *Artistas modernos de Israel* [Modern Artists of Israel] held at MAM Rio in June 1954. Calmon, on the other hand, was invited to visit Israel and traveled at the same time as Portinari, according to Samuel Malamud, honorary consul in Rio de Janeiro at the time.⁹⁴

Moreover, it is important to recall that Portinari received a copy of the catalog produced in Israel for the national representation at the 3rd São Paulo International Biennial (1955)⁹⁵ from Dante Costa. In this catalog, the text signed by Haim Gamzu stated, “The young generation in our country is eager for knowledge and enthusiastic about Art. Thousands of young people attend courses and lectures on Art History and Aesthetics; tens of thousands visit the exhibitions.”⁹⁶ This connection with politicians and other artists interested in Israel played a key role in sparking Portinari’s curiosity about the newly created nation in Palestine. Thus, “when he arrived in Israel, [Portinari] already had a formed opinion about Israeli art.”⁹⁷

Gamzu’s words proved almost prophetic in light of the Brazilian painter’s successful exhibition in Jerusalem the following year. *Portinari. Pinturas a óleo e desenho* [Portinari. Oil Paintings and Drawings 1940-1956] opened on June 16, 1956, at the Bezalel Museum [Fig. 10] and received coverage in major Israeli and Brazilian newspapers. By June 20, the newspaper *Correio da Manhã* reported on the exhibition’s success, highlighting the attendance of “two thousand people” on opening night. Although the artist was absent—having returned to Brazil after spending ten days in Israel—the exhibition continued to tour, with successive showings at the Tel Aviv Museum of Modern Art, the Art Pavilion at the Ein Harod Museum, and the Haifa Museum of Modern Art.⁹⁸

94. Interview of Samuel Malamud with Maria Cristina Guido and Rose Ingrid Goldschmidt. Rio de Janeiro, Nov. 24, 1983. Portinari Archive, Testimonies DE45 (14).

95. Letter from Dante Costa to Candido Portinari, Jul. 28, 1955. Projeto Portinari, registration n. CO-1409.1.

96. Catalog of the 3rd São Paulo Biennial. São Paulo, MAM SP, 1955, pp. 173-174.

97. Carneiro, 2010, p. 28.

98. Jayme Maurício. “A Delegação de Israel no Brasil envia as primeiras informações sobre a exposição de Cândido Portinari no Museu Nacional. ‘Bezalel’ de Jerusalém no dia 16 corrente, às 20 horas” [The Israeli Delegation in Brazil Sends the First Reports on Cândido Portinari’s Exhibition at the National Museum. ‘Bezalel’ in Jerusalem on the 16th of this month, at 8 p.m.]. *Correio da Manhã*, Jun. 20, 1956, p. 12.



Fig. 10. Exhibition *Portinari. Oil Paintings and Drawings 1940-1956*, at the National Museum of Art Bezalel, Jerusalem, Israel, in June 1956. Photographic Reproduction: Projeto Portinari collection (AFRH-50.1).

“The Ten Days That Shook Me”

During the few days Portinari spent in the country, the painter expressed his empathy for the Palestinian–Israeli people. Citing Maria Portinari, Antonio Bento, in his book about the artist, highlights a certain sense of rediscovery the painter experienced in Israel, driven by memories of his childhood in Brodowski—“through “readings of the Bible, constantly recited by his father and devoutly listened to by the family gathered around the dinner table.”⁹⁹

Portinari himself repeatedly emphasized the success of his visit: “They are wonderful people—friendly, cultured, and dedicated, working with faith, simplicity, and efficiency, with no greater concern than the industrial, agricultural, and cultural development of Israel.” He also praised their sense of organization and purpose, as well as their “reverence for the lessons of the past through works of art, books, and other intellectual activities.”¹⁰⁰ Portinari’s words, published in Jayme Maurício’s column in *Correio da Manhã*, may today sound like explicit propaganda. However, it is important to note that his enthusiasm was widely celebrated at the time by his closest critics, especially given that the artist was not in his best days in Brazil.

Portinari was ill, experiencing the early symptoms of oil paint toxicity. Moreover, he had grown disillusioned with the development of the Brazilian art scene, which was increasingly focused on the production and circulation

99. Bento, 2003, p. 308.

100. *apud* Jayme Maurício. “A viagem e exposição de Portinari em Israel” [Portinari’s Travels and Exhibition in Israel]. *Correio da Manhã*, Aug. 12, 1956.

of abstract art. Bento identifies this period as part of “a profound crisis.”¹⁰¹ According to the critic, the artist, after having “experimented with everything in painting” and revealed contradictions in his acclaimed style, felt that any form of renewal would be futile. “It was during this difficult moment in his professional life that he visited Israel. There, he envisioned a new epic, which rekindled his enthusiasm.”¹⁰²

The artist’s biography, published shortly before his trip, reflected the crisis Portinari was experiencing. Written by Antonio Callado¹⁰³ and funded by MAM Rio, it aimed to celebrate his artistic journey. However, its reception was not unanimous, as evident in Mario Pedrosa’s remark: “a personality full of uncertainties, disappointments, bitterness even, and disbelief in his own art, armed with a poorly concealed aggressiveness.”¹⁰⁴

The press at the time captured the painter’s shift in mood during his trip. In an interview with Egídio Squeff, published in *Para Todos* (Rio de Janeiro), the artist expressed not only his admiration for Israel’s economic model, with its mechanized agricultural cooperatives, but also for the country’s commitment to the dissemination of the arts and artistic education. Summarizing his thoughts, he stated, “I know that man cannot live without bread, but he cannot survive as a man if he does not take an interest in or cultivate the things of the spirit.”¹⁰⁵ Portinari also had the opportunity to meet with local artists,¹⁰⁶ advising them to seek the foundations of their culture, “pursuing the national character of their homeland and freeing themselves

101. Bento, 2003, p. 311. The illness, coupled with a possible prohibition from continuing to paint, likely had a profound impact on the artist’s state of mind, even as praise from art critics remained strong. Moreover, Portinari had recently been awarded the gold medal by the “International Fine Arts Council” for his body of work (*O Estado de S. Paulo*, Jan. 19, 1956, p. 6), and invitations for exhibitions abroad were rapidly increasing, including to the United States, Mexico, Germany, France.

102. *Idem*, p. 312.

103. Callado, 1955.

104. Mario Pedrosa. “O Portinari de Antonio Callado” [Antonio Callado’s Portinari]. *Jornal do Brasil*, Mar. 13, 1957, p. 8. Patrícia Reinheimer (2013) analyzes how Pedrosa’s relationship with Portinari shifted between the late 1930s and the 1950s. From admiration for the painter’s social thematic project to disdain for his attachment to the same themes, Pedrosa’s writings exemplify a broader shift in the appreciation of the São Paulo artist.

105. *apud* Egídio Squeff. “Portinari fala dos dez dias que o abalaram em Israel” [Portinari Talks About the Ten Days That Shook Him in Israel]. *Para Todos*, Rio de Janeiro, first half of Sept. 1956, p. 5.

106. See Carta de F. Schiff a Candido Portinari [Letter from F. Schiff to Candido Portinari], Jun. 3, 1956, Projeto Portinari, registration n. CO.819.1 (in French), regarding a “soirée” at the Haifa Museum of Modern Art with Israeli painters.

from the influence of French painting. Among other things, he advised them to understand the depth of the feelings of their simpler brothers.”¹⁰⁷

Reports published in Brazilian newspapers highlighted the artist’s warm reception in the cities he visited and the success of his work: “I sold all the paintings I could in Jerusalem. I would have sold them all if I didn’t have to send them to Italy to make a book. But I even sold the paintings I had refused to sell in Brazil; such was the insistence of the buyers.”¹⁰⁸

As with any diplomatic promotional effort, some impressions of the artist in Israel were also reproduced in Brazil as a means of praising him. This was the case with the article by critic Yona Fischer, published on June 29, 1956, in the newspaper *Lamerhav* and reprinted by Jayme Maurício in his column in *Correio da Manhã*.

And finally, the greatest of wonders are the drawings—nearly a hundred. Here, the artist’s talent and movement reach their fullest and most powerful expression, achieved with such simple means. Each one is so strong, so convincing, that we can no longer fathom how it is accomplished. What, in truth, are Portinari’s drawings? They are not the typical drawings based on light and delicate lines, nor the kind where a line seeks to capture complex movement. More often than not, with the simple aid of a pencil—sometimes colored pencils—Portinari approaches drawing as a work in which he applies the full technique of an oil painting. His drawings are not grounded in line or the limitation of movement, though they are filled with expression; they are built with details, and Portinari does not shy away from accumulating them on paper. Whether he spreads out or clusters the figures, the composition is always wonderfully harmonious.¹⁰⁹

Fischer would go on to become a significant figure in the history of Israeli curatorship and museology in the following decades.¹¹⁰ However, at that

107. Carneiro, 2010, p. 28.

108. *apud* “O Povo de Israel vai ser o mais saudável do mundo” [The People of Israel will be the healthiest in the world]. *O Estado de Florianópolis*, Aug. 9, 1956, p. 8. A brief clarification is needed: here, we can observe an overlap of themes. Portinari refers to the fact that he was unable to sell the paintings sent to Israel because the Italian publisher responsible for the book needed to photograph them. However, the book in question focused specifically on the works the artist created during his time in that country.

109. *Apud* Jayme Maurício. “Visita de Portinari a Israel” [Portinari’s Visit to Israel]. *Correio da Manhã*, Jul. 31, 1956, p. 14.

110. “The son of Maurice Fischer [Yona Fischer] (1903-1965), the first ambassador of Israel to France, began his career at the Bezalel Museum in 1960. In 1965, he was invited to join the renowned Willem Sandberg (1897-1984), who was then leading the future of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Later, Fischer became the chief curator of the Tel Aviv Museum and, in

moment, his focus was on Portinari's drawings, particularly those made with colored pencils, a medium the Brazilian artist had used more frequently since his diagnosis of oil paint intoxication. The drawings also played a prominent role after the artist's return to Brazil, when he brought back works from Israel inspired by his trip, which he described as "Os dez dias que me abalaram" [The ten days that shook me].¹¹¹

Israel. *Disegni di Portinari*

Between his departure from Israel and the exhibition at MAM Rio in 1958, Portinari made a brief stop in Italy, where he presented his "Palestinian-Israeli" works to the Italian critic and editor Eugenio Luraghi. This meeting was crucial for the reception of the exhibition *Israel. Disegni di Portinari* at MAM Rio, as the perception of the works displayed there, particularly those created in Israel, was shaped by Luraghi's analyses in his book *Israel. Disegni di Portinari*, published in collaboration with Abrahão Koogan at the end of 1957 [Fig. 11].¹¹² The book included reproductions of 53 of the artist's works. Certainly, the treatment given to the pieces by Luraghi aligned with the comments, letters, and records found in Portinari's interviews during those years.¹¹³ But what exactly was this treatment, after all?

1993, founded *Art Focus*, a contemporary art biennial, for which I collaborated with my close associate Ami Barak, also one of Yona's disciples." See B. Blistène, "Yona Fischer. Hommage," *Art Press*, Mar. 11, 2022, online. Available at: <https://www.artpress.com/2022/03/11/yona-fischer-hommage/>; accessed Sept. 2024. Translated from the French by the author into Portuguese, our translation into English.

111. *apud* Carneiro, 2010, p. 38.

112. Upon his return to Brazil, following a brief stay in Italy, Portinari announced plans for the publication of a book about his visit to Israel. The book was to be edited by Luraghi, who had previously authored *Disegni di Portinari* in 1955. Luraghi later published *Brasil. Dipinti di Candido Portinari* in 1960 through ILTE.

113. Jayme Maurício, "A viagem e exposição de Portinari em Israel" [Portinari's Travels and Exhibition in Israel]. *Correio da Manhã*, Aug. 12, 1956; Egídio Squeff, "Portinari fala dos dez dias que o abalaram em Israel" [Portinari Talks About the Ten Days That Shook Him in Israel]. *Para Todos*, Rio de Janeiro, First half of Sept. 1956, p. 5; *O Estado de Florianópolis*, Aug. 9, 1956, p. 8.



Fig. 11. Cover of the book organized by Eugenio Luraghi, published by ILTE in 1957. Collection of the Central Library of the University of Brasília.

In his book, Luraghi, with the approval of the painter, Abrahão Koogan, and Maria Portinari,¹¹⁴ constructs a trans-temporal strategy linking the drawings made in 1956 to biblical excerpts, connecting them through a complex web of quotations and selections. In a letter to Portinari, the Italian editor indicated the verses to be used for each of the reproduced works.¹¹⁵ This explicit strategy quickly became a central interpretative axis adopted by critics who reviewed the MAM Rio exhibition. Its effectiveness was far from circumstantial. On the contrary, the interpretation of the Brazilian artist's drawings—reflecting the reality of the new nation and their deep connection with the imagery of the Holy Land—was reaffirmed in the decades that followed. This is evident in the critical assessment of Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro in the exhibition and book organized by the Centro de Cultura Judaica [Jewish Cultural Center] in São Paulo in 2010. Drawings such as *Os Três Reis Magos*, *Job*, and *Monte das Oliveiras* [The Three Wise Men, Job, and Mount of Olives], created in 1956, undoubtedly supported the strategy of the Italian publication. Furthermore, in the book's preface, the painter Arie Aroch—who at the time was simultaneously the Israeli ambassador to Brazil (1956-1959) and Venezuela (1957-1958)—emphasized that Portinari's connection with “his people” was key to his understanding of Israel: “He

114. Bento, 2003, p. 310. See also, Letter from Eugenio Luraghi to Maria Portinari and Candido Portinari, November 15, 1957, Projeto Portinari, registration n. CO-2932.1.

115. Letter from Eugenio Luraghi to Candido Portinari, April 17, 1957. Projeto Portinari, registration n. CO-2945.1.

was able to understand the soul of this ancient community that ensures the continuation of the Jewish presence in this land steeped in religiosity.”¹¹⁶

Two processes were necessary to establish this connection between the present Palestinian–Israeli situation and the narratives of the Holy Land. The first involved the critical construction of Portinari’s visual grammar, focusing on his preferred themes and subjects. The second was achieved through the reaffirmation of figuration and its tradition within the emerging context of abstract art in Brazil during the latter half of the 1950s.

In the first case, the necessary narrative thread for activating a potential alliance between Portinari and the people of Israel was woven through the autobiographical themes interpreted by the artist. His childhood in Brodowski and its children were linked to the children of Israeli kibbutzim; the rural workers, abundantly depicted by the Brazilian painter, were reimagined in scenes of Israeli agricultural communities. The selection of *Kibutz*, an oil on cardboard dated 1956,¹¹⁷ to be reproduced as a full-color double-page spread in Luraghi’s book highlights both the artistic quality of this “study”¹¹⁸ and the reaffirmation of the artist’s classic themes.¹¹⁹

The series *Biblica* [Biblical], created between 1942 and 1944 for the Rádio Tupi Headquarters in São Paulo, commissioned by Assis Chateaubriand, is explicitly linked to the works produced in Israel. The singular Bedouin riding a bicycle in the Negev Desert¹²⁰ “looks like an apparition from goodness knows where, but he is the same extraordinary Black man on a bicycle painted in the Radio Tupi Studios at Rio de Janeiro.”¹²¹ Additionally, the *Retirantes* [Migrants] series was continually connected to the drawings of the desert and the realities of Palestine in 1956.

116. Luraghi, 1957, p. XXVI. Translated by the author into Portuguese; our translation into English.

117. The image is available on the Projeto Portinari website (FCO-1698): <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/16360/kibutz>; accessed Oct. 2024.

118. *Kibutz* served as the basis for the creation of the oil on wood *Kibutz* dated 1957, with noticeable changes in colors and the schematic elements of the work. The image is available on the Projeto Portinari website (FCO-1181): <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/16359/kibutz>; accessed Oct. 2024.

119. Letter from Eugenio Luraghi to Abrahão Koogan, Sept. 9, 1957. Projeto Portinari, registration n. CO-2957.

120. The image of the Bedouin can be viewed in the reproduction on page 69 of the book or on the website: <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/18917/arabe-de-bicicleta>; accessed Oct. 2024.

121. Luraghi, 1957, p. 30.

In this latter case, the interplay is one of contiguity, both for Luraghi and for the commentators of the periodicals: *Retirantes* portrayed an artist committed to a certain “reality,” denouncing and criticizing social injustices and poverty. However, if we set aside the rhetorical framework and strategy and focus on the drawings created in Israel, the connection with *Retirantes* loses much of its strength. It could even be said to become incongruous. In Portinari’s Palestinian–Israeli works, we do not explicitly find the misery, pain, and desolation of *Enterro na Rede, ou Criança Morta* [Burial in a Hammock or Dead Child], both from 1944. On the contrary, whether due to diplomatic considerations or the controlled agenda within the Palestinian–Israeli territory, *Job* seems to be the only work that allows a connection between the *Bíblica* and *Retirantes* series. Even so, the biblical narrative takes precedence over any specific social demands.

It is also important to highlight the case of *Derrama lágrimas dia e noite* [Sheds Tears Day and Night], included in Luraghi’s selection but not part of the Israel series. This is a new title for a work by Portinari from 1943, originally titled *Jeremias* [Jeremiah], a study for the panel of the same name. It is likely that Portinari sent the drawing to Luraghi before assigning it a new date, 1956, as it appears in the documentation for his catalog raisonné. Alongside *Job*, *Derrama...* connects to the dramatic themes of the artist but simultaneously distances itself from the set of drawings created in Israel, which are characterized by their lyrical tone and a certain emotional “distance” in the treatment of the characters.

Tadeu Chiarelli reminds us that the Israel series falls into the category of “travel notes,” primarily graphic in nature. Even for established artists, such notes allow for “greater freedom of execution, unlike ‘definitive works’ (such as paintings).”¹²² From the perspective of Portinari’s grammar, the paintings created upon his return to Brazil—such as *Kibutz* (1957-1958), *Crianças de Israel* [Children of Israel, 1957], *Yavé, oráculo do Senhor* [Yahweh, Oracle of the Lord, 1957], and *Ciranda* [Circle Dance, 1958]—exhibit a different level of refinement, with the use of rare chromatic elements not found in the drawings made during the trip, as well as less compact spatial schemes. Chiarelli takes a distinct position, emphasizing that, in these few cases, Portinari managed to maintain certain formal foundations “to the detriment of purely narrative aspects.”¹²³

122. Chiarelli, 2012, p. 241.

123. *Idem, ibidem.*

In total, Portinari produced 122 images, including paintings and drawings, which reflect his vision of the Middle Eastern country.¹²⁴ Subsequent publications and documentation indicate that 49 of these works were produced in Palestinian–Israeli territory. Among them, the pen-and-ink drawings published in periodicals at the time depicted the Palestinian landscape as a backdrop for biblical characters, which became the dominant theme in Luraghi’s book, at the expense of representing contemporary local inhabitants familiar to readers. The images portray an exotic territory while simultaneously reinforcing the illustrative nature of biblical narratives—a rhetorical-narrative model mastered and celebrated by the artist, as evidenced by the dozens of illustrations he created for literary publications.¹²⁵

Beauty Queens at Portinari’s MAM

There were few reports on the exhibition *Israel. Desenhos de Portinari* at MAM Rio—a modest reception compared to the frequent mentions and coverage the artist typically received in Rio’s press at the time. The exhibition was, above all, an event to launch Luraghi’s book-album, with some commentary appearing in social columns, including mentions of beauty queens competing for Miss World attending the vernissage.¹²⁶ The works displayed were classified within Portinari’s familiar grammar: “The pieces that made the strongest impression were those depicting small farmers, rural life, agricultural work, and country festivities.”¹²⁷

Three newspapers—*Correio da Manhã*, *Jornal do Brasil*, and *A Tribuna* (São Paulo)—reported on an exhibition featuring works “on biblical themes.” Overall, despite the modest reception of the exhibition at MAM Rio, the project we might call “Portinari in Israel” was a success. Nearly all commentators referenced the enthusiastic reception of the works by Italian critics during

124. Carneiro, 2010, p. 38

125. Among the most well-known are the illustrations created for the books *Memórias Póstumas de Braz Cubas* [The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas] and *O Alienista* [The Psychiatrist] by Machado de Assis; *Menino de Engenho* [Plantation Boy] by José Lins do Rego; *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes; *Os Sertões* [Rebellion in the Backlands] by Euclides da Cunha; and *Duas Viagens ao Brasil* [Two Voyages to Brazil] by Hans Staden. See Fabris, 2000, pp. 123–149.

126. Present were Marita Lindal from Finland; Claude Navarro from France; Lillian Madfen from Denmark; and Nedin Ula from Sweden. See “‘Misses’ adiaram por meia hora estreia de Portinari no MAM: movimento no salão” [Beauty Queens Delayed Portinari’s Debut at MAM by Half an Hour: Activity in the Hall]. *Jornal do Brasil*, Apr. 24, 1958, Section 1, p. 9.

127. Jayme Maurício. “Portinari no Museu de Arte Moderna. Entusiasmo unânime pelos desenhos de Israel.” [Portinari at the Museum of Modern Art. Unanimous Enthusiasm for the Drawings from Israel]. *Correio da Manhã*, Apr. 24, 1958, pp. 1 and 12.

their exhibition in Italy. Newspapers highlighted the praise from Raffaele Canieri, originally published in the magazine *Época*,¹²⁸ on the first exhibition of the works at the Galeria del Librario in Bologna in February 1958. Canieri emphasized the “laconic and dramatic style with natural intensity.”

High and low notes, concentrated in a small space like a terrible duet between a [French] horn and a saxophone, define Portinari. The current collection is entirely dedicated to the journey Portinari made to Israel. What pilgrimage could be more fitting for the son of immigrants? Portinari did not choose the poor as a theme for his repertoire. The poor are his very life, his essential element, his inspiration, and his art.¹²⁹

Another critic cited in Brazil was Renzo Biasion, whose brief review, published in *Oggi*, once again highlighted the biographical connection between the son of Italian immigrants and the migration toward the construction of the State of Israel.¹³⁰ The appeal to the artist’s ancestry was a recurring theme, serving as a means of affiliating him, through familial ties, with the European cultural tradition and, consequently, with a recognizable historical chronology.

Following a similar path—evoking the talent of the “camponesinho esperto” [clever little peasant] and attempting to reconcile the painter’s narrative figuration with the tactics of abstractionism (as Chiarelli aptly noted)¹³¹—Carlos Drummond de Andrade praised Portinari’s ability to blend the artist’s free and expressive commentary with the documentary value of his drawings:

128. Commentary reproduced in the newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, Apr. 24, 1958, with the full title being: “Portinari no museu de arte. Entusiasmo unânime pelos desenhos de Israel. Inaugurada no MAM exposição capital para o conhecimento da obra de Portinari – Crítica internacional acolheu entusiasticamente a exposição – Primeira mostra individual de Portinari desde os painéis da ONU – Chagall, foi completado, diz crítico italiano – Lançado um livro de Portinari” [Portinari at the museum of art. Unanimous enthusiasm for the drawings from Israel. Inaugurated in Rio de Janeiro at MAM, a key exhibition for the understanding of Portinari’s work – International critical reception was enthusiastically welcomed the exhibition – First solo exhibition of Portinari since the UN panels – Chagall, It’s Completed, Says Italian Critic – A Book on Portinari Released].

129. In the same review reproduced in the newspaper, Canieri questioned why the Brazilian pavilion at the Venice Biennial had never dedicated an exhibition to Portinari. “The thirty-odd drawings and almost a dozen oils that make up the exhibition are, while revealing new facets of Portinari’s talent, a true synthesis of everything he has already painted and the seed of future works, the development of which the series of studies seems to predict.” See *Idem, ibidem*.

130. Jayme Maurício. “Israel visto por Portinari: um livro e uma exposição” [Israel Seen by Portinari: A Book and an Exhibition]. *Correio da Manhã*, Feb. 26, 1958, 1st Section, p. 12.

131. Chiarelli, 2012, pp. 234-238.

Portinari witnessed the birth of Israel and captured the touching yet contradictory aspects of this dawn: new forms emerge from ancient ones, extending them, while all the mechanical apparatus of modern civilization serves a dream drawn directly from the Bible. The “information” that Portinari conveys to us about this spectacle is imbued with a kind of lyricism—both rough and delicate—that only his eyes could perceive. The figures and scenes he reproduced interested him not only as visual elements but also because he found in them something connected to the bittersweet or joyous essence of the world, a theme he constantly explored as an artist. Thus, the stories of Israel’s birth intertwine with what is dramatic, childlike, and generous in Portinari. His sympathy for all that lives and suffers—one of the spiritual keys to his work—his persistent curiosity about forms of labor, his appreciation for structures in motion, where the dynamism of the themes aligns with the very dynamism of the composition, and his ability to convey speed through a rapid visual language all contribute to making this encounter with Israel particularly significant. Portinari’s universal camaraderie with the world around him lends this connection with Israel a unique importance.¹³²

As Drummond pointed out, the works gathered at MAM Rio reflected a relatively cohesive set of interpretations that not only served the publicity goals of Israeli institutions—both within and beyond Brazil—but also reinforced what we might now call “critical clichés” about Portinari’s work. These clichés, at the time, were still taking shape within critical and historiographical debates. An artist synonymous with “national” identity now stood before a new “nation,”¹³³ eager for the acceptance of its culture within the emerging post-World War II geopolitical order.

In both the Brazilian and Israeli contexts, the portrayal of a people was the key determinant for identity recognition. However, the drawings of Israel resonated particularly within religious debates, contributing to the formation of a Judeo-Christian coalition in defense of both a territory and a tradition—specifically, the biblical tradition. Portinari’s accounts of his journey, published in the press, played a role in solidifying this perspective:

132. Carlos Drummond de Andrade. “Portinari, Israel.” *A Tribuna* (Santos), Apr. 27, 1958, p. 6.

133. In an interview discussing the role of art, Portinari stated, “I believe that the artist should draw inspiration from his country, its traditions, and the problems of its people the themes for his work. Creating within this nationalist sense, his work can achieve universal reach, revealing his country to the world through the work of art.” For the artist, any art that does not follow this approach was destined to “sterile and inconsequential universalism.” *apud* A. Vasconcelos. “A arte é como um automóvel. Breve entrevista com Candido Portinari” [Art is like an automobile. A brief interview with Candido Portinari]. *O Cruzeiro*, Nov. 27, 1954, p. 41.

In Nazareth, I was shown Joseph’s carpentry, the father of Christ, and the manger. I was deeply moved and bewildered, seeing those places that had always existed in my mind as poetry, legend, and religious fervor. It felt as though I were dreaming. It seemed unreal... However, I didn’t feel any major difference when making notes and sketches, except in terms of the atmosphere, the light, and the colors, which are, of course, quite distinct. But, as in Brazil, in Israel, I focused on fieldwork, rural aspects, common people and workers, and certain features of the landscape, such as elevations, vegetation, and the cultivation of the land.¹³⁴

Years later, Antonio Bento stated that Portinari had confessed to him that, during his time in the Palestinian–Israeli territory, he rediscovered the same atmosphere “as in the times of Jesus’ miracles.” The evocation of “biblical times” is always explicit; however, it is important to consider alternative ways of interpreting these works when viewed as a whole.

A brief commentary on the exhibition at MAM Rio, published in the newspaper of São Paulo’s Jewish community,¹³⁵ includes a reproduction of the pen-and-ink drawing *Rapaz dirigindo trator* [Boy Driving Tractor],¹³⁶ which, along with *Kibutz*,¹³⁷ forms a thematic axis representing the collective communities that organized agriculture in the country since at least the 1930s. Other drawings focused on the mechanization of agriculture, blending advanced technology with traditional clothing and landscapes, as seen in *Árabe no Arado (Sabath)* [Arab at the Plow (Sabbath)],¹³⁸ *Árabe no Arado* [Arab at the Plow],¹³⁹ and *Água para o Deserto* [Water for the Desert].¹⁴⁰ In all these works, the model of land distribution for new settlers is an underlying

134. *apud* Jayme Maurício. “A viagem e exposição de Portinari em Israel” [Portinari’s Travel and Exhibition in Israel]. *Correio da Manhã*, Aug. 12, 1956.

135. “Exposição de Candido Portinari no Museu de Arte Moderna” [Exhibition of Candido Portinari at the Museum of Modern Art]. *Nossa Voz*. São Paulo, May 29, 1958, p. 1.

136. The image is available on the Projeto Portinari website (FCO247): <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/15137/rapaz-dirigindo-trator>; accessed Oct. 2024.

137. The image is available on the Projeto Portinari website (FCO1698): <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/16360/kibutz>; accessed Oct. 2024.

138. The image is available on the Projeto Portinari website (FCO249): <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/15141/arabe-no-arado>; accessed Oct. 2024.

139. The image is available on the Projeto Portinari website (FCO248): <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/15140/arabe-no-arado>; accessed Oct. 2024.

140. The image is available on the Projeto Portinari website (FCO 270): <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/15168/agua-para-o-deserto>; accessed Oct. 2024. Portinari also depicts more rudimentary farming techniques in *Árabe e Dromedário*, for example (FCO 5577): <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/20246/arabe-e-dromedario>

theme—an issue that continues to provoke conflict in the region to this day. At the time, little attention was given to Portinari’s admiration for this model.

Bento emphasized that the artist returned to Brazil advocating for a similar agrarian reform in the country, the only way to prevent “poor boys from Brodowski and the sick children with enormous bellies, those tragic creatures from the groups of *retirantes*, as frightened as the migratory birds of the Northeast during the murderous droughts.”¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, the collectivism of Palestinian–Israeli society was not a topic addressed by critics in Brazil or by other political and cultural commentators.

As in his works on childhood, this series reflects an optimistic view of the new country, with no significant indication of the civil-military mobilizations for its defense, despite the severe internal and external threats at the time. It is important to recall that in 1956, during the exhibition of Portinari’s works in Israel, the Suez Crisis—also known as the Suez War—was underway, pitting Israel against Egypt and other Arab countries over control of navigation in the Red Sea. During his exhibition in Haifa, Portinari’s works were even moved to a reserved and secure location as a precaution against air raids.¹⁴²

Nor were there any signs of the climate of military mobilization in the territory depicted in his drawings. Instead, the works convey a vision of peaceful coexistence among the diverse peoples the artist encountered there. Pieces such as *Figuras em roda dançando* [Figures Dancing in a Circle]¹⁴³ and the small drawing *Árabe e Israelita* [Arab and Israelite]¹⁴⁴ express, in their own way, a conciliatory vision. For the creator of the famous panels *Guerra e Paz* [War and Peace], inaugurated in 1957 at the United Nations headquarters,¹⁴⁵ this vision underscored a political stance that acknowledged the legitimacy of the newly established state. On this topic, years later, Bento reaffirmed this position, writing:

Anyone who delves into the study of the millennia-long and tragic struggle between Jews and Arabs cannot help but be moved by the idea Portinari had during his trip to Israel when he created a drawing of a group of people from Palestine dancing and singing in a circle.

141. Bento, 2003, p. 311.

142. See *Diário da Noite*, Nov. 10, 1956, p. 3.

143. The image is available on the Projeto Portinari website (FCO1857): <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/17295/figuras-em-roda-dancando>; accessed Oct. 2024.

144. The image is available on the Projeto Portinari website (FCO234): <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/15115/arabe-e-israelita>; accessed Oct. 2024.

145. See “Inaugurados os painéis Guerra e Paz na sede da ONU” [The War and Peace panels inaugurated at the UN headquarters]. *Jornal do Brasil*, Aug. 6, 1957.

In that moment, he united members of both peoples—irreconcilable enemies since time immemorial.¹⁴⁶

At the same time, a careful look at the Israel series presented at MAM Rio would reveal the presence of the key social actors who were mobilizing Palestinian–Israeli society in the construction of this new social order. Emerging from these works is a diverse human and non-human landscape: religious and secular Jews, Arabs, Bedouins, Druze, men and children, animals, and more. In addition to depicting religious and educational institutions, the drawings also highlight the country’s expanding economic¹⁴⁷ and social infrastructure, as seen in *Montanha do Sermão* [Sermon Mountain], *Porto de Haifa* [Haifa Port], and *Porto e Rede Elétrica* [Port and Electrical Grid].¹⁴⁸ This perspective is further reinforced in the previously mentioned interview that the painter gave to Egídio Squeff.

The more contemporary dimension of Israel was not effectively highlighted by critics. As in Luraghi’s book, the religious interpretation dominated reviews of the exhibition at MAM Rio. However, not all critiques were favorable. Regarding the exhibition, Ferreira Gullar was emphatic:

Portinari is, and always has been, a rhetorical artist—one who prioritizes the superficial, external expressiveness of the figure over its form as a plastic value. This inability to understand form translates into another limitation: Portinari does not grasp space. It is evident that his drawings and paintings never involve a conscious and controlled occupation of the rectangle; there is never a dialogue between form and space, nor between the forms themselves. The figures spread out like parasites across the entire canvas (or paper), driven by an urge to “fill it,” to neutralize the space. [...] Were it otherwise, it would not explain why Portinari invariably resorts to cliché figures in almost all his works. Who does not recognize his overused figures in a “resting” position (boys, women, men) or the woman sitting with her head bowed, her hair falling forward—later adapted into the figure of the miner ent over his pan and, again, into the laundress

146. Bento, 2003, p. 317.

147. Sznjader, 2017.

148. Indeed, *Porto de Haifa* is considered by Annateresa Fabris to be the best work in the set formed by “architectural structures captured through a nervous and concise drawing,” because in *Porto de Haifa* the painter “creates a stepped perspective, which practically cancels out the effect of depth.” See Fabris, 2010, pp. 1-3. The images are available on the Projeto Portinari website: <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/19997/montanha-do-sermao> (FCO-5072). <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/17479/porto-de-haifa> (FCO-2049); <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/17480/porto> (FCO-46340); <https://www.portinari.org.br/acervo/obras/15172/rede-eletrica> (FCO-2740); accessed Oct. 2024.

pressing her face against the washboard? [...] This systematic adaptation of cliché elements reveals the superficial level at which this artist's work operates, uninterested in true creation.¹⁴⁹

Ferreira Gullar states that Portinari created groups of figures that would later be adapted into isolated elements, relying on their barely “justifiable”¹⁵⁰ disproportion. After visiting the MAM Rio exhibition, Gullar concluded that the painter was famous because he was “acceptable”—having replaced the “academic pictorial” concept with modern expressions and vocabulary. The stance of the young critic and poet signaled a shift in the aesthetic parameters that shaped new identity representations in art. Reinheimer discusses this shift, noting that the literature and intellectual foundations that had influenced the painter in the 1930s and 1940s had evolved in the following decade. In the early years of his prestige, the painter “created representative symbols of Brazilianness largely in accordance with the suggestions of the surrounding intellectuals.”¹⁵¹ By the second half of the 1950s, however, Portinari's realistic-expressive grammar was being challenged; describing it “was, to some extent, to accept it.”¹⁵² Universal models and the inner perspective of artists were now under debate.¹⁵³

Gullar's critique did not alter the trajectory of *Israel. Desenhos de Portinari*. The exhibition, which began its journey in Bologna, was later extended to MAM Rio. In Brazil, it traveled to the Museum of Art in Pampulha in May 1958 and, the following month, to MAM São Paulo. In September 1958, it was presented at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Lima, and in May 1959, it was hosted by the National Museum of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires.¹⁵⁴

On one hand, the Israel series unifies distinct moments in the painter's trajectory: a primitivism evident in the “swift” treatment of the landscape, a “biblical” setting shaped by his childhood memories, and the need to address collective labor through observations of the inequalities and conflicts it

149. Ferreira Gullar. “Portinari no MAM do Rio” [Portinari at the MAM in Rio]. *Jornal do Brasil*, May 11, 1958, Sunday Supplement, p. 3.

150. *Idem, ibidem*.

151. Reinheimer, 2013, p.83.

152. *Idem*, p. 165.

153. See Couto, 2004.

154. In a letter to Maria Portinari, Arie Arcoh states that 58 works were presented at the Pampulha Museum. For Lima, Peru, 57 works were sent, under the insurance and responsibility of the Embassy of Israel in that country. Letter from Arie Arcoh to Maria Portinari, Sept. 5, 1958. Projeto Portinari, registration n. CO-397.

suggests. On the other hand, it explicitly lays bare Israel's cultural diplomacy project, implemented at the height of the Cold War,¹⁵⁵ which involved the collaboration of various institutions, including MAM Rio.

As part of an editorial project and the network built by the Portinari family in the 1950s, *Israel. Desenhos de Portinari* also reflected the transformation of museums into agents of cultural diplomacy. This shift led to greater openness among institutions to official exhibitions of all kinds, whether managed directly by their members—such as MAM Rio's executive director, Niomar Moniz Sodré—or facilitated through foreign diplomatic bodies seeking to expand their business base or secure a favorable political position. This was the case with the associations and communities that sponsored Portinari's travels and exhibitions. Regarding MAM Rio specifically, the painter played a marginal role in its institutional consolidation, but this was by no means insignificant given his international reputation¹⁵⁶ and his ability to provide compelling “national” representations—ones that, as Gullar pointed out, were widely accepted. Unlike Tarsila do Amaral, another modernist who visited the Holy Land in 1926, Portinari presented a vision that effectively synthesized the aesthetic, political, and institutional concerns of the time. As Drummond reminds us, Portinari exercised on us “his ability to [spark] interest and move.”¹⁵⁷ This demonstrates that much remains to be explored about the “clever little peasant.”

155. In the journal of the Jewish community, *Nossa Voz* (São Paulo), dated June 5, 1956, alongside a brief note about the opening of Portinari's exhibition at the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem, the following article appears: “Quebrar a cortina da guerra fria. Nahum Goldman Convidado a Visitar a URSS” [Breaking the Cold War Curtain. Nahum Goldman Invited to Visit the USSR] with the subtitle: “Convidado Presidente do Conselho Mundial Judeu a ir a U.R.S.S” [Invited Jewish World Council President to Visit the USSR].

156. “A imprensa visitou a sede do Museu de Arte Moderna” [The press visited the headquarters of the Museum of Modern Art]. *Jornal do Commercio*, Jan. 25, 1958.

157. Carlos Drummond de Andrade. “Portinari, Israel”. *Op. cit.*

Visibility, Value, and Meaning for Modern Printmaking in the Exhibition *Jovem Gravura Nacional* – 1966, MAM Rio

MARIA LUISA LUZ TAVORA

Expanding the artistic printmaking: institutional networks and national circulation

Starting in the 1950s and continuing for over two decades, artistic printmaking flourished along the Rio-São Paulo axis, driven by the efforts of several advocates of this expressive medium who were aligned with the principles of modern art—both as a form of expression and as an autonomous art form. The close relationship between teaching and artistic practice fostered the expansion of printmaking, often challenging its traditions through a plurality of artistic approaches. In both cities, the establishment of teaching hubs, whether in independent or institutional workshops, became a cornerstone of the vitality that printmaking exhibited from the 1950s to the 1970s, introducing modernizing practices to printed poetics and fostering critical and reflective attitudes.

Thinking about the production of artistic printmaking necessarily involves recognizing the role of both individual and collective exhibitions organized within this context, which promoted printmaking within the broader field of visual arts. Since 1963, for example, the exhibition *Resumo JB* [Overview JB], organized by MAM Rio in partnership with *Jornal do Brasil* [JB], provided a platform for print artists in all ten of its editions until 1972. In São Paulo, the four *Panorama da Arte Atual Brasileira* [Panorama of Current Brazilian Art] exhibitions (1971, 1974, 1977, and 1980), held at the MAM SP in Ibirapuera Park, were particularly significant. These shows established a dedicated space for Drawing and Printmaking, awarding two prizes in each category. Their goal was to provide an overview of national modern and contemporary printmaking, generating interest among scholars in identifying different

artistic approaches—particularly innovations in artistic printmaking—and the exhibition spaces that brought visibility to this production.

Among the many exhibitions, *Jovem Gravura Nacional* [Young National Printmaking], a traveling exhibition organized by the Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo [Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo – MAC USP], held in two editions in 1964 and 1966, became a significant event in the promotion of contemporary printmaking. Its format was proposed by historian and art critic Walter Zanini, then director of MAC USP, as part of his dedicated effort to gather, disseminate, and exhibit the museum’s collection.¹⁵⁸ The two editions of *Jovem Gravura Nacional* were the first itinerant contemporary art exhibitions organized under Zanini’s management, alongside the 1963 edition of *Jovem Desenho Nacional* [Young National Drawing]. This focus on works on paper had a pragmatic motivation: they were easier to transport in terms of packaging and logistics.

Zanini understood that the itinerant nature of the exhibitions would not only encourage the production of young Brazilian artists but also expand MAC USP’s influence, fostering artistic networks and engagement in different cities across the country. “The itinerant exhibitions held throughout Zanini’s tenure primarily reflect the intent to make the museum’s extraordinary collection accessible in other cities through close collaboration with the academic community.”¹⁵⁹ With the two editions of *Jovem Gravura Nacional* and *Jovem Desenho Nacional*, a framework for the “activation of artistic printmaking” was established, spanning from the north to the south of Brazil and revealing the imaginative processes of its creators.¹⁶⁰ The exhibition catalogs, produced with limited resources, generally listed the participating artists and some works on display. Mapping articles related to these exhibitions—published in newspapers or specialized journals—offers insight into the aesthetic and cultural debates sparked by this itinerant geography. These events, as moments of celebration and legitimization of the visual arts, added value and meaning to the artists’ creative work.¹⁶¹

158. Zanini returned to Brazil in the early 1960s, a period marked by the crisis at MAM SP, during which, among other issues, its members decided to transfer the museum’s collection to the University of São Paulo (USP). For further details on this subject, see Freire, 2013, pp. 23-73.

159. Freire, 2013, p. 63.

160. In 1967, the two exhibitions were replaced by *Jovem Arte Contemporânea* (JAC), which maintained the spirit of promoting contemporary expressions across various media and fostering interconnections between museums, artists, and diverse audiences. It became a continuous activity of the museum, integrated annually into its programming.

161. Bourdieu, 1996.

Jovem Gravura Nacional

The first edition of *Jovem Gravura Nacional*, in 1964, was organized at MAC USP and traveled through six Brazilian cities—Ribeirão Preto, Campinas, Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre, Curitiba, and Florianópolis—until 1965. It showcased three works by each of the 30 artists selected by a jury composed of printmaker Marcelo Grassmann and art critic José Geraldo Vieira, both elected by the participating artists, along with Walter Zanini, director of MAC USP. Five “Prêmios Aquisição” [Acquisition Awards] integrated works from the selected artists into the MAC USP collection, including three woodcuts by Roberto Magalhães, Ana Luisa Belluci, and Newton Cavalcanti and two metal engravings by Anna Bella Geiger and Wesley Duke Lee.

The second edition, which opened at MAC USP on November 18, 1966, and ran until December 11, also featured 30 artists. It was subsequently held at MAM Rio (from March 9 to April 2, 1967) and toured four additional cities until 1969—Juiz de Fora, Belo Horizonte, Salvador, and Belém.¹⁶² Walter Zanini served on the jury alongside printmaker Edith Behring and critic Pedro Manuel Gismondi, both chosen by the participating artists. From the first edition onward, artist registration was limited to those under the age of 35, and for this second exhibition, participants were allowed to submit only two works each. MAC USP awarded seven Acquisition Awards, including Vera Barcellos from Rio Grande do Sul [Fig. 12] and Miriam Chiaverini from São Paulo,¹⁶³ who were recognized for their “informal” abstract woodcuts.¹⁶⁴

162. RIO DE JANEIRO: Museum of Modern Art of Rio; JUIZ DE FORA: Celina Art Gallery; BELO HORIZONTE: Pampulha Art Museum; SALVADOR: Museum of Modern Art of Bahia; and BELÉM: Theater Service of the University of Pará.

163. The artwork *Gravura II*, 1966, color woodcut, 38.6 x 52.2 cm, is part of the MAC USP collection. The image is available at the link: <https://acervo.mac.usp.br/acervo/index.php/Detail/objects/18255>.

164. We use the term “informal” in quotation marks because we consider it inadequate to describe the works it refers to. Much like the designation “abstract,” the term “informal” encounters its own inadequacy. How can we speak of “informal art” if form is a fundamental element of visual perception? Pioneeringly used by Michel Tapié in his critique of Camille Bryen’s work, the term came to be applied to all artistic production freed from mathematical and geometric procedures. George Mathieu, on the other hand, used the term “lyrical abstraction” as the title of an exhibition he organized in Paris at the Luxembourg Gallery, which featured artists such as Arp, Atlan, Hartung, Picasso, Riopelle, Ubac, and Wols. Despite the term’s impropriety, it gained acceptance starting in 1951, and when used, it involves formal experiments grounded in intuition and sensitivity. The internationalized term gave rise to “Informalism,” used systematically in the history of European art. In 2006, an exhibition titled *L’Envolée Lyrique. Paris 1945-1956* was organized in Paris at the Luxembourg Museum, dedicated to lyrical abstraction. It was a retrospective of “informal” art.



Fig. 12. Vera Barcellos. *Movimento III* [Movement III], 1966, color woodcut, 80 × 62 cm. Vera Chaves Barcellos Collection (FVCB).

Vera Barcellos and Miriam Chiaverini were participating in the exhibition for the second time, as were Emanuel Araújo from Bahia, Evandro Carlos Jardim from São Paulo, and Miriam Cerqueira from Goiás. Also awarded were Henrique Fuhro from Rio Grande do Sul and Marília Rodrigues from Minas Gerais, both participating in *Jovem Gravura Nacional* for the first time. Among this distinguished group, five artists explored woodcut techniques, while two employed various metal engraving processes.

The Special Room (1966): A Turning Point in Brazilian Printmaking

In the 1966 edition of *Jovem Gravura Nacional*, a Special Room was created to feature six printmakers recognized for their contributions to printmaking. Located at the entrance to the main hall, this space displayed works by Anna Letycia Quadros, winner of the Travel Abroad Prize at the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna [National Salon of Modern Art] in 1962; Edith Behring, awarded at the American Biennial of Printmaking in Santiago in 1963; Fayga Ostrower, awarded at the São Paulo Biennial in 1957 and the Venice Biennale in 1958; Isabel Pons, awarded at the São Paulo Biennial in 1961; and Maria Bonomi and Marcelo Grassmann, awarded at the São Paulo Biennial in 1965 and 1955, respectively. Grassmann, as we have seen, served the jury for the 1964 exhibition.

A particularly relevant aspect of the Special Room was that five of the six artists were given a separate space for their “informal” abstract works.

Each of these printmakers had received major awards from prestigious institutions, reinforcing their significance within Brazilian printmaking. Their inclusion in the exhibition, according to its organizers, was a strategy to “connect the younger generation to the preceding one.” For critic Quirino Campofiorito, “the works of the young artists thus allowed for an intriguing confrontation.”¹⁶⁵ An “intriguing confrontation”? What insights did it reveal? What artistic dialogue emerged from it? And why did art criticism place such emphasis on this development?

The inclusion of free-form abstraction in the 1966 exhibition underscores the organizers’ commitment to embracing diverse approaches within “informal” abstraction, particularly in the context of artistic printmaking along the Rio-São Paulo axis. This focus is also aligned with MAM Rio’s efforts to promote its Printmaking program, reinforced by the presence of Edith Behring, the program coordinator, on the selection jury for this edition.

However, when they began their work, and despite receiving significant awards like those listed here, these printmakers faced coordinated rejection from art critics committed to geometric abstractionist experiments.

The Historical Context: Abstractionism & Art Criticism

So, what had become of the previous generation? Between the 1950s and the late 1960s, Brazil experienced a period of intense artistic exploration and experimentation, during which the question of artistic mediums deeply engaged both artists and critics. The shift away from traditional techniques in favor of new artistic forms expanded creative possibilities. Abstractionist experiments gained momentum, manifesting in several ways, particularly in the Rio-São Paulo region.

The choice of free and expressive formal solutions, along with the subjective articulations of so-called “informal” abstraction, faced resistance amid internal disputes over its place in Brazilian art. In this “combative environment,” different factions vied for dominance in defining and interpreting abstract tendencies. Notably, works labeled as “informal” were often dismissed and disqualified as art by figures aligned with the rationalist trend. Such disputes were not unique to Brazil. Similar controversies arose in postwar Paris, where heated aesthetic debates unfolded between abstraction and figuration, followed by further conflicts within abstract art itself.¹⁶⁶

165. Quirino Campofiorito. “Jovem Gravura Nacional em São Paulo” [Young National Printmaking in São Paulo]. *O Jornal: Artes Plásticas*, Jan. 1, 1967, p. 12.

166. Ragon, 2006.

Geometric abstraction positioned itself as the artistic vanguard, a movement that dominated the early postwar years.¹⁶⁷

Starting in 1957, we see an example of critic Ferreira Gullar's combative stance toward the theoretical framework and practice of "informal" abstractionism, as he openly opposed and rejected its very nature:

A painting that denies all defined form, the desire for construction, structure, and any reference to the external world must inevitably rely either on the disordered impulses of subjectivity or the automatism of action.¹⁶⁸

Gullar associated the term "*tachisme*" with so-called informal abstractionism, further asserting that "such painting always falls short of a truly creative work of art, which, while undoubtedly drawing from chaos, does not merely allow it to spill out on its own but instead asserts itself over it, giving it form."¹⁶⁹

The six abstract printmakers featured in the Special Room in 1966, known for their sensitive and subjective abstraction, had received significant national and international recognition for more than a decade (1957-1965) for their work. However, their prints did not align with *tachisme*.

During the 1960s, a new analysis emerged that more effectively addressed the nature of abstractionism criticized by Gullar. Its author, Theon Spanudis (1915-1986), a Turkish-born psychoanalyst trained in Vienna, arrived in Brazil in 1950 at the invitation of the *Sociedade Brasileira de Psicanálise de São Paulo* [Brazilian Society of Psychoanalysis of São Paulo]. He practiced in São Paulo until 1957, when he permanently closed his office and shifted his focus to the city's cultural and artistic scene. Spanudis had already been engaged in literature—translating Greek texts, writing poetry, contributing articles to periodicals, and authoring exhibition catalog texts—while actively visiting artists' studios, exhibitions, and galleries. He considered himself a collector, eventually donating 453 works from his collection to MAC USP. Through his profound involvement in the arts, he became intricately connected to the Rio de Janeiro art scene and the *Grupo Frente*, later becoming one of the signatories of the *Manifesto Neoconcreto* [Neo-Concrete Manifesto] in 1959.

167. A salon (*Les Réalités Nouvelles*), a magazine (*Art d'aujourd'hui*), and a gallery (Denise René), all of which functioned as key platforms for promoting the movement and took active steps to enhance its visibility.

168. Testimony by Ferreira Gullar. In: Cocchiarale; Geiger, 1987, p. 241.

169. *Idem, ibidem*.

In the article “A arte das formas e a arte das formações” [The Art of Forms and the Art of Formations], written in a conciliatory tone, Spanudis offers a unique perspective as a witness to the polarization of abstractionism among artists in the Rio-São Paulo hubs.¹⁷⁰ As part of his analytical approach, Spanudis—a concrete poet—identifies two distinct strands of abstractionism, which he terms *Arte das Formas* [The Art of Forms] and *Arte das Formações* [The Art of Formations]. The former represents a rational control over ideas and forms, while the latter orchestrates the flow of existence within the formative process itself, responding to events and materialities as they unfold during the creation of the work. His perspective not only clarifies the distinctions between these two approaches but also softens the antagonisms emphasized by critics at the time, highlighting their many points of convergence. Extending this framework, one could argue that *Arte das Formas* resulted from a structured project, whereas *Arte das Formações* emerged from a process-oriented vision.

In this sense, the Special Room holds historical significance. The proposed connection between the group responsible for the “activation of printmaking” as an artistic expression and the young artists selected for the 1966 exhibition affirmed the recognition of printmaking’s established trajectory as an autonomous art form, shaped by its pioneers. This exhibition represents both a historiographical revision and a more precise understanding of abstract printmaking’s role within the broader movement. Arguably more than any other medium, artistic printmaking most effectively captured the plurality of “informal” abstraction in Brazilian art.

Atelier Livre of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro

It is important to note that most of the artists invited to and featured in the Special Room of the 1966 exhibition received their printmaking training at the Atelier Livre of MAM Rio, with the exceptions of Fayga Ostrower and Marcelo Grassmann [Fig. 13]. From its inauguration in 1959 through the late 1960s, the Atelier played a key role in reshaping the approach to metal engraving, firmly establishing it as a medium for artistic creation. This transformation was driven by Franco-German printmaker Johnny Friedlaender, who led the inaugural training program in May 1959, and Edith Behring, who later took over as director, guiding the studio’s development until the late 1960s.

170. Text likely written in the 1960s, IEB/SP collection [Institute of Brazilian Studies of the University of São Paulo], undated, published in: *Arte & Ensaio*, *Journal of the Visual Arts Graduate Program*, n. 23, 2011, pp. 135-143.



Fig. 13. Atelier of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1959. Photograph: Foto Carlos. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

The setup of the printmaking studio at MAM Rio was the result of a coordinated effort involving multiple institutions and individuals. At the forefront of this initiative was Niomar Moniz Sodré, then-director of MAM Rio and its educational program, alongside the Cultural Division of the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty) and UNESCO. A key figure in this collaboration was Paulo Barreto Carneiro, a Brazilian diplomat and UNESCO representative in Paris, who played a crucial role in securing resources and technical expertise. Their joint efforts led to the hiring of renowned printmaker Johnny Friedlaender as a remote consultant, tasked with advising on the studio's setup and the structure to ensure it was properly equipped for teaching metal engraving. Carneiro's contributions were instrumental in the project's success, including his facilitation of specialized material imports for printmakers.

Ambassador Wladimir Murtinho arranged for Johnny Friedlaender to lead the inaugural printmaking program and was also responsible for selecting printmaker Edith Behring as Friedlaender's assistant. Behring later expanded this role when she assumed coordination of the studio. This process underscored the close connection between diplomacy and MAM Rio.¹⁷¹

171. Since its founding in 1948—an initiative of Raimundo Castro Maia—the board of directors at MAM Rio had included diplomats who played a significant role in the institution's project to consolidate modern art.

The studio was designed and established “to become the national or Latin American center for printmaking and printing.”¹⁷² Equipped with an unprecedented array of resources for teaching printmaking, it represented a major advancement in the field.¹⁷³ Despite prior material shortages, the atelier benefited from MAM’s substantial investment in its printmaking program. As printmaker Rossini Perez observed, “With the opening of the Museum’s printmaking training program, we will use foreign resources and materials of the highest quality—including three fantastic presses!—resources that most printmakers never had access to.”¹⁷⁴ According to Carmen Portinho, the studio and its educational program became known as “the apple of the Museum’s eye.”¹⁷⁵ In addition to three electric presses, essential tools such as burnishers, scrapers, and burins, along with waxes, varnishes, candles, and paper, were imported from Paris. As a high-caliber center of study, the studio significantly elevated MAM Rio’s reputation.¹⁷⁶ Regarding the exemplary nature of this space, and in her role as the studio’s coordinator, Behring stated:

New techniques, new materials, and new resources await the experimental spirit of humankind. [...] Let us discover them, then, rather than remain bound by the constraints of traditionalism. [...] Freedom is a fundamental constant in all artistic production, including printmaking.¹⁷⁷

Beyond technical refinements, Friedlaender’s guidance centered on fostering experimentation, encouraging his students to embark on a personal

172. Jayme Maurício. “Vigor e criatividade da gravura brasileira” [Vigor and creativity of Brazilian printmaking]. *Correio da Manhã*, Sept. 17-18, 1972. Annex, p. 1.

173. Rossini Perez highlights the inadequate conditions of the studios available in Rio de Janeiro for printmakers: there were no specialized varnishes for engraving, the presses were small, and the tools were makeshift—phonograph needles used as etching needles, “cat claws” crafted from filed carpenter nails, and rudimentary gouges made from umbrella rods. The printing inks were of inferior quality for *intaglio* processes, as was the locally produced paper. Rossini Perez. “Itinerário das Artes Plásticas” [Itinerary of the Visual Arts]. *Correio da Manhã*, May 27, 1959.

174. Jayme Maurício. “Encontro com Rossini Perez: O curso de Friedlaender e suas vantagens” [Meeting with Rossini Perez: Friedlaender’s Course and Its Advantages]. *Correio da Manhã*, May 27, 1959. First Section, p. 12.

175. In a recorded statement to the author, Rio de Janeiro, Feb. 21, 1997.

176. The total cost of the four-month course was Cr\$6,000. Four groups of 15 students each were organized, with two weekly classes distributed across two shifts. [Translator’s note: Cr\$ refers to the *Cruzeiro*, Brazil’s currency in use from 1942 to 1986. In the 1960s the exchange rate was approximately Cr\$200:\$1]

177. Behring. “Atelier de Gravura do MAM. Apointamentos gravura em metal.” [MAM Printmaking Studio: Notes on Metal Engraving]. Manuscript, 1959. Marilene Behring Collection.

artistic journey. The view that printmaking was a viable field for plastic experimentation became a defining feature of teaching at the MAM Rio studio, ultimately transforming the direction of metal engraving practices in Rio de Janeiro. Notably, the studio's extensive resources played a crucial role in fostering this experimental approach, reinforcing printmaking as a modern means of artistic expression. According to Friedlaender:

All teaching, to be valid, must revive acquired experiences and stimulate a taste for research, *free to discover what already exists*; it must stem from a method of living inquiries, not from a system of dead rules.¹⁷⁸

Despite his recognition in Paris and within the European printmaking community, Friedlaender's career and work were little known in the Rio de Janeiro art scene. An admirer of the primitives—Master E.S., Dürer, Schongauer, Jean Duvet, Goya, and Käthe Kollwitz—and deeply influenced by Paul Klee, he fused an extensive graphic tradition with contemporary artistic solutions. Friedlaender endured the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp, and after the war, once free, he settled in Paris, where he dedicated more than four decades to producing and teaching printmaking at his Atelier de l'Ermitage, a space frequented by artists from around the world.¹⁷⁹ In Paris, he moved away from expressionist figuration, reinventing a world of visions and dreams where birds took on infinite variations. His aquatints came to embody a subjective, colorful figuration.

Behring studied at Friedlaender's Parisian studio from 1954 to 1957 before going on to manage the Atelier Livre at MAM Rio for ten years. There, she continued applying his methodology—rigorous technical mastery tailored to students' expressive needs, combined with creative freedom. This approach fostered experimentation and encouraged the integration of diverse technical solutions into metal engraving. Critic Mário Barata succinctly captured the essence of this training: "There was always multiplicity in the group's works, but in some way, it aligned with a fundamental unity of vision regarding material and technique."¹⁸⁰

178. Friedlaender, 1950. Emphasis added.

179. Located at 187 Rue St. Jacques, the studio was visited by several Brazilians both before and after Friedlaender's visit to Brazil in 1959, including Arthur Luiz Piza, Flávio Shiró, Henrique Oswald, João Luiz Chaves, Leda Watson, Maria Leontina, Mário Carneiro, and Sérvulo Esmeraldo.

180. Barata, 1964.

The Six Artists of the 1966 Special Room

We now turn our attention back to the 1966 Special Room of *Jovem Gravura Nacional* and the six artists who shaped its legacy. Complementing Mário Barata's perspective, the participating artists shared a common approach—exploring material as a means of expanding their inner universe. Among them, Anna Letycia, Isabel Pons, and Maria Bonomi had all participated in the inaugural program at MAM Rio, where they were first introduced to these principles. This raises an essential question: What reflective processes on “informal” art did each award and the 1966 Special Room inspire?

The inclusion of Fayga Ostrower in the Special Room was justified by her pioneering contributions to free and expressive abstraction, for which she was widely recognized, particularly in her lyrical prints. Although she was not part of the printmaking studio, she had been active at the Museum since the 1950s as a teacher of the Composition and Critical Analysis course. Her work and teaching played a fundamental role in shaping the discourse around printmaking as a modern artistic language, bridging traditional techniques with conceptual exploration.

Ostrower's print featured in the 1966 Special Room demonstrated an unusual exploration of color structures, a process that defined her approach to space and form. Her career as a printmaker began in 1946 after attending the Drawing and Graphic Arts Course offered by the Fundação Getúlio Vargas in Rio de Janeiro. Initially, she worked in a figurative style with social themes, creating illustrations for newspapers and books—a field in which many printmakers were active. Social issues and human drama particularly interested printmakers, as these themes allowed for the expression of emotional intensity, an interest Ostrower pursued through expressionist formulations.

Even in her figurative phase, she displayed a strong tendency toward articulating essentially plastic solutions, foreshadowing the transformation her work would undergo in the early 1950s. During this period, her imaginative process shifted significantly as she became increasingly focused on planes, lines, and rhythm, captivated by the formal concerns of composition. Ostrower ultimately concluded that certain social issues could no longer be effectively addressed through aesthetic commentary alone, as they, in her view, required a different kind of action.

Ostrower's transition to abstraction emerged from a personal blend of research and influences, particularly her engagement with Cézanne's work, through which she came to see art as a form of knowledge born of active

consciousness. This understanding compelled her to embrace abstraction, pioneering its exploration through printmaking.

In 1966, an abstract print of hers was exhibited in the Special Room [Fig. 14]. Maintaining this recognition, her prints had been receiving awards since 1957 at the São Paulo Biennial and, the following year, at the 29th Venice Biennale.

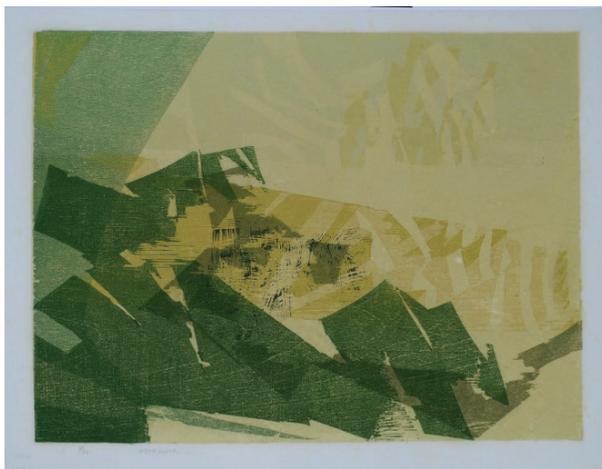


Fig. 14. Fayga Ostrower, 6614, 1966, 60 × 40 cm, color woodcut. Photograph: Haroldo Durão. Fayga Ostrower Institute Collection.

Woodcut, as a medium for imaginative possibilities, allowed Fayga Ostrower to create images where color was explored with greater freedom. In the 1960s, by revisiting woodcut—a primitive and simpler printmaking technique—she brought a new aesthetic dimension to this expressive medium, moving toward lyricism. She established specific types of spatial balance, transforming her surfaces into transparencies. Without being fully conscious of this choice, Ostrower incorporated into her engraved space a remarkable experience: the impact of perceiving the transparency of the night sky in Rio de Janeiro as a child upon returning to Brazil. This lived experience, this bodily engagement with the world, resonates in her work. Before her creations, the viewer is invited through lyrical engineering to deepen their gaze into the transparencies.

Like Fayga Ostrower, Marcelo Grassmann did not attend the MAM Rio studio. He began his studies in woodcut at the São Paulo Liceu de Artes e Ofícios [High School of Arts and Crafts] in 1943. Six years later, seeking to learn etching techniques in metal engraving, he enrolled at the Liceu de Artes e Ofícios in Rio de Janeiro. Grassmann's artistic formation was shaped

by key influences, including the works of Oswaldo Goeldi—particularly his illustrations and woodcuts published in the supplement of the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *A Manhã*. From Lívio Abramo, he drew inspiration from end-grain engraving, incorporating intricate lace-like patterns and technical refinements into his own work. He adapted these techniques to depict the fabulous and the fantastic, often drawing upon the medieval world with its diabolical imagery and fantasies. These influences became significant references for a new generation of young artists. Grassmann also received numerous prestigious awards in the 1950s, including the Travel Abroad Prize at the National Salon of Modern Art in 1952. At the São Paulo Biennial, he won national awards in Printmaking (1955) and Drawing (1957), followed by an international award at the Paris Biennale in 1959. By the 1960s, he had become actively involved in teaching at the Fundação Alvares Penteado, in São Paulo.

The presence of Edith Behring in the 1966 Special Room—by then a mentor to an entire generation of 1960s artists—reveals a printmaker deeply engaged in the rehabilitation of the physical world, the exploration of material in the creation of texture, and an appeal to the tactile, shaped by the expressive release of acid's action. Behring's artistic education in Brazil developed within the context of modern art. She studied under Candido Portinari, Lúcio Costa, and Alberto da Veiga Guignard in the Teacher Training Program in Drawing at the Institute of Arts of the University of the Federal District in Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). Strongly associated with Guignard, she later worked as his assistant at the Escola Parque in Belo Horizonte. She later pursued printmaking studies under Johnny Friedlaender in Paris.

In her creative process, Behring does not make sketches; she works directly on the copper plate, relying on the immediate solidarity of the material to craft her images. These are images of matter that, according to Gaston Bachelard, “the eye names, but the hand knows.”¹⁸¹ From the manifestation of matter, an iconography of anxiety and tension emerges. Acid creates a narrative through its creative destruction. While allowing acid to act as a collaborator in shaping the image, Behring incorporates the whites of the support into her prints—a solution that tightly controls the tension within the image. Do matter and form reflect the existential drama of embracing the freedom of material or controlling it? Artist, acid, and metal, in a tense orchestration, present us with printed sheets bearing images of energies experienced in a terrain of agreements, resistances, and concessions into

181. Bachelard, 1989, p. 2.

which the matrix has been transformed. For Behring, the materiality of printmaking is a fundamental element of her expressiveness.

Ana Letycia Quadros began her training in painting in the 1950s. In 1954, she sought modern instruction in drawing and painting from Iberê Camargo at his private studio. At the time, Camargo had recently begun teaching printmaking at the Municipal Institute of Fine Arts, where he introduced Quadros to the medium. Initially, she approached printmaking with a purely technical interest. However, from that point forward, she focused on this form of expression, even as she continued painting stage sets and designing costumes for Maria Clara Machado at *O Tablado*, as well as creating illustrations, like many other printmakers. In 1959, Quadros attended Friedlaender's inaugural printmaking program at MAM Rio and later worked as Behring's assistant at the studio during two periods, from 1961 to 1963 and again from 1965 to 1969.

Ants, still lifes, birds, armadillos, and snails became recurring themes in Quadros's prints. Having spent her childhood in Teresópolis (Rio de Janeiro), in a house with a backyard surrounded by nature, she grew up playing among these creatures, which later became central to her artistic imagery. Armadillos, in particular, remained a subject in her prints for several years. She alternated between armadillos and snails, exploring the contrast between the animal's external form and its hidden interior. Both became symbolic representations, serving as a visual expression of something deeper within the artist herself. Quadros preferred working with direct metal techniques, such as drypoint and burin, which she studied at *Casa da Moeda*, the Brazilian National Mint. She sought to impart strength to her work, treating the engraved space as a confrontation with the hard material. Her drypoint techniques gave her armadillos a velvety texture. Integrating almost an Asian calligraphy into their skeletons, she eliminated unnecessary elements in favor of essential structures, a reflection of her pursuit of order. Many of these creatures are confined within black surfaces, an imagined spatiality that offers the viewer a simultaneous vision of both the inside and the outside. Drawn to hidden, earthbound creatures, Anna's fascination with these forms mirrors her own introverted temperament.

Having also participated in Friedlaender's inaugural program, Quadros ventured into creative solutions that aligned with her imaginative process. Until 1963, she worked with full metal plates. During this phase, which earned her several awards, she began cutting the plates to produce color prints in a single impression. Although this was initially a purely technical decision to simplify her process, the fragmentation of the matrix transformed her works into sites for exploring the medium itself, expanding the role of the plates.

She treated them as “matrix-forms,” actively incorporating their presence into the spatiality of the printed image.

Isabel Pons, also honored in the Special Room of 1966, had been awarded at the São Paulo Biennial five years earlier, in 1961.¹⁸² A Spaniard from Barcelona, she settled in Brazil in 1948 and established herself as a painter in Rio de Janeiro. Her artistic training took place in her homeland, where she had been exhibiting her work since 1941. She devoted herself to painting, specializing in portraits of high-society figures in Rio de Janeiro and birds, her great passion. Her connection to printmaking began in 1959 while recovering from cancer surgery, during which she was immobilized in a chair for months. Upon hearing about the inaugural printmaking program at the *Atelier Livre de Gravura* at MAM Rio, she enrolled. Abandoning painting, she later recalled: “I became so attached to and enthusiastic about printmaking from the very first day that it cured me.”¹⁸³ For her, making prints was a deeply personal experience, a means of overcoming illness. The critic Mario Pedrosa, who had disapproved of the direction her painting had taken, recognized a positive transformation in her relationship with printmaking: “When she devoted herself to printmaking, she discovered herself as a modern artist—unintentionally or without even thinking about it.”¹⁸⁴

Isabel Pons crafted a sense of spatiality that merged tangible action with elements of imagination and memory, shaped by her upbringing as the granddaughter and daughter of antique dealers. Her father and grandfather owned antique shops on Calle de la Paja in Barcelona, where she spent much of her childhood. Pons delved into the graphic technique of craquelure, whose materiality resonated with her existential reality. As a child, she played with friends in the antique shops, carrying with her a sense of archaism that later emerged in her artistic practice. Craquelure became her signature, ingrained in her very being, evolving into a visual narrative of her past and lived experiences. This technique reflects a blending of the present with affective imagery: “The image of the past is not the occurrence itself reappearing in the present but rather the real happening, imbued with its absences and condensations.”¹⁸⁵

182. Within a year of working in printmaking, Pons received the Gold Medal at the 2nd Mexico Biennial, the Fiat Prize at the 31st Venice Biennale (1962), and a Special Room at the 7th São Paulo Biennial (1963).

183. Pons, 1986, p. 22.

184. Pedrosa, 1963, p. 114.

185. Costa, 2014, p. 52.

Initially, Pons abandoned figurative representation and immersed herself in experimentalism, allowing stains, textures, reliefs, plate incisions, and juxtapositions to emerge. As she structured the material, she gradually began incorporating figures, most often birds. Childhood memories took on a leading role in her spatial compositions, while the material itself became a narrative element, acquiring depth and meaning. The surfaces shaped by the craquelure technique became imbued with the distant echoes of her childhood.

Maria Bonomi, the last of the six artists presented at the Special Room, became a significant reference for young printmakers. An Italo-Brazilian artist active in São Paulo, she had just received the top printmaking award at the São Paulo Biennial in 1965. From an early age, she displayed a keen interest in drawing. Her artistic training was grounded in theories and techniques of the visual arts, which she studied throughout the 1950s, both in Brazil and abroad. With a pluralistic, critical, and restless spirit, she engaged with groups of intellectuals, collectors, restorers, critics, and artists.

In São Paulo in the early 1950s, Maria Bonomi studied drawing with Yolanda Mohalyi and painting with Karl Plattner. Her connection to printmaking began in 1953 when she attended an exhibition by Lívio Abramo. The following year, she became his student in São Paulo, an experience that deepened her engagement with the medium. Later, with a scholarship, she studied at the Pratt Graphics Center in New York, where she was a student of Seong Moy.

Upon returning to Brazil, Maria Bonomi went to Rio de Janeiro to attend Friedlaender's inaugural course at MAM. Shortly afterward, she returned to São Paulo, where, in 1960, she joined Lívio Abramo—at his invitation—to establish *Estúdio Gravura*, an educational center that operated until 1964. The intensity of her experimentalism reflected the lasting influence of Friedlaender's guidance during his course on metal engraving techniques.

Through woodcut, Maria Bonomi—like Fayga Ostrower—expanded the scope of her printmaking, achieving a monumentality previously unfamiliar to the medium's tradition. Through meticulous studio research and creative experimentation, she and her peers pushed the boundaries of woodcut and metal engraving beyond their traditional status as “crafts.” For these artists, the exploration of wood transcended its role as a mere support for recording forms and gestures. Bonomi's prints are thematic [Fig. 15], but this does not mean they are strictly “figurative” or “non-figurative”—a polarization that does not interest her. Instead, her work engages with material and process, emphasizing the expressive potential of printmaking beyond rigid classifications.



Fig. 15. Maria Bonomi, *A escada* [The Staircase], 1966. Woodcut, 134.5 × 101.5 cm.
Photograph: João Caldas. Artist's collection.

Bonomi's images gain eloquence through the formal refinement she brings to them. She explores a single matrix as a constitutive element of the image, using it in different orientations or with an assortment of colors. For Bonomi, rhythmic directions take precedence. The wood is not merely a support for printing but is reorganized according to the varied orientations of its grain, generating diverse rhythms. Her prints often receive unexpected titles, inspired by notes she makes from a wide range of experiences—travels, films, newspaper stories, objects observed, events, histories, and conversations. These sources enrich the viewer's relationship with her prints.

Final Remarks

The engagement with young artists' prints, fostered by the second edition of *Jovem Gravura Nacional* through the creation of the Special Room—where works associated with sensitive abstraction predominated—was driven by a commitment to keeping artistic discourse open, avoiding the polarization that had defined earlier phases. The young exhibitors were envisioned as central figures in affirming printmaking as a vital expressive medium within the framework of modern reflexivity. The exhibition highlighted a historically significant set of approaches that had spearheaded the revitalization of printmaking since the 1950s, showcasing key pathways of innovative graphic practices. These practices were defined by their experimental nature, playing a decisive role in redefining the values and purposes of printmaking: enhancing the material's potential and generating unexpected, intuitive

spatialities shaped by reminiscence; expanding the role of the matrix, treated as an autonomous form; incorporating the printing process as a creative act, exploring overlaps and juxtapositions; and liberating the timing of acids in their action. Printmaking emerged as a dynamic artistic practice, revealing the soul of the material as a field of action, with technical mastery directed more toward expression than virtuosity. This was evident in the diverse approaches taken by Edith Behring, Anna Letycia Quadros, Isabel Pons, Fayga Ostrower, and Maria Bonomi. In constructing their poetic universes, these artists appropriated traditional printmaking techniques with both freedom and individuality.

This second edition of *Jovem Gravura Nacional*, with its Special Room, became a space for generating meaning and legitimizing “informal” abstraction, where, as noted, “It was not about reproducing an image but finding it through execution on a surface.”¹⁸⁶ It reinforced the value of the selected body of work within the field of printmaking in the visual arts landscape. By recognizing the artistic quality of the selected creations, it granted them historicity.¹⁸⁷

During his administration at MAC USP, Walter Zanini “believed that, from the perspective of museum organization, historical areas should coexist with areas dedicated to artistic ‘inauguration,’ balancing the dual nature of the museum in its ‘introverted and extroverted’ aspects.”¹⁸⁸ The traveling exhibition and the network created for its showcases—including MAM Rio—carried an implicit discussion about the museum’s role in contemporary times. In the broader circulation of modern printmaking, particularly “informal” abstract printmaking—including the awards that year to young exhibitors Vera Barcellos and Miriam Chiaverini—the 1966 *Jovem Gravura Nacional* contributed to recognizing the resonance of these poetics within regional networks. It fostered critical discourse and prompted a possible reevaluation of the role of artistic printmaking in modernity, particularly within the scope of abstraction, placing everything up for discussion—especially the distinct nature of “informal” abstraction.

186. Bonomi, 2007, p. 154.

187. Argan, 1992, p. 19.

188. Freire, 2013, p. 29.

Part II. Art Diplomacies

The network of cultural agents engaged with modern art institutions in Brazil encompassed cultural organizations, government agencies, and foreign embassies, forming a distinct circuit of cultural diplomacy. Alongside the circulation of international exhibitions, aesthetic standards and evaluation criteria for modern and contemporary art were disseminated, establishing benchmarks that helped define a universal canon. The articles in this section examine the role of institutions and government agencies from the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, and France in this process.

The first article, by Dária Jaremtchuk, illustrates how traveling exhibitions played a key role in shaping the first contours of an American artistic identity in South America. Maria de Fátima Morethy Couto analyzes the relationship between the British Council, MAM Rio, and the São Paulo Biennial, which functioned as strategic centers for disseminating British cultural influence in Latin America. Michiko Okano explores how Japan's aspiration to join the hegemonic art world led the country to participate in Universal Expositions and art biennials. She ultimately focuses on exhibitions with Japanese themes held at MAM Rio in connection with the São Paulo Biennial. Renata Zago examines the international exhibition of French tapestries, which also traveled to MAM Rio after the 9th São Paulo Biennial (1969), to better understand the exchanges between France and Brazil and the intersections between modern art and applied arts.

Through these studies, the following themes will be explored: geopolitical issues in cultural agendas during the Cold War; the circulation of aesthetic values as central to geopolitics; the construction

of a universalizing narrative of modern art; the intersection of modern art, design, and decorative arts; national representations in international exhibitions; and the role of cultural diplomacy in forging connections between countries and shaping the artistic canon.

Traces of an American Artistic Identity in Traveling Exhibitions

DÁRIA JAREMTCHUK

In the first half of the 20th century, artistic production in the United States (USA) was largely unknown in South America, and traveling exhibitions played a key role in introducing the first contours of a North American artistic identity. In this context, the *Contemporary North American Painting* exhibition, organized in 1941 by the Art Committee of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA-USA) between the American Republics to tour South America, was a significant milestone. For this exhibition of paintings and watercolors, directors from the Museum of Natural History, the Brooklyn Museum, the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Whitney Museum were invited to participate. The practice of bringing together professionals from different artistic institutions to select works for traveling exhibitions became a common strategy in the United States, particularly since the country never had a ministry of culture or a governmental body dedicated to such tasks. Thus, assembling specialists to curate works representing the nation's artistic production not only provided a seal of legitimacy to the selections but also helped mitigate personal biases and prevent ideological scrutiny in the selection process.

As a result, *Contemporary North American Painting* provided a comprehensive overview of visual production in the United States. In the catalog text, Helen Appleton Read acknowledged the connection between American and European art, noting that "American painting did not emerge from primitive foundations, but rather from a series of

transplants of various roots brought by the immigrants who were our ancestors.” She emphasized that the artists came from “various races and nationalities,” yet they were “old masters [who] responded to the stimulus of the American environment.” Despite these influences, she asserted that “our art has developed an expression so independent; moreover, our artists today remain deeply tied to America.”¹⁸⁹

While recognizing the impact of European heritage, Read argued that the American environment played a crucial role in detaching artists from their original artistic sources. In other words, the natural and historical contexts in which they lived were instrumental in shaping an original artistic identity. Although *Contemporary North American Painting* is not the primary focus of this study, it remains relevant for the way its texts and organizational strategies articulated elements of an American artistic identity—elements that were echoed in various other traveling exhibitions and became reference points for subsequent exhibitions sent abroad by U.S. institutions. This recurrence underscores the deliberate construction of a narrative about American artistic production.

Due to the challenges posed by World War II, large-scale traveling exhibitions like *Contemporary North American Painting* did not take place during that period. It was only with the establishment of modern art museums in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in the late 1940s that the circulation of American artistic production in Brazil was reestablished and intensified. From the 1950s to the 1980s, the systematic dissemination of American art was made possible through a structured exhibition circuit centered on traveling shows in museums and binational cultural centers, which played a key role in shaping its artistic presence.

It is important to note that this circuit reflected unequal and hierarchical institutional relationships, with the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) playing a central role in the internationalization of modern and contemporary art. Brazilian modern art museums and certain binational cultural centers participated in this circuit, serving as venues for MoMA’s traveling exhibitions. This exchange provided MoMA with valuable experience in shaping its artistic and curatorial projects while fostering connections with institutions that would become long-term partners. However, the circuit itself was less concerned with promoting

189. Read, 1941, pp. 9-10. The Art Committee of the Coordinator of Commercial and Cultural Relations between the American Republics involved these institutions in the exhibition project, particularly in the selection of works that toured Latin America between May and December 1941. Original translated by the author into Portuguese; our translation into English.

local artistic production and functioned primarily as a recipient and promoter of exhibitions from MoMA and other international institutions. Thus, the transnational alliances formed after World War II were also reflected in the artistic field, as South American institutions primarily operated as recipients of curated projects—such as MoMA-organized exhibitions that traveled to cities across the continent.

For MoMA, modern art museums in Brazil were considered ideal partners for hosting its traveling exhibitions. These institutions were not only prestigious spaces connected to the most privileged sectors of society but also closely aligned with the artistic and museological paradigms that MoMA promoted in its global modernization efforts. This preference is evident in a 1956 letter from Porter McCray, then director of MoMA's International Program, to Mario H. G. Torres, director of the Brazil-United States Institute in Rio de Janeiro (IBEU Rio de Janeiro). In the letter, McCray expressed a preference for establishing partnerships with modern art museums rather than binational centers, which were more directly associated with official U.S. government activities.¹⁹⁰ However, despite this inclination, the network of binational institutes proved valuable to MoMA, particularly due to the infrastructure provided by U.S. consulates and the United States Information Service (USIS), which played a direct role in implementing traveling exhibitions. While IBEU Rio de Janeiro was not the primary venue for MoMA-organized exhibitions, it hosted several significant shows, including *Homage to the Square* by Josef Albers in 1964 and *New Photography from the USA* in 1970. From the perspective of American cultural diplomacy, binational centers were the preferred venues for exhibitions of American art. However, this did not prevent U.S. authorities from providing dedicated support to ensure the success of MoMA's exhibitions, whether in binational centers or modern art museums. The U.S. Embassy remained highly invested in promoting American art, and Rio de Janeiro—despite ceasing to be the nation's capital in 1961—continued to serve as Brazil's artistic and cultural epicenter until the 1970s, hosting the most significant traveling exhibitions from the United States. Undoubtedly, in terms of scale, official U.S. representations were the most ambitious. However, they were exhibited exclusively at the São Paulo Biennial, and only a few of them became traveling exhibitions.

190. Letter from Porter McCray to Mario H. G. Torres, Aug. 30, 1956. MoMA Archives, NY. IC/IP, I.A.165. There are numerous traces in countless correspondences of efforts to ensure that museums were the recipients of MoMA's traveling exhibitions, even if not as directly as in McCray's correspondence.

In retrospect, it is important to recognize that MoMA's close relationship with Brazilian art institutions was largely the result of Nelson Rockefeller's personal efforts—a fact frequently emphasized by the museum to remind subsequent directors of the historical significance that justified maintaining these relationships. This is evident in a 1957 letter from Porter McCray to William A. M. Burden, in which McCray recalled that the American magnate had donated both money and artworks to Brazil's two modern art museums. Beyond his personal generosity, McCray stressed that “he has imparted his own contagious enthusiasm and has encouraged this Museum to lend its technical knowledge and assistance at the time these institutions were being organized.”¹⁹¹ The connections between MoMA and the establishment of modern art museums in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo have already been the subject of significant analyses, particularly regarding exhibition practices, as well as the organization and development of collections. A substantial body of literature explores how MoMA became an institutional and curatorial model in Brazil, especially in relation to the museological infrastructure linked to modern art practices.¹⁹² However, an analysis of American art exhibitions held at MAM Rio during its early decades reveals that their number was relatively limited. The IBEU Gallery in Rio de Janeiro also played a key role in hosting these exhibitions, effectively sharing this function with the modern art museum.

A comparative analysis of the programming at IBEU Rio de Janeiro and MAM Rio between 1948 and 1970 reveals a stark contrast in the number of American exhibitions presented. The inauguration of the IBEU Copacabana Art Gallery in October 1960, combined with its status as a binational center and its direct access to bureaucratic and financial

191. Letter from Porter A. McCray to William A. M. Burden, Jun. 6, 1957. 4 pages (quote on p. 1). MoMA Archives. IC/IP IV.B.49. The letter is accompanied by a detailed account of the exchanges between New York's MoMA and the two modern art museums in Brazil. It also highlights the support provided by MoMA's Film Library to the film library at MAM São Paulo, including contributions to cinema-related events and assistance in securing licenses for film screenings.

192. Included among these investigations are: Regina Teixeira de Barros, *Revisão de uma história: a criação do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo* [Revisiting a History: The Creation of the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo], São Paulo: ECA/USP, 2002. Master's Thesis – School of Communications and Arts, University of São Paulo; Maria Cecília França Lourenço, *Museus acolhem moderno* [Museums Embrace Modernity], São Paulo: Edusp, 1999. *Habilitation Thesis* – Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, University of São Paulo; Ana Paula Nascimento, *MAM: museu para a metrópole* [MAM: A Museum for the Metropolis], São Paulo: FAU/USP, 2003. Master's Thesis – Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, University of São Paulo.

support from the U.S. Embassy, contributed to the higher number of exhibitions held in this space compared to MAM Rio. In contrast, MAM Rio’s programming reflected both the competition among international institutions and its engagement with the local art scene.

Table 1. American Art Exhibitions Held at MAM Rio¹⁹³

Year	Name	Sponsors	Location
1948	<i>Alexander Calder</i>	USA Embassy	MAM Rio MASP
1957	<i>Exhibition of American Art (Fleischman Collection)</i>	USIS	MAM Rio
1959	<i>Alexander Calder</i>	USIS	MAM Rio
1960	<i>Frank Lloyd Wright</i>		MAM Rio
1962	<i>Abstract Drawings and Watercolors USA</i>	MoMA USIS	MAM Rio; MAM SP
1966	<i>Visionary Architecture (8th São Paulo Biennial)</i>	MoMA	MAM Rio; Belo Horizonte (BH) City Hall Museum; USIS Recife
1968	<i>The New Vein</i>	USIS	MAM Rio
1969	<i>Brazilian Prints from the Museum of Modern Art</i>	MoMA	MAM Rio
1970	<i>Cartier-Bresson: Recent Photographs</i>	MoMA	MAM Rio; MAC USP

193. I am grateful to Daniela Moura for preparing the tables and conducting the documentation research in the MASP archives.

Table 2. American Visual Art Exhibitions Held at IBEU RJ

Year	Name	Sponsors	Location
1948	<i>Alexander Calder</i>	IBEU RJ	Ministry of Education and Health RJ
1948	<i>Margaret Spence</i>		IBEU RJ
1948	<i>Polly McDonell</i>		IBEU RJ
1951	<i>Coletiva de Pintores Brasileiros e Norte-Americanos</i> [Collective Exhibition of Brazilian and American Painters]		IBEU RJ
1952	<i>Gravuras Norte-Americanas</i> [American Prints]		IBEU RJ
1952	<i>Polly McDonell</i>		IBEU RJ
1956	<i>Moderna Xilogravura Norte-Americana</i> [Modern American Woodcuts]	MoMA	IBEU RJ
1957	<i>Trabalhos de estudantes de Belas-Artes norte-americanos</i> [Works by American Fine Arts Students]		IBEU RJ
1960	<i>Gravuras de Mauricio Lasansky e seu grupo – Intaglios</i> [Prints by Mauricio Lasansky and His Group – Intaglios]		IBEU RJ; MAM SP
1960	<i>Contemporary Art: 2a Exposição de Artistas Brasileiros e Norte-Americanos</i> [Contemporary Art: 2 nd Exhibition of Brazilian and American Artists]		IBEU RJ
1962	<i>Gravuras da Coleção Pennell</i> [Prints from the Pennell Collection]	Library of the Congress	IBEU RJ; MASP
1964	<i>“Homenagem ao Quadrado” – Josef Albers</i> [“Homage to the Square” – Josef Albers]	MoMA US Embassy	IBEU RJ; MAC USP
1964	<i>Gravadores Norte-americanos</i> [American Printmakers]		IBEU RJ
1965	<i>Lettering by Modern Artists</i>	MoMA	IBEU RJ
1966	<i>Têxteis Contemporâneos – Artesanato Norte-Americano</i> [Contemporary Textiles – American Crafts]		IBEU RJ
1966	<i>Arte Brasileira em Coleções Norte-Americanas</i> [Brazilian Art in American Collections]	American Society	IBEU RJ

Year	Name	Sponsors	Location
1968	<i>Quarenta Gravadores Norte-Americanos</i> [Forty American Printmakers]	Smithsonian Institute	IBEU RJ MAC USP
1969	<i>Trinta Cartazes Norte-Americanos</i> [Thirty American Posters]		IBEU RJ
1969	<i>Arte Infantil nos Museus dos EUA</i> [Children’s Art in U.S. Museums]	Smithsonian Institute	IBEU RJ MAC USP
1970	<i>Nova Fotografia dos EUA</i> [New Photography from the U.S.]	MoMA American Consulate	IBEU RJ; MASP
1970	<i>Arte de Computadores</i> [Computer Art]	California Computer	IBEU RJ

On multiple occasions, MAM Rio stated that it lacked space in its schedule to host exhibitions offered by MoMA. Nevertheless, the New York museum remained persistent, as evidenced by a 1973 letter from Waldo Rasmussen, director of MoMA’s International Program, to Heloisa A. Lustosa, then director of MAM Rio. Rasmussen proposed resuming cultural exchanges between the two museums, emphasizing that Brazil had missed several major MoMA-organized exhibitions that had toured Latin America, such as *Cézanne to Miró*, *The Art of Surrealism*, and *Alexander Calder*. The connection between the interruption of relations between the two museums and the absence of these exhibitions in Brazil suggests that renewing the partnership would prevent it from being excluded from such cultural opportunities.¹⁹⁴ Rasmussen’s strategy of requesting that MoMA resume exchanges with MAM Rio becomes clearer when considering the Rio museum’s significance in international cultural diplomacy and the competition among foreign institutions to secure representation there.

As for the interruption in the flow of exhibitions from MoMA to MAM Rio, it is known that MAM Rio faced significant difficulties in settling its debts with the New York museum. In most cases, traveling exhibitions required a fee, a recurring issue in institutional negotiations. The U.S. Embassy often covered the costs of exhibitions held at MAM Rio, though payments were frequently delayed. In a 1969 letter, Annette Allwardt, administrative assistant of MoMA’s International Program, addressed this issue: “The problem the Museum of Modern Art in Rio faces with exhibitions of this sort is the lack of funds. They have been unable

194. Letter from Waldo Rasmussen to Heloisa A. Lustosa, Apr. 4, 1973. MoMA Archives, NY. IC/IP, I.A. 901: “I should emphasize that my trip is purely unofficial and that our International Program is supported by private, non-governmental sources”.

to schedule anything that requires outside expenditures. In the case of the Tamarind exhibition, we managed to raise 250 dollars from other sources, and the Museum will mount the exhibition with its own staff.¹⁹⁵

In contrast, the situation at the São Paulo museum was different. In 1950, MoMA and MAM SP signed a reciprocity agreement, committing to collaborate on the exchange of contemporary art exhibitions, the screening of films for artistic and educational purposes, and the distribution of publications and reproductions. This agreement was the first of its kind that MoMA established outside the United States and remained in effect until 1961, when the New York museum ceased managing official U.S. representations.¹⁹⁶ Until 1962, MAM SP hosted traveling exhibitions organized by MoMA, alternating them with the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP). Notably, the participation of the United States in the São Paulo Biennial—which was still organized by MAM São Paulo until the early 1960s—was facilitated by the New York museum between 1951 and 1961. Matarazzo viewed MoMA's decision to cease organizing U.S. representations with concern. He remarked:

If I permit myself to express to you our regret for that action, I cannot [fail] to recognize the serious reasons you have for no longer assuming financial responsibility for the United States representation at our Biennial and stopping at Venice's Biennial. I hope, however, that the good and warm relations we [have] had in the past will continue [in] the future. Your Museum has been for us like a good senior brother, whose help and cooperation [with] us will never be forgotten. I am sure that [this] cooperation will not stop, even if it would have to be of another character. As you have just said in your letter, we will always [be] ready to accept and to ask for your advice and experience.¹⁹⁷

195. Letter from Allen E. James (US Embassy) to Annette Allwardt (Administrative Assistant, International Program – MoMA), Sept. 17, 1969. MoMA Archives. IC/IP I.A. 1912.

196. After MoMA's withdrawal, responsibility for the United States' artistic representation at the biennials was transferred to the United States Information Agency (USIA), which organized two editions. The Walker Art Center was invited to represent the U.S. at the 7th Biennial (1963), and the Pasadena Art Museum at the 8th Biennial (1965). In 1967, the Smithsonian Institution took on this role, with William C. Seitz serving as curator for the 9th São Paulo Biennial. The Smithsonian continued to organize the United States' artistic representation, inviting professionals and institutions to collaborate. Currently, this responsibility lies with the Department of State, which nominates and supports artistic institutions to represent the country at various international biennials. For more on this topic, see Jaremtchuk, 2023.

197. Letter from Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho to René d'Harnoncourt. São Paulo, May 15, 1962. MoMA Archives, RDH VI.8.

Unlike the frequent and continuous relationship between MoMA and MAM SP, which stemmed from their collaboration in organizing the São Paulo Biennial, interaction with MAM Rio was more sporadic. As a result, São Paulo's art scene remained more attuned to developments in American art. As previously discussed in *Políticas de atração: relações artístico-culturais entre Estados Unidos e Brasil* [Policies of Attraction: Artistic and Cultural Relations Between the United States and Brazil, 2023], MoMA's decision to withdraw from organizing the official U.S. representation at the Venice and São Paulo Biennials—a move anticipated by discussions with the United States Information Agency (USIA) in August 1960—deserves attention, as it occurred just a few years before the launch of MoMA's *Program of Exhibition Exchange with Latin America*, established to organize traveling exhibitions of American art. In the context of the Cold War, the political dimension inherent in these official representations appears to have been a decisive factor in the USIA assuming responsibility for the biennials starting in 1963.

Alexander Calder at MAM Rio and MASP in 1948

Returning to the topic of American art traveling exhibitions, in 1948, Alexander Calder's exhibition in Rio de Janeiro was displayed on the second floor of the Ministry of Education and Health (now the *Palácio Gustavo Capanema*) and in São Paulo at the Museum of Art, now known as the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP). MAM Rio also played a role in supporting the Calder exhibition, although it was still planning its inaugural exhibition, *Pintura Européia Contemporânea*, to be held in 1949 at its temporary headquarters on the 16th floor of Banco Boavista in downtown Rio de Janeiro.¹⁹⁸ The Rio de Janeiro press reported that Calder's exhibition was held under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture, MAM Rio, the Institute of Brazilian Architects, the Brazil-United States Institute (IBEU RJ), and a group of local artists and intellectuals.¹⁹⁹ It is important to highlight that, as MAM Rio was still in formation and lacked a permanent home, neither it nor the Brazil-United States Institute of Rio de Janeiro (IBEU RJ) had a suitable exhibition space for large-scale shows like the Calder exhibition.

Although Calder's exhibition received institutional support, its realization was largely driven by personal connections between Brazil's intellectual elite and the artist himself. The initiative, therefore, emerged from a more organic and

198. In this regard, see Vera Siqueira's chapter, "Modern Art at the Crossroads: The Inaugural Exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro," in this collection.

199. "Artes Plásticas" [Visual Arts]. *Correio da Manhã*, Sept. 12, 1948. I am grateful to Moema de Bacelar Alves for this information.

personalized process of cultural exchange. Calder's work was not new to Brazil. According to Roberta Saraiva, three gouaches and a mobile had already been exhibited at the *III Salão de Maio* [Third May Salon] in São Paulo in 1939. She suggests that these works arrived in Brazil through Flávio de Carvalho, the salon's organizer, who had met Calder at the 1937 International Exposition, where he presented his *Mercury Fountain* at the Spanish Pavilion, directly across from Picasso's *Guernica*. However, Calder's presence at the 1939 Brazilian salon went largely unnoticed. It was only with the 1948 exhibitions that his work gained widespread enthusiasm.²⁰⁰

Architect Henrique Ephim Mindlin played a crucial role in bringing Calder's exhibitions to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in 1948. Having met Calder in the United States in 1943, Mindlin developed a deep appreciation for his work and actively promoted it among Rio de Janeiro's elite, as noted by Saraiva. He facilitated the sale of Calder's works, securing their place in private collections. According to Saraiva, Mindlin's apartment became "a sort of showcase for mobile sculpture," where he frequently announced new private commissions, often integrated into modernist architectural projects. Strengthened by frequent correspondence, Mindlin launched a campaign in early 1948 to bring Calder to Brazil, mobilizing two key institutions: the Ministry of Education and Health and the Museum of Art of São Paulo (MASP). To organize Calder's exhibition, he also secured support from the Institute of Brazilian Architects, IBEU Rio de Janeiro, and the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro—an institution still taking shape in 1947 and consolidating in 1948 ahead of its official inauguration in 1949. Saraiva notes that "Calder's first Brazilian exhibition became one of the first public interventions of the new museum."²⁰¹

Regarding the São Paulo exhibition, Pietro Maria Bardi, then director of the newly established MASP, was reportedly contacted by a group interested in bringing Calder to Brazil. In addition to Mindlin, this group included Rino Levi, Jacob Ruchti, and Miguel Forte, who, according to Saraiva, had also visited the artist in the United States.²⁰² Bardi formalized the invitation to organize an exhibition of Calder's works, writing to the artist: "Rino Levi told me that you are considering a visit to Brazil. As I am extremely interested in organizing an exhibition of your works at the Museum of Art (MASP), I would very much like to contact you directly."²⁰³ This process underscores the importance of personal

200. Saraiva, 2006, pp. 20-21.

201. *Idem*, p. 64.

202. *Idem*, p. 74.

203. Letter from Pietro Maria Bardi to Alexander Calder, Apr. 20, 1948. MASP Archives, Box 5, Folder 5.

networks and private initiatives in promoting international art in Brazil, even with the institutional support of the São Paulo museum.

The reception of Calder's works in Brazil in 1948, though framed within the broader debate between abstraction and figuration, emphasized the singularity and freshness of his style—qualities identified as distinctly American. While some analyses sought to draw connections to the European abstract tradition, most critiques highlighted elements of American modernity present in his work. Beyond Calder's role in discussions on abstract art in Brazil, his work was particularly noted for embodying a modern American artistic identity, which is the focus here. Just as the 1941 exhibition *Contemporary North American Painting* had signaled an artistic identity already distancing itself from European traditions, the reception of Calder's 1948 exhibition in Brazil largely reinforced this perspective.

As early as 1939, distinctly American characteristics in Calder's work were already recognized. In an anonymous review published in *Diário da Noite* about the Third May Salon, he was described as:

One of the most intriguing artists featured in the exhibition on Rua Barão de Itapetininga [...] is one of the greatest Yankee architects [...] who became renowned in the United States as the creator of so-called "mobile sculpture" [...]. He is one of the most formidable talents of the current generation of innovative artists who are ahead of their time and, for this reason, are sometimes beyond the routine comprehension of the average person and stagnant critics. He is the author of the renowned *Water Ballet*, which is achieving resounding success at the International Exhibition in New York.²⁰⁴

In 1945, Henrique Mindlin also published a review of Calder's works in *Revista de Arte*, where he emphasized the modernity and distinctiveness of American art in Calder's work. He wrote:

Among all the American artists of today, one stands out in particular. It is Alexander Calder (Sandy to his friends), not only for the position he holds in the contemporary art movement but also for the expressive way he translates some of the deepest characteristics of the American mentality into his art. [...] Calder manages to embody the exuberant spirit, the pioneering ambition, and the easy and spontaneous humor of his compatriots far better than others. [...] Lipchitz once told me, "Only an American could so successfully attempt the mechanization of Poetry." [...] Calder expresses more than the inventive and

204. *Diário da Noite* (São Paulo), Jul. 8, 1939. *Apud* Saraiva, 2006, p. 23.

youthful spirit of the American. The humor, instability, and unpredictability of his works psychologically convey the transience and nervousness of our time.²⁰⁵

Years later, Mindlin continued to emphasize these same characteristics in Calder's work. In an article published in *Diário de São Paulo* on August 29, 1948, titled "Calder – Ferreiro e Escultor" [Calder – Blacksmith and Sculptor], he introduced the artist to the Brazilian public with the following words:

A Calder mobile differs from a sculpture, first and foremost, by being dynamic rather than static. The breeze that moves it and gives it a new configuration at every moment, always within the same rhythm intended by the artist, is like the breath of a new dimension—time—introducing itself into the previously three-dimensional work of the sculptor. [...] In this, Calder's work follows a line parallel to contemporary thought in philosophy and science. The new concepts of simultaneity and relativity find their strongest plastic expression here, much like the great mathematical ideas of the Renaissance found their plastic expression in the development of linear perspective. Fleeting and ever-changing, Calder's work also expresses the sense of transition and transformation of our era.²⁰⁶

According to Roberta Saraiva Coutinho, the relationship between Mindlin and Calder was akin to a marriage certificate uniting mobile sculpture and modern Brazilian architecture, creating a reciprocal exchange that, by the late 1950s, led Calder to visit Brasília and propose a piece for the city—though Oscar Niemeyer ultimately disregarded the idea. Saraiva notes that, for Mindlin, Calder's mobiles presented extraordinary opportunities for integrating art with contemporary architecture. He envisioned one of Calder's large mobiles suspended at the entrance of a modern building in Brazil, such as the Ministry of Education or the Instituto de Resseguros [Reinsurance Institute]. Mindlin further emphasizes that these sculptures—moved by the breeze and filling the space with dynamic rhythms—not only underscored Calder's contributions to modern architecture but also highlighted their unique potential within Brazilian architecture, known for its open, sunlit spaces.²⁰⁷

While Mindlin emphasized the specificity of Calder's works in capturing the unique complexities of the American experience, Mario Pedrosa, in 1948,

205. Henrique Mindlin. *Revista de Arte*, n. 3. Rio de Janeiro: Escola Nacional de Belas Artes, 1945. *Apud* Saraiva, 2006, pp. 54-58.

206. Henrique Mindlin. "Calder – Ferreiro e escultor" [Calder– Blacksmith and sculptor]. *Diário de São Paulo*, Aug. 29, 1948.

207. Coutinho, 2018, p. 183. Henrique Mindlin. "Alexander Calder". *Op. cit.* Text reproduced in the catalog of Calder's exhibition at the Ministry of Education and Health (Rio de Janeiro, 1948).

introduced the artist's work to the Brazilian public, highlighting its connection to modernization and the use of industrial materials. Pedrosa recognized that Calder drew inspiration from everyday objects essential to American life, repurposing them in unexpected ways. He attributed to these objects an aesthetic value they had previously lacked. The artist employed industrial tools in a non-utilitarian manner, adopting a surrealist approach that diverted these objects from their conventional functions, aiming to create new forms and meanings. His work stood in dialectical opposition to the logic of American civilization, which was centered on profit and business. Calder emerged as the most representative artist of the United States precisely because he was a "rebel against his environment," much like many of his predecessors. His art was uninhibited in applying principles of engineering and industrial design, using materials, tools, and mechanical processes unpretentiously to express his vision. Throughout his analysis, Pedrosa emphasized Calder's deep familiarity with machines, and unlike in other artistic productions, Calder's work completely dispels any sense of apprehension associated with these objects.²⁰⁸

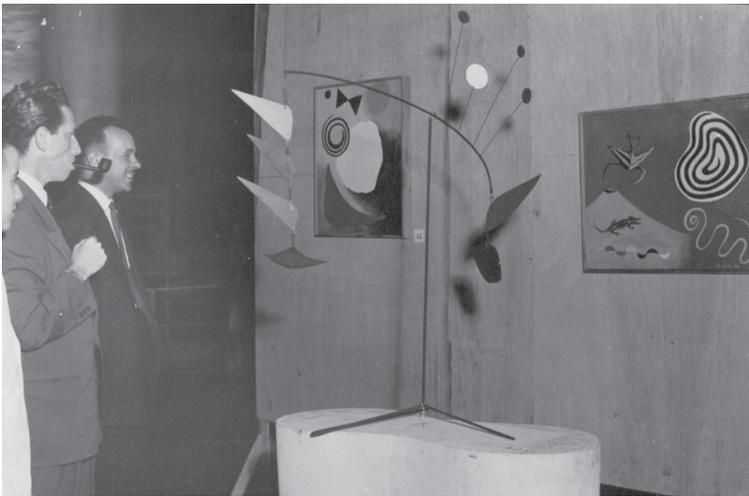


Fig. 16. View of Alexander Calder's exhibition at the Ministry of Education with two paintings and a mobile, 1948. Photograph: Unknown Author (*Diário de São Paulo*, Sept. 26, 1948). Collection of the Research Center of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP).

Pedrosa met Calder during his exile in New York between 1938 and 1945 and, from that point on, developed a profound interest in his work. He later became Calder's most prominent interlocutor during the artist's exhibitions in Brazil.

208. Mario Pedrosa. "A máquina, Calder, Léger e outros" [The Machine, Calder, Léger, and Others]. *Diário de São Paulo*, Oct. 31, 1943.

Pedrosa highlighted aspects of Calder's life, noting that, since childhood, the artist had chosen "absolutely modern heroes: the automobile, the gramophone, and cinema." He emphasized that Calder's time at the Technological Institute had made him an engineer, but that he left his job at an engineering office in New York to become a "circus chronicler." It was during this period that Calder conceived the idea of "making animals that walked, lifted their paws, and jumped like those in the circus ring." Using wire and cork, he created horses, cats, tigers, and dogs. Pedrosa also recalled that American art critic James J. Sweeney had said the circus "instilled in Calder the aesthetics of the unfinished and the unexpected." More than tracing a genealogy of Calder's artistic poetics, Pedrosa may have sought to emphasize how the artist's work "was inseparable from playful enjoyment, from the toy." Pedrosa described how Calder, through play, created the circus—first crafting wooden sculptures, then wire figures. This material revealed to him the secret of design, the special graphic quality that expanded his creative verve. By using wire in space, Calder gave transparency to volume, allowing his "aerial forms" to emerge, capable of being viewed simultaneously from all sides. In his wire sculptures, emptiness suggested volume, defined solely by lines and contours.²⁰⁹

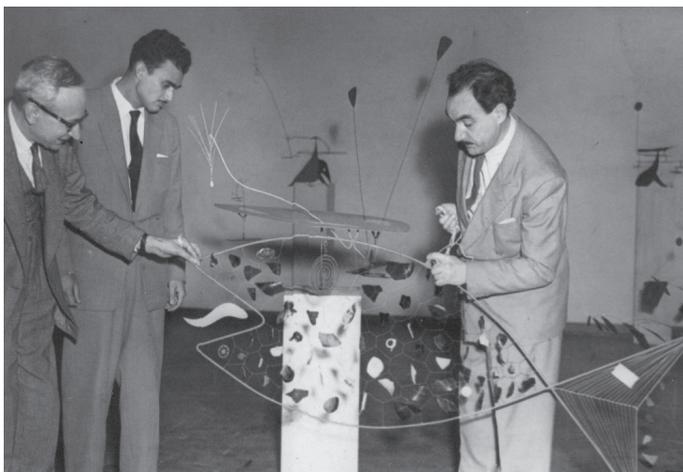


Fig. 17. Professor Pietro Maria Bardi (right) accompanies Professor Michel Simon and a reporter (left) as they examine the "fish" made of glass shards and teacup handles, a work by Alexander Calder exhibited at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, 1948. Photograph: Unknown Author (*Diário de São Paulo*, Oct. 5, 1948). Collection of the Research Center of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP).

209. Mario Pedrosa. "Introdução a Alexandre Calder" [Introduction to Alexander Calder]. *O Estado de S. Paulo*, Nov. 5, 1948. Vera Pacheco Jordão also recalled that the circus emerged when Calder was working for a newspaper, creating illustrations for a report on a circus, and "there he discovered the world of fantasy, the atmosphere of the unexpected, surprise, danger, and joy." See Vera Pacheco Jordão. "Calder e o móbile" [Calder and the Mobile]. *Diário de Notícias*, Sept. 19, 1948.

Thus, when considering the two most significant interlocutions of Calder’s work in Brazil, it becomes clear that for Mindlin, Calder’s pieces were closely integrated with modern architecture, lending them a more decorative and accessory-like quality. In contrast, Pedrosa emphasized their aesthetic of the unfinished and the unexpected. He highlighted Calder’s distinctive stylistic approach, which expanded the expressive potential of his work, suggesting aerial forms visible from all angles, while also drawing attention to their playful and humorous dimensions. While Mindlin helped facilitate the private collection of Calder’s works, Pedrosa’s reflections clearly supported their acceptance and integration into the Brazilian art scene.

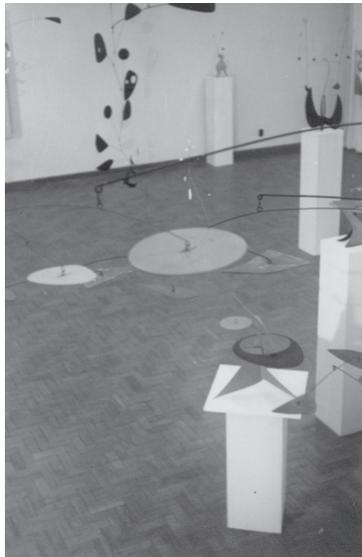


Fig. 18. View of Alexander Calder’s exhibition, 1948. Photograph: Unknown Author. Collection of the Research Center of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP).

When Pedrosa gave a lecture on Calder’s exhibition at MASP at the invitation of Pietro Maria Bardi,²¹⁰ he recounted the controversial reception of the mobiles in Rio de Janeiro, where they had been labeled “reactionary art”—a characterization he firmly refuted.²¹¹ This controversy may have

210. Telegram from Pietro Maria Bardi to Mario Pedrosa [Manuscript]. MASP Archives, box 5, folder 56.

211. “Surpreendido com a compreensão de sua arte pelo público” [Surprised by the Public’s Understanding of his Art]. *Diário da Noite*, Oct. 13, 1948. Mario Pedrosa gave a lecture on Calder in the MASP auditorium, where a short documentary on Calder, produced by the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1944, was also shown. The screening took place at the Centro de Estudos Cinematográficos [Center for Cinematographic Studies], which was in the MASP auditorium. “No

influenced the ironic tone in Bardi's text, *Calder e os "Móviles"* [Calder and the Mobiles], which satirized the prevailing trends in Brazil's abstractionist art scene. Bardi stated:

It is the so-called "abstract" art, now fully in fashion and drawing followers from all circles—from new sensitive painters to dilettante ladies who, at last, can conceal—among the lines and even stranger colors—all their inadequate pictorial virtues in one stroke. But, setting aside the intruders who inevitably make their way into all artistic trends, abstract art is something far removed from any journalistic controversy. It must be regarded, undoubtedly, as a matter of utmost seriousness by artists who wish to express and affirm rigorous, clear, lucid, intellectual, cold, and rational ideas [...] so as to reassess certain mysterious geometric values— or purely mathematical and analytical ones.²¹²

The text continued with an analysis of Calder's work and its relationship to abstract art. Adopting a provocative tone, it concluded, "In this note, however, we wish only to announce the upcoming Calder exhibition and to clarify for São Paulo's cultured public the significance of the controversy surrounding abstract art, without anticipating any judgment."²¹³



Fig. 19. View of Alexander Calder's exhibition, 1948. Photograph: Unknown Author. Collection of the Research Center of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP).

Museu de Arte apresentará um filme sobre 'Móviles' de Alexandre Calder" [At the Art Museum, a Film on Alexander Calder's Mobiles will be Shown]. *Diário de São Paulo*, Oct. 10, 1948.

212. Pietro Maria Bardi. "Calder e os 'Móviles' em próxima exposição" [Calder and the Mobiles in an Upcoming Exhibition]. *Diário de São Paulo*, Sept. 26, 1948.

213. *Idem, ibidem*.

It is worth noting that during this period, the São Paulo art scene was involved in preparations for the exhibition *Do Figurativismo ao Abstracionismo* [From Figurativism to Abstractionism], organized by art critic Léon Degand, which would open in April 1949 as the inaugural event of MAM SP's new headquarters on Rua 7 de Abril, the *Diários Associados* building. Bardi's ironic tone should be understood within this context, as abstract art was facing harsh criticism from influential sectors of the art world. In fact, during a visit to MAM SP, Calder met Degand in person when the museum was still operating provisionally within the facilities of the Metalúrgica Matarazzo steelworks, where Calder saw an exhibition by Cícero Dias.²¹⁴

Despite the controversies surrounding abstract art in the Brazilian art scene, the reception of Calder's work was quite positive. The artist himself was surprised by both the public's enthusiasm and the strong sales in São Paulo. Critics such as Osório Cesar emphasized the impact of Calder's exhibition at MASP in their reviews. Cesar stated:

The imagination of this artist is prodigious. His creations of modern "toys" designed to enchant our eyes are original. He succeeded in achieving abstractionism in motion. Upon first entering this exhibition, one feels bewildered amidst these exotic figures that stand out—awkward in their joints yet maintaining balance. It gives the impression of being in a phantasmagoric world. After this first encounter, one begins to appreciate Calder's 'mobiles' for the harmonious composition of their geometric figures and their colors. [...] His oil paintings are abstractionist. They do not hold the same interest as his 'mobiles,' nor do they possess their originality.²¹⁵

Osório Cesar emphasizes that Calder's true innovation lies in his ability to bring abstractionism to life through movement and spatial interaction. His abstract paintings, on the other hand, do not achieve the same level of originality and visual impact as his more dynamic and engaging mobiles.

In contrast, critic Geraldo Ferraz, in his reviews of Calder's exhibition at MASP, highlighted the uniqueness of the artist's abstract work and its significance for the city, while also praising Bardi's leadership at the museum. Referring to Calder's earlier success in Paris, where he had exhibited at the Galerie Louis Carré, Ferraz viewed the São Paulo show as a landmark—one

214. "No museu de Arte Moderna: 'Há grandes quadros aqui: é sem dúvida um magnífico esforço, um ótimo início'" [At the Museum of Modern Art: 'There are great paintings here: It is undoubtedly a magnificent effort, an excellent beginning'] *Diário de São Paulo*, Oct. 8, 1948.

215. Osório Cesar. "Exposição dos 'Mobiles' de Alexandre Calder" [Exhibition of Alexander Calder's Mobiles]. *Folha da Noite*, Oct. 11, 1948.

that signaled a break from the past and an opening to a *devenir* (“becoming”) rooted in imagination, pure geometry, and the free sensitivity that defines Calder’s work.²¹⁶ Unlike critics who linked Calder’s work to the American context, Ferraz described it as “bewitched and bewitching,” underscoring the fusion of rational and irrational elements, geometry and sensitivity, and nature and the cosmos within his creations.²¹⁷

In summary, the reception of Calder’s 1948 exhibition in Brazil can be described as complex, shaped by the Brazilian art scene’s ongoing process of validating and embracing abstract art. The artist’s work surprised audiences with its ability to merge abstract forms and movement. Most reviews emphasized the dynamism of his pieces, associating them with aspects of modern life and the creative freedom of American culture. Critics also noted that his use of industrial materials, combined with the abstraction and motion of his mobiles, resonated with these emerging ideas. Thus, the 1948 exhibitions not only introduced Calder to the Brazilian public; they also helped solidify a modern American artistic identity within the country’s cultural imagination.

The association of Calder’s work with American “modernity,” combined with its positive reception in Brazil, likely influenced MoMA’s decision to feature him at the 2nd São Paulo Biennial (1953) with a retrospective of 44 works. This recognition was further reinforced in 1959 when the U.S. Department of State supported Calder’s trip to Brazil, helping to cement his image as an “ambassador of American art.” The artist himself acknowledged this dynamic, stating, “For many years, it was thought that there were no artists in the United States simply because American art was not publicized worldwide.”²¹⁸ His visit culminated in another solo exhibition at MAM Rio, further strengthening his presence in the Brazilian art scene and affirming a reception that increasingly emphasized the distinctly American qualities of his work.

216. Geraldo Ferraz. “Os ‘Mobiles’ de Alexandre Calder em exposição em São Paulo” [The ‘Mobiles’ by Alexander Calder on display in São Paulo]. *Diário da Noite*, Oct. 5, 1948. There was also a screening of a film about Calder, which was produced by MoMA. See Geraldo Ferraz. *Diário de S. Paulo*, Oct. 10, 1948.

217. Geraldo Ferraz. “Calder e seus móveis hoje à tarde em S. Paulo” [Calder and His Mobiles This Afternoon in São Paulo]. *Diário da Noite*, Oct. 6, 1948.

218. “A arte norte-americana por muito tempo foi pouco conhecida, porque não era divulgada” [For a Long Time, American Art was Little Known Because it was not Publicized]. *A Tarde* (Salvador), Sept. 15, 1959. Alexander Calder’s statement was published in several newspapers at the time, most likely due to a press release distributed by USIS.

Finally, the analyses presented here examined Alexander Calder's 1948 exhibitions at MAM Rio and MASP, shedding light on the complex reception of modern American art in Brazil. This process was shaped by personal relationships, private initiatives, and institutional support. While MAM Rio—still in its formative stages—and IBEU RJ played a limited role in the exhibition's organization, Mindlin played a crucial role in facilitating Calder's visit and promoting his work among Brazil's intellectual elite. Critics highlighted the distinctiveness of Calder's style, linking it to American modernity—characterized by mobility, dynamism, and the use of industrial materials—while also recognizing his ability to transcend stylistic boundaries.

Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: U.S.A.

The exhibition *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: U.S.A.* was organized by Porter McCray and Waldo Rasmussen, both key figures in The Museum of Modern Art's International Program. It was held under the auspices of the Museum's International Council in New York, with additional support from the Cultural Division of the U.S. Embassy in Brazil. The project aimed to tour multiple cities across Latin America, ultimately reaching twelve locations between January 1962 and May 1963: Caracas, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Santiago, Lima, Guayaquil, Quito, Bogotá, Panama City, and Mexico City.²¹⁹ Most of the works were on loan from New York galleries, as well as from the artists' own collections and private collectors. The only piece belonging to a museum was a pencil and charcoal drawing by Arshile Gorky, *Study for the Plough and the Song* (1944), loaned by the Allen

219. The complete itinerary through Latin America included: Caracas from January 14 to February 24, 1962; Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio) from March 29 to April 22, 1962 (Brazil, in collaboration with the Embassy); São Paulo (MAM SP) from May 10 to May 20, 1962; Buenos Aires (Museo de Arte Moderno) from July 2 to July 22, 1962 (USIS); Montevideo (Salón de la Municipalidad) from August 3 to August 19, 1962 (Embassy); Santiago (Reifschneider Gallery) from September 24 to October 6, 1962; Lima (Instituto de Arte Contemporáneo) from October 23 to November 3, 1962; Guayaquil (Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana) from November 10 to November 19, 1962 (USIS); Quito (Museo de Arte Colonial) from November 23 to November 30, 1962 (USIS); Bogotá on February 27, 1963 (USIS?); Panama City from March 11 to March 26, 1963; and Mexico City (Museo Nacional de Arte Moderno/Palacio de Bellas Artes) from May 8 to May 28, 1963. MoMA had hoped that *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA* would also be exhibited in Salvador, Belo Horizonte, Recife, and Brasília, in addition to São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, but this did not happen. Letter from Annette Allwardt to Allen E. James, Sept. 9, 1969. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A. 1912.

Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College in Ohio.²²⁰ In other words, this was not a traveling exhibition composed of works from MoMA's collection.

To bring the project to fruition, Rasmussen personally reached out to museums through correspondence, presenting the exhibition as a showcase of diverse interpretations of abstract art produced after World War II. The selection encompassed geometric abstraction, Neo-Dadaism, and Abstract Expressionism, among other movements, featuring works by "leading" artists. He justified the selection by emphasizing the chosen mediums: "We feel that the drawing and watercolor media, with their spontaneity and informality or their intimate relation to larger works in progress, are especially successful in introducing the work of this group of artists."²²¹

Undoubtedly, *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: U.S.A.* was the first major initiative to circulate American abstract art in Latin America, even though some works retained traces of figurative elements.²²² Given the breadth of the debate on the promotion of abstractionism after World War II, a comprehensive analysis falls beyond the scope of this article. Instead, the discussions presented here focus on how MoMA, through this exhibition,

220. *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA* featured the following artists: James Brooks; Charles Cajori; Nicolas Carone; Edward Corbett; Burgoyne Diller; Helen Frankenthaler; Sonia Gechtoff; Fritz Glarner; Arshile Gorky; Stephen Greene; Philip Guston; Hans Hofmann; Jasper Johns; John Kacere; Franz Kline; Willem de Kooning; Nicholas Marsciano; Robert Motherwell; Jackson Pollock; Robert Rauschenberg; William Ronald; Ludwig Sander; Miriam Schapiro; Mark Tobey; Jack Tworkov; Esteban Vicente; Jean Xcéron; and Adja Yunkers.

221. Letter from Waldo Rasmussem to Rafael Squirru. MoMA, Jan. 24, 1962. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A. 999. Original Text: "I am writing to inform you of the availability of the exhibition ABSTRACT DRAWINGS AND WATERCOLORS: USA, organized by The Museum of Modern Art under the auspices of the International Council of The Museum. The many variations in postwar abstract art in this country—including geometric abstraction, neo-dadaism, abstract-expressionism and other important trends—are significantly represented by the work of some of our leading artists. *We feel that the drawing and watercolor media, with their spontaneity and informality or their intimate relation to larger works in progress, are especially successful in introducing the work of this group of artists.* The exhibition, selected by the well-known art critic Miss Dore Ashton, in consultation with Mr. William Seitz, Associate Curator of Painting and Sculpture Exhibitions at our Museum, opened at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Caracas on January 14, 1962. We plan to invite approximately 10 museums in leading Latin American cities to collaborate with us in showing the exhibition." As the letters sent to museums often contained the same presentation of the traveling exhibitions and the conditions for hosting them, it is highly likely that Brazilian museums received similar correspondence. The letters in MoMA's archives, offering these exhibitions, have identical content.

222. The exhibitions proposed by the International Program were funded by the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art. During the 1960s, efforts were made to include Latin Americans on this council. For many of the traveling exhibitions, it was possible for local sponsors and supporters to contribute to the project.

promoted a wide range of artistic approaches, extending beyond the boundaries of any single form of abstraction.²²³

In an interview for the MoMA Archives Oral History project, Waldo Rasmussen, director of MoMA's Department of Circulating Exhibitions, offers insights into the institution's increasing interest in bringing exhibitions to Latin America.²²⁴ He discusses the Program of Exhibition Exchange with Latin America, which, as previously mentioned, significantly expanded the reach of circulating exhibitions across the continent in the 1960s. According to Rasmussen, given the strong anti-American sentiment in the region, it was not advisable to present exhibitions with overtly nationalist or explicitly American themes.²²⁵ During this period—defined by the cultural Cold War in Latin America, particularly after the Cuban Revolution of 1959—it is highly likely that MoMA's International Program remained attuned to these geopolitical sensitivities in U.S. foreign policy.

Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA followed the capillary exhibition model, characterized by a compact and accessible format that ensured fluidity and connection between the venues where it was displayed, as logistics and assembly were simplified. These exhibitions aimed to achieve broad circulation across various artistic scenes and to showcase American production to a diverse range of audiences. With less burdensome budgets compared to exhibitions dedicated to painting and sculpture, most capillary exhibitions featured smaller-scale works—typically prints, drawings, photographs, or even reproductions of artworks. The small dimensions of the pieces facilitated adaptation to exhibition spaces, which were not always suitable for art displays and often required adjustments. The narratives of these exhibitions adapted to the varied display configurations of each space.

223. Among the authors who develop this argument are Caute (2008) and Sandler (2008).

224. "MoMA Achives Oral History: W. Rasmussen"; https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_rasmussen.pdf. pp. 28-42. Accessed on Mar. 31, 2024. The interview with Waldo Rasmussen was conducted by Sharon Zane in New York on Nov. 1, 1994. Waldo Rasmussen was appointed Executive Director of the Department of Circulating Exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in 1962, a position he held until 1969, when he took over as director of the International Program. He retired in 1993 and subsequently became Director Emeritus of the program.

225. "MoMA Archives Oral History: W. Rasmussen"; https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/learn/archives/transcript_rasmussen.pdf. pp. 28-42. Accessed March 31, 2024. The interview with Waldo Rasmussen was conducted by Sharon Zane in New York on Nov. 1, 1994. Waldo Rasmussen was appointed Executive Director of the Department of Circulating Exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in 1962, a position he held until 1969, when he assumed the direction of the International Program. He retired in 1993 and subsequently became Director Emeritus of the program.

In summary, this paradigm of traveling exhibitions contrasted with exhibitions organized as one-time events destined for specific or dedicated venues, such as art museums, biennials, or international fairs.

The vast majority of traveling exhibitions included catalogs featuring curatorial texts, theoretical perspectives to understand the works, and biographical information about the artists. MoMA encouraged the production of these catalogs by providing templates at cost and suggesting adaptations, as demonstrated in the case of Caracas, whose template was suggested for Buenos Aires. Furthermore, MoMA offered texts and images for the host institution to produce its own catalog, taking its budgetary resources into account.

Significant efforts were made by the International Program to ensure the success of *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA*. Rasmussen wrote directly to USIS staff in various Latin American countries, as well as to Lois Bingham, who at the time was Head of the Fine Art Section of the Exhibits Division at USIA in Washington, D.C., requesting authorization for the agency to provide assistance to the circulating exhibition.²²⁶ The result was positive, and several Cultural Affairs Officers took charge of the logistics for transporting the works, while the embassies contributed subsidies to move the exhibition between cities.²²⁷ Furthermore, ambassadors attended the opening ceremonies, reinforcing the importance of the exhibition.²²⁸ The exhibition also gained visibility through radio and television programs, such as in Santiago and São Paulo, further

226. Letter from Waldo Rasmussen to Miss Carnetta Kraner. MoMA, Jan. 24, 1962. MoMA Archives, IC/IP IA 999. Original text: "The show is, as you will see in the descriptive sheet and check list which I have enclosed, a rather broad sampling of artists and trends in postwar American art and has been selected to introduce the works of many of our leading artists. I am writing in the hope that you will offer Sr. Squirru your assistance and that you might discuss our proposal with him. The exhibition has been offered at no costs other than those of one-way transportation from the preceding exhibitor and we are hopeful that this will make the Buenos Aires showing financially feasible. Of course, if U.S.I.A. could undertake even a portion of the transportation costs, it might be an added inducement."

227. The United States embassies contributed to the high transportation costs, such as the transfer between São Paulo and Buenos Aires, which subsequently brought the exhibition to Montevideo, Uruguay. Before arriving in Brazil, the exhibition was in Caracas, and the costs were shared between MAM Rio and MAM SP. However, during the process, a significant currency devaluation made it difficult for the Brazilian museums to cover their share of the expenses. They requested that the American embassy cover the exchange rate difference, which was ultimately approved. Notably, USIS staff in Montevideo made a significant effort to ensure the exhibition took place in the city and promoted it remarkably well, resulting in extensive press coverage.

228. Letter from Waldo Rasmussen to Garnetta Kramer. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A. 999. Letter from Richard Palmer to Francis E. Townsend. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A. 1002. Letter from Patricia Picard-Ami to Richard L. Palmer. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A. 1003.

highlighting its significance.²²⁹ *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA* was also accompanied by a significant discursive apparatus parallel to the exhibition, including roundtable discussions and lectures in various cities.

The reception of the exhibition at MAM Rio and MAM SP in 1962 exemplifies the coordination between MoMA's initiative to promote its traveling exhibitions and local institutional networks. Mario Pedrosa, then director of MAM SP, negotiated directly with Aloysio de Paula, director of MAM Rio, and Niomar Moniz Sodré, a member of MAM Rio's board, to share transportation costs and catalog publication expenses, while also engaging the American embassy in the discussions.²³⁰ This was not an isolated case; numerous collaborations were established among Latin American institutions, particularly in managing the logistical requirements of circulating exhibitions. These partnerships illustrate how MoMA not only disseminated American art but also fostered cooperation among Latin American institutions, expanding its transnational reach and solidifying its role as a central reference within this circuit. From these developments, it becomes evident that institutional connections were crucial to the success of MoMA's projects in Latin America, as the achievements of its traveling exhibitions relied on the networks and relationships among key institutional figures.

Beyond the significance of these local and regional circuits, the exhibition *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA* highlights the synergy between the U.S. government, its cultural diplomacy, and MoMA—entities that shared political and ideological goals in promoting American art, particularly within the context of the cultural Cold War. However, MoMA's efforts extended beyond mere political instrumentalization; its agenda also included specific strategies to publicize its collection and circulate select contemporary artistic languages and poetics.

Despite its title's nationalist inclination, *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA* presented a complex and multifaceted view of postwar American abstract art. The exhibition featured 28 artists, each represented by two to four works, challenging a strictly abstract definition by including pieces with figurative elements by artists such as Jasper Johns, Robert

229. Chile: "A local newsreel company filmed interviews with the art critics and principal dignitaries present for broadcast over the University of Chile's television station." [...] "Interviews with leading art critics were conducted by the USIS Radio Section and broadcast throughout Chile. A twenty-minute television program was aired in Santiago, featuring a lecture on abstract art in the United States and the works and artists represented in the collection." Memorandum from Barbara M. White (USIS-Santiago) to USIA Washington. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A. 987.

230. Letter from Mario Pedrosa to Waldo Rasmussen, Jan. 26, 1962. Letter from Mario Pedrosa to Waldo Rasmussen, Feb. 9, 1962. MAC USP Archives, MAMSP 005/034.

Rauschenberg, and Jack Tworkov. It also featured women artists, including Helen Frankenthaler, Sonia Gechtoff, and Miriam Schapiro, as well as immigrant artists such as Hans Hofmann, Willem de Kooning, Adja Yunkers, Fritz Glarner, and William Ronald, along with Esteban Vicente, a Spanish artist active in the U.S. The selection was curated by Dore Ashton with the support of William C. Seitz, then curator of MoMA's Department of Painting.

In the catalog text, Ashton highlights the diversity of styles and approaches of the period. She describes how the collection reflects a broad spectrum of artistic visions rather than "a single dominant language"—a production shaped by post-World War II aesthetic liberation, the immigration of European artists to the U.S., and New York's consolidation as a global artistic center. She argues that terms like "Abstract Expressionism, Purism, Lyrical Abstraction, and Abstract Impressionism" are inadequate "in light of the individual differences among these twenty-eight artists." For Ashton, "the healthy indifference of the artists to the rigid categories of modern art's past has enabled them to assimilate whatever best serves to express their individual temperaments." She underscores the influence of artists such as Pollock (his daring rhythm), Kline (his urban strokes), Gorky (his hidden symbolism), Tobey (his Eastern approach), de Kooning (his reinvention of conventional motifs), and Hofmann (his influence as an art teacher), illustrating how they expanded the boundaries of abstraction and became references for a younger generation—some of whom were represented in the exhibition. However, while emphasizing each artist's "basic vocabulary" and the collection's diversity, Ashton still framed the production within an American context, though without directly addressing the implications of this perspective.²³¹

Certainly, the curatorial selection challenged the notion of a singular American artistic identity, instead revealing the decisive role of immigration and transcultural exchanges in shaping a cosmopolitan and dynamic artistic landscape, as Ashton herself emphasized in her essay. One could argue that the exhibition presented a broad and less essentialist interpretation of American abstraction—one that underscored its hybridity and complexity while still acknowledging its distinct characteristics.

Despite significant institutional efforts to promote the exhibition, its reception in Rio and São Paulo was limited, as reflected in only a few

231. Quotation from the catalog: "Descriptive language has barely been able to keep up with the rapid transformations of twentieth-century art. Not long ago, for example, the word 'abstract' referred only to the work of those artists who rigorously eliminated any relationship with visible forms. Today, especially in the United States, abstract art encompasses a broad category that is open to many variations. The American abstract artist considers all contingencies, visible and invisible, yet insists that the essential elements be abstracted from the chaos of everyday life." See Ashton, 1962.

newspaper reviews. In this context, a notable unsigned article published in *O Estado de S. Paulo*—with a translated version available in MoMA’s archives—stands out. The article analyzes the event and questions the classification of the exhibition as strictly abstract, noting the presence of figurative elements in works by artists such as Motherwell and Rauschenberg. The author suggests that the exhibition is more complex than it initially appears, describing Motherwell’s work as imbued with “vitalizing eroticism” and Rauschenberg’s as incorporating figures through collages and transpositions. The article acknowledges the exhibition’s quality and representativeness, citing artists like Pollock, Tobey, and Kline, while also analyzing the characteristics of works by de Kooning, Xcéron, and Hofmann, whose lightness is compared to a “quasi-Eastern character.” The author regards the exhibition sent to Brazil’s two modern art museums as an artistic and cultural exchange that “serves as an additional link in the communication between our communities and our artists.” In conclusion, the article praises the “amalgamating” capacity of the United States, describing it as “so far removed from the racial prejudices that plague certain aspects of its national characterization, as manifestations of a ridiculous egotism.” Regarding the exhibition itself, the author asserts that “what matters here, what truly mattered, was the quality of these artists’ production.”²³² Certainly, the parallel drawn between the exhibition’s diversity and racial segregation added a significant political dimension to the review, as racial issues have always been a key concern in U.S. diplomacy.²³³

Antonio Bento, in discussing the artistic agenda of the city of Rio de Janeiro, highlights one name in the exhibition: “Jackson Pollock is undeniably the star of the exhibition. He is an artist who has gained great renown recently, developing his own style and rising to the status of a great master of abstraction.”²³⁴ However, Bento neither mentions nor discusses Pollock’s oil painting or the drawing featured in the exhibition, leaving the audience without a clear understanding of the significance of the works on display.²³⁵

232. “Desenhos dos EUA expostos no MAM” [Drawings from the USA Displayed at MAM]. *Estado de S. Paulo*, May 27, 1962.

233. Also, due to its more politicized tone, one headline stands out: “Desenhos e aquarelas ianques no MAM” [Yankee Drawings and Watercolors at MAM]. *Folha de S. Paulo*, May 8, 1962.

234. Antonio Bento. “Americanos e Tchecos no MAM” [Americans and Czechs at MAM]. *Diário Carioca*, Mar. 29, 1962.

235. The MAM Rio catalog notes that Jackson Pollock exhibited two works in *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA: Untitled n. 19*, created in 1948, oil on paper, 77.9 x 57.1 cm, from the collection of Mrs. Fred Hauck, New York; and *Untitled Drawing*, created in 1951, ink, 44.2 x 56.4 cm, from the Morton Feldman Collection, New York. This information aligns with the list titled “Check list: Abstract drawings and watercolors: USA,” p. 8, MoMA Archives, IC/IP, I.A.985.

Perhaps the emphasis on Pollock stems from his widespread recognition in international artistic contexts rather than from what the audience actually encountered in the exhibition.

The scarcity of reviews about the exhibition in Rio and São Paulo makes the “Publicity Reports”—forms sent to MoMA by the hosting institutions—an important source of information. These reports, intended to assess the impact of traveling exhibitions, requested data on attendance and on the audience profile both at the opening and throughout the exhibition. They were often accompanied by press materials, many of which were translated into English, especially when they were favorable to the event. When presented to the International Council, this information provided a comprehensive overview of the exhibition’s circulation and impact—essential data for evaluating the success of the circulating exhibitions and guiding decisions about the project’s continuity.²³⁶



Fig. 20. Opening of the exhibition *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA* at MAM Rio, Mar. 29, 1962. Present figures: Mrs. Monika Mirabel (Cultural Attaché of Poland), Mrs. Adnan Di Podiputro (Embassy of Indonesia), Miss Maria da Glória Capanema, and the wife of Ambassador Lincoln Gordon. *MAM Rio Archives*. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

236. Regarding the form, other items referred to the catalog, sponsors, opening ceremony, number of visitors, special visitor groups, events, and available materials about the exhibition (usually press materials). In the case of MAM Rio, the form contained limited data. It noted that there was a 29-page catalog; that the Embassy had been a sponsor; that the ambassador’s wife had attended the opening; that two television channels had covered the exhibition; that the audience was approximately 1,000; and a comment stating that the exhibition had been a great success. It also mentioned that photographs of the opening ceremony and the installations were available. See Manuscript: Title: “Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA.” MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A.986.



Fig. 21. Opening of the exhibition *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors USA*, March 29, 1962. Present figures: Mr. Leopold Arnaud, Miss Daphne Lynch (U.S. Embassy), and the wife of Ambassador Lincoln Gordon. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

The report sent by MAM SP [in English], regarding the exhibition held between May 10 and 30, 1962, emphasized the quality of the works on display but justified the low attendance. The text stated that:

From the perspective of the quality, the exhibition was a real success. Most of the artists, critics, and good amateurs who visited it were enthusiastic about it. Press comments were in general very favorable. Concerning the general public, attendance was quite modest. Many reasons can be pointed out for the little attendance. The most important one is related to our present state of things. We are passing through a period of complete reorganization. Our activities are not yet in full development due to our administrative reorganization, including the relocation of offices and the creation of new rooms for our permanent collection, etc.²³⁷

237. Publicity Report. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A.987. On the reception in Rio de Janeiro: "The exhibition was a remarkable success. There came people off all classes (intellectuals, artists, amateurs, *collectionneurs* (sic) and plain people). Everybody agreed on the strength of Modern Art in the USA." In: Publicity Report (exhibition *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA*), Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A.987. In São Paulo, on May 16 at 8:30 p.m., the exhibition was shown on the TV Cultura program, with commentary by the museum's director, Mario Pedrosa. The report also states that two groups of university students visited the exhibition and that 2,000 invitations were distributed for the opening. Publicity Report (exhibition *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA*), Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A.987.

Similarly, Mario Pedrosa, then director of MAM SP, also did not provide details about the exhibition when informing Rasmussen that the show had been well received by both the public and the press. In a formal tone, he described the exhibition as excellent, very well curated, and representative of the vitality of contemporary American art. He expressed hope that the International Council's circulating exhibitions project would continue to develop fully and help strengthen inter-American artistic relations.²³⁸ Certainly, Pedrosa's vague assessment reflects the dismantling state of MAM SP.

The limited impact of the exhibition in São Paulo can be attributed to the institutional crisis at MAM SP, stemming from the donation of the Matarazzo collection to USP, which led to the museum's re-establishment and the reconstruction of its holdings. However, the similarly modest reception in Rio de Janeiro suggests that the primary factor was the lack of novelty the exhibition offered to the Brazilian audience. The São Paulo Biennials had already presented abstract works and artists featured in *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA*. Furthermore, the exhibition's broad scope—with a large number of artists—differed from the model typically well received by the Brazilian public. For instance, the U.S. exhibition at the First São Paulo Biennial in 1951 was criticized for the diversity of its artists and the breadth of artistic poetics.²³⁹ Suggestions for the United States to send more cohesive, individual exhibitions were made, including by Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho. Not coincidentally, at the 2nd Biennial, MoMA sent Calder's solo exhibition.

Another significant detail concerns the organization of the 6th São Paulo Biennial, when MoMA was still responsible for curating the U.S. exhibition. Efforts were made to ensure a balanced representation of American art, avoiding a predominance of abstract works—a recurring theme in communications between USIS Brazil and USIA in Washington, D.C. A clear example of this concern was the directive that U.S. participation in the biennial should reflect a broad spectrum of contemporary styles and include

238. "It was good in itself, very well selected and really representative of the vitality of American Art in our days. I hope that the project for traveling exhibitions of the International Council of your Museum will be carried on in all its possibilities for the good of American artists and for the good of our interamerican artistic relations." *In*: Letter from Mario Pedrosa to Waldo Rasmussen, May 29, 1962. MAC USP Archive, MAMSP 005/034.

239. Lourival Gomes Machado. "World Art Goes to São Paulo," pp. 21-23. Unnamed newspaper clipping, filed under *Bienal de São Paulo* (1st: 1951): miscellaneous uncatalogued material. Material located in the MoMA Library. ("The United States sent about 120 items. The committee appointed by the Museum of Modern Art in New York to choose them showed extreme eclecticism. If this may have detracted from the forcefulness of the grouping, at any rate it gave a good idea of the tremendous variety of contemporary U.S. art."). MoMA Archives, IC/IP, I.A.324.

artists working in representational modes, rather than being dominated by abstraction. For USIS agents, American abstract art no longer seemed to resonate with Brazilian audiences. This assessment may also be linked to the reception of the *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA* exhibition.²⁴⁰

Further on the reception of the exhibition, a brief text by José Geraldo Vieira titled “Mostras norte-americanas” [American Exhibitions] draws a parallel with the *Pennell Collection* exhibition, which featured 40 prints organized by the Library of Congress in Washington and displayed at MASP. Vieira emphasized the language of both exhibitions, which were presented almost simultaneously, showcasing “variations of their techniques.” The *Pennell Collection* included “woodcuts, serigraphs, etchings, aquatints, burins, and lithographs,” while MAM SP presented drawings and watercolors, “predominantly abstract,” although there were figurative works in the *Pennell Collection* by artists such as Irving Amen, Nathan Oliveira, and Mauricio Lasansky. Vieira concluded his analysis by stating that both exhibitions featured a wide range of variants: linear, formal, informal, tachist, textural, among others.²⁴¹

Although the exhibition’s reception in Brazil was modest, the response in other Latin American cities was markedly different. Comparing cities presents methodological challenges, as receptiveness to international art exhibitions can vary significantly—a dynamic exemplified by *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA*. Cities such as São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires, with their well-established art scenes and greater exposure to international art, regularly received traveling exhibitions, unlike many other locations. Meanwhile, Mexico City maintained a more critical and tense relationship with the New York art scene. With these nuances in mind—and acknowledging that research on the circulation of *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA* is still in its initial stages—highlighting a few examples can provide only a general sense of the exhibition’s impact in Latin America. However, despite the variations in reception, the exhibition never went unnoticed. Dore Ashton’s text, for instance, was widely cited in reviews and even published in full in multiple locations, suggesting broad distribution of the catalog or press materials to the media. One constant remained: regardless of location, U.S. cultural diplomacy and MoMA dedicated the same level of effort to ensuring the exhibition’s visibility.²⁴²

240. For more information on the case, see Jaremtchuk (2023b).

241. José Geraldo Vieira. “Mostras norte-americanas” [American Exhibitions]. *Folha de S. Paulo*, May 11, 1962.

242. Publicity Report. MoMA Archive, IC/IP I.A.987.

In Montevideo, the exhibition was presented as the first synthesis of action painting and abstract expressionism ever shown in the city. Although it primarily featured watercolors and drawings—media that tend to have less impact on the general public than painting—it was recognized as a valuable starting point for cultural exchange with the United States. The article “El aporte artístico del arte americano,” signed by M.L.T., examined specific aspects of several artists’ works.²⁴³

The reception of the exhibition in Santiago, Chile, was among the most enthusiastic and laudatory. A considerable number of reviews were published, most of them highly favorable toward American abstract art. The analyses focused on abstraction, emphasizing its innovative qualities and originality in contrast to European abstract art. Notably, the invitation referred to the exhibition as “Acuarelas y dibujos abstractos del Museo del Arte Moderno de New York,” omitting any mention of the United States.²⁴⁴ As previously mentioned, the exhibition was also featured on television²⁴⁵ and radio programs, along with other activities such as lectures and a roundtable discussion on American abstract art.²⁴⁶ Barbara M. White, a USIS employee in Santiago, remarked, “The success with this exhibit points up once again the forceful impact that a top-quality cultural event can make on this community,

243. M.L.T. “El aporte artístico del arte americano” [The artistic contribution of American art]. *El País*, Montevideo, Aug. 6, 1962.

244. “Acuarelas y dibujos abstractos del Museo del Arte Moderno de New York” [Abstract Watercolors and Drawings of The Museum of Modern Art of New York]. University of Chile. Institute of Extension for the Visual Arts.

245. “El señor Francisco Otta dará una charla sobre ‘Dibujos y Acuarelas Abstractas en los Estados Unidos’ el próximo martes 9, de 21 a 21:20, por el Canal 13 de TV de la Universidad Católica. La charla del señor Otta dice relación con la exhibición titulada ‘Dibujos y Acuarelas Abstractos: USA’, que se presenta en la Sala Reifschneider, en Agustinas 1151, bajo los auspicios del Instituto de Extensión de Artes Plásticas de la Universidad de Chile y la Asociación Chilena de Pintores y Escultores, y que fué preparada por el Museo de Arte Moderno de Nueva York.” [Mr. Francisco Otta will give a talk on ‘Abstract Drawings and Watercolors in the United States’ next Tuesday, the 9th, from 9:00 to 9:20 p.m., on Channel 13 of the Catholic University TV. Mr. Otta’s talk relates to the exhibition titled ‘Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA,’ which is being held at the Reifschneider Hall, at Agustinas 1151, under the auspices of the Institute of Extension for the Visual Arts of the University of Chile and the Chilean Association of Painters and Sculptors, and which was organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York]. Oct. 5, 1962. Manuscript: “Charla sobre arte abstracto en los estados unidos habrá en Canal 13 de TV” [Talk on Abstract Art in the United States will Air on Channel 13 of TV]. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A.987.

246. Manuscript: Roundtable on U.S. Abstract Art to be held on Tuesday in the Reifschneider Room. *MoMA Archive IC/IP I.A.987*. This manuscript records the presence of artists Eduardo Martínez Bonati, Matías Vial, Eduardo Vilches, Alberto Pérez, Emilio Hermansen, Carlos Ortúzar, and Francisco Otta; art critics Ricardo Bindis and Vitor Carvacho; and journalist Daniel del Solar.

far outweighing the results of any number of mediocre activities.”²⁴⁷ Alicia Santaella, in turn, summarized the exhibition’s reception:

Discussed with applause or simply with expressions of perplexity, it is far from having generated an indifferent reaction. Moreover, it reveals that art remains, as it has throughout the centuries, an artistic expression for everyone.²⁴⁸

In some articles, the philanthropic nature of the project subtly transpired: “The International Council of the Museum of Modern Art is a nonprofit organization composed of patrons of the arts and civic leaders, which sponsors exhibitions abroad. This organization has supported several presentations of American art in South America, including exhibitions of prints, architecture, and photography.”²⁴⁹ In other words, the promotion of these traveling exhibitions was presented as free from political or ideological interests.

Regarding Mexico City, perhaps the report by James H. Webb Jr., Cultural Attaché of the U.S. Embassy, provides the most succinct overview of the artistic community’s rejection of *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA*. He wrote:

That, assuming everything is carried out as planned, seems to boil my immediate possible contribution down to your request for any “personal reaction.” Simple as that may seem, I am afraid I am at a loss. You will receive and analyze the press comments, and they should represent a fair cross section of Mexican critical opinion. I have seen only one, which is best described as noncommittal. I have, on the other hand, inquired among individuals to whom I look for meaningful comments on art topics, with various replies. I am afraid the negative outweighed the positive, although it was by no means completely one-sided. One of Mexico’s outstanding painters thought the pictures were “bad examples by good artists.” Another painter, less well known but in my opinion entirely sincere, thought the collection served a valuable purpose in interpreting American originality in the fine arts. So, there you are: it’s anybody’s game.²⁵⁰

247. Memorandum from Barbara M. White (USIS-Santiago) to USIA Washington. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A. 987.

248. Alicia Santaella. “La otra cara de la exposición” [The other side of the exhibition]. *La Nación*, Oct. 7, 1962. Santiago, Chile.

249. “Arte Abstracto de Estados Unidos” [US Abstract Art]. *El Diario Ilustrado*, Santiago, Sept. 22, 1962. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A.987.

250. Letter from James H Webb Jr. (Cultural Attaché, American Embassy, Mexico) to Richard L. Palmer. MoMA Archives, IC/IP I.A. 1005.

Despite the uncertainties in the embassy official's report, the reception of the exhibition appears to have been largely negative. Newspaper critiques focused primarily on abstractionism itself, criticizing the selection of works as unrepresentative, the absence of key artists, the inadequacy of the title, and the quality of specific pieces. One review's comparison with the *Escuela Mexicana* highlighted a revealing contrast in artistic qualities.

The comparative analysis of the reception of circulating exhibitions, though constrained by methodological limitations, reveals a striking complexity and heterogeneity, with notable variations across national contexts. The contrast between the enthusiastic reception in Chile and the harsh criticism in Mexico underscores the need for further in-depth investigations, particularly regarding *Abstract Drawings and Watercolors: USA*, MoMA's first circulating exhibition project aimed at promoting abstract art in Latin America. Such studies should consider the structure of the artistic field in the postwar period, the geopolitical context of the Cold War, and its broader implications for North-South relations in the arts.

Between the São Paulo Biennial and MAM Rio: The *Ben Nicholson and 10 British Sculptors* Exhibition and the Role of the British Council in Brazil (1950s-60s)

MARIA DE FÁTIMA MORETHY COUTO

MAM Rio in Its Own Home

The Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro officially inaugurated its permanent home in the Aterro do Flamengo on January 27, 1958, with a major exhibition featuring paintings and drawings by Ben Nicholson, alongside works by ten young British sculptors—Robert Adams, Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick, F.E. McWilliam, Bernard Meadows, Eduardo Paolozzi, Leslie Thornton, William Turnbull, and Austin Wright—organized by the British Council. The exhibition restaged the British delegation’s presentation at the 4th São Paulo Biennial (September–December 1957), curated by Philip Hendy, director of the National Gallery in London. On that occasion, Ben Nicholson was awarded Best Foreign Painter, while Austin Wright received an Acquisition Award for his sculpture *Argument*, now part of the MAC USP collection.

The exhibition of British artists was thus linked to a pivotal moment in the museum’s history—its transition to the building designed by Affonso Eduardo Reidy. However, this was only a partial inauguration of the new headquarters, as only the Bloco Escola [School Block] had been completed. This space served a dual purpose, accommodating both educational activities and exhibitions until 1967, when the Exhibition Block was finally completed. Despite this, the inauguration carried a tone of celebration and triumph, as “a gigantic organism was beginning to move on its own, even before reaching the full maturity of its development,” as described in the January 1958 edition of the *Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*.²⁵¹ It celebrated the “first

251. “O museu em casa própria” [The Museum in its Own Home]. *Boletim do Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro*, n. 16, Jan. 1958, n. p.

crowning achievement of years of struggles, advances and setbacks, hopes and disappointments. The first major, secure, and deliberate step toward the significant milestone already visible in the near future: the full operation of the museum as a center for contemporary culture, the first major step toward institutionalizing Brazilian artistic culture on solid foundations.”²⁵²

The official inauguration ceremony received extensive coverage in the Rio de Janeiro press, especially as it was attended by several political authorities, including the President of Brazil, Juscelino Kubitschek; the Minister of Education, Clovis Salgado; and the Mayor of Rio de Janeiro, Negrão de Lima. The event also welcomed Brazilian ambassadors and foreign dignitaries, such as the British Ambassador, Sir Geoffrey Harrison, and the president of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, William Burden [Fig. 22]. Ahead of the opening, an informal gathering was held at the museum on January 24, bringing together prominent figures from Brazil’s literary and artistic circles. Among those present were Candido Portinari, Ivan Serpa, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Oscar Niemeyer, Fayga Ostrower, Ione Saldanha, Quirino Campofiorito, Bruno Giorgi, and architect Affonso Eduardo Reidy, who provided insights into the design choices for both the School Block and the museum as a whole.



Fig. 22. President Juscelino Kubitschek, Mrs. Niomar Moniz Sodré, Mr. William Burden, Ambassador Sir Geoffrey Harrison, Minister Clovis Salgado, Carmen Portinho, and Mayor Negrão de Lima at the inauguration ceremony of MAM Rio. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

252. *Idem, ibidem.*

The January 27th inauguration drew an overwhelming public turnout. Period photographs capture a large crowd filling the ground floor and the ramp leading to the upper level, where the exhibition of British artists was on display [Fig. 23 and 24]. Simultaneously, part of the museum's collection was exhibited on the ground floor of the new building.



Fig. 23. Visitors at the inauguration ceremony of MAM Rio at Aterro do Flamengo. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.



Fig. 24. Inauguration ceremony of MAM Rio at Aterro do Flamengo. Carmen Portinho, President Juscelino Kubitschek, Ambassador Maurício Nabuco, and Niomar Moniz Sodré. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

At the ceremony, speeches were delivered in the following order: Ambassador Maurício Nabuco, president of MAM Rio; Niomar Moniz Sodr , the museum’s executive director; Sir Geoffrey Harrison, the British Ambassador; and Juscelino Kubitschek, President of Brazil. In her speech, Niomar Moniz Sodr  recalled key moments in the effort to construct the museum’s permanent home: the donation of land at the Aterro do Flamengo by then-mayor Jo o Carlos Vital; the financial assistance provided by the National Congress (as Rio de Janeiro was still the federal capital at the time); and the ambitious fundraising campaign, which Moniz Sodr  herself led both in Brazil and abroad. She mobilized business leaders, bank executives, and industrialists, ultimately securing the creation of the Friends of MAM Rio Committee in the United States under the leadership of William Burden (president of MoMA). She also acknowledged the invaluable support received from private donors and the press. Moniz Sodr  concluded by affirming the museum’s future ambitions: “Now, more than ever, in our own home, we will intensify our programming—not only through national and international exhibitions, but also by expanding our course offerings, increasing the number of students, and developing the film department, eventually becoming a Technical School of Creation, Theater, Music, and Ballet.”²⁵³

Echoing Moniz Sodr ’s remarks and reinforcing the idea that modern art museums should be defined by their educational initiatives and commitment to a diverse artistic vision, Juscelino Kubitschek devoted his speech to praising the pedagogical role of the new MAM. He also took the opportunity to call attention to Brazil’s ongoing modernization efforts. In his view, it was particularly significant that “this complex began with the building intended for the School of Artistic Creation”:

This museum will not merely be a passive showcase, a collection of fine works selected from the most expressive and original creations of contemporary art. It will also, and essentially, be a school. [...] Thus, an institution devoted to the arts and aesthetic creation becomes part of a development program as a necessary and irreplaceable step. A techno-industrial civilization that does not grow alongside intense artistic activity would be at risk of deforming itself.²⁵⁴

Kubitschek’s intention to align the history of MAM Rio—as well as the creation and expansion of other cultural institutions in Brazil—with his broader developmentalist agenda is evident. This vision would ultimately

253. *Idem, ibidem.*

254. *Idem, ibidem.*

culminate in the construction of Brasília and the relocation of the country's capital to the Central Plateau. At the same time, the new MAM Rio sought to position itself as one of the country's key entry points for international cultural influences while asserting its role as an active and relevant player in the post–World War II geopolitical arts landscape. In contrast, the aspiration to foster mutually beneficial connections with the Americas was echoed in the speech of British Ambassador Sir Geoffrey Harrison, who declared that Brazil's Federal Capital would “finally have the permanent center for modern art that it deserved,” underscoring the significance of his country's specific contribution:

That Great Britain is so closely associated with the inauguration of this museum by presenting an exhibition of works by Ben Nicholson and ten of our youngest sculptors is, for me, a source of great satisfaction. It is truly a great honor and privilege that this British contribution to modern art, recently exhibited at the 4th São Paulo Biennial, now holds a special place in the official opening of the Museum. In previous years, the Biennial has allowed us to bring to Brazil works by many of our contemporary artists, such as Graham Sutherland, Henry Moore, and others. This year, for the first time, our national exhibition has come to Rio, and we hope that, in the future, we will find further opportunities to strengthen our existing cultural ties by exhibiting other shows in this magnificent building.²⁵⁵

The practice of exhibiting works from the São Paulo Biennial through agreements with foreign delegations participating in the event was becoming an increasingly common part of MAM Rio's cultural agenda. With minimal costs—since the artworks were already in the country—this approach reinforced the museum's internationalization efforts and solidified its role as an institution dedicated to promoting contemporary art. In 1952, at its second location in the Ministry of Education and Health building, the museum showcased a selection of award-winning pieces from the First São Paulo Biennial alongside works from its own collection [Fig. 25]. Two years later, in 1954, a major exhibition on Cubism was held, featuring works from the French delegation at the 2nd São Paulo Biennial. The show included 57 paintings, eight sculptures, and nine drawings by prominent figures of the French movement, such as Georges Braque, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger, Juan Gris, Marie Laurencin, Fernand Léger, Pablo Picasso, and Raymond Duchamp-Villon.

255. *Idem, ibidem.*



Fig. 25. View of the exhibition *MAM Collection and 1st São Paulo Biennial*, Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1952. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

As Sir Geoffrey Harrison noted, this was the first time a traveling exhibition representative of the British national representation at the São Paulo Biennial had reached MAM Rio. However, in September 1955, MAM Rio had already received the exhibition *Lithographs by English Artists* directly from MAM SP. This exhibition featured works on paper that had been purchased by the São Paulo museum following their presentation at the 1st São Paulo Biennial, including prints by Prunella Clough and Robert Adams, both of whom had received Acquisition Awards at the event. As shown in Table 3, MAM Rio hosted a considerable number of exhibitions featuring British artists within the period covered in this study (1948-1978), with many of these exhibitions displaying, either in full or in part, works from Great Britain's delegation at the recently concluded São Paulo Biennial. As Harrison had anticipated, artistic ties between Brazil and Great Britain grew stronger from the 1950s onward, largely due to the British Council's efforts in the visual arts.

Table 3. Exhibitions of British Artists at MAM Rio (1948–1978)

MAM Rio Exhibition	Year
Lithographs by English Artists	1955
Ben Nicholson and Ten British Sculptors	1958
William Scott, Lynn Chadwick, Merlyn Evans	1962
Great Britain – Posters	1962
Alan Davie – Paintings (7 th São Paulo Biennial)	1964
Eduardo Paolozzi Davie – Sculptures and Graphic Arts (7 th São Paulo Biennial)	1964
Victor Pasmore and Patrick Heron	1966
British Representation at the 9 th São Paulo Biennial	1968
Kenneth Armitage, 1951-1963	1973
Richard Smith – Páginas Amarelas [Yellow Pages]	1975
Contemporary British Drawings	1976
Color in British Painting	1977

The British Council in Brazil and the São Paulo Biennial (1950s to 1960s)

The British Council was established in 1934 with the goal of fostering closer cultural ties with other countries, operating in a complex space between cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy. Its mission was to shape international public opinion while establishing—or strengthening—political and commercial connections. As Alice Byrne points out,

The British Council’s initial mission was to promote the cultural expansion of the United Kingdom, aiming to enhance British prestige on the international stage and, in turn, secure support for its foreign policy; but it was also entrusted with a seemingly idealistic mission: fostering reciprocal cultural relations that would encourage more harmonious internal relations. Unfortunately, the rapid deterioration of the international climate left little room for truly reciprocal projects.²⁵⁶

Among its key missions were the promotion of British literary works and periodicals, the expansion of English language instruction, the deployment of lecturers and scholars abroad across various fields, as well as the organization of exhibitions and the hosting of international students in the United Kingdom. The organization remains active today, operating independently from the government while still relying on public funding. However, the geopolitical

256. Byrne, 2018, p. 5. Translated by the author from French into Portuguese; our translation into English.

shifts following World War II blurred the line between its idealistic goals—fostering mutual understanding among nations—and its more strategic objectives: projecting British influence internationally.

As Margaret Garlake recounts in an article on Great Britain and the São Paulo Biennial, the British Council “had been actively operating in Latin America since 1935.” In 1941, it established an office in Rio de Janeiro “as part of the campaign against Nazi-Fascist propaganda,” but the office was closed at the end of the decade due to a lack of financial resources.²⁵⁷ This did not prevent the organization from continuing to program cultural activities in the region, led, from the postwar period onward, by Lilian Somerville. Director of the Fine Arts Department at the British Council from 1948 to 1970, Somerville was one of the few women to serve as a commissioner (chief or assistant) and juror at major international art exhibitions, including the São Paulo Biennial. She was part of the award jury for the 1963 and 1965 editions of the event.

One of the primary responsibilities of the Fine Arts Department at the British Council was selecting artists to represent the country in major seasonal international art exhibitions—including the Venice, São Paulo, Paris, and Tokyo biennials, as well as *documenta* in Kassel. The department also oversaw the organization of traveling exhibitions on British art and culture worldwide. This work was carried out by an advisory committee led for many years by Philip Hendy, director of the National Gallery of Art, and overseen by Somerville. It’s worth noting that many of the international traveling exhibitions originated from the national British delegations sent for the art biennials. Behind the scenes, however, ongoing disputes over funding emerged between the British Council’s Directorate and the Foreign Office, alongside internal disagreements regarding the promotion of *avant-garde* artists.²⁵⁸

Somerville’s role in shaping a specific canon of modern British art and promoting it internationally still requires further study. Although her name frequently appears in articles and academic studies on the subject, the only publication I found entirely dedicated to her is a text in the catalog of an exhibition held at the Osborne Samuel gallery in London in 2022, which

257. Garlake, 1991, p. 10.

258. Jachec, 2006. One of the tensest moments of this dispute occurred during a meeting of the advisory committee held in January 1956, which was attended by the General Director of the British Council, Paul Sinker. During the meeting, Sinker stated that the committee should not stray too far from the general public’s taste and focus solely on promoting *avant-garde* artists. Clive Bell spoke up to challenge him, asserting that this was a committee of experts and, therefore, it should have the final say. Minutes of the meeting, Jan. 31, 1956. Fine Arts Committee. Minutes and Papers. The National Archives, Richmond, BW 78.

showcased works by artists she supported throughout her career. The text explores her network of contacts, her significance within the British art scene, and her ability to propel artist careers both domestically and internationally. It also highlights her vital role in building the art collections of the British Council, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, and the Peter Stuyvesant Foundation. Her importance in this process of mediation and agency led art critic Charles Spencer, in 1966, to describe her as “probably the most influential woman in the British (perhaps international) art establishment.”²⁵⁹

In 1958, in recognition of her services to the British monarchy, Somerville was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE, Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire), and in 1971, upon her retirement from the British Council, she received the Order of St. Michael and St. George (CMG, The Most Distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George), an honor bestowed upon individuals who have made prominent contributions to the United Kingdom abroad and in international affairs.

Somerville focused on advancing the British Council’s interests on the international art scene and, as my research indicates, showed no interest in engaging with the local artistic environment during her visits to Brazil. In an interview with Spencer, she stated, “I’m sure I’m disliked in many circles. But the task of the British Council is not to be “fair”—its role is to enhance the prestige of Britain through the arts.”²⁶⁰

Regarding the attention given by the British Council to the São Paulo Biennial, Margaret Garlake notes:

Before 1951, the promotion of British art in Latin America had been sporadic and uncoordinated. The Biennial offered an unprecedented opportunity to introduce leading artists systematically to their South American colleagues and, not least, to new markets, headed by two recently established contemporary art museums in São Paulo. Since the Council sent virtually no exhibitions to the United States until the 1960s, it was also a rare chance for North American critics to become acquainted with the work of young British artists or rediscover those who had already made their American commercial debuts.²⁶¹

Based on the awards received, Great Britain’s participation in the São Paulo Biennial—especially in comparison with other hegemonic countries such as France and Italy—can be considered successful. Consequently, the

259. *Apud* Legrove, 2022, p. 5.

260. *Idem*, 2022, p. 8.

261. Garlake, 1991, p. 13.

strategies devised by Somerville may be evaluated positively. These strategies were developed in collaboration with other prominent figures in the postwar British art world, including Philip Hendy, John Rothenstein, Nikolaus Pevsner, Alan Bowness, Clive Bell, and Herbert Read. As art critics, curators, museum directors, and art historians, these individuals served on the British Council's advisory committee, assisting Somerville in selecting works to represent Great Britain abroad, writing texts for exhibition catalogs, and frequently serving on award juries at these international exhibitions. At the São Paulo Biennial, the presence of a British representative on the award jury was consistent: Eric Newton (1951), Herbert Read (1953), Philip Hendy (1957), Roland Penrose (1959), Lilian Somerville (1963 and 1965), and Alan Bowness (1967).



Fig. 26. Eric Newton, member of the award jury, in the Great Britain Room at the 1st São Paulo Biennial (1951). In the background are works by Lucian Freud (*Girl with Roses*) and Prunella Clough (*Greenhouse in Winter*). Photograph: Peter Scheier. Collection: Wanda Svevo Archive/São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

It is important to note that until its 8th edition in 1965, the São Paulo Biennial allowed commissioners of foreign delegations to serve on the award jury. Prizes were awarded in various categories—painting, sculpture, printmaking, and drawing—to both national and international artists. Beginning with the 2nd Biennial, a Grand Prize with a higher monetary value was introduced to recognize an artist distinguished by their body of work. In 1967, during Brazil's military dictatorship, the event's regulations were

modified, altering this system. The number of regular prizes increased, and they were unified under the name “São Paulo Biennial Award.” The Grand Prize was replaced by the “Itamaraty Award,” established through an agreement between the Biennial Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty), which began financing the awards and ensured stable funding for the event. That same year also saw the introduction of the “Grand Latin American Prize Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho.” Under this new system, Acquisition Prizes, Honorable Mentions, and some special awards continued to be granted. By the 15th edition in 1979, however, all awards were abolished—a decision that had already been implemented in major international exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale and the Paris Biennale for Young Artists, created in 1959.

Among the individuals mentioned above, Herbert Read was certainly one of the foremost promoters of British art abroad during the second half of the 20th century. As Henry M. Hughes states in his article on the promotion and reception of British sculpture abroad between 1948 and 1960:

he [Read] was involved as a selector and, frequently, author, lecturer, and publicist for at least ten British Council exhibitions, several of them large and most of them touring, between 1947 and 1953 alone, when most of the groundwork was laid for the future development of the British Council’s visual arts work. And for the rest of the 1950s, the hard core of artists selected by the Council to show at numerous international exhibitions—including biennales and major touring exhibitions of British sculpture—was largely restricted to various combinations of the same ten artists whom Read and his fellow selectors had first proposed for the Venice Biennales of 1948, 1950, and 1952.²⁶²

It was Herbert Read who coined the term “geometry of fear” to describe the work of eight young British sculptors who, alongside Graham Sutherland and Edward Wadsworth, represented Great Britain at the 1952 Venice Biennale. Titled *New Aspects of British Sculpture*, this exhibition, held in a separate room, was a remarkable success with both the public and critics, becoming one of the event’s sensations, even though the prize in this category was awarded to the American sculptor Alexander Calder. Read linked these artists’ sculptures—crafted in bronze or welded metal and depicting strange, twisted, and tortured human figures or animals—to the collective anxieties of those traumatic years. The term “geometry of fear” subsequently came to define a British “school” of sculpture credited with revitalizing art

262. Hughes, 2016, n. p.

in the country after World War II. The exhibition also helped establish the international careers of several of these sculptors. It is worth noting that six years later, these eight sculptors—Robert Adams, Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick, Geoffrey Clarke, Bernard Meadows, Eduardo Paolozzi, and William Turnbull—were featured in the MAM Rio exhibition currently under analysis.²⁶³

In addition to his participation in the 2nd São Paulo Biennial, Herbert Read also served on the jury of three editions of the Venice Biennale (1952, 1956, 1960) and the 2nd Córdoba Biennial, in Argentina (1962). Regarding his participation in the 2nd São Paulo Biennial, Read wrote an extensive letter to Lilian Somerville reporting alleged maneuvers by part of the awards jury to disqualify the work of Henry Moore and Alexander Calder to secure the Grand Prize for the French sculptor Henri Laurens—which is, in fact, what happened. In the end, however, after several disputes among the jurors, all three artists were awarded different prizes.²⁶⁴

In the 1950s, the British Council's selections for both the Venice and São Paulo Biennials primarily focused on British sculptors, emphasizing Henry Moore and later Barbara Hepworth, as well as Kenneth Armitage, Lynn Chadwick, and Eduardo Paolozzi, already mentioned. In painting, the organization most frequently supported Graham Sutherland, Ben Nicholson, Ceri Richards, William Scott, Paul Nash, Francis Bacon, and Lucian Freud during this period.

In São Paulo, Moore received the award for Best Foreign Sculptor at the 2nd São Paulo Biennial in 1953, while Nicholson, as noted, won the award for Best Foreign Painter at the fourth edition of the show in 1957 [see Table 4]. It is worth highlighting Moore's presence in Brazil for the opening of the 2nd Biennial. Sutherland had a special room within the British delegation at the 3rd São Paulo Biennial (1955) and received an Acquisition Prize. It is also worth noting that Hepworth won the Grand Prize at the 5th São Paulo Biennial (1959), the most significant award of her career up to that point.

263. Some of these sculptors also represented Great Britain at the 1st documenta in Kassel (1955).

264. Letter from Herbert Read to Lilian Somerville, Dec. 15, 1953. Lilian Somerville Papers. Tate Archive.



Fig. 27. A visitor observes the sculpture *King and Queen* by Henry Moore at the 2nd São Paulo Biennial (1953). Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Wanda Svevo Archive/São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the British Council began promoting younger artists engaged with international modernism and its developments in abstract art, as well as pop art, while distancing itself from artists whose works were controversial or overtly critical. Other significant awards at the São Paulo Biennial were granted during these years, including the Best Painter award for Alan Davie at the 7th Biennial (1963), the Itamaraty Prize for Richard Smith at the 9th Biennial (1967), and the São Paulo Biennial Prize for Anthony Caro the following edition (1969). In Venice, two Grand Prizes for Sculpture were awarded to British artists—Henry Moore (1948) and Lynn Chadwick (1956)—while the Grand Prize for Painting went to Bridget Riley (1968).

Table 4. Awards won by British artists at the first ten editions of the São Paulo Biennial (1951-1969)

Awarded Artists	Year and Award
Prunella Clough	1951. Acquisition Award (print)
Robert Adams	1951. Acquisition Award (print)
Henry Moore	1953. Best Foreign Sculptor
Graham Sutherland	1955. Acquisition Award (painting)
Ben Nicholson	1957. Best Foreign Painter
Austin Wright	1957. Acquisition Award (sculpture)
Barbara Hepworth	1959. Grand Prize (sculpture)
William Scott	1961. Acquisition Award (painting)
Alan Davie	1963. Best Foreign Painter
Patrick Heron	1965. Honorable Mention
Richard Smith	1967. Itamaraty Prize
Anthony Caro	1969. São Paulo Biennial Prize

Ben Nicholson and 10 British Sculptors: A Master Among Young Artists

Britain's representation at the 4th São Paulo Biennial was covered in the Rio de Janeiro press, with its composition published in the "Itinerário das Artes Plásticas" [Itinerary of the Visual Arts] column by Jayme Maurício in the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper on May 7, 1957. It is worth noting that the newspaper was owned by Paulo Bittencourt, who was the second husband of Niomar Moniz Sodré. Maurício writes:

Seventy-four works will represent Britain at the 4th São Paulo Biennial, with 39 by painter Ben Nicholson and the remainder by a new generation of British sculptors. Ben Nicholson, who had already exhibited at the 1st São Paulo Biennial, is one of the most renowned artists worldwide—indeed, one of the painters who has made some of the most significant contributions to the evolution of modern art. This year, he won the Guggenheim Prize—\$10,000—which reaffirms the merits of this tireless artist, whose works have marked fundamental stages in the history of modern art.] The presence of Chadwick's sculptures is particularly significant for audiences on the continent, who recently had the opportunity to become acquainted with them through documentation circulated by the 28th Venice Biennale [1956], where, as is known, this young British sculptor was awarded the highest international prize for sculpture.²⁶⁵

265. Jayme Maurício. "Itinerário das artes plásticas: Delegação da Grã-Bretanha na IV Bienal" [Itinerary of the Visual Arts: British Delegation at the 4th Biennial]. *Correio da Manhã*, May 7, 1957, p. 16.

The activities of MAM Rio received special attention in the pages of *Correio da Manhã*, whether through brief notes or longer articles. The São Paulo Biennial, in turn, was a recurring topic in the art columns of the Brazilian press more broadly. Mentions of the awards received by Nicholson and Chadwick reaffirmed the quality of their work and drew public attention to contemporary British art. Nicholson rose to prominence on the international scene after World War II. In 1954, he was awarded the Ulisse Prize at the Venice Biennale and received the Guggenheim International Award (GIA) at the inaugural edition of the event (1956). At the time, it was one of the most valuable monetary prizes in the art world, granted every two years by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation to an artist whose work had been selected by an international jury convened for that purpose.²⁶⁶ As noted, the young sculptors were supported by the British Council and had been featured in international exhibitions organized by the institution since 1952. In 1956, the previously mentioned award for Best Sculptor was given to Lynn Chadwick at the 28th Venice Biennale. In the following edition, in 1958, Kenneth Armitage received the David E. Bright Foundation Award for artists under 45.

Although Maurício's note does not mention a future exhibition at MAM Rio, discussions might have already been underway. In a new note published on August 24, the journalist announced that "due to the great interest that British art generates in Latin America, the entire section dedicated to Britain will later be exhibited by the British Council in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires, and the sculptures will continue to be displayed on a tour of Latin American capitals, including Santiago de Chile, Lima, and Caracas."²⁶⁷

In fact, this collection of works, or part of it, was taken to various South American capitals after its presentation at MAM Rio, as shown in Table 5. In Buenos Aires, following previous requests from Jorge Romero Brest, the full exhibition was presented at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. In Montevideo, according to Margaret Garlake, the exhibition—now limited to the sculptors—marked the inauguration of a new museum. In Lima, it was hailed as the largest exhibition of foreign sculpture ever presented, featuring works by some of the most outstanding young British artists. In Caracas, the

266. The *Guggenheim International Award* was held only four times—1956, 1958, 1960, and 1964—before being discontinued due to disagreements over the use of funds from the Solomon Guggenheim Foundation.

267. Jayme Maurício. "Itinerário das artes plásticas: A representação britânica na IV Bienal" [Itinerary of the Visual Arts: The British Representation at the 4th Biennial]. *Correio da Manhã*, Aug. 24, 1957, p. 16.

museum acquired three sculptures by Armitage and received *Curved Form in Reaction, no. 2*, by Adams as a donation from the British community.²⁶⁸

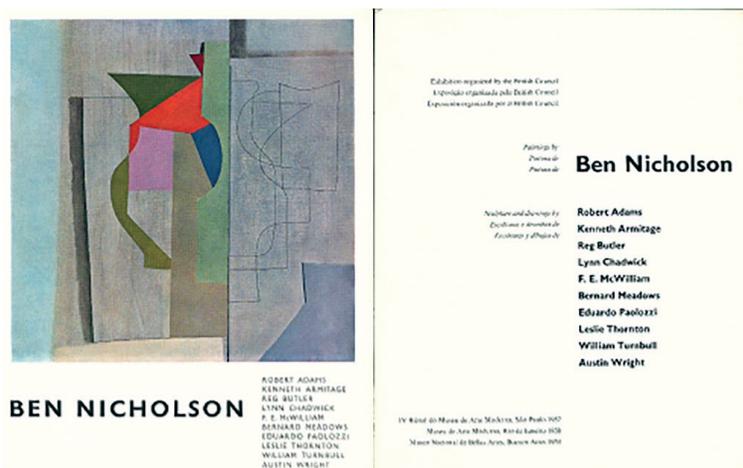


Fig. 28. Cover and back cover of the Catalog *Ben Nicholson and 10 British Sculptors*.
Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

For this tour, the British Council produced a color catalog in three languages—English, Spanish, and Portuguese—featuring several illustrations, a foreword by Herbert Read (the same text published in the catalog for the 4th São Paulo Biennial), and brief biographies of the artists [Fig. 28]. The catalog reflected the British Council's concern with the impact of its initiatives abroad, as well as its commitment to implementing a policy of exhibiting and circulating works by British artists worldwide. The British Council also produced separate catalogs for its delegations to the Venice Biennale, featuring various black-and-white and color images, along with texts about the artists and their careers.

268. Garlake, 1991, p. 70.

Table 5. *Ben Nicholson and 10 British Sculptors* Exhibition. Tour in South America after the 4th São Paulo Biennial

Hosting Institution	Exhibition Period
Brazil (Rio de Janeiro), Museu de Arte Moderna	Jan. 27, 1958–Feb. 23, 1958
Argentina (Buenos Aires), Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes	Apr. 17, 1958–May 4, 1958
Uruguay (Montevideo), Museo de Arte Moderno	Jul. 8, 1958–Aug. 8, 1958
Chile (Santiago), Instituto de Artes Plásticas	Oct. 8, 1958–Nov. 3, 1958
Peru (Lima), Instituto de Artes Contemporáneas	Jan. 19, 1959–Feb. 13, 1959
Venezuela (Caracas), Museo de Bellas Artes	May 3, 1959–May 31, 1959

The Research and Documentation collection at MAM Rio includes only seven photographs related to the *Ben Nicholson and 10 British Sculptors* exhibition, likely because the inauguration of the museum’s new home became the main event at the time [Figs. 29, 30, and 31]. In some of these photos, we can see a spacious, airy exhibition area, with Nicholson’s paintings hung on partitions or on wooden panels suspended from the ceiling. The sculptures, mostly medium-sized, are displayed on pedestals carefully arranged throughout the room. The images explore the interplay between interior and exterior created by Affonso Eduardo Reidy in a building with no internal walls and predominantly glass external walls, which became an international icon of modernism. The famous landscape of Guanabara Bay also comes into play, competing for the viewer’s attention.



Fig. 29. View of the exhibition *Ben Nicholson and 10 British Sculptors*, Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1958. Photograph: Aertsens Michel. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.



Fig. 30. View of the exhibition *Ben Nicholson and 10 British Sculptors*, Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1958. Photograph: Aertsens Michel. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.



Fig. 31. View of the exhibition *Ben Nicholson and 10 British Sculptors*, Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1958. Photograph: Aertsens Michel. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

The MAM Rio exhibition featured 126 works, including paintings, sculptures, and drawings, 38 of which were by Ben Nicholson. It was therefore

far from a modest exhibition, presenting side by side the work of a 63-year-old artist who achieved late international recognition alongside sculptures of younger artists at the height of their rise in the art world. The catalog produced by the British Council features eight full-page color reproductions of Nicholson's paintings—including the one used on the cover—and one black-and-white reproduction of a sculptural work by each of the other participants. Nicholson's abstract paintings and drawings, constructed with precision, contrast with the biomorphic forms and more expressive nature of the sculptures on display, emphasized by their rough, textured surfaces.

The text written by Herbert Read highlights Nicholson's work while also seeking to reaffirm, once again, the idea that a new school of modern sculpture was emerging in Britain:

Nicholson's great distinction as an artist is due to his combination of the finest sensibility with a formal intelligence of universal significance. Among Nicholson's greatest admirers are architects, engineers, and scientists of the new age. And poets. In the present exhibition, Ben Nicholson's paintings have for congenial company a selection of works by the younger English sculptors. The renaissance of the art of sculpture in England during the past thirty years has astonished the world. An isolated 'sport' such as Henry Moore might be expected to appear in any country, but Henry Moore has been followed, a generation later, by a whole school of sculptors, not in any obvious way inspired by his work, but no doubt encouraged by his example. [...] I may be a prejudiced observer, but it seems to me that all these sculptors have developed a personal idiom while remaining, like Ben Nicholson, within the wider current of the *Zeitgeist*. Their work spans a broad spectrum: from pure abstraction (Adams) to relative realism (Armitage), and from traditional techniques such as stone carving and modeling to new methods in metal and plastics.²⁶⁹

The exhibition concluded on February 23, 1958. Jayme Maurício's column in *Correio da Manhã*, published on February 16, 1958, was titled "Ten Minutes with the Reserved Ben Nicholson."²⁷⁰ It was an attempt at an interview conducted at the Gimpel Gallery in London with "a man who does not like to waste time, does not like cocktail parties, and does not like superficial conversations." According to Maurício, Nicholson was evasive, preferring to respond to questions about the role of abstractionism in contemporary art

269. Read, 1958, n. p.

270. Jayme Maurício. "Itinerário das artes plásticas: Dez minutos com o reservado Ben Nicholson" [Itinerary of the Visual Arts: Ten Minutes with the Reserved Ben Nicholson]. *Correio da Manhã*, Feb. 16, 1958, p. 10.

by showing excerpts from two books written by Read about his work. This exchange underscored the enduring partnership between the artist and the art historian. Averse to gatherings and celebrations of any kind, Nicholson declined a reception proposed by the Brazilian Embassy in London in honor of the award he received at the 4th São Paulo Biennial. However, he expressed enthusiasm for the architectural design of MAM Rio and showed interest in visiting Brazil, which ultimately did not happen.

Months earlier, in an article published in October 1957, Jayme Maurício once again dedicated part of his column to the British delegation that originated the exhibition at MAM Rio, strongly defending the aesthetic quality of the collection and praising the British Council's commitment to the São Paulo Biennial:

Few countries have given as much importance to the São Paulo Biennial as Britain. It has already sent us a complete group of its best young painters. It has already sent us Henry Moore. It has already sent us Sutherland [*sic*]. As commissioners, it always sends its finest representatives. It has already sent us Sir Herbert Read. This time, it has sent us its greatest authority, the director of the National Gallery and the president of the Fine Arts Committee of the British Council, Sir Philip Henry. And representing it at this Biennial, we have the great painter Ben Nicholson [...] and ten of its best sculptors from the generation after Moore and Barbara Hepworth, young artists who continue Britain's undeniable contribution to the values of global sculpture. [...] The British Council is, once again, to be congratulated. We hope that at the next Biennial, it will send us a special room dedicated to Barbara Hepworth, who is still little known here, along with an excellent collective exhibition of English artist's engravings and drawings, heirs to the great tradition of William Blake.²⁷¹

At the next edition of the São Paulo Biennial (1959), the British delegation featured fewer artists, focusing on those with well-established careers. The selection included Francis Bacon (painting), Barbara Hepworth (sculpture and drawings), and Stanley William Hayter (printmaking). As noted, Hepworth won the Grand Prize, the Biennial's most prestigious award, further solidifying Britain's artistic influence in Brazil and beyond.

271. Jayme Maurício. "Itinerário das artes plásticas: A delegação britânica" [Itinerary of the Visual Arts: The British Delegation]. *Correio da Manhã*, Oct. 8, 1957, p. 14.

Japanese Participation in International Exhibitions: From the Early World's Fairs to the São Paulo Biennials and the Traveling Exhibitions at MAM Rio (1950-1970)

MICHIKO OKANO

World's Fairs: Reaching the Hegemonic World

Considering that art serves as a tool for fostering receptiveness and cultivating affection toward a foreign country—promoting a form of acceptance of difference and otherness²⁷²—we now turn to how this cultural diplomacy was carried out through the World's Fairs and the Tokyo Biennial in relation to the Venice Biennale and the São Paulo Biennial.

We begin by examining the early World's Fairs in which Japan participated, from the late 19th to the early 20th century, to understand its initial experiences within Western international exhibition circuits. This analysis considers Japan's position as an Asian country that had remained largely closed to foreign nations for approximately 215 years (1639-1853) and was therefore peripheral to the hegemonic Western powers. With the rise of Japonisme, cultural diplomacy became especially vital for Japan—serving, in the words of one scholar, as “a prime vector of values and symbolic representations”²⁷³—as it sought to secure a selective place in the sun.

In analyzing Japan's participation in the São Paulo and Tokyo Biennials—both of which emerged around the same time during Japan's postwar recovery and remained active through 1970—our focus lies on their geopolitical dimensions. We also seek to determine whether, in both cases, there was a West-oriented perspective, as well as to identify the nuances of that outlook.

The 19th-century World's Fairs reflected a range of interests among the parties involved: for organizers, they were geopolitical events on a global scale;

272. Madeira Filho, 2016, p. 23.

273. *Idem*, p. 27.

for the visiting public, a kind of “theme park”; and for exhibitors, commercial opportunities. For artists and intellectuals, these fairs offered spaces for learning, exchange, and the sharing of experiences—but also served as arenas where prejudice and political, economic, and social inequalities came to the surface.²⁷⁴ Notably, for Western visitors, the very presence of Japanese attendees at these events was itself a spectacle, on par with the artworks on display.

Japan’s inaugural appearance at a Western world’s fair took place at the second International Exhibition of London, in 1862, while the country remained partially isolated under the shogunate system of the Edo Period (1603-1868). This debut featured a display of a private collection belonging to Rutherford Alcock, the first British consul in Japan, who resided there between 1858 and 1864. A Japanese delegation of 38 members, dressed in traditional attire, traveled to London, heightening the sense of exoticism evoked by the 600 exhibited items, which included lacquerware, ceramics, bronzes, porcelains, woodblock prints, and everyday objects such as farmers’ raincoats, sandals, and lanterns [Fig. 32]. Coming from a peripheral nation, the Japanese understood the significance of the event as an opportunity to assert their presence within the hegemonic international arena.



Fig. 32. The Japanese Ambassadors at the International Exhibition of London, 1862. *The Illustrated London News*, 24 May 1862. Wikimedia Commons.

274. Sanjad, 2007, p. 787.

Five years later, in 1867, the shogunate officially participated in the International Exposition of Paris, responding to an invitation from Emperor Napoleon III of France.

The December 21, 1867 issue of the *Illustrated London News* features a striking full-length portrait of a samurai. He is elegantly dressed in a formal kimono, his left hand holding a sword and his right hand resting on a stool, calmly gazing towards the viewer. Something is odd about this picture, however: the sword looks too large for his body, his forehead too high, and his entire stature seems rather diminutive, even for a Japanese.²⁷⁵

That describes Akitake Tokugawa, the half-brother of Shogun Yoshinobu Tokugawa (known in the West as “the Tycoon”). At the age of fourteen, he traveled to Paris as part of a delegation representing the shogunate at the show. He remained in Europe for approximately two years, accompanied by Eiichi Shibusawa, who oversaw the financial management of his stay in France. Shibusawa also traveled with Akitake to several other European countries [Fig. 33].



Fig. 33. 1867 Universal Exposition: Aritake Tokugawa and the Japanese delegation—Eiichi Shibusawa in the back row at the far left. Unknown author. Shibusawa Memorial Museum Archive, Wikimedia Commons.

In addition to selling Japanese works exhibited at the *International Exhibition*, Shibusawa studied the Western financial system, which later

275. Morisawa, 2017, online, TN.

enabled him to establish Japan's first national bank. He would go on to become a central figure in Japan's political and economic development and is now widely regarded as the father of Japanese capitalism. A report in *The Baltimore Sun* dated June 12, 1902, refers to "Baron" Shibusawa as the "Pierpont Morgan of the East"—one of the wealthiest men in Japan—who was scheduled to meet with President Roosevelt.²⁷⁶ This illustrates how the movement of key individuals to Europe, as well as their engagement within these transnational spaces, played a crucial role in Japan's modernization and Westernization.

At the time of the 1867 Paris International Exposition, Japan was in a politically uncertain situation, with the power and legitimacy of the shogunate under threat. This instability was reflected in Japan's representation at the exposition: autonomous regions of Saga and Satsuma organized independent exhibits, separate from the official Tokugawa display, and established commercial contacts with countries such as France, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Another notable participant, operating independently of the official or domain-based delegations, was the merchant Usaburō Shimizu, who built a tea ceremony house that became a remarkable success. According to *The Pall Mall Gazette*, August 14, 1867, "The teahouse is built of bamboo and some choice white wood. It has its little counter, at which tiny cups of tea—with sugarplums to sweeten it—are retailed, and also a tea room where both tea and liqueurs are supplied to the guests."²⁷⁷ However, the author notes that the real attraction was not the tea ceremony itself, but rather the presence of the "Japanese geishas."

Even in this early stage of contact with Westerners in the 19th century, the stereotype of the Japanese geisha—so popular and globally recognized—was already observed.²⁷⁸ The following excerpt from Shibusawa's diary illustrates this point, highlighting the ethnographic curiosity inherent in the Western gaze:

They [geishas] are very much the object of interest, since not only are they exotically attired, but they are the first Asian women who have ever come to Europe. The crowd, forbidden to enter the room, jostled with one another, and peered at them intently through spyglasses.²⁷⁹

276. Theodore Roosevelt Center (n.d.). *Shibusawa Eiichi: Father of Japanese Capitalism*. Retrieved Feb. 10, 2025, from: <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Blog/Item/Shibusawa%20Eiichi:%20Father%20of%20Japanese%20Capitalism>.

277. Morisawa, 2017, online, TN.

278. It is important to clarify that the term "geisha" is formed by the ideograms 芸 (*gei*), meaning "art," and 者 (*sha*), meaning "person." Consequently, a geisha is a woman whose purpose is to offer the art of dance, singing, and refined hospitality. She is expected to have general knowledge, engage in conversation, and cultivate cultural skills, but she does not offer sexual activities in exchange for economic benefits.

279. Shibusawa, 1928, *apud* Lockyer, 2009, p. 67.

The exhibition space allocated to Japan was comparable in size to those assigned to delegations such as Portugal, Greece, or Egypt. However, Japan shared this space with Siam (modern-day Thailand) and China, although the latter had declined Napoleon III's invitation. As a result, the Chinese display consisted of works from private collectors—similar to Japan's first participation in London in 1862.

As part of the 1867 Paris International Exposition, a pavilion generically titled the "Orient" was constructed. The Japanese exhibition—featuring exquisite lacquerware and furniture adorned with mother-of-pearl, gold, and silver, along with ceramics, porcelains, katanas, and a tea ceremony house—undoubtedly fueled the fantasy of Japan that would inspire the movement known as Japonisme.

The 1873 Vienna International Exposition, held six years later, offered another opportunity to promote Japonisme in Europe—this time under vastly different historical circumstances for Japan. Now governed by the imperial system of the Meiji Period (1868-1912), Japan received an official invitation from the Austro-Hungarian representative in 1872 [Fig. 34]. Unlike in previous expositions, Japan would not share its space with other countries. For the Japanese, this signified the achievement of a place among the Western nations.



Fig. 34. 1873 Vienna World's Fair. Illustration of the entrance of the Japanese pavilion.
Author: Yoshio Tanaka, Narinobu Hiramama. Wikimedia Commons.

There was a need to present a “new Japan” to the world—as a unified nation—and the Japanese commission for the show produced two publications for visitors. The first, *Notice sur l’Empire du Japon et sur la participation à l’Exposition Universelle de Vienne, 1873* [Notice on the Empire of Japan and on its Participation in the Vienna Universal Exposition, 1873], provided information on the country’s geography, history, the new Japanese government, and its commercial characteristics. The second, *Catalogue*, listed selected Japanese artworks, crafts, agricultural products, and industrial objects on display at the exhibition.²⁸⁰

This demonstrates that the International Expositions also served a geopolitical purpose for Japan, enabling it to present itself as a unified nation—particularly to the hegemonic Western powers. For the more industrialized countries, meanwhile, these events functioned primarily as a stage for reaffirming their economic and political dominance. At the same time, the Japanese were eager to understand how their products were received abroad, aiming to expand exports while studying Europe’s advanced industries and manufactured goods. This reflects a commercial interest in engaging internationally through these events, with the goal of adopting and refining foreign techniques and technologies.²⁸¹

At these exhibitions, the classification system for displayed objects was constantly reviewed and adapted to reflect the period’s evolving standards. This system shaped the spatial organization of the event and, consequently, the planning of national pavilions. However, it posed a particular challenge for Japan, whose approach to viewing and conceptualizing artistic works differed significantly. It was precisely at the 1873 Vienna Exposition that the term *bijutsu* 美術 (美 = beauty, 術 = technique or skill), meaning “fine arts,” was introduced in Japan for the first time—prompted by the need to conform to the exposition’s categorization of artworks.

Until the Edo Period (1603-1868), Japan made no distinction between fine arts and applied arts, nor did it impose dualities or hierarchical separations. This highlights how the concept of “art” itself became Westernized. For example, a lacquer box (*urushi*) held the same value as an *emaki* scroll painting. Works were classified based on format (Buddhist statues, screen paintings, calligraphy, *emaki*), style (*ukiyo-e*), or function (*sadōgu* – tea ceremony utensils; *kotō* – antiques; *horimono* – carved objects, etc.).²⁸² The adoption of Western systems of interpretation, valuation, and classification introduced

280. Pantzer, 2018, p. 28.

281. Kutsuzawa, 2018, p. 8.

282. Nakatsuka, 2006, p. 6.

ambiguity and complexity to Japanese works: how should arts like *ukiyo-e* prints—so widely admired by Western audiences and by many Impressionist artists—or the tea ceremony, a traditional, gestural, and ephemeral art form, be categorized? This remains a point of contention. *Ukiyo-e* prints, once mass-produced and affordably priced for urban dwellers during the Edo Period, became collector’s items for both Western and Japanese audiences, thereby increasing their perceived value. Similarly, the tea ceremony, widely popularized by *The Book of Tea*, written in English by Kakuzō Okakura in 1906, is now recognized as a “traditional art.”

With the adoption of the term *bijutsu*, Japan quickly aligned many of its artistic values with Western standards—a shift that was also reflected in the planning of its exhibition. This process was shaped by the Western perspective of the German scholar Gottfried Wagener, who had been residing in Japan since 1868. Hired by the Japanese government to curate the selection of works, Wagener’s role made clear the government’s decision to prioritize what Western audiences wanted to see over what the Japanese themselves wished to present. His appointment, in turn, had been recommended by Heinrich von Siebold, a collector and translator serving at the Austrian Embassy in Tokyo. Siebold proposed showcasing something grand enough to attract public attention and underscore the exoticism of the East.

Heinrich von Siebold was the brother of Alexander von Siebold, an official of the Japanese government who served as assistant to Tsunetani Sano and as vice president of the exposition’s administrative staff. Both Wagener and the von Siebold brothers argued that Japan’s presence in Vienna should prioritize the display of traditional Japanese objects, as the country’s technological products were still underdeveloped.²⁸³

Artistic objects on display included lacquerware, ceramics, metalworks, cloisonné, *ukiyo-e* prints, porcelains, dolls, a replica of the *kinshachi*²⁸⁴ from Nagoya Castle, a reproduction of the pagoda from Ten’nō-ji Temple in Yanaka, and a 15-meter-tall replica of the Great Buddha of Kamakura.²⁸⁵ The exhibition also featured a Japanese garden with a bridge and a reproduction of a Shinto shrine. In this way, Japan was presented to the West in accordance with foreign preferences, reflecting the dual aspiration to align with “Western

283. Kutsuzawa, 2018, p. 9.

284. The *Kinshachi* 金鯨 (金 = gold 鯨 = sea monster) is a mythological creature with the head of a tiger and the body of a fish. Its tails always curve upward, and it is placed atop the roofs of Japanese buildings (one male and one female) as a form of divine protection. According to legend, in the event of a fire, the *shachi* would spout water.

285. Calvo, 1992, p. 25. *Apud* Alagón, 2016, p. 629.

countries as a modern nation-state and at the same time represent itself as an Oriental civilization rich in tradition.”²⁸⁶

Japan was prominently featured in several Viennese newspapers, emerging as one of the most discussed and illustrated countries at the exposition. One publication noted “the rarity of such design” and “the Viennese people’s desire to acquire genuinely Japanese items,” adding that the Japanese bazaar recorded daily sales of approximately 3,000 fans.²⁸⁷ The author also observed that the King of Belgium was a significant buyer of Japanese goods, acquiring attractive, novel, and “exotic” items. Many of the Japanese works displayed at the exposition would later become part of the collections of the Museum of Applied Arts and the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna.

The way these objects were distributed reveals the keen sense of exoticism present in Vienna—fueled by Japonisme, a movement that began in the 1850s and was coined by Philippe Burty in 1872—becomes particularly evident. It is especially intriguing to consider the destinations of these Japanese objects: one being a museum of “applied arts,” the other of ethnology. This distinction reflects the classification imposed by Western institutions on Japanese art, although it remains unclear which objects were allocated to which museum. This would be a compelling subject for further study.

Japan continued to participate in International Expositions. The 1876 exhibition—the first to be held in the United States, in Philadelphia—also contributed to the development of a Japanese collection in the country. A traditional Japanese residence and bazaar were featured, with buildings constructed in accordance with traditional Japanese architecture, using materials sent from Japan and built by Japanese craftsmen.²⁸⁸ Porcelains and other artifacts were available for sale, attracting considerable interest from the American public, who were captivated by Japonisme. Seizing the momentum of this expanding aesthetic, the Japanese company Kiritsu Kōshō-gaisha—established to export Japanese art and objects—opened a branch in New York in 1877, following the Vienna Exposition.

Events such as this gave rise to figures like the collector William Sturgis Bigelow, who lived in Japan from 1882 to 1889. This demonstrates that the movements sparked by the Expositions were not unidirectional—from Japan to the West, as in the case of Shibusawa (mentioned earlier)—but rather occurred in both directions. The Japanese works in Bigelow’s possession

286. Rado, 2015, p. 605.TN

287. Pantzer, 2018, p. 29.

288. Alagón, 2016, p. 629.

were later donated to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Notably, the museum's Japanese collection—one of the largest in the world—was built not only by Bigelow but also by a group of Bostonians, including the collector and physician Charles Goddard Weld and the art historian and Orientalist Ernest Francisco Fenollosa. Fenollosa first arrived in Japan in 1878, invited by the American zoologist Edward S. Morse. He was one of several foreign professors hired by the Japanese government to teach Philosophy and Political Economy at the Imperial University of Tokyo during Japan's fervent embrace of Western knowledge. It was Fenollosa who coined the term *Nihonga* (Japanese-style works) to distinguish artworks that were not *Yōga* (Western-style works, typically oil paintings). During his 12-year stay in Japan, he converted to Buddhism, studied Japanese art extensively, and, together with his former student Kakuzō Okakura, cataloged Japan's National Treasure. Okakura, author of *The Book of Tea* (mentioned earlier), would later become the curator of the Department of Asian Art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

The World's Fair in Japan

Almost one hundred years after the U.S. International Exposition, it was Japan's turn to host a World's Fair: *Expo '70* in Osaka. Unlike the prewar expositions, in which nations sought international recognition, the postwar fairs addressed pressing global issues brought about by technological advancement and industrialization—such as pollution, ethnic conflict, and geopolitical tensions. In other words, the concept of the exposition shifted from one centered on “showcasing” to one oriented toward “reflecting” on the challenges of modern society.²⁸⁹

Nevertheless, from Japan's perspective, the World's Fairs continued to serve as an ideal platform for projecting a desirable national image and enhancing international prestige—especially as the host nation and the first country in Asia to assume this role. However, the process was far from straightforward. An unofficial decision had already been made to hold the next fair in Australia in 1972, and financial concerns emerged, as only three years had passed since the previous exposition in Montreal. As a result, Japan's bid was met with skepticism from some members of the BIE (Bureau International des Expositions), the intergovernmental organization responsible for overseeing World's Fairs, of which Japan had been a member since 1965. By insisting on the relevance of hosting the exposition—both as a

289. Kahata, 2022, p. 3.

way to commemorate the centennial of Japan's formal engagement with the West and because the two-year interval required by official regulations had passed—the bid emphasized the significance of the event's pioneering shift to Asia, that is, to an “entirely different continent.”²⁹⁰

A strategic diplomatic effort was necessary to make *Expo '70* a reality—particularly in securing the support of countries such as New Zealand, Canada, and the United Kingdom, along with the involvement of key industrial leaders—in order to obtain a favorable response from the BIE (Bureau International des Expositions) and secure approval of Japan's bid. According to Sanjab,

The host State plays a key role, particularly in extending invitations to other states and persuading the international community. [...] While the ephemeral nature of the event is designed to glorify the host country, it also fosters rivalry and challenges other nations to showcase their greatness and achievements.²⁹¹

Therefore, Japan's efforts did not end with the approval to host the long-awaited World's Fair; the challenge of inviting and persuading other nations to participate proved equally arduous. By July 1967, only twelve countries had responded positively, prompting the formation of a delegation that embarked on a series of diplomatic missions to more than 264 countries, including Brazil, later that year. Securing broad international participation was crucial for the Japanese government—not only to stage a more impressive exposition than Montreal's, but also to justify Japan's selection as the host nation. In the end, 76 countries participated—a record at the time—sixteen of which were Asian,²⁹² whereas the 1967 Montreal Exposition had no representation from Asian countries.

Such an achievement required significant effort, as Japan offered to cover the costs of constructing shared exhibition pavilions for nations that had cited financial constraints as their reason for declining participation. These spaces, known as *Kokusai Kyōdōkan* (International Place), enabled several developing countries to take part in the show. A total of six International Places were built, accommodating 29 countries—including those from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.

In this way, Japan established itself as the leading country in Asia. The chosen theme, “Progress and Harmony for Mankind,” aimed to promote

290. *Idem*, p. 5.

291. Sanjad, 2017, p. 789.

292. Kahata, 2022, pp. 6-7.

an exhibition centered on harmony through three key elements: the ideal, entertainment, and hope as a vision for the future.²⁹³ The exposition also sought to reshape foreign perceptions by calling attention to Japan's technological prowess and rapid development despite its defeat in World War II. It framed Japan's postwar reconstruction in continuity with the Tokyo Olympics, held just a few years earlier in 1964.

However, Japan also received warnings from the BIE office and several countries for inviting foreign private companies without involving the mediation of the respective national governments. Both official and confidential letters condemned this approach, noting that it could lead the exhibition to diverge from its intended theme. In many cases, governments feared that the content presented by private companies might outshine their own. At a meeting held in June 1967, Japan argued that it had acted in accordance with the established rules and that inviting companies did not constitute a deviation from the exposition's theme. However, from that point forward, Japan proceeded with greater caution—consulting official bodies before extending invitations to companies and taking care to avoid overemphasizing the commercial dimension.²⁹⁴

It is likely that the significance of being the first Asian host of a World's Fair, combined with Japan's desire to ensure a successful event with numerous participants—and its limited experience in organizing such events—led Japan to act in a way that, according to researcher Kahata, may have strained its relationship with Western countries.

Within Japan, the artistic presentation of *Expo '70* was widely criticized for its governmental tone and for omitting Japan's political context at the time—including student protests, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and, most notably, the renewal of the Security Treaty between the United States and Japan. Certain artistic groups, such as Bikyōto, along with prominent art critics—among them the renowned Ichirō Haryū, considered one of the “Three Greats,” and the critic and photographer Kōji Taki—intensified their criticism of the exposition, viewing it as a strategy to divert public attention from pressing political issues.

According to these critics, *Expo '70* “symbolized the end of art, which had been co-opted by commercialism and technology, losing its autonomy.”²⁹⁵ In their view, the success of the exposition also marked the triumph of the renewed Security Treaty between the United States and Japan, further

293. Ishikawa, 2018, p. 3.

294. Kahata, 2022, pp. 12-13.

295. Yoshimoto, 2011, p. 3. T.N.

intensifying disillusionment with the idealistic vision of progress that had emerged during Japan's postwar economic development—disillusionment that was exacerbated by environmental pollution and the oil crisis.²⁹⁶

We know that 55 years after the first Asian World's Fair, Osaka will once again host *Expo 2025*, under the theme “Designing Future Society for Our Lives,” with subthemes focused on “saving lives,” “empowering lives,” and “connecting lives.” This time, however, the event will likely unfold without the burden of representativity or the perceived “need” for recognition through the Western gaze that shaped earlier World Fairs, including that of 1970.

Biennials and Traveling Exhibitions to the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro

Alongside its participation in World's Fairs, Japan began engaging in international biennials in the post-World War II period, even while still under American occupation (1945-1952). This included the 1st São Paulo International Art Biennial (1951) (hereafter São Paulo Biennial) and, the following year, the 26th Venice Biennale. Both Japanese delegations were organized by the government agency *Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai* (The Society for International Cultural Relations), which, in 1972, transferred its responsibilities to the Japan Foundation—a semi-governmental organization dedicated to promoting cultural exchange between nations.²⁹⁷

At the 1st São Paulo Biennial, Japan was represented by 46 artists, each contributing one work. The selection included 31 *Yōga* paintings (oil on canvas), but no traditional *Nihonga* paintings, which are created using water-based pigments on paper or silk. Additionally, the exhibition featured eight prints and seven sculptures.²⁹⁸ However, this selection did not receive favorable reviews. The choice undoubtedly echoed the challenge previously identified by the von Siebold brothers and Wagener during the 1873 Vienna International Exposition, when they advised Japan against displaying industrial products, considering them still too immature.

Nevertheless, this was not solely a Japanese decision. In a letter dated May 16, 1951, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho wrote to the institution

296. *Idem, ibidem.*

297. In 2003, the Japan Foundation became an administrative institution affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

298. Sourced from the document “Relação do Material recebido pelo Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo” [List of Materials Received by the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo] from the Wanda Svevo Archive of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

responsible for organizing Japan's national participation in the Biennial, requesting the following:

Since modern Japanese art is almost unknown to the Brazilian public, we would be most grateful if your society (the Japanese) would agree to send us, under the regulations of our Exhibition, a collection of some thirty canvases by modern Japanese painters to show them together with all the other works of renowned artists or of new artists to appear in our Exhibition.²⁹⁹

Thus, it becomes evident that the Brazilian organizers—who had limited knowledge of Japanese art—prioritized “modern art.” For the Japanese, *Yōga* symbolized the modernization (or Westernization) of art and helped project the image of a “modern” nation. Notably, nine of the 46 participating artists in the 1st São Paulo Biennial would go on to take part in future editions of the show.

Stepping back in chronology to better understand the issues surrounding *Yōga*, the establishment of the *Kōbu Bijutsu Gakkō* (Technical Art School) in Tokyo in 1876 by the federal government marked a significant turning point. This occurred during the post-Meiji Restoration period (1868), when Japan actively embraced Western values—including in the arts.³⁰⁰ The school hired foreign instructors such as painter Antonio Fontanesi, sculptor Vincenzo Ragusa, and architect Giovanni Vincenzo Cappelletti to teach Western techniques, which were regarded as superior to traditional Japanese methods. The Ministry of Industry even coined the slogan *shokusan kōgyō*, meaning “foster industry, promote production with artistic education.”³⁰¹ Thus, *Yōga* emerged as a product of a government-orchestrated modernization effort.

Japanese participation in the 26th Venice Biennale (1952) was different: drawing on the experience of the 1st São Paulo Biennial the previous year, they decided to reduce the number of works to 22, produced by 11 artists,³⁰² and to introduce more *Nihonga* paintings than oil paintings (*Yōga*). With artist-commissioner Ryūzaburō Umehara and two collaborators, Yoshinobu Masuda

299. Document from the Wanda Svevo Archive of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

300. During the Edo Period (1603-1868), Japan implemented a policy of closing its ports to foreign nations, known as *sakoku*, which lasted from 1639 until 1868, the year of the Meiji Restoration and the full reopening of the ports. This isolationist foreign policy of the Tokugawa shogunate was, in part, a response to the arrival of the Portuguese in the mid-16th century and their efforts to convert the Japanese population to Christianity.

301. Schilcher, 2020, s.p., TN.

302. Yamashita, 2018, p. 72.

and Teiichi Hijikata, the Japanese delegation was composed of eight *Nihonga* artists and five *Yōga* artists.³⁰³ Notably, none of the artists who participated in the 1951 São Paulo Biennial were invited to this Venice Biennale.

It is worth noting that Japan adopted different approaches to representing the country in the two biennials: in Venice, more *Nihonga* artists were selected than those working in oil painting, a genre that had been largely overlooked in the São Paulo edition. This reflects the experimental nature of Japan's participation, as it sought—through trial and error—the most effective way to showcase the nation in international exhibitions.

Looking at a broader timeline—from Japan's first appearances at the Venice and São Paulo Biennials up to 1970—it is evident that other approaches were adopted to represent the Japanese nation through art. This included *Yōga*, which came to embody an intersection of Western and Japanese techniques and themes; traditional *Nihonga*, which declined in favor of abstract art; and sculpture and, most significantly, printmaking—a medium for which Japan had gained international recognition. The prominence of printmaking is underscored by the fact that at the 9th São Paulo Biennial (1967), 18 of the 20 participating artists presented works in this medium.

Returning to the 1950s—this time in Japan—alongside its participation in the Venice and São Paulo Biennials, the country decided to organize its own biennial. First held in Tokyo in 1952, it was called the *Japan International Art Exhibition*. Sponsored by the Mainichi Newspaper Company, the event had 18 editions, running from 1952 to 1990. The title Tokyo Biennial was officially adopted with the 6th edition in 1961. The exhibition aimed to bring in artistic influences from abroad during Japan's postwar reconstruction while also fostering competition among Japanese artists at home.

Furthermore, the initiative was considered a response to criticism from Atsuo Imaizumi, curator of the National Museum of Modern Art (Japan) and commissioner of the 31st Venice Biennial, who claimed that Japanese art was “lagging behind” (*mota mota shiteiru*). He advocated for the dismantling of the traditional art groups (*gadan*), which comprised the main art associations (*bijutsu dantai*), as well as the Nitten Salon, and emphasized the need for an international exhibition in Japan.³⁰⁴ This once again reflects the desire to align with Western artistic traditions by rejecting traditional structures often associated with the disastrous consequences of the war.

The American occupation of Japan officially ended with the ratification of the Treaty of San Francisco in April 1952. Shortly afterward, the 1st Tokyo

303. Sourced from the catalog of the 26th Venice Biennial, 1952.

304. Tomii, 2011, p. 200.

Biennial took place, running from May to June. However, it is important to note that the revitalization of Japanese art in the postwar period had already been gradually unfolding since the end of World War II, despite the American occupation. This process included the reorganization of artistic groups and the resumption of national exhibitions.

Among the 18 editions of the Tokyo Biennial, it is notable that from the first (1952) to the ninth (1967), foreign countries participated through national representations, with invitations to their embassies and consulates. Meanwhile, the Japanese selection was conducted by a committee established by the *Mainichi Newspaper*. During the first three editions, all invited artists were consistently reselected for subsequent events. It was only with the fourth edition that new artists were admitted, and by the 9th Tokyo Biennial, *avant-garde* artists had begun to be gradually incorporated into the Japanese national selection.

In the catalog of the 1st Tokyo Biennial, art critic Sōichi Tominaga stated that “the Japanese art scene had been confronted with the problem that we must consider Japanese art from an international position and viewpoint.”³⁰⁵ In other words, the very notion of art as a transnational concept was at stake. This edition featured the participation of seven foreign countries—the United States, France, Italy, England, Brazil, and Belgium—with a total of 396 works by 233 artists. External participation gradually increased over the years, rising from seven countries in 1952 to 17 by the 9th Biennial (1967), with special highlights including works by Henry Moore and prints by Picasso, Miró, and Giacometti.

With the economy stagnating after the oil crisis, national representations were discontinued starting with the 10th Tokyo Biennial, which adopted a distinct model, as we will explore later. The 11th Biennial featured one session dedicated to American art and another to European art. From the 12th through the 20th editions, only one foreign country participated in each Biennial, changing with every iteration.

Between the late 1960s and the 1970s, the global art world underwent significant changes: the 36th Venice Biennial (1972) ended its award system; the 6th Paris Biennial (1969) eliminated national representation; and the 7th Paris Biennial (1971) also removed its award system. A drastic shift likewise took place at the 10th Tokyo Biennial in 1970, under the theme *Man and Matter* and the curatorship of Yūsuke Nakahara: works were no longer classified by genre—such as painting or sculpture; most artists participated in residencies; and many works were exhibited in outdoor spaces—initiatives that made the event iconic.

305. Yamashita, 2018, p. 75. T.N.

On the Brazilian side, four Japanese national delegations from the São Paulo Biennial traveled to MAM Rio throughout the 1960s, each taking place a year after the respective Biennial. These included: *Exhibition of Japanese Artists* (1962), drawn from the Japanese delegation to the 6th São Paulo Biennial; *Japanese Paintings and Sculptures* (1964), from the 7th Biennial; *Exhibition of Paintings and Sculptures* (1966), featuring works from the 8th Biennial; and *Representation of Japan* (1968), from the 9th São Paulo Biennial.

At the 6th São Paulo Biennial (1961), with Kenjirō Okamoto serving as commissioner, works by six artists were featured: Yoshishige Saitō, Tadashi Sugimata, Tazuko Tanaka, Hisao Dōmoto, and Yasukazu Tabuchi—all exhibiting oil paintings—and Mitsuo Kanō, exhibiting prints [Fig. 35]. Among them, Tadashi Sugimata went on to participate in the 31st Venice Biennial the following year, while Saitō, Dōmoto, and Kanō took part in its 32nd edition in 1964. It should be noted that, on that occasion, the Japanese representation also included a separate exhibition of works by Tessai Tomioka (*Nihonga*) and another dedicated to calligraphic art. As a result, no *Nihonga* artist was included in the main group of six participants. Of these exhibitions, only the Tessai show did not travel to MAM Rio.



Fig. 35. General view of Japan's hall at the 6th São Paulo Biennial (1961). Photograph: Athayde de Barros. Collection: Wanda Svevo Archive/São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

At the subsequent edition, the 7th São Paulo Biennial (1963), also under Okamoto's curatorship, the Japanese delegation featured five artists presenting oil paintings—Takeo Yamaguchi, Masanari Murai, Toshimitsu Imai, Shoichirō Mori, and Soichirō Tomioka [Fig. 36]—three printmakers—Mitsuo Kanō, Masuo Ikeda, and Yukihisa Isob—and one sculptor, Bukichi Inoue. Among them, Murai and Ikeda went on to participate in the 32nd Venice Biennial (1964), while Imai had previously taken part in the 30th edition (1960).

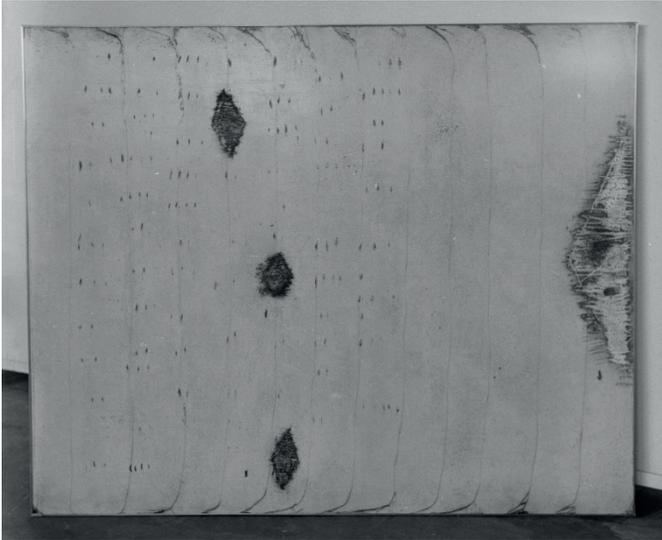


Fig. 36. Sculpture by Soichiro Tomioka. 7th São Paulo Biennial (1963). Photograph: Athayde de Barros. Collection: Wanda Svevo Archive/São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

At the 8th São Paulo Biennial (1965), commissioner Yoshinobu Masuda selected three oil painters—Kumi Sugai, Teruo Ōnuma, and Shōsuke Ōsawa; one relief painter—Shimomura Ryōnosuke; four printmakers—Masuo Ikeda, Hideo Hagihara, Yukio Fukazawa, and Masaji Yoshida; and two sculptors—Toyofuku Tomonori [Fig. 37] and Gorō Kakei. The latter's sculpture, *Eva*, is currently located in the garden of Casa Ema Klabin in São Paulo. Ikeda and Fukazawa later participated in the 32nd Venice Biennial (1964), while Sugai was featured in both the 31st (1962) and 34th editions (1968). According to a letter from the Consulate General of Japan to the São Paulo Biennial Foundation (hereafter Biennial Foundation), the ten works by Ōnuma were sent directly to Rotterdam and were not included in the MAM Rio *Exhibition of Paintings and Sculptures* (1966).³⁰⁶

306. Sourced from the Wanda Svevo Archive of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

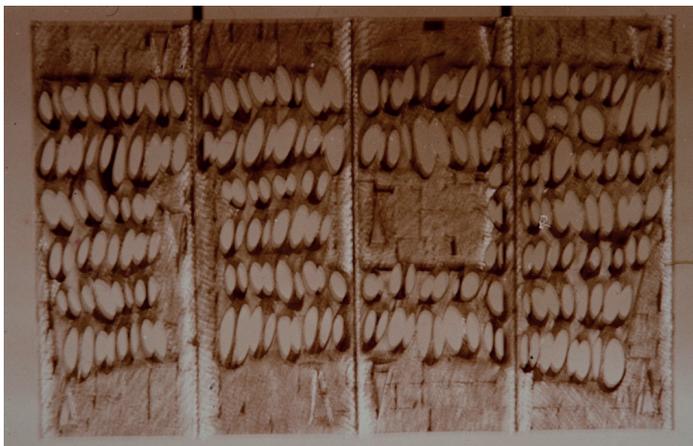


Fig. 37. *Céu II*. Sculpture by Tomonori Toyofuku. 8th São Paulo Biennial (1965). Photograph: Athayde de Barros. Collection: Wanda Svevo Archive/São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

At the 9th São Paulo Biennial (1967) —the final edition of the decade to tour MAM Rio and still under the direction of Yoshinobu Masuda—18 printmakers were featured: Kazumi Amano, Kunihiro Amano, Maki Enokido, Yukio Fukazawa, Fumiaki Fukita, Hideo Hagiwara, Jōichi Hoshi, Mitsuo Kanō, Shō Kidokoro, Kenji Kusaka, Tokio Miyashita, Masanari Murai, Kihei Sasajima, Akiko Shirai, Shirō Takagi, Hodaka Yoshida, Masaji Yoshida, and Hideo Yoshihara. Additionally, only two *Nihonga* artists, Iri Maruki and Tamako Kataoka, were included. Notably, Fukazawa, Kanō, and Murai had previously participated in the 32nd Venice Biennial (1964).

On this last São Paulo Biennial analyzed, Pedrosa comments:

The “do not touch” taboo is finally abandoned. The masses of spectators at last understand and accept the invitation to participate. The vanguard of the audience—children—no longer holds back. They explore freely, touching everything. The adults, or the rearguard, follow suit. The result is either total or near-total destruction—or contagious joy.³⁰⁷

This “contagious joy” took over when a power outage occurred in the Biennial building for twenty minutes on October 11, 1967, during which some artworks were damaged—including prints that had already been sold, among them the award-winning piece by Fumiaki Fukita.³⁰⁸ In fact,

307. *Apud* Arantes, 1995, pp. 273-274.

308. Amarante, 1987, p. 154.

many works in this category were sold, although there were conflicts and negotiations between the Biennial Foundation and the organizer of the Japanese representation, *Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai* (The Society for International Cultural Relations). This is evidenced by letters exchanged between the two institutions, preserved in the archives of the Biennial Foundation.³⁰⁹

If Japanese national participation in the 6th São Paulo Biennial (1961) was dominated by oil painters representing five of the six artists selected, the 7th Biennial (1963) maintained the same number, but painters made up only about half of the delegation (five out of nine). In the 8th edition (1965), the number dropped to three, and by the 9th Biennial, there were none. Printmaking, by contrast, followed the opposite trajectory, despite already being a steady feature of Japanese representation. There was just one printmaker in the 6th Biennial, rising to three in the 7th and four in the 8th. By the 9th Biennial, that number jumped to 18 artists presenting prints.

Yoshinobu Masuda, the Japanese commissioner for the 8th and 9th São Paulo Biennials, justified the significant presence of prints by stating, “[...] if there was one thing that had remained unchanged until then, it was the Japanese preference for woodblocks and paper as mediums.”³¹⁰

Nevertheless, a letter from the Biennial Foundation reveals the institution’s dissatisfaction with the Japanese delegation being limited to 18 printmakers and two *Nihonga* artists, which they referred to as “drawings.” The letter requested the Japanese ambassador’s assistance in securing a more comprehensive representation, one that would also include paintings and sculptures. Japan, however, declined for two reasons: first, commissioner Yoshinobu Masuda—himself a painter—struggled to select additional participants; and second, Yoshishige Saitō’s oil painting was returned damaged in 1963, which was attributed to improper storage and handling.³¹¹

During the 1960s, all Japanese commissioners for the São Paulo Biennial seemed intent on presenting a broad panorama of Japanese art. Rather than relying on the traditional dichotomy between *Nihonga* and *Yōga*, however, they focused on exploring something new emerging at the intersection of different artistic movements. This approach gradually

309. Sourced from the Wanda Svevo Archive of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

310. Catalog of the Japanese Delegation at the 9th São Paulo Biennial, 1967, p. 2.

311. Sourced from the Wanda Svevo Archive of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

eroded the once-prominent divide, especially as Abstract Art gained greater prominence.

Takeo Yamaguchi, for instance, a participant in the 7th São Paulo Biennial, combined traditional Japanese lacquer with oil painting and reinterpreted Eastern calligraphy—an approach also seen in the work of Masanari Murai. Some artists were already living in Europe at the time of their participation, such as Toshimitsu Imai (7th Biennial), who was based in Paris, and Toyofuku Tomonori (8th Biennial), who had been living in Milan since participating in the 1960 Venice Biennial and went on to present his work again in the 1964 edition.

Even at the 9th São Paulo Biennial, where most of the works were woodblock prints, the *ukiyo-e* style that Brazilians had seen in the event's fifth edition was no longer present. Instead, the exhibition featured prints that, as Commissioner Masuda described, carried "in their new forms and styles a certain essence of Japanese art tradition in the guise of modern artistic expression."³¹²

There was a close relationship between the Tokyo and São Paulo biennials. For example, when looking at the artists who participated in both the 6th Tokyo Biennial and the 6th São Paulo Biennial in 1961, we find that nine Japanese artists from the Tokyo exhibition gained international recognition, with some receiving awards. Among them was Minoru Kawabata, who had already taken part in the 4th and 5th São Paulo Biennials and won the Acquisition Award at the latter. Tadashi Sugimata also participated in the 6th São Paulo Biennial and later represented Japan at the 31st Venice Biennial. Kumi Sugai [Fig. 38] received the Best Foreign Painter at the 8th São Paulo Biennial in 1965. Yoshishige Saitō, another 6th Biennial participant, was awarded the Best Foreign Painter there as well; he had previously been recognized at the 1957 and 1959 Tokyo Biennials and had also shown work at the 1960 Venice Biennial. Notably, the recognition of Japanese artists at the São Paulo Biennial often coincided with the presence of Japanese commissioners on the award jury.

312. Catalog of the Japanese delegation at the 9th São Paulo Biennial, 1967, p. 2.



Fig. 38. Oil painting by Kumi Sugai. 8th São Paulo Biennial (1965). Photograph: Athayde de Barros. Collection: Wanda Svevo Archive/São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

Internationality—but of what kind?

The question of the Western gaze has long been central for the Japanese, reflecting their desire to join the select group of hegemonic world powers from the 19th through the 20th century through engaging in events such as the World Fair, the São Paulo Biennial, the Venice Biennial, and even the Tokyo Biennial itself—though each was approached in different ways. In the postwar period, the notion of internationality became a prominent topic among Japanese critics. In the catalog of the third Tokyo Biennial (1955), the Japanese poet and critic Shūzō Takiguchi (1903–1979), who introduced surrealism in Japan, states that “The concept of internationality emerged as a practical awareness among Japanese artistic groups precisely after World War II, and that, above all, a new geographic diagram began to emerge in Japanese art, with the rise of a new global scenario.”

Takiguchi emphasized the concept of global relevance (*sekai-sei*), which was central to the 5th Tokyo Biennial (1959)—the last edition to carry the title The Japan International Art Exhibition. Unlike his more measured tone in 1955, he introduced a critical perspective in this proposal, questioning Japan’s excessive push for internationalization. He disapproved of the “excessive attention to international reputation, which would result in the absence

of global relevance, since what matters is the ‘conscious and autonomous’ (*shutai-teki ishiki*) aspiration for global art.”

In other words, Takiguchi stressed the danger of losing Japanese subjectivity in the overwhelming pursuit of internationalization. The Japanese were always concerned with presenting themselves as a modern nation and apprehensive about discovering their “backwardness” when their works were placed side by side with those of other countries around the world. The concept of *sekai-sei* was frequently used during the 1950s in debates about the relevance of traditional art forms, such as calligraphy, in the creation of a new postwar culture—a topic we will explore further later on.³¹³

Another art critic, Ichirō Haryū, expressed his thoughts on the matter after visiting the 5th Paris Biennial (1967), noting that being close to the international level can also serve as a tool to expose and highlight shortcomings. Using the “other” as a reference, he argued, ultimately reinforces a sense of belonging to the periphery.³¹⁴ The negative connotation of this internationality is tied to Japan’s desire to “reach” the center, driven by a relentless pursuit of progress. In art, this manifests as “imitation” or a form of “learning,” further revealing the country’s subordinate position.

Thus, many intellectuals integrated insights from abroad, along with their own critical perspectives, into the catalogs of the second through ninth Tokyo Biennials, positioning the event as a platform for assessing the place of Japanese art within the international artistic landscape.³¹⁵

In this context, the ideas of artist Tarō Okamoto emerged,³¹⁶ reinforcing a previously expressed concern: the loss of a distinct national identity. Okamoto opposed the aggressive Westernization of art and argued that the true source of Japanese art lay in *Jōmon* ceramics from the era of the same name (14,000 BCE-300 BCE)—a time when Japan had yet to come into contact with other Asian countries and, therefore, possessed a genuinely native aesthetic. He also emphasized that even if regional distinctions were lost, an intrinsic reality would always remain to define Japanese identity.³¹⁷

From another perspective, the “national characteristic” was considered rooted in the traditional hierarchy of groups and associations within

313. Tomii, 2011, p. 200.

314. Haryū, *apud* Tomii, 2009, p. 128.

315. Yamashita, 2018, p. 75.

316. Okamoto was an artist who studied Philosophy, Art, and Anthropology in Paris from 1930 to 1940 and was in contact with figures such as Marcel Mauss, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Arp, among others.

317. Yamashita, 2018, p. 76.

Japanese art, standing in contrast to the concept of internationality. In this view, being international was equated with an awareness of “Western contemporaneity”—a notion that became more pronounced during the 1960s, when New York solidified its dominance in the international art world through the rise of Abstract Expressionism.

Thus, a new connection emerged between this “national characteristic” and the international art world, provoking a shift in the Japan—West artistic relationship that unfolded from the late 1950s into the 1960s. Informal abstraction became the driving force behind this transformation, linking abstract art with Japanese calligraphy—particularly the *avant-garde* styles known as *bokushō* and *zen’ei-sho*. In this new calligraphic trend, artists had the freedom to express themselves without the need for legibility, blurring the boundaries between painting and calligraphy. According to Ichirō Haryū, one of the “Three Great” art critics of the time, the concept of art underwent significant international change between 1955 and 1956, fueling an informal trend that “grew like an avalanche” during that period.

Both Ichirō Haryū and Masayoshi Honma, respectively critic and chief curator of Japan’s National Museum, argued that Japan had transcended the dualisms of East/West and modern/traditional by recognizing contemporaneity as something simultaneously international. Honma emphasized the “simultaneity” of artistic developments between Japan and the West, suggesting that Franz Kline’s black-and-white abstract works could not have existed without the influence of *bokushō* calligraphy.³¹⁸

Aligning with the views of Haryū and Honma, Sōichi Tominaga, commissioner of the 30th Venice Biennial (1960) and director of the National Museum of Western Art, wrote that:

For the last few years, Japanese contemporary art has struggled with the adventure of abstract art. Some outstanding artists of the younger generation, in particular, have sought a new way of artistic expression with violent passion. Japanese art is now past the stage where it was nearly suffocated by the pressure of its long history and rich tradition. It has been revived and has kept pace with the tempo of world contemporary art.³¹⁹

Abstract art was the magical form through which the connection to traditional Japanese art became evident, allowing ancient Japanese techniques to partake in the global trend.³²⁰ From the 1960s onward, Japanese art was seen in a new light:

318. Honma, *apud* Tomii, 2009, p. 129.

319. The Japan Foundation/The Mainichi Newspaper, 1995, p. 78. Preface to the Japanese Catalog.

320. Catalog of the 29th Venice Biennial, 1958, p. 235.

no longer considered inferior to Western art, it gained international prominence, redefined within the modern framework of abstract art.

The fact that the Japanese national representations from the 6th to the 9th São Paulo Biennials in the 1960s also toured MAM Rio—expanding the exhibition’s reach beyond São Paulo—reflects a period when Japanese art had gained confidence and recognition in the global art scene. Furthermore, the prohibitive cost of transporting works from such a distant country likely justified this extended exhibition, as it incurred only a negligible additional expense relative to the overall budget.

The connection between informal abstract art and Japanese calligraphy also resonated within the Japanese Brazilian art scene. Renowned artist Manabu Mabe won the Best National Painter Award at the 5th São Paulo Biennial in 1959 and had a special room in 1963 showcasing his informal abstract works. Notably, the most prominent Japanese Brazilian artists of the past century emerged from this artistic tradition.

Therefore, due to the strong interaction between this reinterpretation of Japanese tradition and abstractionism, several Japanese calligraphy exhibitions were held in Brazil during the 1960s and 1970s. These included the *Exhibition of Japanese Calligraphic Art* at the 6th São Paulo Biennial (1961); *Modern Japanese Calligraphy* (1965) [Figs. 39 and 40] and *Contemporary Calligraphy of Japan* (1971) at MAM Rio; as well as *Japanese Calligraphy* (1973), *The Modern Sho of Sekijin Kano* (1974), and the *Exhibition of Modern Japanese Calligraphy* (1975) at MASP.

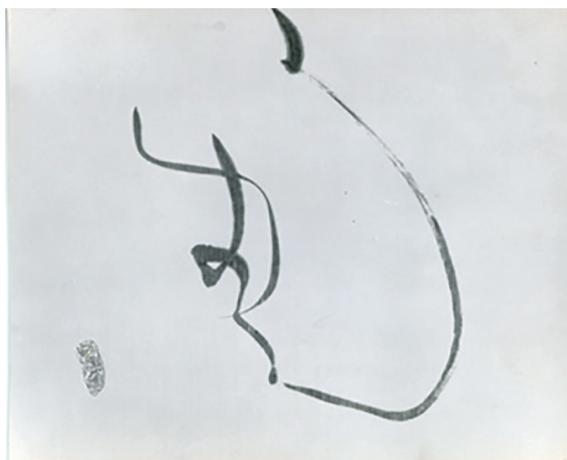


Fig. 39. A calligraphy that occupies an intermediate space between verbal code and painting. Calligraphy by Suzuki Seiken. *Kumo* (Cloud), which featured at the exhibition *Caligrafia Moderna japonesa [Modern Japanese Calligraphy]* at MAM Rio, 1965. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.



Fig. 40. Calligraphy by Hirao Ko-ô. Saying by Lao Tzu. *Sono atsuiki ni oru* [To behave naturally, without pretense]. Work featured at the exhibition *Caligrafia Moderna japonesa* [Modern Japanese Calligraphy] at MAM Rio, Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

The *Exhibition of Japanese Calligraphic Art* at the 6th São Paulo Biennial was organized at the request of critic Mario Pedrosa, General Secretary of the Biennial, and resulted from his 12-month stay in Japan between 1958 and 1959, funded by a UNESCO grant. The exhibition featured both ancient and modern calligraphic works, sourced from the Gotō Art Museum and the private collection of Moritatsu Hosokawa, grandfather of Japan's former Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa. It reflected Pedrosa's vision to showcase "the origins of origins, that is, to demonstrate the functioning of artistic creation itself, in its very beginnings."³²¹

The exhibition catalog highlights calligraphy as an art form and traces its history back to China, from the use of ideographic characters in divine rituals to the invention of paper in the first century and the adoption of brush and ink. It also emphasizes that "it is legitimate to assert that these works are significant examples of the characteristics of Far Eastern painting,"³²² thereby positioning calligraphy within the artistic realm as recognized in the West.

Final Remarks

Since the late 19th century, the World Fairs have played a key role in showcasing the power and influence of hegemonic nations on the international stage. For Japan, such events—particularly the early exhibitions examined here—served as a catalytic space for Japanese culture, shaping an image of the country as both traditional and exotic. This can be considered a strategy of soft power,³²³ emerging after more than 200 years of isolation (*sakoku*) from foreign nations. The Fairs also held significant diplomatic and

321. Alambert; Canhete, 2004, p. 87.

322. Iijima, 1961, p. 7.

323. The definition proposed by Nye in 2008 describes it as the ability to shape others' preferences through cultural, political, and institutional values.

strategic value. They facilitated the movement of Japanese people to the West while consequently introducing Western economic, technological, and cultural systems into Japan. These changes, understood as “modernization,” along with the circulation of Westerners in Japan and the development of Japanese art collections abroad, were direct outcomes of this contact.

Thus, art has been—and continues to be—a relevant element in shaping a nation’s subjectivity in relation to others in the pursuit of international recognition. “Those government-supported exhibitions can be considered efforts to homogenize the population and elevate the ideals of popular sovereignty by producing a progressive conception of history.”³²⁴

The Tokyo Biennial sought to symbolize modernity. Over its nearly 40-year history, it reflected Japan’s postwar transformations, continued through the period of economic development, and culminated in the early years of the so-called “lost decade,” marked by the collapse of the real estate and financial bubble that led the country into a period of crisis. Within this specific context, we can observe both confrontation and convergence between Japan and the West, between *avant-garde* and conservative art, shifts in value systems, and the very conception of art itself—aligning with the Venice Biennale and the São Paulo Biennial.

The Tokyo Biennial may have been influenced by Japan’s experiences at the World Fairs since the late 19th century, recognizing art as a powerful tool for diplomacy and politics. Indeed, even with the country semi-destroyed after World War II and still under American occupation, artistic exhibitions were held. The adoption of cultural diplomacy through the arts played a key role in securing Japan a prominent place on the global stage and in reshaping its image in the eyes of the world.

We have observed that the artistic relationship between Brazil and Japan was established from the earliest biennials, both those held in São Paulo and in Tokyo, including the circulation of four Japanese exhibitions from the São Paulo Biennial to MAM Rio. Japan showcased various facets of its artistic production at the São Paulo Biennial throughout the 1960s: from the 6th edition, where nearly 85% of the works were oil paintings, and culminating in the 9th Biennial, where oil painting dropped to 0% and printmaking accounted for 90% of Japan’s participation. Despite the justification provided earlier regarding this curatorial decision, it is likely that by the end of the decade, Japan felt confident in exhibiting works that resonated with those receiving the greatest artistic attention from the West.

324. Schilcher, 2020, n.p. TN.

The concern with the Western perspective remained a key factor in these exhibitions—not only in relation to the Brazilian lens, but also to that of all the nations participating in the São Paulo Biennial. This was reflected in the pursuit of international admiration through works that combined traditional techniques with modern elements. Perhaps underlying this was the enduring fascination with Japanese woodblock prints in Europe at the turn of the previous century—a fascination that remained a defining image of Japan dating back to the World Fairs. It is worth recalling that, eight years before the 9th São Paulo Biennial, in its 5th edition (1959), Japan had organized an exhibition featuring one hundred *Ukiyo-e* woodcuts dating from the 17th to the 19th century, captivating Brazilian audiences with the same Japonisme that had profoundly influenced Impressionist artists.

The discontinuation of transferring Japan's representations from the São Paulo Biennial to MAM Rio after the 9th edition (1967) may reflect the country's growing prominence in the international art world. By this point, the connection between calligraphy and informal abstract art had firmly established Japan's artistic presence on the global stage, as explored earlier.

In this process of analysis, the art exhibitions studied revealed the establishment of traveling exhibitions, connections, and international networks. It became evident that these events cannot be analyzed without considering the geopolitics of art. They are intrinsically intertwined with social, economic, and cultural contexts, as well as with the agents operating within them. A broader understanding of these dynamics is essential to grasp the role that art plays on the world stage.

In Japan's case, while art was also used to introduce Western mentalities into the country for political and commercial purposes, the power of human artistic roots took precedence. Rather than abandoning its heritage of traditional art, Japan connected it to the Western world—in a fruitful exchange full of possibilities that lies at the heart of all creative movement.

Tapêtes Francêses Contemporâneos: Tenth São Paulo Biennial (1969) and MAM Rio (1970)

RENATA CRISTINA DE OLIVEIRA MAIA ZAGO

Since its founding in 1948, the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio) has played a fundamental role in consolidating and promoting modern art in Brazil, contributing to the construction of a complex narrative of modernity while educating the public in the appreciation of modern artists and movements. Initially, under the presidency of Raymundo de Castro Maya, the museum prioritized frequent temporary exhibitions, adopting an approach defined by circulation and innovation. The emphasis was on temporary exhibitions as the institution's central focus reflected a desire for movement, aligning with its broader goal of engaging the public through continuous renewal and experimentation.³²⁵ Following Castro Maya's administration, under Niomar Moniz Sodré's leadership as executive director, MAM Rio expanded its outreach initiatives to attract and cultivate its own audience.

This focus on temporary exhibitions expanded in the 1950s when MAM Rio underwent a significant structural transformation, aligning with a new modern vision. Still housed in the Ministry of Education and Health building, the museum continued its exhibition program with a particular emphasis on nationally focused exhibitions,³²⁶ including retrospectives of major figures in Brazilian art, such as Cícero Dias (1952), Bruno Giorgi (1952), Portinari (1953), Guignard (1953), the first of Di Cavalcanti (1954), Pancetti (1955), Burle Marx

325. Sant'anna, 2011.

326. See Sant'anna, 2011, pp. 113-116, for an inventory of exhibitions organized by MAM Rio between 1948 and 1958.

(1956), Maria Martins (1956), Goeldi (1956), Dacosta (1956), Volpi (1957), and Abramo (1957).³²⁷

It was also during this period that MAM Rio began organizing exhibitions abroad. In 1955, *Incisioni e Disegni Brasiliane*, a printmaking exhibition, was presented in Lugano, featuring 25 works by artists such as Fayga Ostrower, Zélia Salgado, Vera Bocayuva, Mindlin, Santa Rosa, Burle Marx, Goeldi, and Vera Tormenta. That same year, in collaboration with MAM SP, another exhibition traveled to Paris, Zurich, and Pittsburgh, showcasing artists associated with the São Paulo Biennial, including Santa Rosa, Clark, Serpa, Carvão, Elisa, Déa Campos Lemos, Décio Vieira, Djanira, Palatnik, Blanc, Schaeffer, Heitor dos Prazeres, Geraldo de Barros, Mohalyi, Pancetti, Portinari, Maria Martins, Brecheret, Caciporé, Spence, and Zélia Salgado. This growing international exchange was further strengthened by MAM Rio's close ties with the São Paulo Biennial, which facilitated segments "exhibited there to be brought to Rio."³²⁸

Modern art institutions in Brazil—such as the São Paulo Biennial, MAM Rio, MAM SP, and MASP—viewed the post-World War II reconstruction of Europe as an opportunity to internationalize³²⁹ the local art scene and foster continuous exchanges between Brazilian artistic production and hegemonic cultural centers. The São Paulo Biennial emerged in a moment when Brazilian cultural identity was being consolidated in the 1950s, alongside the founding of museums aimed at making art more accessible to the public. This period of transformation, as analyzed by Maria Lucia Bueno, not only shaped art and culture but also intensified processes of border dissolution and deterritorialization, integrating continents and nations into a new global dynamic.³³⁰

By establishing itself as a space conducive to the construction of a modern society—despite being marked by a certain degree of isolation—Brazil turned to art as a means of overcoming this condition. In this context,

327. Lourenço, 1999, p. 145.

328. *Idem*, p. 146.

329. According to Bueno, internationalization is the exportation of artistic and cultural content, ways of being and living, and economic, philosophical, and political models beyond national borders, based on frameworks produced by nations with significant political and economic power. This process of deterritorializing norms, models, and traditions leads, in the art world, to the transformation of a phenomenon—whether an artistic trend or theory—into a normative model capable of operating in an international context. She argues that this process of rapprochement and integration of individuals "carries a civilizational tone—one of its strongest expressions being colonial empires—and is rooted in the ideology of the Westernization of the world" (Bueno, 1999, p. 109).

330. Bueno, 1999.

the modernist project that took shape in the country was not merely a reproduction of foreign models but rather a distinct movement shaped by specific historical, social, and cultural factors. As part of this process, museum institutions such as MAM Rio, MAM SP, and the São Paulo Biennial played a key role in advancing modernity in Brazil through artistic engagement, fostering connections between Brazilian society and the cultural expressions of other nations.³³¹

However, if MAM Rio's mission were to shape a modern social environment, this vision was not without contradictions. As Patricia Corrêa points out, under Niomar Moniz Sodré's management, the museum adopted a multidisciplinary approach aimed at integrating diverse artistic languages, dismantling traditional boundaries between "high art" (painting, sculpture) and "minor arts" (craft, tapestry). This led to a paradox: while the museum sought to promote a modern identity aligned with European *avant-garde* movements, it also embraced works that engaged with artisanal and folk traditions, ultimately broadening the very definition of modern art.³³²

In this context, major international exhibitions were hosted at MAM Rio, "brought through connections with important foreign institutions, in an effort recognized by newspapers and bulletins that underscored the institution's vitality and aimed to position it on the same level of prestige as international institutions."³³³ Beyond their artistic significance, international exhibitions at MAM Rio also played a strategic political role. To ensure the success and relevance of these initiatives, it was essential for cultural and diplomatic representatives to understand the needs and interests of both the public and the institutions involved, while also considering the broader political and social context in which they operated.

Thus, between the 1950s and 1970s, MAM Rio became a key venue for exhibitions from the São Paulo Biennial (BSP), organized by foreign delegations and international institutions. These exhibitions were curated by artistic directors and supported by art and culture committees, with the collaboration of the embassies of Brazil and participating countries. After each edition of the São Paulo Biennial, national representations, special exhibitions, or selected works could travel to other Brazilian museums. MAM Rio, for example, hosted exhibitions featuring artists such as Eduardo Paolozzi (7th BSP, 1962), a showcase on the Netherlands (7th BSP, 1964), and works by Rubio Camin, Juan Ponç, and Juan Genovès (8th BSP, 1966), as well as *Tapêtes Françêses Contemporâneos*

331. Sant'anna, 2011, p. 121.

332. Corrêa, 2022.

333. Sant'anna, p. 117.

[Contemporary French Tapestries] (10th BSP, 1970), among others. In this way, MAM Rio not only expanded its role as an artistic institution but also fostered cultural ties between Brazil and other nations, further strengthening its presence on the international art scene.

We have chosen to analyze the *Tapêtes Françêses Contemporâneos* exhibition, organized by France for the 10th São Paulo Biennial in 1969, and its subsequent tour to the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro in 1970. Our objective is to examine the relationships between MAM Rio, the São Paulo Biennial, and the foreign institutions involved in organizing these exhibitions, while also exploring the political and diplomatic perspectives and the aesthetic debates that shaped these events.

This choice is primarily based on two factors that shape a specific framework: the historical-artistic context of the São Paulo Biennial, combined with the intent to critically examine the inclusion of textile works in spaces dedicated to modern and contemporary art, in alignment with the modern paradox highlighted by Corrêa.³³⁴ This dynamic is linked to the broader debate on the transformation of the art world, where new objects, practices, and institutional relationships emerge, as exemplified by the São Paulo Biennial and MAM Rio.

The Boycott of the 10th São Paulo Biennial and the France Room

This period of transformation in Brazilian art institutions coincided with a turbulent historical-artistic context exemplified by the international boycott of the 10th São Paulo Biennial in 1969. The protest document, *Non à la Biennale de São Paulo*, was led by the French critic Pierre Restany and signed by various European and North American critics and artists, as well as Brazilian artists living abroad. “In Brazil, the critic Mario Pedrosa urged artists to withdraw from the exhibition. The French critic Pierre Restany, together with exiled Brazilian artists, helped organize the boycott by European artists that year.”³³⁵

By the late 1960s, following the enactment of AI-5 [Institutional Act n. 5],³³⁶ the international boycott of the São Paulo Biennial gained momentum as a means of denouncing the authoritarianism of the civil-military regime

334. Corrêa, 2022.

335. Green, 2009, p. 175.

336. The Institutional Act n. 5 was enacted by Brazil’s military dictatorship in December 1968 and aimed to restrict and control freedom of expression across the country. During this period, many journalists, artists, and intellectuals faced intense censorship, with their works suppressed or silenced by the regime.

and the shortcomings in the management of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation.³³⁷ This political demonstration, initiated by a group of artists and intellectuals in Paris, quickly spread across various countries, resulting in a wave of cancellations and refusals to participate in the 10th Biennial. By disrupting the organization of an exhibition that marked its 20th anniversary, the boycott had a significant impact on international relations and cultural diplomacy.

With the circulation of information beyond national borders—via mail and telegrams—and the presence of Brazilian artists and intellectuals abroad, a counter-information network was established, successfully circumventing the restrictions imposed by the dictatorial regime. The *Non à la Biennale de São Paulo* dossier was compiled with updated data on Brazil's political and cultural situation. By reproducing and distributing copies, the manifesto, accompanied by a petition, reached multiple countries and gathered a total of 321 signatures. Among the first recorded refusals were France, including the artists and the commissioner of the initially planned delegation, as well as some later invited artists; the complete delegations of the Netherlands, Sweden, and Spain; from Belgium, the artist Pol Bury; from the United States, Hans Haacke; and Pierre Restany, who had been organizing an exhibition specifically for the 10th Biennial at the invitation of Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, director of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation.³³⁸

According to Caroline Schroeder, “by outlining the reasons for the boycott, the manifesto asserted the need for a general and international

337. In addition to political protests, the São Paulo Biennial faced pressure from artists and critics demanding greater democratization of the institution. Since the 1960s, the exhibition had been criticized in the national press for its organizational structure and its growing divergence from the Brazilian artistic community. While some critics, such as Marc Berkowitz and Olney Krüse, complained that Brazil was represented exclusively at the Biennial by artists whose work aligned with an “international style,” others, such as Aracy Amaral (1961) and Paulo Mendes de Almeida (1962), criticized the excessive number of Brazilian participants. Organizations like the Brazilian Association of Art Critics (ABCA) and the International Association of Plastic Artists (AIAP) spoke out against the centralized administration of Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, president of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation, which hindered the implementation of structural changes. In 1968, the Technical Art Committee was established, composed of three members appointed by the Biennial and three nominated by ABCA and AIAP. That year, the committee included Edyla Magabeira Unger, Aracy Amaral, Waldemar Cordeiro, Mário Barata, Wolfgang Pfeiffer, and Frederico Nasser, who aimed to revise the Biennial's regulations and reshape its format. However, the centralized stance of the Biennial Foundation's leadership, particularly that of Matarazzo Sobrinho, made it difficult to implement most of the proposed changes. Faced with these challenges, the committee gradually became disorganized until it was ultimately dissolved. Textual documents related to this context can be found in the Wanda Svevo Archive of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

338. Schroeder, 2022.

refusal to participate in the São Paulo Biennial,” as it functioned as Brazil’s cultural showcase to the world, masking the repression.³³⁹ The document not only denounced the authoritarian actions of the civil-military regime but also criticized the “official” status of the Biennial, which was closely tied to the dictatorial government.³⁴⁰ To organize the exhibition, which included an increasing number of participating countries and artworks, the São Paulo Biennial Foundation (FBSP) relied on support from Itamaraty and an expansion of public funding. Thus, the Biennial served the interests of those in power, actively participating in repression by censoring works deemed “immoral or subversive,” while its international presence sought to legitimize the generals’ political agenda. The document also emphasized that it was no longer acceptable to ignore the severe repressive conditions in Brazil, which affected the general population, political activists, intellectuals, and artists.³⁴¹ Therefore, the only authentic representation of France would be a collective refusal to participate.

It is important to highlight that France’s official delegation did not attend the 10th São Paulo Biennial. However, the country participated unofficially, presenting an exhibition of contemporary French tapestries organized by the General Administration of the Mobilier National in Paris and its director, Jean Coural. The show featured works by prominent artists active in the international art scene at the time, including Joan Miró, Jean Arp, Alexander Calder, Sonia Delaunay, Victor Vasarely, Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, and Jean Lurçat, among others.

Nevertheless, the presence of the France Room is clearly documented in the 10th São Paulo Biennial catalog, where it appears alongside national delegations, listed alphabetically, rather than in the section reserved for “special rooms” or commemorative and educational exhibitions. The

339. *Idem*, p. 177.

340. Brazil, 1969. Partial Dossier on Cultural Repression. *Non à la Biennale de São Paulo* Dossier. Archive: Frederico Morais.

341. There were indications of a letter, authored by the Biennial, imposing restrictions on the submission of works with erotic or political content. In addition, the agreement established with Itamaraty in 1967, which provided for dozens of Acquisition Prizes, included a clause stating that the selected works would be exclusively designated for the decoration of diplomatic missions and consular offices. The jury responsible for selecting the works in 1967, which included Frederico Morais, did not take this clause into consideration. Dissatisfied with the outcome, Itamaraty attempted to replace the awarded works with others. According to Morais, because of this contractual clause, “the jury could not purchase works of a markedly political or erotic nature and had to exercise restraint regarding *avant-garde* experiments, research, etc.” Frederico Morais. “Artes Plásticas”. *Diário de Notícias*, 2nd section, Sept. 20, 1967, p. 3. *Apud* Schroeder, 2022, p. 178.

organization of the Biennial catalogs between the 1950s and 1970s included categories such as “Country Representations—Visual Arts Exhibition,” “Special Rooms,” and other shows, like the Theater Biennial, Architecture, and Jewelry Exhibitions. As such, an analysis of the documentation reveals that both in the catalog and in the exhibition floor plan [Fig. 41], France was categorized as a national delegation rather than a special room, suggesting an effort to legitimize its diplomatic presence at the event.

The simplified floor plan of the 10th Biennial [Fig. 41] shows the France Room located on the second floor of what was then called the Armando de Arruda Pereira Pavilion—now known as the Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion or the São Paulo Biennial Pavilion—alongside the official representations of European and Asian countries. The image indicates that the first floor housed the Latin American countries, the *Fantastic Art* special room, and the general Brazil Room. On the third floor, the Architecture, Theater, and Book sections were displayed. Additionally, the France Room occupied a prominent location in the exhibition space, as visitors taking the escalator from the first to the second floor were immediately met with the tapestry exhibition, as illustrated in Fig. 42.

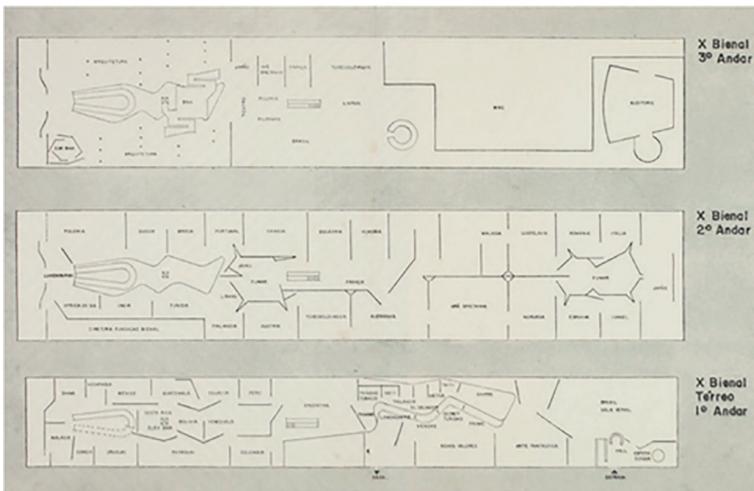


Fig. 41. Floor plan of the São Paulo Biennial Pavilion. Source: Catalog of 10th São Paulo Biennial, 1969.



Fig. 42. View of the France Room at the 10th São Paulo Biennial, 1969.
Collection: Wanda Svevo Archive/São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

Thus, the exhibition *Tapêtes Françêses Contemporâneos* showcased 30 tapestries from the French government's collection to the Brazilian public, featuring works by 23 different artists. As a result, the France Room was exclusively dedicated to tapestries, reflecting—amidst a context of resistance—an effort by the São Paulo Biennial Foundation to maintain France's cultural presence at the event, despite the country's official adherence to the international boycott.

The exhibition demonstrates how art can sustain a country's cultural presence in international events, even amid boycotts. The selection of works by renowned French artists functioned as a strategy to uphold France's cultural relevance, emphasizing its artistic contributions despite political tensions. Moreover, participation in international cultural events facilitates intercultural dialogue, which can ease diplomatic tensions and foster mutual understanding. In this sense, the Biennial exhibition is not merely a display of artworks but also an expression of the intersection between art, politics, and international relations, illustrating how cultural diplomacy can act as a "primary vehicle for values and symbolic representations."³⁴²

342. Madeira Filho, 2016, p. 27.

Tapestry: Weaving, Patterns, and Exhibitions

Although *Tapêtes Francêses Contemporâneos* centers on modern and contemporary tapestry, it is essential to briefly acknowledge the history of this artistic medium. The exhibition at the 10th São Paulo Biennial and MAM Rio not only showcased contemporary works but also revived a longstanding tradition, reaffirming tapestry as a culturally significant and enduring form of artistic expression, particularly within the French tradition. Over time, contemporary artists have reinterpreted tapestry, experimenting with new techniques and concepts that have transformed it into an art form engaged with current social and aesthetic issues. This evolution preserves its historical legacy while expanding the possibilities of this artistic language, ensuring its continued relevance in the contemporary art scene.

Between the 14th and 16th centuries, tapestries were an integral part of courtly life, adorning banquet halls and private chambers of kings and nobles or being prominently displayed during public ceremonies and religious festivals in streets and cathedrals. Woven with thick woolen threads, these pieces were more durable than silk or velvet, making them easier to transport between locations.³⁴³ Tapestries served both decorative and functional purposes: when hung on walls, they helped insulate rooms—castle halls were often equipped with hooks to secure them, softening the harshness of the space. They were also used as canopies over beds or draped over tables and chairs, making interiors more inviting. The nobility valued them for their durability and versatility, as they allowed rooms to be adapted to their taste.³⁴⁴

Both the West and the East valued tapestries highly, though in culturally distinct ways. In the Islamic tradition, Oriental carpets were versatile and did not separate the sacred from the profane, as these aspects of life were inherently intertwined. A prayer rug, for instance, was both a sacred object of devotion and a medium of artistic expression within Islamic culture.³⁴⁵ In contrast, European tapestries had specific functions and were regarded as luxury items, accessible only to the elite.

In Western Europe, the tapestry tradition became firmly established around the 14th century, with Paris and Flanders emerging as major centers of production. By the 15th century, approximately 15,000 weavers were active in the Loire Valley alone, working with both vertical and horizontal looms

343. Campbell, 2006.

344. *Idem*.

345. Ford, 2007.

and incorporating up to 20 colors. These tapestries frequently depicted biblical narratives, and after 1500, they increasingly featured secular themes, including battle scenes and royal portraits. Monarchs often commissioned painters to document battles, which were later transformed into tapestries for their castles. During invasions, these works were frequently modified—cut or sewn together to fit new spaces—sometimes disrupting or merging the original narratives they portrayed.³⁴⁶

In the early 19th century, the invention of the mechanical loom in Flanders made tapestries more accessible and facilitated their wider use. By the end of the century, the French Gobelin manufactory had expanded its color palette to 14,000 shades, achieving an unprecedented level of tonal realism. Meanwhile, the Arts and Crafts movement, which emerged in England, revitalized tapestry by reintroducing artisanal techniques that had largely disappeared due to the Industrial Revolution. William Morris, the movement's leading figure, studied French techniques, developed his own loom, and, alongside his colleagues, produced tapestries inspired by the medieval style. Morris & Co., the decorating company he founded in 1861, played a key role in popularizing these techniques, influencing generations of artists.³⁴⁷

The French artist Jean Lurçat played a pivotal role in the revitalization of tapestry in the 20th century. As Maria Isabel Gradim observes, after studying 12th- and 13th-century tapestries, Lurçat concluded that the essence of this art form had been distorted over time and that modern dyeing techniques restricted creativity by promoting mere reproduction.³⁴⁸ Together with Dubreuil and Gromaire, Lurçat settled in Aubusson, where they reduced the color palette to approximately 40 shades and redesigned cartoon templates to facilitate weavers' interpretation, restoring the medieval production rhythm of two square meters per month. Similar initiatives emerged in Belgium and Poland, but it was only after World War II, in 1945, that contemporary tapestry reemerged, featuring a figurative style renewed in both intent and composition.

For over 500 years, tapestries were created using cartoons based on paintings, which were often reused, sold, and adapted across generations. Initially, these cartoons were derived from paintings made by artists, and the first large tapestries woven from them were intended for European nobility. Later, the same cartoons were reused to produce

346. Garcez; Makowiecky, 2020.

347. *Idem*.

348. Gradim, 2018.

smaller tapestries, with some variations in color and composition, commissioned by wealthy bourgeois patrons. To accurately replicate the details of paintings, weavers used fine warps and intricate weft patterns, sometimes reaching 16 threads per centimeter, and developed specific dyes to match the original colors. Tapestries created without cartoons were rare. It was in the 20th century that French weavers initiated a movement in which artists themselves were expected to design and weave their own tapestries, moving away from the mere reproduction of paintings or photographs. Instead, they sought to leverage textile techniques and materials to imbue each piece with a distinct identity. Some contemporary weavers used photographs as cartoons, employing them as references for their work to enhance details—particularly the effects of light and shadow, depth, and transparency.³⁴⁹

Gradim also observes that during the 1960s, the field of abstraction began incorporating tapestry techniques, leading to increasingly stylized figurative forms. While tapestry retained its two-dimensional nature, weavers started to experiment with textures, introduced new materials, and approached the loom with greater flexibility and creativity. By the end of the decade, the first three-dimensional experiments in tapestry had emerged, alongside new artistic concerns related to material, color, form, and movement.³⁵⁰

In the field of exhibitions, researcher Rebecca Twist conducted a survey of shows that prominently featured tapestry, including *Exhibition of Tapestries* at MoMA in 1969, *Forms in Fiber* at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1970, and *Deliberate Entanglement*, which opened at UCLA in 1971 before touring.³⁵¹ During this period, textiles became recognized as a legitimate medium in artistic production as three-dimensional works made with flexible fabrics began appearing in contemporary art exhibitions. This shift in perspective on tapestry aligns with the rise of the Lausanne International Tapestry Biennial, which became the leading event of this kind worldwide. Organized over the years by the *Centre International de la Tapisserie Ancienne et Moderne* (CITAM), founded in 1961 by Jean Lurçat and Pierre Pauli in Lausanne, Switzerland, these biennials solidified tapestry as a significant art form on the international stage. Gradim states that:

349. Hulse, 2009.

350. Gradim, 2018.

351. Twist, 2012.

Over the course of the Lausanne Tapestry Biennials, the works gradually moved beyond the traditional category of tapestry. For some time, there were efforts to expand the category to accommodate these new works; but updated terms emerged, with *Fiber Art* becoming the most commonly used today.³⁵²

When describing the transformations that took place over the years at the Lausanne Biennial, Gradim highlights that in 1962, during its first edition, the exhibited works spanned more than 12 square meters and were prepared and woven in Aubusson and Gobelins, based on cartoons inspired by renowned artists such as Picasso and Le Corbusier. This inaugural edition set a high standard for tapestry, emphasizing artisanal tradition and the grandeur of the pieces. By the 2nd Biennial in 1965, new trends emerged with the introduction of natural and plant-based fibers, animal hair and hides, nylon rope, and jute, broadening the material possibilities of tapestry and signaling a shift toward experimentation and innovation. In 1967, the 3rd Lausanne Biennial marked a significant shift in regulations, permitting the inclusion of any original work that was handmade, woven on a loom, or embroidered. This edition notably featured the iconic *Abakan* works by artist Magdalena Abakanowicz. The 4th Lausanne Biennial, in 1969, continued this trend of innovation by incorporating new artistic languages such as photography and macramé. It was praised by international critics for its boldness and diversity.³⁵³

Thus, during the first decade of the Lausanne Biennials, tapestries created from cartoons were exhibited alongside experimental works, showcasing the evolution of tapestry as an art form. According to Gradim, as experimental approaches gained momentum, the jury chose to adopt a more flexible stance on the rules, introducing a section dedicated to creative exploration. In 1973, the definition of “tapestry” was redefined, and the Biennial’s regulations were updated to accommodate a broader range of techniques and styles. The 6th Biennial saw the emergence of new techniques, including relief and irregular warps and wefts, reflecting the field’s dynamism. By the decade’s end, between 1977 and 1979, CITAM faced a crisis that prompted a restructuring of the jury’s selection criteria to keep pace with evolving artistic practices. In 1981, the grandeur of textile art was further emphasized, and in the following three editions (1983, 1985, and 1987), the selection of works became theme-based, providing a more focused curatorial approach.³⁵⁴

352. Gradim, 2018, p. 47.

353. *Idem*, p. 50.

354. Gradim, 2018.

Finally, in the 1989 edition, as textile art began to move away from the constraint of being defined solely by its material, Japanese and North American artists gained prominence, reflecting a significant cultural diversification in the tapestry scene. By 1995, in the final edition of the Biennial, a retrospective examined the connection between art and fabric, marking the conclusion of a cycle of innovations and reaffirming tapestry as a relevant and continually evolving artistic medium.³⁵⁵

When analyzing the transformation of tapestry and textiles as art forms, it is essential to connect the trajectory of these works at the Lausanne Biennials with their integration into the Brazilian art system. Maria Isabel Gradim conducted a detailed survey of the tapestries exhibited at the São Paulo Biennial, revealing that between 1955 and 1975, at least one tapestry was featured in each edition of the event, with a notable increase in the reception of this artistic medium between 1963 and 1969. In 1957, for example, the French delegation presented six tapestries, including a work by Jean Lurçat, who was also featured in the 10th Biennial (1969). In 1963, Austria exhibited a total of 20 tapestries, while in 1965, the works of Magdalena Abakanowicz and Jagoda Buic stood out—both of whom were prominent figures in the Lausanne Biennial.³⁵⁶

Leonor Amarante highlights the significance of Abakanowicz's participation in the 8th São Paulo Biennial (1965), stating that "the Polish artist introduced a radical transformation in tapestry, making it three-dimensional."³⁵⁷ This innovation had a significant impact, as the artist presented the installation *As Costas* [Backs], reshaping the perception of tapestry within the artistic context. A decade later, in 1975, Jagoda Buic was awarded at the 13th São Paulo Biennial, further reaffirming the growing role of tapestry in the Brazilian visual arts scene. Amarante concludes that:

The thirteenth edition, for example, awarded the Grand Prize to the Yugoslav tapestry artist Jagoda Buic. The award came ten years after the impact of the Polish tapestry school at the eighth edition, led by Magdalena Abakanowicz [...]. Abakanowicz's success led some Brazilian tapestry artists to Poland and attracted many other artists to this medium. By this time, tapestry had already broken free from the constraints of the floor and the wall, transforming into an object.³⁵⁸

355. *Idem*.

356. *Idem*.

357. Amarante, 1989, p. 146.

358. *Idem, ibidem*.

The analysis of the evolution of tapestry and textiles in art exhibitions reveals a significant trajectory, culminating in a peak at the 9th São Paulo Biennial in 1967, when 36 works were exhibited, featuring Brazilian, Spanish, and Yugoslav artists. The Brazilian delegation stood out with tapestries by Jacques Douchez, Norberto Nicola, and Edith Schaar, each presenting five works. Spain contributed fourteen pieces by Josep Grau-Garriga, while Yugoslavia showcased seven tapestries by Jagoda Buic, who had already been awarded at the previous edition of the Biennial.

This growing recognition of tapestry extended beyond the São Paulo Biennial, leading to the establishment of the first of three Tapestry Triennials at the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo, held between 1976 and 1982. These events further solidified tapestry's importance in Brazil's art scene. As previously mentioned, in 1969, the special French room at the São Paulo Biennial was dedicated exclusively to tapestries, reinforcing their role in fostering intercultural dialogue—a dynamic that continued to evolve at both the Lausanne and São Paulo Biennials.

Tapêtes Françêses Contemporâneos at MAM Rio

Between 1948 and 1978, MAM Rio hosted several tapestry exhibitions featuring both international and national productions.³⁵⁹ Under the management of Niomar Moniz Sodré, the 1952 exhibition *Tapeçarias Modernas Francesas* [Modern French Tapestries] introduced works by Jean Lurçat, Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Georges Rouault, and Le Corbusier, marking a renewal of artistic tapestry through chromatic simplification and modernist flatness [Fig. 43]. In 1956, the exhibition *Tapeçarias Abstratas* [Abstract Tapestries] from the Denise René Gallery showcased works by Jean Arp, Auguste Herbin, Wassily Kandinsky, and Victor Vasarely, establishing a connection between tapestry and European *avant-garde* movements.

359. Corrêa, 2022.



Fig. 43. View of the exhibition *Tapeçarias Abstratas*. Museum of Modern of Rio de Janeiro, 1956. Photograph: Galerie Denise René. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

On the national scene, MAM Rio hosted the exhibition *Tapeçarias Genaro* [Genaro Tapestries] in 1957, featuring works by Genaro de Carvalho, and in 1963, *Tapestries from the Douchez-Nicola Atelier*, where Jacques Douchez remained committed to flat tapestry while Norberto Nicola explored experimental volumetric forms. The traveling exhibition *Tapeçaria Romena Contemporânea* [Contemporary Romanian Tapestry] (1968) was also noteworthy, showcasing 25 artists who blended local traditions with a modernist aesthetic.

Within this context of growing recognition for textile arts, the exhibition *Tapêtes Françaises Contemporâneos* stands out. Initially presented at the 10th São Paulo Biennial (September 27–December 14, 1969), the exhibition later traveled to MAM Rio in 1970, maintaining the same collection of works. As previously discussed, France’s unofficial representation at the 10th Biennial caused some confusion, which was also reflected in institutional correspondence between MAM Rio and the French Embassy in Brazil. In a letter dated April 14, 1969, addressed to the French Embassy, MAM Rio’s then-director, Maurício Roberto, expressed interest in organizing, after the Biennial, an “exhibition of the main representations that participated in the São Paulo Biennial” and inquired whether he could count on “France’s important representation in this exhibition.”³⁶⁰

360. Letter from Maurício Roberto to Jacques Roze, Apr. 14, 1969. Official Document MAM-C. 567/69. Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

In response to the previous correspondence, Jacques Roze, Cultural Counselor of the French Embassy, clarified in a letter dated April 30, 1969, that the works sent to the Biennial did not constitute an official representation but were part of a retrospective exhibition on French tapestry. Initially, this exhibition comprised 50 works—20 historical pieces and 30 contemporary ones. Roze stated that he saw “only advantages” in the request and had already contacted the Ministry of Culture about the possibility of the exhibition touring. He asked Maurício Roberto to confirm his interest, specifically “whether he agreed with the retrospective dedicated to tapestry.”³⁶¹ In his reply on June 9, 1969, Maurício Roberto confirmed the agreement with the embassy, expressing MAM Rio’s satisfaction in hosting the “official representation of France at the São Paulo Biennial,” which was expected to include the full selection of 50 tapestries.³⁶² However, a later correspondence dated November 24, 1969, revealed that only 30 works were actually sent to the São Paulo Biennial and subsequently to MAM Rio.³⁶³ Roze later clarified that “in reality, the historical tapestries that were originally planned to complete the exhibition in São Paulo were not sent to the Biennial.”³⁶⁴

During the negotiations, an agreement was reached for the tapestry exhibition to travel directly to MAM Rio after the conclusion of the São Paulo Biennial. In a letter dated October 16, 1969, French Cultural Counselor Jacques Roze specified that *Association Française d’Action Artistique* (AFFA) would cover the transportation costs from São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro and onward to Bogotá, as well as insurance expenses.³⁶⁵ The Brazilian organizers would be responsible for the on-site organizational costs, including the exhibition

361. Letter from Jacques Roze to Maurício Roberto, Apr. 30, 1969. Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

362. Letter from Maurício Roberto to the French Embassy, Jun. 9, 1969. Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

363. Letter from Jacques Roze to Maurício Roberto, Nov. 24, 1969. Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

364. Original text: “En réalité, seules les trente tapisseries qui figurent actuellement à la Biennale de S. Paulo pourront être présentées dans votre Musée. En effet, les tapisseries anciennes dont l’envoi avait été envisagé pour compléter l’exposition à S. Paulo n’ont pas été envoyées à la Biennale”. Letter from Jacques Roze to Maurício Roberto. Nov. 24, 1969. Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

365. Letter from Jacques Roze to Maurício Roberto, Oct. 16, 1969. Research and Documentation MAM Rio. The *Association Française d’Action Artistique* (AFAA) was founded in 1962, during André Malraux’s tenure as Minister of Cultural Affairs in France. One of its main functions was to promote French art and culture worldwide by organizing exhibitions in various countries. Additionally, this same correspondence indicates that the exhibition would later travel to Bogotá, Colombia.

space, security, installation, publicity, and the publication of a catalog. If the French Artistic Commissioner or their representative traveled to Rio for the exhibition, the AFFA would cover the travel costs, while accommodation expenses would be the responsibility of the Brazilian organizers. The organizers would be reimbursed for local expenses, and the artworks were required to have the same security measures against theft and fire as those applied to museum collections in Brazil.

This exchange of correspondence highlights not only the ambiguity of France's official presence at the 10th São Paulo Biennial but also the complexities of cultural diplomacy during a time of political tensions. Amid the official boycott led by Pierre Restany and supported by French artists, the Ministry of Culture, through AFFA, chose a strategic approach to avoid completely severing France's cultural visibility at the event. AFFA, in coordination with other institutions, opted for a diplomatic path that avoided direct confrontations while reaffirming France's significance in the arts. Instead of an official representation marked by political statements, the decision was made to send a tapestry exhibition with the support of the Mobilier National, ensuring culturally significant content that respected French textile traditions. This move aimed to uphold France's artistic prestige while maintaining a diplomatic stance that reinforced the country's artistic identity and international influence without directly engaging in the political debates of the time.

In this context, the responsibility for organizing the exhibition and writing the introductory text for the catalogs was assigned to Jean Coural, General Administrator of the Mobilier National and the National Manufactories of Gobelins, Beauvais, and Savonnerie. In his introduction, Coural highlights the long-standing tradition of French tapestry, recognizing it as an artistic and artisanal form of foremost importance. He also underscores the decisive contribution of Jean Lurçat, considered the leading figure in the renewal of tapestry with an innovative approach. According to Coural, Lurçat infused this art with "absolute integrity, lyrical warmth, and a rigorous awareness of its purpose," fostering a profound transformation and inspiring other artists to follow his vision. Coural notes that, while some artists present "perspectives that are at times contradictory," the poetic potential of tapestry remains vast and largely unexplored. He concludes his text by emphasizing a "second wave of abstract painters," expressing his satisfaction in showcasing some of the most renowned among them in the show and affirming that "one can witness here the vitality and richness of contemporary French tapestry."³⁶⁶

366. Coural, 1970, p. 3.

The exhibition featured a total of 30 tapestries [Table 6], selected from the public collection of the Mobilier National and produced in France's traditional tapestry centers, reaffirming the connection between craftsmanship and French cultural heritage. Most of these works were woven using the low-warp (*bas-lisse*) technique³⁶⁷ (19 pieces), while ten were created with the high-warp (*haut-lisse*) technique. One tapestry by Georges Braque did not have a specified technique. Among the specialized workshops, ten tapestries were produced at the Gobelins manufactory, seven at the Royal Manufactories of Aubusson, and thirteen at the Beauvais workshops. Jean Lurçat's tapestry *O Céu* [The Sky] was completed in 1956, while most of the other works date from the 1960s, except for three pieces with no specified date.

Table 6. Artists and Works Featured in the Exhibition *Tapêtes Francêses Contemporâneos*

Artist	Name of Work	Dimensions (cm)	Technique	Manufactory	Date
Henri-Georges Adam	Lajes, Areia e Água [Flagstones, Sand, and Water]	400×594	High-warp	Gobelins	1968 (2 nd Copy)
Henri-Georges Adam	<i>Espaços</i> [Spaces]	150×585	Low-warp	Aubusson	1968
Jean or Hans Arp	<i>As Bonecas n. 2</i> [The Dolls n. 2]	195×200	High-warp	Gobelins	1967
Jean Atlan	<i>Sarabanda</i> [Sarabande]	255×493	Low-warp	Beauvais	1965
Jean Atlan	<i>A Dança do Zen</i> [The Zen Dance]	286×454	Low-warp	Beauvais	1966
André Beaudin	<i>Fôlhas Serenas</i> [Serene Leaves]	345×460	Low-warp	Aubusson	1968

367. There are different tapestry techniques, such as high-warp weaving, low-warp weaving, and hand weaving. In high-warp tapestries, the weft threads, typically made of wool or other materials, are interwoven over the warp threads, making them more prominent on the surface of the tapestry. This technique creates a fuller, more textured appearance, enhancing the intensity of colors and patterns. In contrast, in low-warp tapestries, the warp threads remain visible on the back, while the weft threads are inserted beneath them, resulting in a smoother surface with less texture. This technique produces a more uniform and less voluminous presentation.

André Borderie	<i>Jardim Secreto</i> [Secret Garden]	247×343	Low-warp	Aubusson	1966
Georges Bracque	<i>O pássaro</i> [The Bird]	200×285	-	Aubusson	-
Alexandre Calder	<i>Composição</i> [Composition]	300×400	High-warp	Gobelins	1966
Alexandre Calder	<i>Três Estrelas Negras</i> [Three Black Stars]	197×145	Low-warp	Aubusson	-
Sonia Delaunay	<i>Composição n. 1</i> [Composition n. 1]	181×266	High-warp	Gobelins	1967
Sonia Delaunay	<i>Composição n. 2</i> [Composition n. 2]	280×410	High-warp	Gobelins	1967
Emile Gilioli	<i>As dorminhocas</i> [The Sleepy Ones]	280×544	Low-warp	Beauvais	1966
Emile Gilioli	<i>Juventude</i> [Youth]	241×318	Low-warp	Beauvais	1968
Hans Hartung	<i>Composição n. 2</i> [Composition n. 2]	333×241	Low-warp	Beauvais	1962
Jacques Lagrange	<i>Homenagem a Paolo Ucello</i> [Homage to Paolo Uccello]	282×670	Low-warp	Aubusson	1968
Le Corbusier	<i>A mulher e o ferreiro</i> [The Woman and the Blacksmith]	217×362	Low-warp	Beauvais	1968 (2 nd Copy)
Fernand Léger	<i>A criação do Mundo</i> [The Creation of the World]	295×395	Low-warp	Aubusson	-
Albert Lenormand	<i>A água</i> [The Water]	191×198	Low-warp	Beauvais	1964
Jean Lurçat	<i>O céu</i> [The Sky]	344×455	High-warp	Gobelins	1956
Henri Matisse	<i>O céu</i> [The Sky]	197×315	Low-warp	Beauvais	1964 (6 th copy)

Henri Matisse	<i>O mar</i> [The Sea]	197×315	Low-warp	Beauvais	1964 (6 th copy)
Yves Millecamps	<i>Estruturas</i> [Structures]	200×591	High-warp	Gobelins	1965
Joan Miró	<i>Composição n. 1</i> [Composition n. 1]	303×452	High-warp	Gobelins	1966
Mario Prassinós	<i>King Lear</i>	283×585	High-warp	Gobelins	1963
Mario Prassinós	<i>Romeu e Julieta</i> [Romeo and Juliet]	395×558	High-warp	Gobelins	1967
Nicolas de Stael	<i>Composição</i> [Composition]	148×297	Low-warp	Beauvais	1968
Raoul Ubac	<i>Formas cinzentas e amarelas</i> [Gray and Yellow Forms]	330×260	Low-warp	Beauvais	1968
Victor Vasarely	<i>Hekla</i>	207×196	Low-warp	Beauvais	1966
Maria Helena Vieira da Silva	<i>A multidão</i> [The Crowd]	462×315	Low-warp	Beauvais	1967

Own elaboration. Source: (Michelet *et al.*, 1970)

Although only one work by Jean Lurçat is featured in this exhibition, he is widely recognized as a key figure in the revival of textile techniques. This revitalization was not limited to decorative arts but also encompassed debates on contemporary language and materiality that shaped the artistic field of the time. As previously mentioned, Lurçat, alongside Pierre Pauli, played a crucial role in promoting the Tapestry Biennials through CITAM (Centre International de la Tapisserie Ancienne et Moderne) from 1962 to 1995. These events became the leading incubators of artistic experimentation in tapestry and the foremost global forum for this art form.

Lurçat began producing tapestries in the mid-1940s, sparking interest among other artists, and encouraging novel approaches to the technique. He introduced artist-designed cartoons³⁶⁸ into tapestry-making, revitalizing the textile medium and developing the concept of the *new tapestry*. His approach involved abandoning traditional painting models and decorative borders,

368. A cartoon is the design created by the artist, containing the drawing along with indications of colors and materials for the construction of the tapestry. The weaver uses the information in the cartoon as a guide to execute the tapestry.

using a restricted color palette, and creating designs free of perspective—elements that Lurçat both promoted and incorporated into his own works.³⁶⁹

Although no images exist of the work presented by the artist in the contemporary French tapestry exhibition, it is important to note that during this period, he was dedicated to creating the tapestry series *Le Chant du Monde* [The Song of the World], woven between 1957 and 1966. According to Gérard Denizeau, this work reflects the highest spiritual values of contemporary humanity amid the terror of nuclear apocalypse.³⁷⁰ *Le Chant du Monde* blends joy and anxiety, terror, and hope, celebrating the glory of human beings living in peace, and stands as one of Jean Lurçat's most enigmatic masterpieces.

Given the absence of panoramic images of the exhibition layout and installation at MAM Rio,³⁷¹ this analysis aims to approximate the exhibition's presentation by focusing on works documented in the catalog. Thus, even without direct visualization of the pieces within the space, it will be possible to gain a general understanding of the exhibited works and their significance within the context of the show.

Among the featured pieces, one of the most striking was a tapestry by Henri-Georges Adam, known for his innovative techniques and exploration of textile materiality. Associated with the *École de Paris*, Adam was both a printmaker and a non-figurative sculptor, bringing this unique approach to his monumental tapestries. His exhibited tapestry, *Flagstones, Sand, and Water* [Fig. 44], offers an abstract interpretation of natural and geographical elements, using textures and compositions evocative of a natural landscape. The composition emphasizes geometric forms and varied textures, harnessing the textile medium's properties to create a surface rich in tactile nuances. The weave structures intensify contrasts between different sections, juxtaposing denser, more solid areas with lighter, finer weaves that convey movement and transparency. This contrast is central to the work, as it not only defines the separation between elements but also enhances depth and spatial variation, aligning with the principles of modern abstraction.

369. Cáurio, 1985.

370. Denizeau, 2016.

371. Even in the exhibition held at the Biennial pavilion in 1969, the only photograph found in the archive is the one shown in Fig. 42 of this text.

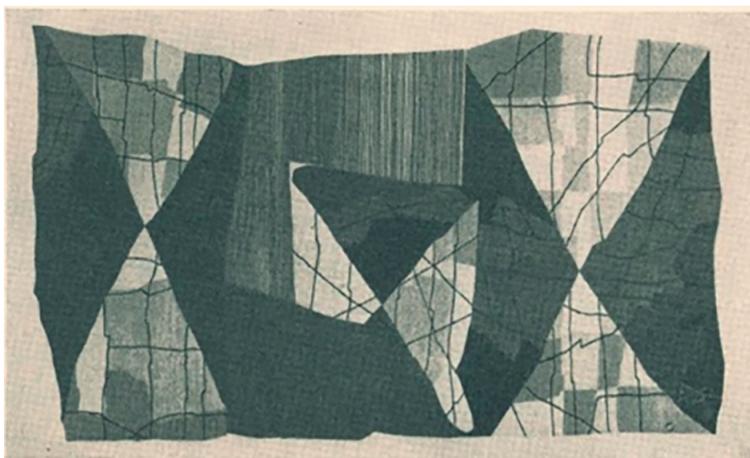


Fig. 44. Georges Henri Adam. *Flagstones, Sand, and Water*, 1968, high-warp tapestry, 400 × 594 cm. Source: (Michelet *et al.*, 1970, p. 4).

This exploration of tapestry as a fertile ground for aesthetic experimentation was not exclusive to Adam but resonated with many modern artists seeking to push the traditional boundaries of the visual arts. In this same multidisciplinary spirit, Le Corbusier—architect, urban planner, and artist—also developed an interest in tapestry during the postwar years. Following the success of the 1946 exhibition at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, a significant movement advocating for this artistic medium gained momentum, culminating in the creation of the *Association des Peintres Cartonniers de Tapisserie* (APCT) by Jean Lurçat and Denise Majorel in 1947.³⁷²

The incorporation of tapestry into these artists' work exemplifies the modern artist's multidisciplinary nature—combining creative freedom with the ability to revisit and reinvent traditional techniques. Many of these creators developed mural pieces that bridged painting and architecture, an approach that inspired Le Corbusier to coin the term *muralnomad* to describe his tapestries—designed to move fluidly between the decorative and the functional within architectural contexts.³⁷³ In the tapestry *A Mulher e o Ferreiro* [The Woman and the Blacksmith] [Fig. 45], Le Corbusier explores symbolic themes through a visual language deeply influenced by modernism. The composition features simplified forms that suggest interaction between the figures—the woman and the blacksmith—depicted with stylized

372. Froissart, 2020.

373. *Idem.*

geometric lines that depart from naturalism. This approach lends the tapestry a dimension that transcends the figurative, emphasizing the artist's interest in formal synthesis.

The visual narrative is built around the duality of feminine and masculine roles, with lines creating a sense of balance and emphasizing the contrast between figures. Additionally, Le Corbusier integrates transparency through bold outlines over a geometric background of solid colors, incorporating a Cubist collage effect—at times overlapping planes, at times intersecting lines. The scene's representation evokes concepts of construction and creation, symbolically reinforcing the role of each character—not only in their aesthetic function but also in their symbolic significance—while highlighting the relationship between form, function, and artistic expression.



Fig. 45. Le Corbusier, *The Woman and the Blacksmith*, 1968, low-warp tapestry, 217 × 362 cm. Source: (Michelet *et al.*, 1970, p. 4).

The MAM Rio 1970 exhibition also featured tapestries by Miró and Calder. Joan Miró—painter, ceramist, sculptor, and draftsman—developed a style throughout his career that combined simple forms and vibrant colors, often incorporating elements of Catalan culture and nature. In the 1920s, he moved to Paris, where he became involved with the Surrealist movement. By the 1960s, he also began creating tapestries in collaboration with the Gobelins manufactory. His textile works frequently feature organic forms and vivid colors, conveying a keen sense of movement. The work presented in the exhibition, *Composition n. 1* [Fig. 46],³⁷⁴ showcases a vibrant, dynamic

374. The reproduction presented here, in black, white, and shades of gray, is taken from the exhibition catalog. However, the work can be viewed in color as part of the Mobilier National

composition characterized by an intense color palette, with dominant shades of blue, black, red, green, and white.

The blue background serves as a base to highlight figures and geometric shapes outlined in black, creating contrasts that add depth to the piece. The tapestry is composed of organic and fluid forms, with sinuous lines that suggest “imaginary creatures” or natural elements, typical of Miró’s Surrealist language. At the center, stylized figures resembling hybrid beings blend human and animal characteristics, while a large red circle, contrasting against the blue background, evokes celestial or solar elements. The tapestry effectively conveys Miró’s aesthetic, known for combining simplicity and spontaneity, exemplifying the expansion of his artistic practice into the textile medium. His collaborations with prestigious manufactories, such as Gobelins in the 1960s, allowed him to translate the expressiveness and originality of his paintings into new dimensions of color and texture.



Fig. 46. Joan Miró, *Composition n. 1*, 1966, high-warp tapestry, 303 × 452 cm.
Source: (Michelet *et al.*, 1970, p. 7).

In a similar exploration of color and form, Alexander Calder's work featured in the exhibition, *Composition* [Fig. 47],³⁷⁵ employs a vibrant palette of primary colors—red, yellow, blue, and black—to create a tapestry that, while distinct in nature, shares Miró's dynamic energy and playful touch. While Miró integrates hybrid figures and natural elements, Calder focuses on simple, circular geometric forms, generating a sense of movement reminiscent of his mobile sculptures. The composition is horizontally divided, with yellow and white dominating the upper section and an intense red filling the lower half. Against these backgrounds, oval and circular shapes of varying sizes float freely, creating a rhythmic dynamism that evokes the characteristic motion of Calder's mobiles. The contrast between black forms and bright colors, combined with the fabric's intrinsic texture, enhances depth and three-dimensionality. Both artists, in their own way, explore the materiality and texture of tapestry, expanding their visual languages. Rather than merely preserving their original aesthetics, the textile medium introduces a new tactile and visual dimension, reinforcing the power of color and form in their work.



Fig. 47. Alexander Calder, *Composition*, 1966, high-warp tapestry, 300 × 400 cm. Source: (Michelet *et al.*, 1970, p. 7).

While Miró and Calder explore dynamism and movement through organic forms and vibrant colors, Maria Helena Vieira da Silva takes a different

375. The reproduction presented here, in black, white, and shades of gray, is taken from the exhibition catalog. However, the work can be viewed in color as part of the Mobilier National collection: Alexander Calder. *Tapeçaria: Composition* [Tapestry: Composition], 1960s. Wool textile, 400 × 297 cm. Manufacture des Gobelins, Mobilier National Collection, Paris. Available at: <https://collection.mobilier-national.fr/objet/GOB-1158-000>. Accessed on Nov. 4, 2024.

approach in her tapestry *The Multidão* [The Crowd] [Fig. 48],³⁷⁶ conveying a sense of complexity and density. A pioneer of abstract art in Brazil, Vieira da Silva's career was defined by her exploration of spatiality, movement, and the fragmentation of forms, often resulting in visually intricate compositions. Her textile work maintains continuity with her painting practice, particularly in her manipulation of geometry, texture, and the construction of dense, fragmented environments. The tapestry *A Multidão* stands as an emblematic example of her textile production, reflecting her ability to depict chaos and multiplicity through abstraction. Interwoven lines and overlapping geometric shapes form the impression of a compact mass—a "crowd" that shifts and reorganizes itself yet always remains disconnected and fragmented. The artist explores the concept of density, both visual and tactile, as the threads of the tapestry offer a physical dimension that adds to her intricate composition. Thus, tapestry allows her to explore the three-dimensional spatiality, introducing a new physical depth to her abstract language.

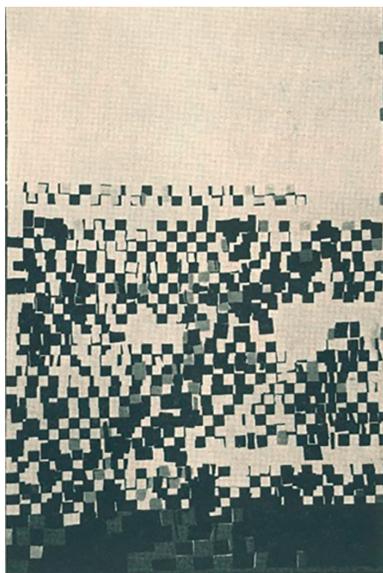


Fig. 48. Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, *A Multidão* [The Crowd], 1966, low-warp tapestry, 462 × 315 cm. Source: (Michelet *et al.*, 1970, p. 11)

376. The reproduction presented here, in black, white, and shades of gray, is taken from the exhibition catalog. However, the work can be viewed in color as part of the Mobilier National collection: Maria Helena Vieira da Silva. *Tapisserie de lice: Panneau n. 3 ou La foule* [High-Warp Tapestry: Panel n. 3 or The Crowd], 1960s. Wool textile, 302 × 469 cm. Manufacture des Beauvais, Mobilier National Collection, Paris. Available at: <https://collection.mobilier-national.fr/objet/BV-131-000>. Accessed on Nov. 4, 2024.

Hans Hartung's tapestry, in turn, continues the exploration of abstraction in the textile medium but takes a different approach from Vieira da Silva's. While Vieira da Silva conveys a fragmented and dense crowd, Hartung focuses on gestural freedom and direct emotional expression. Hans Hartung was a Franco-German painter and graphic artist widely recognized for his gestural and vibrant approach to lyrical abstraction. His works, marked by energetic brushstrokes and bold manipulation of color and form, explore expressive freedom and movement, carrying strong emotional intensity. Although best known for his paintings, Hartung also ventured into tapestry, adapting his pictorial language to the textile medium. Like his paintings, his tapestries convey a unique energy and emotional charge, transferring the gestural qualities of painting to the structure of the fabric.

In *Composition n. 2* [Fig. 49], Hartung translates his gestural language into textiles, creating a piece that pulsates with intensity and movement. Using strokes of varying dimensions that traverse the fabric, he forms lines and organic shapes that seem to shift against the background. The dark lines contrast with the lighter brown, ochre background, generating visual tension that heightens the sense of dynamism. The texture of the fabric adds a tactile dimension to the work, making the movement suggested by the strokes more tangible and impactful. The textile fibers not only complement but also amplify the materiality of the tapestry, enriching its depth and making the piece even more expressive and visceral.



Fig. 49. Hans Hartung, *Composition n. 2*, 1962, low-warp tapestry, 333 × 241 cm. Source: (Michelet *et al.*, 1970, p. 11)

By bringing together works by artists such as Jean Lurçat, Le Corbusier, Joan Miró, and Alexander Calder, among others, the exhibition highlighted the renewal of textile techniques, which came to be regarded not merely as a traditional craft but as a modern artistic expression. Therefore, the 1970 exhibition *Tapêtes Françaises Contemporâneos* at MAM Rio offered a significant panorama of modern tapestry. Originating from the 10th São Paulo Biennial, it underscored tapestry's importance as a contemporary art form and its connection to European *avant-garde* movements. Additionally, the collaboration between MAM Rio's director, Maurício Roberto, the *Association Française d'Action Artistique* (AFFA), and the diplomatic support of the French Embassy was instrumental in making the exhibition possible.

The works on display—such as Lurçat's, which introduced a new approach to tapestry through a restricted color palette and the elimination of traditional perspective, and those of artists like Le Corbusier and Miró, who integrated textiles into their multidisciplinary practices—demonstrated the experimental and innovative nature of tapestry in the 1960s. At the same time, the use of texture and vibrant color, combined with abstract and symbolic forms, reflected artists' search for a new visual language that engaged with modernism and the artistic trends of the period.

Moreover, in the 1960s and 70s, some artists began to explore and challenge the traditional hierarchies between art and craft. Howard Becker, a sociologist who examined this relationship, argues that the world of craft can be divided into three segments: common artisans, artist-craftsmen, and artists who use craft to create art. These transformations allowed textile materials to be incorporated into works of art—not in a uniform way, but through experimentation and critical discussions on the nature of art, the artwork itself, and its limits and hierarchies.³⁷⁷

The artists featured in the French tapestry exhibition analyzed here continued to follow traditional methods, such as high-warp and low-warp weaving, designing cartoons that were later woven by specialized artisans, primarily at the Beauvais and Gobelins manufactories. This dialogue between tradition and experimentation reveals a field in transition, where tapestry occupies an ambiguous position, oscillating between craft heritage and contemporary art legitimization strategies. This tension is also present in the work of other artists who explored textile techniques to create three-dimensional works, including Lucio Fontana, Christo Javacheff, Alberto Burri, Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg, Eva Hesse, and Robert Morris. In Brazil, Norberto Nicola, Jacques Douchez, and Zoravia Betiol were pioneers

377. Becker, 2008.

in incorporating tapestry as an artistic medium, expanding its conceptual boundaries.

We can observe, therefore, that these reflections help us understand how the inclusion of textile works in spaces dedicated to modern and contemporary art, such as the São Paulo Biennial and MAM Rio, aligns with a broader transformation in artistic practices and institutional relationships. This demonstrates the flexibility and reach of tapestry as an artistic medium, capable of moving between decorative art and the *avant-garde*. Furthermore, the MAM Rio exhibition was part of a larger context of cultural identity affirmation and diplomatic relations, reaffirming the importance of artistic practices in building and maintaining a country's international prestige, even in times of political conflict.

Textual Weavings and Final Notes

The analysis of the *Tapêtes Francêses Contemporâneos* exhibition at the 10th São Paulo Biennial and its subsequent presentation at MAM Rio reveals the complex layers that shaped the Brazilian artistic and cultural circuit in the 1960s and 1970s. In the context of military dictatorship, where art and cultural diplomacy were subject to restrictions and political instrumentalization, the show took on a strategic and symbolic role. Organized unofficially by France, its presence at the Biennial reflects an effort to avoid direct confrontation with the regime. Unlike the *Non à la Biennale de São Paulo* manifesto and the refusals to participate, which underscored tensions between art and political power, the French exhibition adopted a conciliatory stance, distancing itself from explicit acts of resistance. However, by avoiding direct conflict, the exhibition also, albeit indirectly, aligned itself with the regime's cultural policy, offering a symbolic alternative to the diplomatic crisis triggered by the international boycott.

Despite France's official absence from the 10th Biennial, its presence was redefined by its inclusion in the exhibition catalog alongside national representations. This gesture suggests an effort—whether by the Biennial's organizers, the Brazilian government, or French institutions—to mitigate the effects of the boycott and reaffirm diplomatic ties between the two countries. The choice of contemporary tapestry as the “curatorial” focus reinforces this strategy, projecting an idea of the transnationalization of art and shifting attention from political controversy to the artistic field. Furthermore, the paradox between the recognition of craftsmanship, represented by tapestry,

and its alignment with contemporary art concepts—as noted by Patricia Corrêa—highlights the contradictions inherent in this construction.³⁷⁸

The inclusion of the exhibition at MAM Rio was part of a broader effort to modernize and internationalize art in Brazil. By hosting exhibitions of this scale, the museum not only fostered cultural exchange but also positioned itself as a key institution in legitimizing the country's modern identity. Additionally, its close ties to the São Paulo Biennial ensured that international exhibitions were not limited to São Paulo, expanding the reach of foreign artistic production in Brazil. This dynamic, though shaped by political tensions, reinforced museums as mediators between Brazil and the global art circuit.

However, this persistent pursuit of international recognition contrasted with other initiatives at MAM Rio, such as the *Salão da Bússola* (1969),³⁷⁹ which featured artists like Cildo Meireles, Artur Barrio, and Thereza Simões, or the promotion of *Domingos de Criação* [Creation Sundays, 1971],³⁸⁰ among other events and exhibitions. These artistic manifestations challenged power structures and questioned the official narrative imposed by the regime. Taking place during a period of repression, they brought visibility to new artistic expressions and served as spaces for symbolic negotiation, reflecting ideological disputes and strategies for legitimizing art.³⁸¹

378. Corrêa, 2022.

379. The *Salão da Bússola* was held at MAM Rio from November 5 to December 5, 1969. The exhibition benefited from a context in which artists had works that were barred from being shown in other events due to censorship and the closure of MAM Rio's exhibition intended to represent Brazil at the Paris Biennial of Young Artists, as well as the boycott of the São Paulo Biennial. Additionally, the jury—composed of Frederico Morais, Mário Schenberg, and Walmir Ayala—played a key role in shaping the show. Except for Ayala, the judges strongly supported radical artistic experimentation. The prizes were awarded to young artists who went on to establish their careers in the 1970s, including Cildo Meireles, Antonio Manuel, Ascânio MMM, Thereza Simões, Artur Barrio, Luiz Alphonsus, and Guilherme Vaz. Beyond the significance of some of the works exhibited at the *Salão da Bússola*, parallel events were also organized, including a series of debates.

380. In 1971, the *Domingos da Criação* took place in the open space beneath MAM Rio and its gardens. Organized by art critic Frederico Morais, the event transformed the museum into a democratic space, bringing together the public and artists in a large-scale “happening.”

381. The transition from the 1960s to the 1970s in Brazil was marked by an increasing radicalization of artistic manifestations, particularly within museum institutions such as MAC USP, then under the direction of Walter Zanini. The museum established itself as a center for research and critical reflection, promoting contemporary art with a focus on dematerialized, process-based, and conceptual productions. It took on a critical and resistant role, challenging established norms and the military regime. See Freire, 1999, for further discussion on this topic.

Thus, while the circulation of *Tapêtes Françêses Contemporâneos* reaffirmed tapestry as a contemporary artistic expression, it also reflected the political tensions that shaped the art field under the military dictatorship. Traveling exhibitions of this period not only sought to align with the international art scene but also operated within the contradictions of the regime's cultural policy, which instrumentalized art as a tool for legitimization. By legitimizing contemporary art, MAM Rio engaged both with the artistic *avant-garde* and the government's cultural diplomacy, positioning itself as a space for symbolic disputes. This underscores that the exhibition circuit was not merely about the dissemination of art but also a battleground for political and ideological conflicts, where culture played a leading role in the struggle over meanings and in resistance—or accommodation—to authoritarianism.

Part III

GEOPOLITICS OF THE SOUTH

The articles in this module examine exhibitions from Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia to explore the role of the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio) in shaping a broader South American cultural agenda. Through these exhibitions, the dynamics of artistic exchange across South American countries come into focus, raising relevant issues such as the intersections of art and design and the pivotal role of women artists in these transnational cultural flows.

Patricia Corrêa analyzes exhibitions by Lucrecia Moyano and Fridl Loos to investigate how the relationship between art and design contributed to the modernization discourse in Brazil and Argentina, promoting artistic and cultural exchange between the two countries. Moema de Bacelar Alves delves into the bilateral relationship between Brazil and Argentina, focusing on a 1959 official agreement and highlighting the political and cultural significance of the 1961 exhibitions of Argentine artists at MAM Rio. Renata Gomes Cardoso discusses the international recognition of Argentine artists Raquel Forner and Alicia Penalba, tracing their careers in Argentina, their participation in the São Paulo Biennial, and their solo exhibitions at MAM Rio during the 1960s.

These texts, therefore, engage with key themes in the history of art and culture, including the relationship between art and design in Brazil and Argentina and their roles in modernization discourses; diverse modes of cultural exchange across South America; the institutional geopolitics of the region; the mobility and visibility of women artists; and the significance of traveling exhibitions as pivotal platforms for cultural policy.

Lucrecia Moyano and Fridl Loos at MAM Rio: Art and design within the power dynamics between Brazil and Argentina

PATRICIA LEAL AZEVEDO CORRÊA

One of the defining features of the Brazilian artistic scene in the 1950s was the interplay between art and design, both in the realm of visual experimentation and in the realm of ideas, energized by modernist optimism. The country embraced the expansion of national industry as a political project, a growing awareness of design as a concept and profession began to take shape, and the first efforts to establish its teaching emerged. A significant part of this process was led by certain Brazilian museums, which invested in educational and exhibition programs aimed at promoting a conception of art as the interaction between traditional languages and mechanical or industrial languages, such as cinema, photography, graphic and product design, textile design, and fashion. The goal was to shape this new type of visual creator, capable of conceptualizing forms within the logic of industry, which also required the simultaneous cultivation of an audience able to appreciate these forms not only in exhibitions but also in the world of consumption.³⁸²

Among the pioneers of this process in Brazil were the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), through the operation of its Institute of Contemporary Art³⁸³

382. I would like to thank the people without whom it would not have been possible to access the documents and images used in this work: Moema de Bacelar Alves (MAM Rio), Diego Gómez Acuña and Julieta Penedo (Fundación IDA Buenos Aires), Guadalupe Kleiman, Vicky Salías, and María Lizaso (Museo de la Historia del Traje Buenos Aires), Felisa Pinto, Maria Laura Carrascal, and Larisa Mantovani.

383. During its brief existence, the Instituto de Arte Contemporânea do MASP [Institute of Contemporary Art at MASP] established a curriculum inspired by those of the Bauhaus in Dessau and the Institute of Design in Chicago, offering a variety of theoretical and practical courses, with a particular emphasis on graphic and textile fields. See Leon, 2014.

between 1951 and 1953, and the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), which in 1952 began offering artist training programs and, from 1954 onward, courses that approached what were then referred to as applied arts and the emerging field of design.³⁸⁴ These educational activities ran parallel to national and international exhibitions that provided the public with direct engagement with a variety of objects—not only paintings, sculptures, and prints but also posters and other printed materials, photographs, visual identity projects, utilitarian or decorative objects, furniture, household appliances, tapestries, textile prints, and garments. These fields offered fertile ground for the circulation of modernist vocabularies within the broader scope of the local metabolization of European *avant-gardes*. These objects both reflected and sought to catalyze the aesthetic modernization that was asserting itself in Brazil as the country urbanized—a project of its new elites, often tied to industry and the press, who, ultimately, founded and managed the museums of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

In the specific case of MAM Rio, which is the focus of our discussion, an analysis of the aesthetic and stylistic references in its relationship with art and design reveals the predominance of abstract and concretist tendencies, undoubtedly tributaries of the Bauhaus-Ulm lineage—closely tied to the presence of the Swiss artist, architect, and designer Max Bill and the formation of concretist groups in Brazil. Let us briefly recall that Bill had studied at the emblematic German Bauhaus school in the 1920s, was awarded at the 1st São Paulo Biennial in 1951, and became the director and founder of the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* (School of Design), inaugurated in the German city of Ulm in 1953—the same year he visited Rio de Janeiro and delivered a series of influential lectures at MAM Rio.³⁸⁵ The equally emblematic Ulm School, which revitalized the social project of design in the post-war period, had among its students key figures of Brazilian concretism, such as Alexandre Wollner, Almir Mavignier, and Mary Vieira, as well as many other

384. In the 1950s, MAM Rio offered the following courses: *Desenho Estrutural e Composição* [Structural Drawing and Composition], taught by Tomás Santa Rosa between 1954 and 1956; *Decoração de Interiores* [Interior Decoration], taught by Wladimir Alves de Souza between 1955 and 1959; *Iniciação Visual* [Visual Initiation], taught by Tomás Maldonado in 1956; and *Elementos de Comunicação Visual - Teoria e Prática* [Elements of Visual Communication - Theory and Practice], taught by Tomás Maldonado and Otl Aicher in 1959. See Varela, 2016, pp. 7-11.

385. “Max Bill - Visita ao Brasil do famoso escultor modernista” [Max Bill - Visit to Brazil by the Famous Modernist Sculptor]. *Boletim do Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro*, n. 9, Jul. 1953, pp. 5-10.

intersections with educational and design initiatives in Brazil, particularly in Rio de Janeiro.³⁸⁶

But the principles of the Ulm School also resonated at MAM Rio through the artist, designer, and Argentine theorist Tomás Maldonado, who, in 1955, became a professor there at the invitation of Max Bill, with whom he had developed a close relationship since 1948.³⁸⁷ It was Maldonado who formulated the pedagogical structure for the *Escola Técnica de Criação* [Technical School of Creation]—a design school modeled after Ulm and proposed by Bill to the MAM Rio's board, although it was never implemented as originally envisioned.³⁸⁸ However, Maldonado also played other significant roles in education at MAM Rio. In 1956, he organized an exhibition of works by Ulm students at the museum and taught the course *Iniciação Visual* [Visual Initiation], based on the visual methodologies developed at Ulm. In 1959, he offered the course *Elementos de Comunicação Visual – Teoria e Prática* [Elements of Visual Communication – Theory and Practice] in collaboration with Otl Aicher, a German designer who also taught at Ulm and who, on that occasion, presented an exhibition of his posters and photographs at the Rio de Janeiro museum. Within this Ulmian-inspired network involving MAM Rio, highlighting Maldonado's actions supports analyses that have increasingly emphasized the contributions of Argentine artists, designers, and critics to the Brazilian concretist movement—going beyond their European influences.

The Argentine art historian María Amalia García, for instance, noted the importance of the first visit of Tomás Maldonado and his wife, the artist Lidy Prati, to Rio de Janeiro in 1951, when they became acquainted with Brazilian artists connected to the art critic Mario Pedrosa, such as Ivan Serpa, Abraham Palatnik, Almir Mavignier, and Geraldo de Barros.³⁸⁹ This encounter was possibly an opportunity for exchanges on *Gestalt* theory, which Pedrosa had introduced in Brazil through his 1949 thesis, *A natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte* [The Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art], then circulating only as a manuscript among acquaintances. However, as early as 1947, *Gestalt* had already influenced the practices of Argentine artists—including in the works of Lidy Prati—and in 1949, one of its principal

386. Nobre, 2008, pp. 65-105.

387. García, 2011, p. 124.

388. MAM Rio's educational activities developed independently of the *Escola Técnica de Criação* program, which was never implemented at the museum. It was only in 1963, through other political and institutional alignments, that a comparable program was established in Rio de Janeiro with the founding of the *Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial* [College of Industrial Design]. Niemeyer, 2007, pp. 70-90.

389. García, 2011, p. 151.

theorists, Wolfgang Köhler, had already been translated and published in Buenos Aires.³⁹⁰

The Brazilian art historian Elizabeth Varela, in turn, emphasized the relevance of this sort of Argentine mediation of German concretism in the context of MAM Rio, exemplified by the impact of the exhibition *Grupo de Artistas Modernos Argentinos* [Group of Modern Argentine Artists], which was held at the museum in 1953 and generated great interest among artists who, led by Ivan Serpa, soon organized into *Grupo Frente* and later formed the core of the Rio de Janeiro concretist movement.³⁹¹ The exhibition was met with enthusiasm and recognized by Brazilian artists and critics as evidence of the Argentines' more advanced relationship with concrete art, particularly noting Maldonado's pictorial work and intellectual leadership before his association with Ulm. It is worth following the lead of these scholars, but we are particularly interested in a recommendation made by García in the conclusion of another of her texts:

Tomás Maldonado's perspective, grounded in compelling arguments, solid theoretical foundations, and the international projection of his career, prevailed and shaped interpretations of the developments of concrete art. Retracing the magnification of Maldonado's figure runs parallel to the inclusion of other histories of concretism, among which are the deconstruction of the masculine canon of concrete art, the revision of scientific postulates through more playful and contradictory aspects, and the discovery of the vernacular where only the purity of forms had once been seen.³⁹²

These words shed light on two exhibitions that are now virtually forgotten in Brazil, uncovered during research in MAM Rio's Research and Documentation Sector, which was part of a long-term investigation into the display of textile objects at the museum over the 30 years between its opening in 1948 and its temporary closure following the devastating fire in 1978. They are the exhibitions of two Argentine women: *Tapetes by Lucrécia Moyano Muñiz* [Rugs by Lucrecia Moyano Muñiz], held from August 8 to September 1, 1957, and *Fridl Loos*, held from November 20 to December 14, 1958. Both artists were directly connected to Maldonado's cultural milieu and to the broader history of the relationships among art, industry, and design in Argentina. However, their brief stay in Rio also intertwined with the

390. *Idem*, p. 165.

391. Varela, 2017, pp. 54-56.

392. García, 2021, p. 144.

circumstances, debates, and events significant to the narratives we construct about the development of visual languages in Brazil during the 1950s. This interconnection shapes the interest and intent of this text, connecting it to García's recommendation, but above all, responding to the fascination of discovering Moyano and Loos in our midst.

The aforementioned research, which brought these two artists to light, sought to understand the massive and persistent presence of textile objects in the exhibitions held during the first 30 years of MAM Rio's operation. This presence could only be explained by its association with the museum's institutional mission. It led us to realize how these textile exhibitions embodied the museum's proposal to foster the conditions for the production, enjoyment, and consumption of the material and symbolic environments of modern life, defined by alignment with the hegemonic models of development that shaped the trajectory of our peripheral capitalism. Positioned between modernist utopia and a certain civilizing proselytism typical of the post-war period, the textiles at MAM Rio promoted what, in another text, we have called *didáticas e políticas têxteis* [textile didactics and politics]: within the public arena of the museum, they became agents of modernization agendas, almost always aligned with affirmative discourses on national identities and interests.³⁹³

The exhibitions of Moyano and Loos at MAM Rio were dominated by textiles. The former showcased rugs made from Moyano's own designs, while the latter featured works of fabric and clothing created by Loos, surrounded by collages, tempera paintings, and photograms also of her authorship. Certain circumstances allow us to connect these shows to what we identify as a "national textile policy":³⁹⁴ the way their exhibitions participated—even if unintentionally—in affirmative strategies asserting Argentina's relevance in the world of art and design, with their implications of originality and industrial leadership. Here, we aim to explore these connections, presenting and analyzing the conditions under which these two exhibitions took place and how they engaged with and were engaged by the creative and critical scene in Rio de Janeiro as well as the broader context of international political dynamics.

Beyond the recurring association between textile production and the feminine sphere, it is important to consider how the textiles exhibited by Moyano and Loos inscribe "other narratives of concretism," outside its "masculine canon," and how they claim "more playful and contradictory

393. Corrêa, 2024, pp. 632-666.

394. *Idem*, p. 642.

aspects” for these narratives, as per García’s recommendation.³⁹⁵ In fact, we can say that both Moyano and Loos were women whose experiences were somewhat displaced in Argentina. Lucrecia Moyano worked for 30 years on the factory floor, directing the artistic line and supervising the industrial glass production line at Cristalerías Rigolleau S.A., located in the industrial hub of Berazategui, a city near Buenos Aires.³⁹⁶ In her personal notes, she described the strangeness she encountered during her early experiences at the factory, in the eyes of the workers who “did not understand, in this absolute kingdom of men, my barely explained presence.”³⁹⁷ Born in Buenos Aires, Moyano was a multifaceted creator: she trained as a painter and watercolorist, studying with artists such as Leonie Matthis and Xul Solar; worked as an illustrator and decorator; and designed furniture before entering glass production in 1934. Simultaneously, starting in 1954, she began working for Argentine textile companies such as Dándolo y Primi and El Espartano, designing carpet patterns on graph paper, which were translated into wool by professional weavers using manual looms. Moyano exhibited her paintings and drawings on numerous occasions but truly stood out—earning recognition in national and international competitions—for her modern glassworks and rugs. She has gradually been recognized as an important figure in the formative field of Argentine design.

Fridl Loos, on the other hand, experienced more literal displacements. Born in Vienna, Austria, she was forced to flee Nazism and, after a period in the United States, decided to migrate to Argentina in 1940, where she settled with her husband, the architect Walter Loos.³⁹⁸ Both had trained within the modernist circles of the *Wiener Werkstätte*, characterized by the collaboration between architecture, interior design, fashion, and textile design. Fridl studied decorative and applied arts with Josef Hoffmann in the 1920s and gained recognition as a costume and fashion designer in Europe before the war. In Buenos Aires, she restarted her career, creating costumes for Argentine cinema and opening stores to sell her fashion collections, which became highly successful. She continued to practice drawing, painting, and photography, disciplines she had cultivated since her time in Vienna. The Loos couple quickly became connected to the Argentine *avant-garde* scene.

395. García, 2021, p. 144.

396. Susana Pereyra Iraola. “La belleza transparente” [The Transparent Beauty]. *Diario La Nación*, Buenos Aires, Apr. 4, 1999.

397. *Apud* Mantovani, 2023, p. 15.

398. Giselle Casares. “Fridl Loos, una creadora sin par” [Fridl Loos, a Creator Without Equal]. *La Prensa*, Buenos Aires, Jul. 24, 1994, p. 6.

According to Lidy Prati, by 1945, Fridl was already close to the concretist artists of the *Asociación Arte Concreto-Invención* and the twelve-tone composers of the *Agrupación Nueva Música*.³⁹⁹ Like Moyano, she is considered a significant figure in Argentine design, though her works still await more extensive studies.

The presence of Moyano and Loos at MAM Rio can largely be attributed to the convergence of the interests of two important cultural figures, whose partnership must be understood within the context of the intense artistic and diplomatic exchanges between Brazil and Argentina, particularly driven from 1955 onward. We refer to the Brazilian Niomar Moniz Sodré, executive director of MAM Rio, and the Argentine Ignacio Pirovano, who in 1956 assumed the role of the museum's representative in Argentina—a position that highlights the importance placed on cultural exchanges between the two countries during this period.

The wife of Paulo Bittencourt, owner of the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, Moniz Sodré exemplified the pattern of an educated urban bourgeoisie, connected to ventures in industry and the press, aligning with major modern art initiatives in Brazil. Upon assuming the executive directorship of MAM Rio in 1951, she ushered in a period of greater dynamism for the museum, following the initial phase under Raymundo Ottoni de Castro Maya's leadership since 1947. Under Moniz Sodré's management, significant changes progressively improved the museum's operations, beginning with its relocation. The first move occurred in 1952, when the museum left the Banco Boavista building in downtown Rio for new facilities in the Ministry of Education and Health building, also in the city center. The second move happened in 1958, when the museum left this building to occupy the structure designed by Affonso Reidy as its permanent home at the Aterro do Flamengo, an area reclaimed from the sea as part of Rio's urban reconfiguration project in the 1950s. The efforts to secure not only a dedicated space but also an emblematic place within the modernization of Brazil's then-capital city cannot be separated from Moniz Sodré's institutional leadership. Her tenure was also responsible for implementing policies to engage and cultivate the public's appreciation of modern art, achieved through an expanded exhibition schedule, initiatives for adult and child education, regular film screenings, lectures, guided visits, and other cultural activities of great significance locally, nationally, and internationally.⁴⁰⁰

399. *Apud* Iraola, 2000, p. 6.

400. Sant'anna, 2011.

An enthusiast of modern art, Moniz Sodr  was an early admirer of Max Bill’s concretism,⁴⁰¹ whom she personally visited as early as 1952. Bill quickly inspired her to propose a Brazilian version of the Ulm School, which added weight to Tom s Maldonado’s interactions with Rio de Janeiro’s cultural scene and MAM Rio throughout the 1950s. Moniz Sodr ’s undeniable contribution to the consolidation of concretist aesthetics in Brazil is a key point of convergence with Ignacio Pirovano, whose role in the Argentine concretist movement has been increasingly highlighted and studied recently.⁴⁰²

The multifaceted Pirovano was a lawyer, painter, art critic, decorator, collector, and businessman, in addition to leading the administration of important public institutions. Between 1937 and 1955, he served as director of the Museo Nacional de Arte Decorativo [National Museum of Decorative Art], and from 1952 to 1953, he presided over the *Comisi n Nacional de Cultura* [National Culture Commission]. Like Moniz Sodr , Pirovano belonged to the educated and progressive elite of his country and, like her, established ties with political power to advance his artistic and cultural projects, particularly aligning himself with the governments of Juan Domingo Per n (1946-1952 and 1952-1955).⁴⁰³ He had been connected to Argentine concretism since its beginnings in the mid-1940s, when his furniture and decoration company, *Comte*, which also functioned as an art gallery, began exhibiting works by artists associated with the magazine *Arturo* and the concretist groups that were forming at the time. His close friendship with Maldonado dates to 1944, a relationship that reoriented his family-inherited interest in collecting and encouraged him to assemble, throughout his life, a significant collection of Argentine and international non-figurative art. From the outset, this collection “was envisioned as the foundation of the dreamed, but not yet established, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires” [Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires]⁴⁰⁴—something that only materialized in the 1980s, after Pirovano’s passing, with the donation of his collection to the aforementioned museum, which had been founded in 1956. Like Moniz Sodr , Pirovano dedicated part of his life to building a modern collection for his city and, driven by a social and political vision of design and through his ties with Maldonado, aspired to establish a version of the Ulm School in Argentina, though he was ultimately unsuccessful.⁴⁰⁵

401. Garc a, 2011, p. 167.

402. Noorthoorn, 2017.

403. Garc a, 2011, p. 107.

404. Garc a, 2017, p. 19.

405. Garc a, 2011, p. 232.

These coincidences between Moniz Sodr e and Pirovano give meaning to their strategic alliance in 1956. But how was this alliance formed? Perhaps the first moment Pirovano was recognized within Brazil’s institutional-artistic milieu as a figure of modern art was in early 1951, during the preparations for the 1st S o Paulo Biennial, as evidenced by a letter from Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, who reached out to him in an attempt to facilitate the participation of Argentine artists in the Biennial—a goal Pirovano sought to achieve but ultimately could not.⁴⁰⁶ It is possible that Pirovano’s name was suggested to Matarazzo Sobrinho by the Argentine art critic Jorge Romero Brest, who was aligned with the political opposition to Peronism and who would later join the jury of the 1st Biennial without the institutional support of Argentina. The challenges hindering these exchanges reveal the tense political context between the two countries, in which Pirovano was identified as a mediating agent within the Peronist state structure, capable of negotiating in favor of modern art despite a government that held predominantly reactionary artistic positions.

The context of these tensions and their gradual resolution during Per n’s second term, but especially under the governments of the so-called *Revoluci n Libertadora* [Liberating Revolution, 1955-1958], during which Pirovano’s partnership with MAM Rio was established, has been extensively analyzed by Mar a Amalia Garc a, who also positioned Niomar Moniz Sodr e within the geopolitical framework where these tensions unfolded. The creation of three art museums between Rio de Janeiro and S o Paulo in the late 1940s—MASP, MAM Rio, and MAM SP, which in 1951 fulfilled Matarazzo’s proposal to establish the Biennial in S o Paulo—and the impressive scale achieved by the 1st S o Paulo Biennial projected Brazil onto the global stage as a country integrated into a significant network of artists, critics, and international institutions. To the Argentine art scene, this reflected the advantages of the Brazilian elite’s ideological alignment with capitalist cosmopolitanism, particularly, of course, with the model of the United States of America. Through various mechanisms, such as financial support, institutional aid, and the donation of artworks that helped establish the three aforementioned museums, the U.S. asserted its hegemony in the postwar period, not without the collaboration of Brazilian governments. In contrast, the absence of Argentine representation at the 1st S o Paulo Biennial led Romero Brest to accuse the Argentine government of “dangerously closing off” the country.⁴⁰⁷ He referred to the consequences of the Peronist *Tercera Posici n*—its refusal to immediately align with the U.S.,

406. *Idem*, pp. 107-108.

407. *Apud* Garc a, 2011, p. 85.

which repelled American soft power—and to the disinterest of Argentina’s official culture and elite in abstract art or any other *avant-garde* movements. This rejection of Brazil’s new cosmopolitan exchanges was possibly a way of defending Argentina’s traditional regional leadership, attributed to a cultural supremacy recognized by Brazilian intellectual circles and one that the Peronist establishment sought to preserve.⁴⁰⁸

According to García, however, this situation began to change in 1952, when Argentina’s openness to foreign capital, the reciprocal need for rapprochement with the United States, and Brazil’s rise on the international stage pushed the Argentine government to admit non-figurative art into its cultural policy. These new diplomatic orientations were reflected in the country’s massive entry into international exhibitions, exemplified by the official Argentine representation at the 2nd São Paulo Biennial, which included many abstract and concrete artists,⁴⁰⁹ a development facilitated by Pirovano’s new responsibilities at the helm of the *Comisión Nacional de Cultura* between 1952 and 1953. However, the most drastic change came after the military coup of the *Revolución Libertadora*, which in 1955 deposed Perón’s government and favored anti-Peronist positions within the Argentine art scene. This shift was exemplified by the appointment of Romero Brest as director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, who recognized Brazil as a model for artistic management and prioritized exchanges with the Brazilian art world.

It is within this new context, under the government of General Pedro Eugenio Aramburu (1955-1958), that Argentina’s foreign policy was reshaped, now committed to aligning itself with the “Brazil-United States axis.”⁴¹⁰ Guided by this axis, Brazil, which had rejected Peronism, supported the Argentine dictatorship. This explains the significance of Niomar Moniz Sodré’s visit to the neighboring country between November and December 1956, when the new government of Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961) also encouraged the alignment of MAM Rio, a private museum, with the cultural strategies of the Brazilian state. Moniz Sodré was a key figure in the new Brazil-Argentina diplomacy at a time of converging interests, which positioned MAM Rio as a kind of showcase for Kubitschek’s modernization policies, focused on industry and urbanization. Her presence in Buenos Aires and her anti-Peronist statements to the local press, in turn, were an asset to the Argentine *avant-garde*.⁴¹¹

408. García, 2011, p. 189.

409. *Idem*, pp. 192-194.

410. *Idem*, p. 198.

411. *Idem*, p. 201.

It is not known exactly when Moniz Sodr e first established direct contact with Pirovano, but it is possible to assert that their collaboration with MAM Rio was facilitated by Tom s Maldonado in the same year, a few months before she traveled to Buenos Aires. Already based in Ulm as a professor at the *Hochschule f r Gestaltung*, Maldonado wrote to his friend Pirovano in May 1956, informing him that he would be traveling to Rio de Janeiro to “deliver several lectures and advise the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro on various matters,”⁴¹² adding that he was not enthusiastic about going to Argentina but hoped that Pirovano would come to Rio in July, as he had something crucial to propose and needed to discuss it with him in person in that city. Maldonado’s trip was related to his development of a pedagogical proposal for the Escola T cnica de Cria o at MAM Rio, during which he also promoted the ideas and activities of the Ulm School.

This meeting with Maldonado did indeed take place, as indicated by a letter Pirovano wrote in Rio de Janeiro and sent in August 1956 to the Argentine ambassador to Brazil, Felipe Espil, whom he also met during that visit. The letter exudes the political tensions that we have just described in the artistic exchanges between the two countries. It is, in fact, a “report regarding the cultural experience that, under the name Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, is currently taking shape in Brazil,” about which the informant requests “discretion,” driven solely by the concern that “the leadership naturally exercised by Argentina” might be lost.⁴¹³ He then provides an overview of the museum’s background and projects: he emphasizes the importance of Le Corbusier in shaping modernity in Brazil; highlights the major museum initiatives and the Biennial in S o Paulo and the response from the Rio de Janeiro museum, with its “absolutely exceptional building”⁴¹⁴ soon to be constructed; and comments on the museum’s pedagogical proposal, based on the Ulm model, lamenting that Argentina was unable to achieve the same, despite its connection with Maldonado, who ultimately ended up serving Brazil more. The purpose of the letter, after reaffirming his “patriotic sense,”⁴¹⁵ was to inform the ambassador that Pirovano was taking on the position he had just been invited to by MAM Rio’s board, as the museum’s representative in Argentina.

412. Letter from Tom s Maldonado to Ignacio Pirovano, May 22, 1956. *In*: Noorthoorn, p. 283.

413. Letter from Ignacio Pirovano to Felipe Espil, Aug. 1, 1956. Typed pages. Ignacio Pirovano Archive, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, folder 719, folios 76 and 77.

414. *Idem*, folio 75.

415. *Idem*, folio 77.

It seems evident that, during his stay in Rio, Maldonado established the collaborative link between Moniz Sodr  and Pirovano. Following Pirovano's correspondence, there are numerous letters exchanged with Moniz Sodr  and other members of the museum's administration, in which activities such as arrangements for the exchange of exhibitions between Brazil and Argentina were planned and coordinated—these being the primary responsibilities of the new collaborator. However, given the limitations of communication through letters, Moniz Sodr  decided to travel to Buenos Aires in November of that same year to “have a long chat” with Pirovano and negotiate directly the organization of Brazilian art and architecture exhibitions in Argentine museums.⁴¹⁶ Everything indicates that this was the occasion when she became acquainted with Lucrecia Moyano and Fridl Loos. An unsigned document, listing personalities visited by Moniz Sodr  during this trip and belonging to the Ignacio Pirovano Archive at the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, suggests that he organized the visits and acted as a guide for the MAM Rio executive director around the city.⁴¹⁷ Names such as the concrete artists Alfredo Hlito, Lidy Prati, and Enio Iommi; the twelve-tone musicians Jorge Grisetti and Juan Carlos Paz; and the architect Amancio Williams—with notes about their aesthetic leanings—reveal the nature of these interactions, which possibly included, directly or indirectly, Moyano and Loos.

Moyano was an old friend of Pirovano, and her creations regularly appeared in salons and decorative arts competitions associated with the institutions he had directed since the 1930s. In an undated and unsigned list of works, part of the Lucrecia Moyano Archive at the *Fundaci n IDA, Investigaci n en Dise o Argentino* in Buenos Aires, we found information about projects that brought the two closer together, such as Moyano's participation in the decoration of the Hotel Llao Llao between 1935 and 1940, a milestone among the projects of the company *Comte*.⁴¹⁸ Additionally, in November 1956, a solo exhibition by Moyano was on display at Galer a Pizarro in Buenos Aires, showcasing a collection of her D ndolo y Primi rugs and her unique blown and molded glass pieces produced at the Rigolleau

416. Letter from Niomar Moniz Sodr  to Ignacio Pirovano, Nov. 12, 1956. Typed pages. Ignacio Pirovano Archive, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, folder 719, folio 34.

417. “Personalidades entrevistadas por Do a Niomar Moniz Sodr  en su visita a Bs/As en noviembre de 1956” [Personalities Interviewed by Do a Niomar Moniz Sodr  During Her Visit to Buenos Aires in November 1956]. Typed pages. Ignacio Pirovano Archive, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, folder 719, folio 42.

418. “Lucrecia Moyano de Mu iz.” Typed pages. Lucrecia Moyano Archive, Fundaci n IDA, Investigaci n en Dise o Argentino, Buenos Aires.

factory, all presented in a highly original exhibition design.⁴¹⁹ It is possible that Moniz Sodré either saw this exhibition or heard remarks about the impressive collection, which was highly successful,⁴²⁰ potentially explaining her recommendation for an exhibition at MAM Rio.

Loos, in turn, stated that she was introduced to the executive director of MAM Rio by the architect Amancio Williams,⁴²¹ with whom both she and Pirovano were remarkably close. Williams and his wife, architect Delfina Bunge, appear on the list of visits made by Moniz Sodré in 1956. The couple formed, along with other architects like Loos's husband, an important modernist nucleus in Buenos Aires. Moreover, Loos was part of the circle of concretist artists and *avant-garde* musicians, who were of great interest to Moniz Sodré,⁴²² as evidenced by her visits to Juan Carlos Paz and Jorge Grisetti, two musicians actively involved in the magazine *Nueva Visión*, created and directed by Maldonado.⁴²³ Like Moyano, Loos was coming out of a particularly productive period as a visual artist—an aspect often overshadowed by her successful career in costume and fashion design. In 1954, Loos held a solo exhibition of collages and temperas at the Krayd Gallery, a hub for new experiments in architecture, design, music, and visual arts in Buenos Aires. Founded by two musicians and a poet inspired by Maldonado (yes, always him), the gallery became a prominent space for concretist trends.⁴²⁴ Then, in January 1956, she held another solo exhibition, this time at the prestigious The Contemporaries Gallery, which had just inaugurated a new location in New York, USA. There, Loos again exhibited collages and temperas. The Contemporaries Gallery, specializing in graphic arts, published a set of 15 color plates for the occasion, seemingly reproductions of some exhibited works, gathered in a portfolio printed solely under Loos's name.⁴²⁵ When

419. Pizarro. "Lucrecia Moyano." Exhibition invitation. Lucrecia Moyano Archive, Fundación IDA, Investigación en Diseño Argentino, Buenos Aires.

420. "Cristales y Alfombras de Lucrecia Moyano" [Crystals and Rugs by Lucrecia Moyano]. *Paris en América*, Buenos Aires, Year XI, n. 40, 1957.

421. Giselle Casares. "Fridl Loos, una creadora sin par". *Op. cit.*

422. A few months after Sodré's trip to Buenos Aires, an article in the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper discussed her interest and plans to promote concrete music performances at MAM Rio. Eurico Nogueira França. "Música – A arte concreta" [Music – The Concrete Art]. *Correio da Manhã*, Feb. 17, 1957, p. 15.

423. Rossi, 2007, pp. 11-24.

424. Rossi, 2006.

425. "F. Loos." Paper folder with 15 colored plates. Fridl Loos Archive, Museo de la Historia del Traje, Buenos Aires. There is no information about these plates, which are neither signed nor dated. We will discuss them further later.

Moniz Sodr e visited Buenos Aires in November of that same year, it is likely that this international exhibition was still resonating for Loos. Perhaps Moniz Sodr e saw these works or their reproductions—what is certain, however, is that at least some of these collages and temperas were displayed in Loos’s solo exhibition at MAM Rio in 1958.

All these connections do not fully explain the choice of these two artists by the executive director of the Rio de Janeiro museum and her collaborator, but they provide many clues in that direction. It is important to understand that, beyond these affinities, Moyano and Loos embodied a modern pedagogy that was of interest to MAM Rio: both were successful examples of the interplay between art, industry, design, and fashion. Their works skillfully translated, with quality and desirable touches of strangeness, the proposal for a broad modernization that was meant to encompass everyday life—and what material is more quotidian than fabric, touched and seen every day, almost every hour? It is worth noting that, in Rio de Janeiro, Moyano exhibited only her rugs, without her glassworks, while Loos, for the first time, displayed her printed fabrics and clothing in an art space. However, they were not the first to do so in Brazil, and it will be important to contextualize them here.

One must also consider how Moyano and Loos became part of the artistic-diplomatic framework that was then unfolding between the two countries, serving as counterparts to projects of foremost importance to the MAM Rio leadership. The solo exhibitions of Moyano and Loos in Rio de Janeiro opened almost immediately following two exhibitions that brought significant regional prominence to Brazil from Argentina: *Arte Moderno en Brasil*, inaugurated in June 1957, and *Arquitectura Brasile a*, opened in October 1958, both held at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires, under the direction of Jorge Romero Brest.⁴²⁶ When Moyano’s solo exhibition opened in Rio de Janeiro in August 1957, *Arte Moderno en Brasil* was beginning its acclaimed tour, making stops in the Argentine city of Rosario, followed by Santiago, Chile, and finally Lima, Peru. As a result of a partnership between MAM Rio and Itamaraty, it was the largest exhibition of Brazilian art ever sent abroad. Loos’s solo exhibition opened in November of the following year, approximately one month after the opening of *Arquitectura Brasile a*, which was attended by Moniz Sodr e alongside the Brazilian ambassador to Buenos Aires, Aguinaldo Fragoso, who was also a member of MAM Rio’s council. It is fitting, therefore, that Moniz Sodr e was awarded the *Orden del M rito de Mayo* by the Argentine government in 1959, in recognition of her “silent and fruitful activity” between the two countries, as described by

426. Garc a, 2011, p. 200.

Ambassador Felipe Espil during a major event at the Argentine embassy in Rio de Janeiro.⁴²⁷

If the elements presented so far allow us to establish a connection between the exhibitions of Moyano and Loos in Rio de Janeiro, despite the interval of more than a year between them, there is a more definitive piece of evidence: the letters between Moniz Sodr e and Pirovano emphasize that the two exhibitions stemmed from the same decision and were part of the same project. The first mention of both appears in a letter dated March 29, 1957, in which Moniz Sodr e states, "I will write to Mrs. Moyano Mu niz and Mrs. Loos to formalize the situation."⁴²⁸ The sentence suggests that the artists had already been selected, but we do not know exactly when this occurred.

A few days later, on April 2, Moniz Sodr e wrote to both artists, initiating the organization of the exhibitions. To Moyano, she informed her that the opening date for the rug exhibition would be August 1 of the same year and requested the titles and dimensions of the pieces, biographical information, and a text for the catalog that the museum would produce. She emphasized that the rugs should be sent to the Argentine embassy in Rio de Janeiro, as Ambassador Felipe Espil would assist in resolving any complications with Brazilian customs.⁴²⁹ The letter ends on a complimentary yet formal note, affirming "the high level of artistic development in the arts and crafts of Argentina."⁴³⁰

In the letter to Loos, the tone is more personal. Moniz Sodr e begins by informing her that, unfortunately, she could not confirm the opening date of her exhibition yet because there was no exact timeline for the inauguration of the museum's new building, which was still under construction. They would need to wait until the first part of the building was completed, which would not happen before the end of that year. Expressing herself as "tremendously excited" about the "exhibition of paintings, models, and fabrics" that would generate "enormous interest here," Moniz Sodr e suggested postponing the "important opening, as we want yours to be," to the following year. She advised scheduling it after the hot months of January, February, and March,

427. *Apud* Jayme Maur cio. "O governo argentino condecorou a diretora do museu" [The Argentine Government Decorated the Museum Director]. *Correio da Manh a*, May 1, 1959, p. 18.

428. Letter from Niomar Moniz Sodr e to Ignacio Pirovano, Mar. 29, 1957. Typed pages. Ignacio Pirovano Archive, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, folder 719, folio 63.

429. Letter from Niomar Moniz Sodr e to Lucrecia Moyano Mu niz, Apr. 2, 1957. Typed page. Ignacio Pirovano Archive, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, folder 719, folio 67.

430. *Idem, ibidem*.

as “few of the people who matter stay in Rio during that time.”⁴³¹ The letter concludes with a warm embrace for Loos and her husband.

These two letters are part of the Pirovano archive because their copies were sent by Moniz Sodré to her Argentine collaborator, accompanied by a brief remark about the different opening schedules for the exhibitions: “As for Loos, we will only be able to hold it next year, in the new building, as it would be a failure in the hall of the temporary headquarters. You understand this well.”⁴³² On April 16, Pirovano wrote to both artists, reaffirming Moniz Sodré’s decisions, though his closer friendship with Moyano becomes evident. He congratulated her on the successful arrangement for the exhibition and suggested including other works, such as her glass designs, furniture designs, and paintings, in the shipment to Brazil, where they could potentially be sold. He remarked that “the industry in Brazil is much more in touch with aesthetic trends and taste than those here.”⁴³³ This cycle of correspondence concludes with a letter from the president of the Dándolo y Primi company, who arranged the shipment of the rugs to Rio. The letter thanks Moniz Sodré and commends her for her efforts in strengthening the ties between the two countries.⁴³⁴

The main reason for the long interval between the two solo exhibitions, conceived simultaneously, was therefore the inauguration of MAM Rio’s new headquarters at Aterro do Flamengo—a milestone that was absolutely crucial to Niomar Moniz Sodré’s leadership. For this, she moved heaven and earth—quite literally, as evidenced by her countless contacts and fundraising trips to secure financial support for the construction. Postponing Loos’s exhibition while proceeding with Moyano’s was a strategic decision by the museum executive director, one that understandably resulted in distinct outcomes for their local receptions and international visibility.

Finally opening on August 8, 1957, Lucrecia Moyano’s exhibition in MAM Rio featured a rather simple layout compared to her show in Buenos Aires a

431. Letter from Niomar Moniz Sodré to Fridl Loos, Apr. 2, 1957. Typed page. Ignacio Pirovano Archive, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, folder 719, folio 66.

432. Letter from Niomar Moniz Sodré to Ignacio Pirovano, Apr. 3, 1957. Typed page. Ignacio Pirovano Archive, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, folder 719, folio 68.

433. Letter from Ignacio Pirovano to Lucrecia Moyano Muñiz, Apr. 16, 1957. Typed page. Ignacio Pirovano Archive, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, folder 719, folio 69. The possibility of Moyano selling her works in Brazil was soon ruled out by the museum’s administration, which explained that items entering through diplomatic channels must return the same way. All indications suggest that Moyano sent only her rugs to Brazil. See Letter from Mathilde Pereira de Sousa to Ignacio Pirovano, Jun. 15, 1957. Typed page. Ignacio Pirovano Archive, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, folder 719, folios 7 and 8.

434. Letter from Savas Dándolo to Niomar Moniz Sodré, Jul. 29, 1957. Typed page. Ignacio Pirovano Archive, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, folder 719, folio 6.

few months earlier. The 18 rugs exhibited in Rio de Janeiro did not differ much from those displayed at Galería Pizarro, but the absence of the visual dialogue with the glass pieces reduced the overall impact of the collection. It lacked the magical and playful atmosphere created by the colorful transparencies of the glassworks, which in Buenos Aires had been arranged among the textile pieces, placed on shelves, or hung from the ceiling.⁴³⁵ The text by Argentine art critic Córdova Iturburu, included in the catalog produced by MAM Rio, attributes a “delicate fantasy” to Moyano’s textile designs. He highlights her interest in “incorporating it into the world of things that surround man and among which man lives and moves,” which, he suggests, motivated the artist’s transition from painting to the applied arts.⁴³⁶

Mostly abstract but sometimes suggesting figures, with an emphasis on irregular shapes—sometimes juxtaposed, other times hinting at overlaps—the rugs were hung on the walls of the museum, which was temporarily housed under the *pilotis* of the Ministry of Education and Health building, in a space temporarily enclosed to host its exhibitions. The catalog cover, printed in two colors and created by Brazilian printmaker Tuni Murtinho, translates in yellow some transparency effects sought in the weaving of the wool [Fig. 50]. Apart from the details chosen by Murtinho for the cover, there are no other reproductions of the rugs in the catalog. However, the Research and Documentation Sector of MAM Rio holds a few black-and-white photographs that allow us to glimpse them [Figs. 51 and 52].

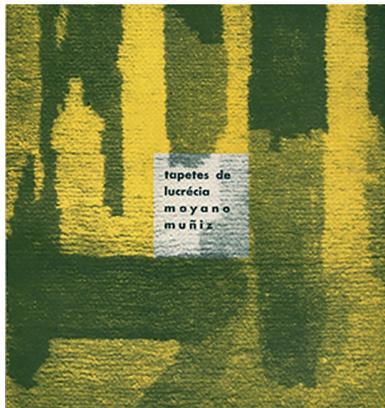


Fig. 50. *Tapetes de Lucrecia Moyano Muñiz*, 1957, exhibition catalog cover. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

435. The Fundación IDA, Lucrecia Moyano Archive, holds photographs of the exhibition at Galería Pizarro.

436. Iturburu, 1957, n. p.



Fig. 51. Opening of the exhibition *Tapetes de Lucrecia Moyano Muñiz*, featuring Carmen Portinho, Lucrecia Moyano Muñiz (center), and Nelson Batista in front of the rug *Vendaval* (1956), 1957. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.



Fig. 52. Lucrecia Moyano, *Outono*, 1955, wool rug, 215 × 130 cm. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

The reviews and notes published in the Rio de Janeiro press, however, raised some criticisms of the exhibition, often based on what was perceived as a new “challenge” for the public and critics already familiar with the tapestry exhibitions that MAM Rio had been organizing for several years. Art critic Jayme Maurício, who authored the column “Itinerário das Artes Plásticas” [Itinerary of the Visual Arts] in the newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, began his coverage of the vernissage by praising the museum’s initiatives in fostering Latin American exchanges, as evidenced by the major Brazilian art exhibition circulating in Argentina at the time and by the rug exhibition the museum was hosting.⁴³⁷ He pointed out, however, that Rio had already experienced many modern tapestry exhibitions, particularly French ones, which emphasized pure, flat colors and became an inevitable reference for evaluating the Argentine show. Indeed, by August 1957, MAM Rio had already hosted exhibitions such as *Modern French Tapestries* (1952), *Lurçat* (1954), and *Abstract Tapestries* (1956), all based on the production of the Gobelins, Beauvais, and Aubusson manufactories—historic French tapestry centers that, in the 20th century, began weaving designs created by modern artists such as Jean Lurçat, Le Corbusier, Picasso, and Kandinsky.⁴³⁸ In addition to these exhibitions, MAM Rio had also recently hosted a major exhibition by Brazilian tapestry artist Genaro de Carvalho, who was greatly influenced by French mural tapestry.

Thus, Maurício wrote, “What we have always seen are pieces for the walls, or rather, tapestries. We had not encountered any current and artistically valid experience within the realm of the immense Oriental tradition—the rug.”⁴³⁹ Despite its admirable success, “given the difficulties in translating nuanced tones into the technique and material used,” this gave rise to the debatable point:

Color on walls, in paintings, on furniture, objects, clothing, and also on the floor—this is something that needs to be carefully considered and explained. Especially when the colors of a single rug vary and reach a certain vibrancy that may not be entirely suitable for it.⁴⁴⁰

437. Jayme Maurício. “Exposição de Tapetes Argentinos” [Exhibition of Argentine Rugs]. *Correio da Manhã*, Aug. 9, 1957, pp. 1 and 14.

438. For information on the presence of French tapestry at MAM Rio, see Corrêa, 2024 and Renata Zago’s chapter, “Tapêtes Francêses Contemporâneos: Tenth São Paulo Biennial (1969) and MAM Rio (1970)”, published in this collection.

439. Jayme Maurício. “Exposição de Tapetes Argentinos”. *Op. cit.*

440. *Idem.*

Such an opinion seemed to resonate in the Rio de Janeiro press. In the newspaper *Última Hora*, an unsigned note stated that “some works are beautiful, while others fall short due to the mediocrity of their coloring.”⁴⁴¹ In *Diário de Notícias*, another unsigned note took a harsher tone: the rugs were deemed ugly, with sad colors, lacking originality—“the worst exhibition ever held at MAM. And it comes to us straight from Argentina, to which we recently sent the best of our art. Who was responsible for exhibiting such a collection in Rio?”⁴⁴² The most detailed commentary came from art critic Mario Pedrosa, published in the *Jornal do Brasil*, as he attempted to better explain the general unease. His text describes the “triangular perplexity” experienced by viewers of Moyano’s works: at first, they seem like paintings, but then it becomes apparent that they are tapestries made of wool, and finally, it is revealed that they are actually rugs—“intended not for the verticality of walls, but to cover the floor,” yet without losing their “distinct pictorial dominance.”⁴⁴³

The issue, therefore, was less about color itself and more about the pictorial effects of color—through stains, glazes, and gradients—that trap the viewer in the “three contradictory planes” of rug, tapestry, and painting. The distinction between textile surface and pictorial surface had precisely been the focus of modern tapestry makers in their efforts to save the art of weaving from becoming a “languid duplication of painting”⁴⁴⁴—as the critic had explained just a few months earlier when commenting on Genaro’s exhibition at the same museum. Moyano’s rugs, on the other hand, seemed to serve as pretexts for the expansion of an eminently pictorial color sensitivity, belonging to a sensitive painter “descended from Impressionism.” These were works whose “ambivalence of genres” appeared to deny their function in horizontality, “beneath our feet.”⁴⁴⁵

Like Maurício, Pedrosa linked the discussion to the experience of French tapestry, a frequent presence at MAM Rio, which was rooted in the modern culture of the frank use of materials and techniques in art, architecture, and design. However, the argument also alluded to the anti-illusionism of

441. *Última Hora*, Rio de Janeiro, Aug. 13, 1957.

442. “A atual mostra no MAM” [The Current Exhibition at MAM]. *Diário de Notícias*, Aug. 21, 1957.

443. Mario Pedrosa. “Tapete, Tapeçaria, Pintura” [Rug, Tapestry, Painting]. *Jornal do Brasil*, Aug. 27, 1957, p. 6.

444. Mario Pedrosa. “Tapeçaria em ‘Oropa, França e Bahia’” [Tapestry in ‘Oropa, France, and Bahia’]. *Jornal do Brasil*, Apr. 10, 1957, p. 8.

445. Mario Pedrosa. “Tapete, Tapeçaria, Pintura”. *Op. cit.*

the abstract and concrete proposals that defined the artistic environment in which they were immersed. From this perspective, Moyano's rugs would be considered anachronistic responses to contemporary experiments, seeking their legitimacy in a certain pictorial aura, thus denying the language announced by their technique and function.

There were, of course, more positive reviews, which essentially unfolded from the debate already established, such as that of critic Marc Berkowitz in his column "Crônica das exposições" [Chronicle of the exhibitions] in the biweekly *Para Todos*. Berkowitz defended the artistic value of the rugs, despite their mistaken presentation on the walls. For Berkowitz, the issue identified in Moyano's work extended to all modern painters who sought to design templates for textile translation, as the latter "has little to do with painting." While some of Moyano's pieces were almost "pastiche brushstrokes," others were described as "true beauties."⁴⁴⁶ An unsigned note in the *Jornal do Commercio* distorted the argument by praising the rugs, claiming that they freed the viewer from the arid world of the "geometric" and "intellectual motifs" to offer instead the rich world of the "picturesque" and "subtle harmonies."⁴⁴⁷

As we have mentioned, it is not possible to observe the original chromaticism of Moyano's rugs in photographs nor in the objects themselves, as no preserved examples are known. What remains are some of her templates on graph paper, used as models by the weavers of Dándolo y Primi, now held by the Fundación IDA in Buenos Aires. A template dated 1956, composed in blues, yellows, a green, and variations between lilac and gray [Fig. 53], serves as a basis for imagining the colors designated for the weaving. In this case, it most likely corresponds to the rug *Jacarandás*, which belonged to Niomar Moniz Sodr e and whose detail was used for the cover of Moyano's exhibition catalog. The template, painted in tempera with the corresponding numerical indications for the selected wools at the bottom of the sheet, offers a possible reconstruction of one of the pieces displayed at MAM Rio. However, it is essential to consider that the brilliance and watery fluidity of the tempera—diluted in this case to allow the grid to remain visible—are quite different from the opacity and density of the woven wool.

446. Marc Berkowitz. "Tapetes de Lucrecia Muniz, no MAM" [Rugs by Lucrecia Muniz, at MAM]. *Para Todos*, Rio de Janeiro, n. 31, Aug. 1957.

447. "Tapeçaria de Lucrecia Moyano" [Tapestry by Lucrecia Moyano]. *Jornal do Commercio*, Aug. 18, 1957.



Fig. 53. Lucrecia Moyano, Template on graph paper for *Dándolo y Primi*, 1956, tempera and graphite on graph paper, 49 × 34 cm. Collection and image credit: Fundación IDA, Investigación en Diseño Argentino. Fondo Moyano, Lucrecia.

Moyano seems to have greatly appreciated the challenge of translating the transparency and dilution of her designs into a woolen structure, as evidenced by her numerous watercolor studies, which served as preparatory sketches for her templates. Such a translation is, of course, impossible, and she was fully aware of this contradiction, being the great watercolorist that she was. Her dedication to rugs began in the 1950s, approximately 20 years after her involvement with glasswork and 30 years after the first exhibitions of her watercolors.⁴⁴⁸ Perhaps Moyano brought the experience of liquid structures and their resistance to fixed contours into the textile world, much as she explored the introduction of color into molten glass and delighted in its so-called flaws—bubbles, deformations, and floating stains—which she pursued with an evidently playful spirit. Perhaps the charm lay in embracing these contradictions. However, this was lost on her critics, partly because her work diverged from the concretist vocabulary that had been defining an Argentine reference in the formative field of design in relation to art within the cultural environment of Rio de Janeiro.

448. "Lucrecia Moyano de Muñiz." Typed pages. Lucrecia Moyano Archive, Fundación IDA, Investigación en Diseño Argentino, Buenos Aires.

Moniz Sodré likely recognized that Moyano's exhibition seamlessly aligned with the museum's established tradition of showcasing tapestries, making it entirely suitable for the enclosed space of the hall in the Ministry of Education and Health building. However, the level of innovation she envisioned for Fridl Loos's exhibition could be significantly improved in the museum's forthcoming new space, with its open views of Rio de Janeiro's sea and mountains. Loos's work held the promise of a more daring and forward-thinking assertion of the museum's *avant-garde* vision, both nationally and internationally, justifying the decision to wait for the new headquarters to host her exhibition show. In January 1958, the new MAM Rio building at Aterro do Flamengo was inaugurated. Designed by Affonso Reidy and surrounded by gardens created by Roberto Burle Marx—two iconic achievements of modern Brazilian architecture and landscaping—the building opened with the completion of its Bloco Escola [School Block], dedicated to the museum's educational activities. This space was immediately repurposed to host exhibitions while construction of the remaining museum blocks continued.

Loos's exhibition opened to the public on November 20, 1958, and was designed to showcase two distinct sets of works. On one hand, it featured 33 paper-based pieces created using mixed techniques, including collage, drawing, tempera, ink, gouache, charcoal, and spray paint, some on black or red cellophane. These were accompanied by a series of photograms, described in the catalog produced by MAM Rio as "fabric designs intended for use in direct photo-imprinting."⁴⁴⁹ On the other hand, the exhibition included fabric samples with Loos's own prints, supposedly in dialogue with the photograms, as well as women's clothing—dresses, blouses, and trousers—designed by Loos and presented through three fashion shows held at the museum. The space where these objects were displayed was carefully designed to enhance the experience of the works. It was located on the second floor of the School Block, in a large glass-walled room that opened onto a garden terrace, offering a breathtaking view of Guanabara Bay and the iconic silhouette of Sugarloaf Mountain in the background.

The connection between the two sets was reinforced in the text by architect Amancio Williams, published in the catalog. He associated the works on paper, "made with simple materials, in clean colors, [...] with a freshness and an endearing simplicity of resources," with the "simple and fresh dresses using fabrics that are never overly luxurious

449. Williams, 1958, n. p.

or elaborate,” identifying in Loos’s work a certain independence from the fashion system: “Her work is more that of a modern artist than that of a fashion designer, which means that her work is much more aligned with the spirit of an era than with the whims imposed by fashion at the moment.”⁴⁵⁰ Despite ending with a somewhat infantilizing, if not sexist, remark thanking Loos for dressing women well and thereby making them beautiful, Williams’s brief text was better than most of what was published in Rio de Janeiro about the exhibition. This was mainly because no one else wrote about her work in Rio—the majority of commentators focused solely on the fashion shows and, more often than not, drifted into trivialities or into clichéd notions of the beautiful woman adorning the world or the home.

However, this overwhelming silence regarding Loos’s visual art in Rio de Janeiro parallels the general lack of analysis or studies on this aspect of her work, which seems to have been overshadowed by her career in fashion. Aware of this erasure, she frequently expressed her desire to be recognized as a visual artist, stating, “The path I chose many years ago: art.”⁴⁵¹ In 2000, she was close to seeing her graphic works and photograms brought together at the Centro Cultural Recoleta in Buenos Aires in an exhibition she helped organize but never got to experience, as she passed away a month before the vernissage. The few reproductions of these works featured in the 2000 catalog or in newspaper reports and articles provide uncertain or no dates, making it difficult to place them within Loos’s body of work. For instance, we know that her experiments with the photogram technique developed at varying intensities from the 1940s to at least the 1960s. Even the collection of her drawings, documents, and photographs, which constitute the Fondo Fridl Loos and were donated by her family to the Museo de la Historia del Traje [Museum of the History of Costume] in Buenos Aires, contains many gaps in information about these objects.⁴⁵²

Thus, we must gather clues to attempt to glimpse some of these works. The catalog produced by MAM Rio in 1958 aids in this effort, as it includes reproductions of two works exhibited at the museum—the first on the cover [Fig. 54] and the second on the opening page [Fig. 55].

450. *Idem*.

451. Giselle Casares. “Fridl Loos, una creadora sin par”. *Op. cit.*

452. Unfortunately, the Museo de la Historia del Traje in Buenos Aires was closed in 2024, and its collection was incorporated into the Museo Histórico Nacional in the same city. Policies of memory...

This catalog was also designed by Tuni Murtinho, and it is noteworthy that it closely resembles the one she created for Lucrecia Moyano: the same dimensions, the same black and vibrant yellow duotone, the same typography, similar text layouts, and the same use of yellow transparency to highlight photographs. One might wonder if Murtinho intentionally established a connection between the two catalogs—a possibility that would not be surprising, given her long-standing working relationship and collaboration with Moniz Sodré and MAM Rio, including her involvement in organizing Loos's fashion shows. Interestingly, the Moyano catalog featured a particularly delicate graphic solution that later appeared among the works exhibited by Loos at the museum: the use of "concrete" transparency through a yellow cellophane sheet. In Moyano's catalog, this sheet was bound between the cover and interior pages, creating a dialogue with the transparency effects so evident in Moyano's rugs.

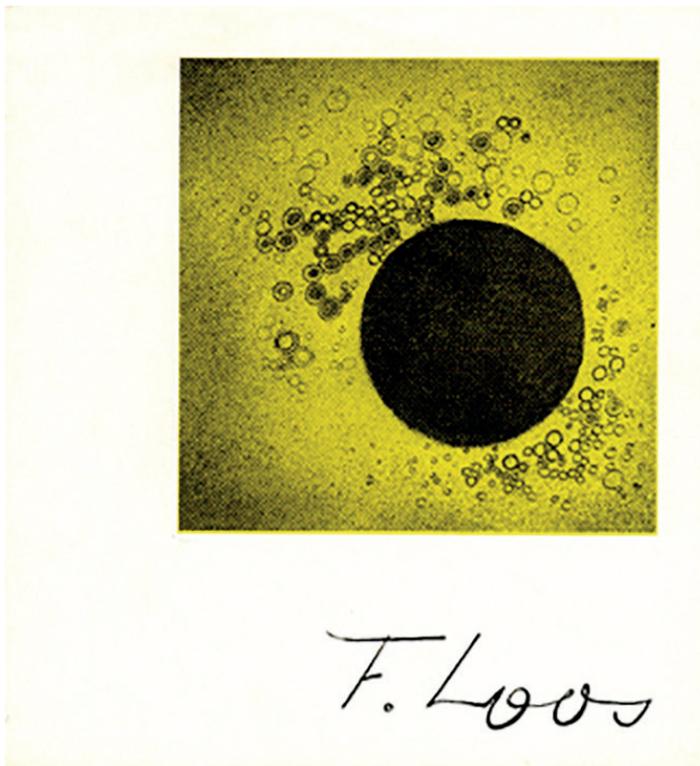


Fig. 54. *Fridl Loos*, 1958, exhibition catalog cover. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.



Fig. 55. *Fridl Loos*, 1958, exhibition catalog page. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

None of the images reproduced in Loos's catalog have been identified, so we do not know the techniques used or whether they had titles or dates. The image on the cover suggests a mixed technique, perhaps a combination of ink, tempera, and spray application, or perhaps a manipulated photogram over which a transparent yellow was applied. It is important to note that this yellow on the cover was not a graphic decision by Murtinho. Thanks to another set of paperwork housed in the Fridl Loos Archive at the Museo de la Historia del Traje, it is possible to glimpse, though not with certainty, some paper pieces exhibited at MAM Rio. This valuable set has already been mentioned: a small black paper folder with Loos's signature printed in white—the same signature seen on the cover of her MAM Rio catalog—containing 15 color-printed plates, produced for Loos's exhibition at the New York gallery *The Contemporaries* in January 1956. One of the plates is identical to the cover designed for Rio de Janeiro: the same black circle, the dotted bubble circles, and the square yellow background on white paper, only without the signature added by Murtinho. This coincidence allows us to imagine Loos's use of color and her experimentation with the photogram technique, which could be the origin of the black elements, possibly created by projecting the shadow of a glass container with liquids and objects.

The photogram technique—direct projection of object shadows onto photographic paper, made famous by artists like László Moholy-Nagy and

Man Ray—became especially significant for Loos in the 1950s. During this period, she was associated with Argentine concretism and exhibited at the Krayd Gallery, where she collaborated with the photographer and graphic designer Tomás Gonda, a Hungarian émigré who lived in Argentina from 1949 to 1958 before becoming a professor at the Ulm School. Gonda contributed to the Krayd collective project by creating graphic materials such as invitations and other prints,⁴⁵³ as well as photographic experiments that he and Loos applied to the creation of textile patterns, a practice she continued in developing her printed fabrics.⁴⁵⁴ The primary purpose of photograms in Loos's work seems to have been the production of textiles with exclusive prints, achieved through the manipulation of everyday objects on photographic paper. It is therefore understandable that the abstract language of her photograms often reveals “weaves crafted with wools, threads, ropes, ties, and ribbons, as inescapable protagonists of the language of sewing.”⁴⁵⁵

The image included on the opening page of the MAM Rio catalog evokes this textile atmosphere of ribbons and interwoven forms. Beyond serving as matrices for textile printing, the photograms also acted as experimental drivers for her works on paper. It may not even be possible to distinguish, in some of these works with photographic material, what functioned as a textile pattern and what was “the path of art” for Loos, as seen in the composition of one of the 15 plates from her New York exhibition [Fig. 56]. From the same period as the work featured on the cover of the MAM Rio catalog—and thus offering insight into the nature of the exhibition in Rio de Janeiro—this piece suggests a mix of photogram, collage, and painting: shadows of a fiber weave, a torn piece of paper—was it positioned on the sensitive surface or glued?—and a circular red plane—was it glued or painted? These playful manipulations of language certainly intrigued Loos, adding complexity to simplicity and shifting sobriety toward playfulness. Yet none of this seems to have caught the attention of the Rio commentators, who were almost exclusively focused on the famous models invited to showcase Loos's designs at the museum.

453. Rossi, 2006, p. 5.

454. Sessa, 2000, p. 19.

455. Pinto, 2000, p. 23.



Fig. 56. Fridl Loos, *s/t*, 1955, dichromatic print on paper. Collection and image credit: Colección Histórica del Traje Argentino, Fondo Fridl Loos.

It was not the first time in Brazil that fashion shows were held in a museum, nor was the fusion of fashion and modern art—especially in the creation of abstract patterns—particularly new. In 1952, the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) hosted the first fashion show in a Brazilian museum, organized to showcase and promote the fabrics and women’s clothing developed in the courses offered by the Instituto de Arte Contemporânea [Institute of Contemporary Art].⁴⁵⁶ Many Brazilian artists also explored the field of textile design, as exemplified by Fayga Ostrower, who, in partnership with Décio Vieira, created abstract patterns and, by the early 1950s, was producing, marketing, and exhibiting printed fabrics in Rio de Janeiro.⁴⁵⁷ But the situation created at MAM Rio for Fridl Loos’s exhibition aimed for a certain originality. The venue and the surrounding landscape also played a role in this.

The exhibition’s opening was to feature an outdoor fashion show on the garden terrace of the second floor of the School Block. However, due to rainy weather, it was moved indoors to the glass-walled room where the paper works and fabric samples were displayed, hanging on the walls.⁴⁵⁸ However, the idea of leveraging the spectacular setting to enhance the

456. Almeida, 2022, pp. 183-195.

457. *Idem*, pp. 264-273.

458. “Chuva transferiu desfile de moda concreta do terraço para o restaurante do MAM” [Rain moved the concrete fashion show from the terrace to the MAM restaurant]. *Jornal do Brasil*, Nov. 21, 1958, p. 7.

event was not entirely lost—the beauty of the models still celebrated the beauty of the building, the gardens, and the surrounding landscape. Moniz Sodré likely anticipated that the fluid spaces designed by Reidy and Burle Marx would resonate with the loose, understated designs of Loos [Figs. 57 and 58], aligning with the modernist advocacy for the frank and direct use of materials and techniques, evident in the exposed concrete and expansive glass walls of the room. The women invited to model included “four ladies and seven young women from the national café society.”⁴⁵⁹ Therefore, they were not professional models, which lent a more relaxed atmosphere to the event while still ensuring the appropriate social distinction of the occasion. The fashion show was accompanied by “concrete music” provided by artist Décio Vieira using a “Hi-Fi” system.⁴⁶⁰ From its earliest announcements in the press, the clothing was referred to as “concrete fashion,” a label Loos herself never used but one that reflected the cultured world of Rio de Janeiro, where discussions about concretism had already reached broader circles. This was evident in the debate on concrete music, which unfolded over several editions of the *Suplemento Dominical* [Sunday Supplement] of *Jornal do Brasil*.⁴⁶¹



Fig. 57. Fashion show opening the Fridl Loos exhibition, featuring a dress modeled by Ms. Karin Bertrand, 1958. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

459. *Idem*

460. Chuck. “Gatos Pardos”. *Correio da Manhã*, Nov. 21, 1958, p. 3.

461. For example, in the editions of Apr. 28, 1957, Aug. 26, 1957, Sept. 2, 1957, and Mar. 9, 1958.



Fig. 58. Fashion show opening the Fridl Loos exhibition, featuring a dress modeled by Mrs. Cecílinha Prado Uchôa, 1958. Photograph: Author unidentified. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

However, despite the “concrete” label, the reception of Loos’s work was shaped primarily by a complete disregard for the pieces displayed on the walls and, secondly, by two main dynamics: assimilation through social or women’s columns and estrangement toward the clothing or even the inclusion of fashion in the museum. The involvement of prominent women acting as models became the most noteworthy aspect, with their names often listed individually in the social columns. While Moyano’s exhibition was mentioned only once in the column “Vamos falar de mulheres?” [Shall We Talk About Women?], written by journalist Rosinha Serzedello for the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper, Loos’s exhibition was referenced four times in the same column.⁴⁶² The social columns “Flagrantes,” authored by J. J. & J., and “Gatos Pardos,” by Chuck, both in the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper, also focused exclusively on the fashion shows. The former, in a blatantly misogynistic

462. Rosinha Serzedello. “Vamos falar de mulheres?” [Shall We Talk About Women?]. *Correio da Manhã*, Nov. 9, 23, and 30, 1958; Dec. 28, 1958.

tone, remarked, “Let’s hope the new abstract designs don’t impact men’s paying pockets too concretely.”⁴⁶³ Chuck’s column offered a longer and more complimentary commentary on the event but noted that some outfits were “bizarre,” despite their originality.⁴⁶⁴ Journalist Pedro Müller, who penned the column “Giro em sociedade” [Society Roundup] for the newspaper *Tribuna da Imprensa*, questioned whether the event could truly be called a fashion show, stating that Loos “attempted a type of concrete fashion which, despite its name, did not prove to be very solid.”⁴⁶⁵ And, to round off the cycle of unfortunate puns, a cartoon in the *Revista de Domingo* [Sunday Magazine] of the *Jornal do Brasil* compared one of Loos’s dresses to a caricature of a woman literally wearing a large box, accompanied by the question, “Is this what the future will look like?”⁴⁶⁶

It is inevitable to think that in a Brazil striving to be modern without shedding its patriarchal, racial, and class structures, women embracing straighter silhouettes seemed to provoke hostility or, at the very least, sarcasm. Perhaps the mention of all the names of the ladies and young women on display was a way to restore the comfort of stable constraints. However, as in her works on paper, Loos conceived clothing as an experience balanced between complexity and simplicity, sobriety, and playfulness. This loose-fitting dress with an original print, reproduced several times in the Rio de Janeiro press as a paradigmatic example of her pieces, connects the designer to the “path of art” she chose. Reflecting on the creation of her prints—derived from photograms, unique combinations, and the individualized production of each pattern—Loos would later say, a few years after her trip to Brazil, “For me, the dress is a handcrafted object, where geometry plays a secret and transcendent role.”⁴⁶⁷

The only more detailed appraisals were made in two articles by the art critic Jayme Maurício in *Correio da Manhã*. Four days before the opening, he announced the novelty of having a fashion designer at MAM Rio, who would present “less extravagant, purer patterns on fabrics that she herself designs and produces.” He also celebrated the introduction of fashion into the museum: “Let us anticipate the shock and consequent reaction that this

463. J. J. & J. “Flagrantes”. *Correio da Manhã*, Nov. 20, 1958.

464. Chuck. “Gatos Pardos”. *Op. cit.*

465. Pedro Müller. “Giro em sociedade”. *Tribuna da Imprensa*, Nov. 24, 1958.

466. “Vai ser assim no futuro?” [Will It Be Like This in the Future?]. *Revista de Domingo - Jornal do Brasil*, Nov. 23, 1958, p. 1.

467. *Apud* Felisa Pinto. “En el salón de la precursora” [In the Salon of the Forerunner]. *Primera Plana*, n. 199, Buenos Aires, Oct. 18, 1966, p. 50.

news will provoke [...] as in some cases in medicine, it is essential to provoke a reaction in certain organisms for the cure of an ailment and for new organic functions.”⁴⁶⁸ The day after the exhibition opened, he published a longer article. For him, the exhibition revealed to the Brazilian cultural world that women’s fashion is “an activity worthy of museums and of interest to all those dedicated to the aesthetic and social manifestations of our time.” In its coercive changes, “fashion provides evidence of tremendous vitality. By recognizing and highlighting this vitality, MAM Rio has also proven its own—and wants to know if ours exists as well.” He argued, though not entirely avoiding a certain misogyny, just as all the surrounding objects should have beautiful and functional forms, so too should women’s clothing, as, after all, women are figures that “largely dominate our entire habitat, much more so than any other form.”⁴⁶⁹

Despite the general sense of strangeness—or perhaps because of it—Moniz Sodré seems to have regarded Loos’s exhibition as a remarkable success. The postponement until the inauguration of MAM Rio’s new and permanent headquarters was not in vain. However, it is unlikely to be coincidental that the opening of Loos’s exhibition coincided with one of Nelson Rockefeller’s visits to the museum, allowing him to visit the rooftop garden and admire Guanabara Bay to the sound of concrete music. The event produced photographs of Moniz Sodré walking ahead of him with the museum under construction in the background [Fig. 59] and of Loos showing him her printed fabrics, receiving his full attention [Fig. 60]. The first photograph appeared on the cover of *Correio da Manhã* on November 21, while the second illustrated Chuck’s column on the same day. Rockefeller, president of the Museum of Modern Art in New York and a member of the board of the Association of American Friends of MAM Rio, had just been elected governor of New York State. Many interests were intertwined on that day. While Rockefeller reaffirmed Latin America as a zone of U.S. influence during the height of the Cold War, Moniz Sodré legitimized the importance of MAM Rio—and of Brazil—on the regional power stage, where Argentina was not just a friendly nation but another player in the same game. There is no doubt that he was one of the “people who matter” mentioned in Moniz Sodré’s letter to Loos.

468. Jayme Maurício. “Itinerário das Artes Plásticas” [Visual Arts Itinerary]. *Correio da Manhã*, Nov. 16, 1958, p. 18.

469. Jayme Maurício. “Itinerário das Artes Plásticas” [Visual Arts Itinerary]. *Correio da Manhã*, Nov. 21, 1958. It should be noted that the critic Mario Pedrosa did not see Loos’s exhibition because he was on a work trip to Japan.



Fig. 59. Nelson Rockefeller, governor-elect of New York, visiting the construction site of MAM Rio, 1958, photograph. Source: *Boletim do Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro*, n. 17, January 1959, n. p. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.



Fig. 60. Nelson Rockefeller examines the fabrics of Fridl Loos, 1958, photograph. Source: *Boletim do Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro*, n. 17, January 1959, n. p. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

Between Foreign Policy and Art Circulation: Argentine Art Exhibitions at MAM Rio in 1961

MOEMA DE BACELAR ALVES

Artistic production and exhibitions between Brazil and Argentina benefited from a politically and diplomatically favorable environment in the late 1950s and early 1960s, fostering greater exchange and stronger cultural ties between the two nations. At the same time, throughout the 1950s, both Brazil and other Southern Cone nations were shaped by the debate and circulation of new artistic ideas. These ideas embraced abstraction as a universal language, challenging the previously accepted understanding of modernism, which remained strongly figurative and distinctly nationalist in tone.

During this period, countries like Brazil and Argentina underwent a phase of developmentalist policies, which influenced the spread of constructivist trends in art.⁴⁷⁰ These trends aimed to break with the traditional past, creating geometric compositions that reflected the modern world of the time.

In this context, cultural institutions were expected to keep up with this modernity, this era, this development, and break with tradition. Modern art museums in Brazil, which emerged in the late 1940s and solidified in the 1950s, were meant to keep pace with this rhythm, serve as expressions of the time, and reflect the dynamics of a society in transformation.

The Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), under the directorship of Niomar Moniz Sodré in the 1950s, fully embraced this sentiment, adopting a dynamic and mobile approach in its initiatives as it sought to establish itself as an institution of international prestige.⁴⁷¹ With Rio de Janeiro as the country's political center and a board composed of

470. Couto, 2023, pp. 23-24.

471. About the foundation and the process of institutionalization of MAM Rio, see Sant'anna, 2011.

individuals influential not only in cultural spheres but also in political and diplomatic arenas, the museum positioned itself as a key venue for major artistic exhibitions from around the world.

The records of exhibitions held at MAM Rio in 1961 list a total of 41 shows, 13 of which featured artists from outside Brazil or collective exhibitions from other countries. Notably, only one country was represented in more than one exhibition—Argentina, with three shows: *Artistas contemporâneos da Argentina* [Contemporary Artists of Argentina, July-August 1961], *Ceramistas Argentinos* [Argentine Ceramists], and *Grupo Sur*, both November 1961.⁴⁷²

There is, of course, a reason three exhibitions from the same country were held at the same museum in the same year: all were organized under the auspices of the Argentine Embassy in Brazil and were part of the celebrations surrounding the *Convênio de Amizade e Consulta* [Friendship and Consultation Agreement], signed that same year in 1961, which marked the strengthening of relations between the two countries.

While this discussion focuses on the exhibitions at MAM Rio, it is worth noting that Argentina, like Brazil, was also asserting its artistic presence internationally. This included participation in the 6th São Paulo Biennial [October to December 1961], as well as exhibitions in private galleries and theaters in Brazil. The Galeria Bonino, whose Rio de Janeiro branch had been inaugurated by Alfredo and Giovana Bonino the previous year, featured works by the Argentine artists Héctor Basaldúa and Ronaldo de Juan also in 1961. Additionally, Argentine music filled the Teatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro, and Argentine theatrical performances were staged at Largo do Boticário. These are just a few examples of the broader cultural program promoted or supported by the Argentine Embassy.

According to the official catalog of the 6th São Paulo Biennial, Argentina was represented by 14 artists showcasing a total of 87 works, including paintings, sculptures, and engravings. Additionally, two special rooms were dedicated to individual artists: one featured the paintings of Raquel Forner, and the other highlighted the sculptures of Alicia Penalba, who won the International Sculpture Award that year, with 25 and 21 works, respectively.⁴⁷³ This was no small achievement. Unfortunately, due to the absence of a complete list of works exhibited at MAM Rio, it is impossible to determine the similarities and differences between the pieces displayed in both cities. However, among

472. Sometimes also referred to as *Grupo del Sur*; however, to maintain consistency in the text, *Grupo Sur* will be used, as presented by Rafael Squirru in the exhibition catalog, the local press, and the invitation to the exhibition's opening.

473. Renata Gomes Cardoso, in this publication, addresses the circulation of these two Argentine artists in Brazil.

the artists featured in both exhibitions, two participated in the 1961 Biennial but were not part of the earlier MAM Rio exhibition in July: Guillermo Walter Thiemer (drawing, in the sculpture section) and Zygro (engraving).

Thus, understanding the relationship between foreign policy and the circulation of art provides valuable insight into these events and their consequences, revealing how political relations occurred and evolved, but also how they took shape within artistic spaces. This discussion seeks to examine how this context, along with the artistic production of that time, facilitated the exchange of art between the two countries.

Bilateral Relations

If the 1950s marked the strengthening of bilateral relations between Brazil and Argentina, it was due to the government projects of Arturo Frondizi, president of Argentina from 1958 to 1962, and Juscelino Kubitschek, president of Brazil from 1956 to 1961. These efforts were further reinforced during the administrations of Jânio Quadros (January-August 1961) and João Goulart (1961-1964).

Frondizi's political proposal was known as *desarrollista* [developmentalist], a concept closely aligned with what Kubitschek promoted in Brazil, known as *desenvolvimentismo* [developmentalism]. Under Frondizi, the model of international engagement affirmed national sovereignty, the principles of self-determination and non-intervention, the universalization of trade relations, the pursuit of industrialization, and the goal of Latin American integration.

Relations between Brazil and Argentina had always fluctuated between rapport and moments of rivalry since both countries gained independence. However, Argentina's adoption of a foreign policy focused on national industrialization and foreign investment facilitated alignment with Brazil's policies in the mid-1950s. This process began even before Frondizi took office when, already elected but not yet inaugurated, he visited Brazil at Kubitschek's invitation.⁴⁷⁴

In November 1959, in Buenos Aires, Brazilian Foreign Minister Horácio Lafer and Argentine Foreign Minister Diógenes Taboada signed an agreement to enhance cultural, artistic, and scientific exchange between the two countries. Then, in April 1961, the newly inaugurated president of Brazil, Jânio Quadros, and the president of Argentina, Arturo Frondizi, held a historic meeting in Uruguaiana, Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil), accompanied by Foreign Ministers Diógenes Taboada (Argentina) and Afonso Arinos de Mello Franco

474. Botega, 2011.

(Brazil), as well as Carlos Manuel Muñiz, the Argentine ambassador in Rio de Janeiro, and Aguinaldo Boulitreau Fragoso, the Brazilian ambassador in Buenos Aires.

Beyond its symbolic role in advancing bilateral relations between Brazil and Argentina, this meeting also laid the groundwork for a proposal for joint international action. Among other topics, discussions addressed how both countries would position themselves on the Cuban issue, as Cuba had just announced its alliance with the Soviet Union. During this meeting, the *Declaração Conjunta sobre Cooperação Política* [Joint Declaration on Political Cooperation], also known as the *Declaração de Uruguaiana* [Uruguaiana Declaration], was signed, reaffirming the common points of both countries' foreign policies. As part of this agreement, the *Convênio de Amizade e Consulta* was also signed, establishing a system for information exchange and reaffirming commitments to expanding integration in the economic, cultural, and judicial fields.

A legislative decree promulgated the *Convênio de Intercâmbio Cultural* [Cultural Exchange Agreement] with Argentina in November 1959, following its signing in Buenos Aires. Consisting of 19 articles, the agreement aimed to "increase cultural, artistic, and scientific exchange between both countries." Among these articles, the most relevant to the circulation of artworks and the promotion of artistic production are:

Article I

Each Contracting Party shall commit to promoting cultural exchange between Brazilians and Argentines, supporting the work carried out within its territory by cultural, educational, scientific, or historical institutions dedicated to the dissemination of the language, cultural values, and artistic heritage of the other Party.

[...]

Article V

1. Each Contracting Party shall annually grant scholarships to graduate students, professionals, or artists sent by one country to the other to further their studies.

2. Brazilian and Argentine recipients of these scholarships shall be exempt from administrative formalities, tuition fees, examination fees, and other similar charges.

[...]

Article VIII

Each Contracting Party shall sponsor the periodic organization of cultural exhibitions, as well as theater, music, and documentary and artistic film festivals.

Article IX

Each Contracting Party shall commit to studying the most appropriate means to facilitate the free entry into their respective territories, of artwork, scientific materials, books, recordings, musical scores, and other cultural publications originating from the other Party.

Article X

Each Contracting Party shall recommend to official institutions and private entities, especially writers' and artists' societies and book chambers, that they send their publications to the national libraries of each Party. It shall also encourage the translation and publication of major literary, technical, and scientific works by national authors of the other Party.

[...]

Article XIV

1. Each Contracting Party shall protect, within its territory, the rights of artistic, intellectual, and scientific property originating from the other Party, in accordance with the international conventions to which it has adhered or may adhere in the future.

2. It shall likewise study the best means to ensure that authors from the other Party receive the same treatment as national authors in obtaining their rights.

Article XV

Each Contracting Party shall facilitate the entry into its territory, as well as the eventual departure, of scientific and technical instruments, educational materials, artworks, books, documents, or any other objects originating from the other Party that contribute to the effective development of the activities covered by this Agreement or that, when intended for temporary exhibitions, must be returned to their place of origin, always in compliance with national heritage regulations.⁴⁷⁵

We have seen, then, that the agreement focused on promoting the circulation of artwork and cultural publications, as well as facilitating the entry and exit of “artwork, books, documents, and any other objects originating from the other Party” that contributed to the development of scientific, educational, and cultural activities or, when intended for temporary exhibitions, were to be returned to their place of origin, always in compliance with the regulations governing national heritage.

475. Decree n. 52,921 of Nov. 22, 1963 – Original Publication. Available at: <https://www2.camara.leg.br/legin/fed/decret/1960-1969/decreto-52921-22-novembro-1963-392838-publicacaooriginal-1-pe.html>. Accessed on Nov. 20, 2024.

In August 1964, during the early months of the military government established in Brazil, the *Convênio de Amizade e Consulta*, signed in Uruguaiiana in 1961, was approved through another legislative decree. However, foreign policy would change significantly under military rule—a subject better addressed on another occasion.

Bilateral Relations and Art Exhibitions

Three months after the signing of the Uruguaiiana agreement, on July 10, 1961, MAM Rio inaugurated the exhibition *Artistas contemporâneos da Argentina* [Contemporary Argentine Artists],⁴⁷⁶ an event that celebrated the friendship agreement between the two countries.

As is customary for a major cultural event, in the weeks leading up to it, newspapers were already filled with anticipation for its opening, which was to be conducted by President Jânio Quadros in celebration of the recently signed agreement and the strong relations with the neighboring country. Given the substantial number of artworks brought for the events discussed below, we can infer the significant efforts made to put the provisions of the agreement into practice.

However, at the opening of the July 1961 exhibition, political and diplomatic matters overshadowed artistic concerns after a speech took center stage on opening night, possibly shaping the exhibition's initial reception.

At the request of Jânio Quadros, the exhibition was scheduled to be inaugurated on Friday, July 7, in the late afternoon. And it was on this date the press reported that the event would take place. However, just three days before the opening, the Argentine embassy, which was organizing the exhibition, received a message from the Palácio da Alvorada [the official residence of Brazilian presidents] informing them that, due to “unpostponable reasons,” the president would not be able to attend. The disappointment was significant. However, two days later, on the eve of what was supposed to be the vernissage, a request was sent to the museum and the embassy to postpone the inauguration until the following Monday, with the promise of a presidential speech that would have “profound international repercussions.”⁴⁷⁷ The request was granted, and

476. It may also be referred to in some newspapers as *Exposição de Arte Argentina Contemporânea* [Contemporary Argentine Art Exhibition].

477. Jayme Maurício. “Adiada a mostra argentina para JQ inaugurar” [Argentine Exhibition Postponed for JQ to Inaugurate] *Correio da Manhã*, July 7, 1961, 2nd Section, p. 2.

at 12:30 p.m. on July 10, the grand event took place. We can imagine the confusion caused by the sudden rescheduling of such a large and widely publicized exhibition. Beyond the institutional procedures, programming adjustments, and the fact that a fully prepared exhibition remained closed to visitors, we must also consider the efforts required by the press in both countries. The Argentine press closely followed developments related to the agreement, even sending journalists to Rio de Janeiro to cover the exhibition's inauguration. On July 7, the originally scheduled opening date, several newspapers announced the event as set to take place that afternoon. However, only *Jornal do Brasil* and *Correio da Manhã*—owned by Paulo Bittencourt, husband of Niomar Moniz Sodré, head of MAM—reported the date change on July 7 itself.

The day after the official inauguration finally took place, all major newspapers in Rio de Janeiro prominently featured the previous night's event. However, one detail stands out in their reporting: the star of the evening was not the artworks, the artists, or even art itself, but instead Jânio Quadros—and his speech!



Fig. 61. Inauguration of the *Arte Argentina Contemporânea* Exhibition, Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1961. Photograph: José Santos Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

And if I am to elaborate on the account of this exhibition's inauguration, it is because political and artistic events became so intertwined that the opening served as a true platform for advocating positions on the country's foreign policy. Thus, allow me a brief detour before returning to the event itself.

As is well known, the 1960s were still shaped by the Cold War and its bipolarization. In particular, 1961 was marked by several global events, including the "Cuban crisis," which saw the breakdown of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States and the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. In September of that year, the Conference of Heads of Government of Non-Aligned Countries took place in Belgrade, then the capital of the former Yugoslavia. This event later became known as the Non-Aligned Movement, bringing together representatives from 25 countries who declared their neutrality in the East-West conflict and their intention not to align with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the Soviet-led bloc. In terms of foreign policy, the Jânio Quadros government adopted what became known as *Política Externa Independente* [PEI – Independent Foreign Policy], which was based on maintaining an independent and neutral stance in the U.S.-USSR bipolar confrontation. This very issue was, in fact, discussed at the Uruguiana meeting.

Then, on July 6, shortly after returning from a trip, John Cabot, the American ambassador to Brazil, held a press conference for the Rio de Janeiro press, stating that since Brazil had signed commitments with the United States and other countries on the continent, it could not be classified as non-committed. Referring to the upcoming conference in Yugoslavia, he acknowledged that, as a sovereign nation, Brazil was free to adopt whatever stance it deemed appropriate, even disengaging if it so chose. Cabot also alluded to a possible Brazilian attempt to mediate the Cuban issue, emphasizing that no negotiations with communism were acceptable and that, therefore, any such attempt would be doomed to failure.

Jânio Quadros, who had withdrawn from inaugurating the exhibition due to "unpostponable reasons," certainly recognized that the gathering of politicians, diplomats, and members of the press—including foreign correspondents—would provide the ideal stage to deliver his response and ensure it resonated widely. This explains why the request to change the exhibition's opening date was made on the eve of the originally scheduled date, coinciding with the publication of the American ambassador's interview. The weekend was undoubtedly crucial in shaping the speech the president of Brazil would deliver, reinforcing a strong message of national sovereignty.

Jânio, at MAM, reading from a six-page speech on official Itamaraty letterhead, reaffirmed his stance of neutrality, stating that the country would not tolerate interference from any party. He also spoke about strengthening its

bilateral policy and reinforcing both nations' ability to freely address their matters of interest. Immediately after his speech, the Argentine ambassador, Carlos Muñiz, visibly moved—according to the press—delivered an impromptu address, emphasizing that the president had spoken as both a Brazilian and an Argentine. Ambassador Cabot and the Cuban cultural attaché, Martin Mora, both present at the inauguration and during the president's speech, declined to comment.⁴⁷⁸

Jânio Quadros' speech was published in its entirety in *Correio da Manhã* the day after the event. I will not analyze it in detail, but I will present an excerpt of particular interest to us.

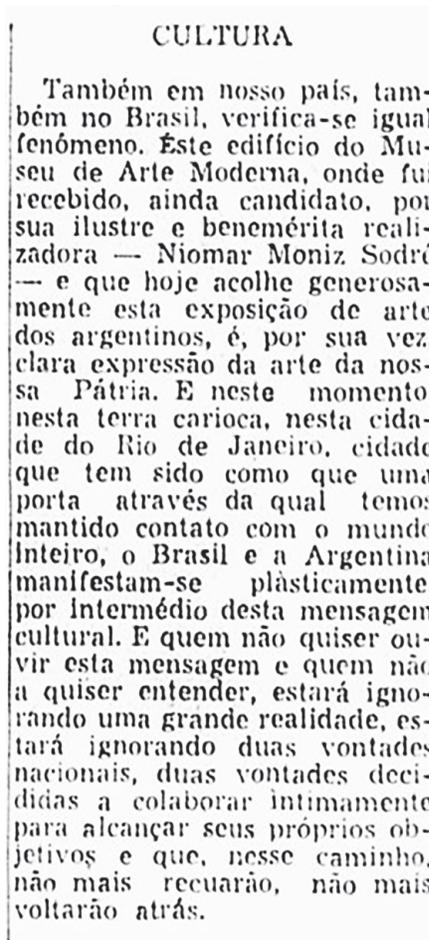


Fig. 62. Excerpt from Jânio Quadros' Speech. Source: *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, July 11, 1961, p. 14

478. *Tribuna da Imprensa*, Jul. 11, 1961, 2nd Section, p. 1.

With his speech structured into distinct topics, it is particularly noteworthy that he began by addressing culture, as well as emphasizing and praising the institution hosting him at that moment. Just over a month after this emphatic speech, Jânio Quadros resigned from the presidency. Meanwhile, Ambassador Cabot remained in Brazil only until August of that year, later assuming the ambassadorship to Poland. Cabot left the Brazilian embassy on August 17, and Jânio resigned on the 25th of that month. But before Jânio shocked everyone with his speech, many topics were discussed while the exhibition had yet to begin. An account of this moment is provided by Hélio Fernandes in his column *Fatos e Rumores* [Facts and Rumors] in the newspaper *Diário de Notícias*. From his text, we learn that Jânio Quadros' plane suffered a malfunction, causing the president to be delayed by an hour and a half! The inauguration, originally scheduled for 11:00 a.m., only began at 12:30 p.m. Meanwhile, MAM Rio, filled with authorities, artists, and intellectuals, became a stage for small meetings and social interactions. One, however, stands out: a conversation between Aloysio de Paula and João Carlos Vital regarding the upcoming election for MAM's board of directors. According to Hélio Fernandes, the most favored candidate for president was Gustavo Capanema.

Niomar Moniz Sodré, executive director of the museum since 1951, had been on leave for several months due to health reasons and was temporarily replaced by Aloysio de Paula, the museum's 2nd Vice President. In May 1961, Niomar formally requested her to step down from her position, prompting a call for new elections.⁴⁷⁹ The atmosphere at the exhibition was therefore one of apprehension regarding the museum's future, as elections were set to take place in as little as ten days.

On July 20, the new board of directors took office. As anticipated, Gustavo Capanema assumed the presidency of the museum, replacing Ambassador Maurício Nabuco. João Carlos Vital remained as 1st Vice President, while Nelson Augusto de Faria Baptista, who had previously served as Treasurer Director, took over Aloysio de Paula's former position of 2nd Vice President. Aloysio de Paula, in turn, officially became the museum's executive director.⁴⁸⁰

It was not the first time, however, that MAM Rio served as the venue for an event that was part of the diplomatic agenda between Brazil and Argentina. On the last day of September 1959, Diógenes Taboada arrived in the city for a

479. Niomar Moniz Sodré then took on the position of Honorary President of the museum.

480. At that time, Carmen Portinho continued as Deputy Director, Jorge Paes de Carvalho was elected Treasurer Director, and Luiz Gonzaga Nascimento Silva was elected Secretary Director.

brief two-day visit during which he would address matters of mutual interest with the Itamaraty. On this visit, he was awarded the *Ordem Cruzeiro do Sul* [Order of the Southern Cross], Brazil's highest honor for foreign dignitaries, and was honored with a dinner at the MAM Rio restaurant, attended by representatives of the political and diplomatic spheres of that time. The minister was thus present at the museum; and just over a year later, an exhibition celebrating the friendship between the two countries would be held there.



Fig. 63. View of the dinner table, showing Mr. Diógenes Taboada, Mrs. Horácio Lafer, Lord Wailingier, Niomar Moniz Sodré, Jayme Bastian Pinto, and Ambassador Boulitreau Fragoso. Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1959. Photograph: Foto Carlos. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

But, after this brief digression that reaffirms the tightening of ties between art and politics, institutions, and diplomacy, let us return to June of 1961, when, after the excitement sparked by Jânio Quadros' speech, the exhibition continued as planned until its closure in mid-August. Nevertheless, press coverage focused more on the president's speech and the accompanying lectures than on the artworks themselves. We learn from Quirino Campofiorito, in a report published in *O Jornal* on July 28, that Romualdo Brughetti, one of the critics who gave a lecture at MAM, expressed his surprise during a critics' meeting at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes. He found it odd that, more than a week after the exhibition's opening, it had yet to receive any reviews from Brazilian

critics (or those active in Brazil), while the Argentine artists were eager to know how their works were being received by local critics.⁴⁸¹ Yet, as we follow the newspapers—at least those circulating in Brazil—this curiosity remains unresolved.

María Amalia García, in her analysis of Jorge Romero Brest's⁴⁸² relationship with Brazil during his tenure at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, states that the MAM exhibition was a major gamble. Despite a carefully selected group of artists and a meticulous presentation of 20th-century Argentine production, the exhibition failed to establish a strong connection between Argentine and Brazilian visual arts, as had happened in other instances. She concludes her text by questioning why the exhibition did not have an impact on the Brazilian public, even speculating that the timing of the event may not have been ideal for the emergence of new exchanges. She also mentions the weight of history, the formal reciprocities between institutions,⁴⁸³ and the diplomatic protocol, which ultimately failed to create the most suitable setting for an artistic encounter.⁴⁸⁴

This is also what we understand after a close examination of what the exhibition's opening actually turned into—a political gathering that overshadowed the artistic exchange, with diplomatic concerns drowning out the discourse on modern art.

And upon examining the photographs in the exhibition dossier from the MAM Rio archives, we observe that, much like the images and comments published in the newspapers, politics overshadowed art, with the figure of the President of Brazil standing out more than the exhibition itself in these records. As a result, the little we can see of the exhibition rooms and artworks is mediated through the presence of Jânio Quadros.

481. Quirino Campofiorito. "Artistas e críticos argentinos" [Argentine Artists and Critics]. *O Jornal* (Rio de Janeiro), Jul. 28, 1961, p. 6. Column: Artes Plásticas [Visual Arts].

482. An important art critic and cultural manager, Romero Brest was the director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes from 1955 to 1963, during which he organized the aforementioned exhibition that was brought to Brazil.

483. María Amalia García refers to the Brazilian art exhibition organized by MAM Rio in Buenos Aires a few years earlier.

484. García, 2009, p. 135.



Fig. 64. President Jânio Quadros and the Argentine Ambassador, Carlos Manuel Muñiz, touring the exhibition *Arte Argentina Contemporânea*, Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1961. Photograph: José Santos. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

The exhibition encompassed forty years of Argentine artistic production, divided into sections of painting, sculpture, and printmaking. In other words, within the narrative organized for presentation in Brazil, contemporary Argentine art was defined as production beginning in the 1920s. Works by 102 painters, 26 sculptors, and 11 printmakers were brought in, totaling 139 carefully selected artists, with the assistance of Ignacio Pirovano, the representative of MAM Rio in Buenos Aires. The exhibition catalog includes images of one work from each artist, mostly in black and white, with some in color, though the number of exhibited works is not specified. Newspapers—including the column of the journalist Jayme Maurício, who had a close relationship with MAM Rio—mention that approximately 400 works were on display. Given the number of artists and pieces, it is clear that the exhibition was truly large in scale, and one can easily imagine the earnest effort required to bring it to fruition.

On the title page of the catalog, it is stated that the exhibition was sponsored by the Argentine Embassy in Brazil, immediately followed by a list of Argentine authorities involved in the event: President Arturo Frondizi; Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship, Adolfo Mujica; Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, Oscar Camilion; Ambassador of the Argentine Republic to Brazil, Carlos Manuel Muñiz; and General Director of Cultural Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, Rafael Squirru.⁴⁸⁵ Ambassador Carlos Muñiz also provides a brief introduction, highlighting the emerging cultural exchange and presenting the exhibition as a first step toward deepening mutual understanding and strengthening ties between Brazil and Argentina.

The catalog's introductory text, signed by Jorge Romero Brest, is brief—only one page—but emphasizes the exhibition's panoramic scope. It underscores the need to value American culture and highlights the role of exhibition spaces as platforms for self-representation and dialogue.⁴⁸⁶

That same week in which the exhibition's opening ultimately took place, a series of conferences on Argentine art also began at MAM Rio. The Argentine Embassy organized the event and was responsible for inviting critics and writers to discuss the country's artistic scene and perspectives on art. Participation was free, and those who attended the full program received a certificate of attendance.⁴⁸⁷ Prominent figures from Argentina's critical and literary scene—actively engaged in debating modern art both in the press and within institutional settings—delivered lectures at the museum. From July through early August, speakers at MAM Rio included Romero Brest, Manuel Mujica Lainez, Ernesto Ramallo, Osvaldo Svanascini, Ernesto B. Rodriguez, Romualdo Brughetti, Lorenzo Varela, Enrique Azcoaga, Hugo Parpagnoli, and Cordova Iturburu.⁴⁸⁸

485. Rafael Squirru, writer, critic, and poet, was also the founder and first director of the *Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires*.

486. Romero Brest, 1961.

487. "Arte Argentina Contemporânea" [Contemporary Argentine Art]. *Diário Carioca*, Jul. 7, 1961, p. 6.

488. Vera Martins. "Programa no MAM: visão geral da arte argentina" [Program at MAM: An Overview of Argentine Art]. *Jornal do Brasil*, Jul. 5, 1961, Caderno B, p. 4. Column: Artes [Arts].



Fig. 65. View of the audience at the Conference Circle that attended the *Arte Argentina Contemporânea* exhibition, Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1961. Photograph: José Santos. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

To mark the exhibition, the embassy also organized a monograph competition on contemporary Argentine art, with the prize being a trip to Buenos Aires. The winning monograph, published later that year, remains a valuable historical record. It offers a description of the exhibition and the speeches delivered at the event, capturing both what was seen and the appeals and peculiarities of the statements made at the time.



Fig. 66. Cover of the winning monograph of the First Prize in the competition. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

It is through this account that we learn that the exhibition occupied five rooms in the School Block, with works also displayed in the large corridor. According to the author, Áureo Guimarães de Macedo, only three artists—Lino Spilimbergo, Miguel Carlos Victoria, and Emilio Pettoruti—were exhibited in the first hall, while the other rooms featured a greater variety of names and styles. Through his descriptions, we can navigate the exhibition's spaces and artists, attempting to reconstruct its narrative, as no images have survived. Some of the paintings he mentions do not appear in the catalog, leaving us to wonder about other names that were not recorded.

Between the third room (where Raquel Forner's works were displayed) and the fourth, a series of pieces led Macedo to question the term *painting* due to the materials and techniques used. In this corridor, among other techniques, there were "rustic collages on wood and industrial materials on display."⁴⁸⁹ The fourth room was dedicated to what he identifies as works of political-social realism. Among them were pieces by Antonio Berni, for example, as well as engravings and drawings, on which he does not dwell, but were created by artists such as Xul Solar.

Finally, we know that the fifth and last "hall" was on the upper floor and featured artists already well known in Brazil, both for their presence in numerous collections and for being frequently exhibited in private galleries. This space was, above all, dedicated to non-figurative art, bringing together "the most brilliant works that modern Platine art could offer us"⁴⁹⁰—a selection that reveals Macedo's preference—with featured artists such as Tomás Maldonado, Miguel Ángel Vidal, and sculptures by Alicia Penalba.

In a year when exhibition openings featured at least three shows running simultaneously, having the entire museum reserved for a single show was a noteworthy event. Additionally, we must not forget that the Bloco de Exposições [Exhibition Block] had not yet been inaugurated; it would only open six years later. The exhibition, therefore, took place in the Bloco Escola [School Block], and the upper floor mentioned earlier—likely what we now know as the Salão de Eventos [Event Hall], which also hosted exhibitions at the time.

In October 1963, a similar version of this exhibition, now titled *Exposición de Pintura Argentina* [Exhibition of Argentine Painting], was set up at the Museo de Bellas Artes de Caracas in Venezuela. This time, the critic Hugo Parpagnoli curated the show. Having been at MAM Rio two years earlier to give lectures, he had just taken over as director of the Museo de Arte Moderno de

489. Macedo, 1961, p. 20

490. *Idem*, pp. 21-22

Buenos Aires, succeeding Rafael Squirru—a position he held until 1971. From the exhibition catalog organized by Parpagnoli, we see some changes in the selection of artists compared to those presented in Brazil two years earlier, though the majority remained the same. Unlike the Brazilian catalog, this one does not include images but instead features explanatory texts by Parpagnoli on the generations and groups of artists. As a result, the catalog—and the exhibition itself—was structured into eight sections: *Generación, Escuela, Lenguaje, Solos, Conquista, Fidelidad, Mundos, and Actitud*.

We cannot confirm whether the artists selected for the exhibitions in Rio de Janeiro and Caracas presented the same works; therefore, it is not possible to state that the two exhibitions were identical. However, it was certainly a version of it, as it maintained the same panoramic approach, the same 20th-century scope, and began with the generation of Pettoruti, Victorica, and Spilimbergo.⁴⁹¹

The 1960s marked a period of significant economic growth for Venezuela, and Caracas, in particular, was undergoing rapid modernization, providing an ideal setting for the program promoting modern Argentine art. But let us return to Brazil, as there are still other exhibitions held at MAM Rio in 1961 to discuss.

November Events

A few months later, on November 22 at 5:30 p.m., MAM Rio inaugurated seven exhibitions, two of which featured Argentine art: *Ceramistas Argentinos* [Argentine Ceramicists] and *Grupo Sur*. For nearly a month, the museum's galleries were filled with works by artists from multiple countries, representing various techniques and forms of expression. The other five exhibitions accompanying the Argentine exhibits were *Martin Bradley*; *Antonio Prado* (painting); *Tapestries by Gina* (featuring tapestries by Gina Prado); *Renée Sasson* (jewelry); and *Projeto Cães de Caça* by Hélio Oiticica (a model).⁴⁹²

Unfortunately, I do not have as much information about the shows that opened on November 22 as I do for the one inaugurated a few months earlier, in July. This time, there was no political backdrop. Instead, fewer

491. Also in December 1963, the exhibition *L'art argentin actuel* [Current Argentine Art] was inaugurated at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, remaining open until February of the following year. Unfortunately, I did not have access to the catalog, making it impossible to continue the comparison.

492. *Invitation to the Opening of the Exhibitions*. Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 1961. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

reports addressed the opening events, and greater emphasis was placed on the artists and the exhibition organizers.

When reporting on the upcoming exhibition of Argentine artworks at MAM Rio, newspapers recalled the July exhibition, noting that some artists from Grupo Sur were already known to the Rio de Janeiro public as a result of their participation in that earlier event.⁴⁹³ From the articles announcing the soon-to-open exhibitions, the public also learned that the members of Grupo Sur were all Argentine artists studying in Paris and that the ceramics exhibition was organized by what was referred to as the Centro de Ceramistas de Buenos Aires [Buenos Aires Center for Ceramic Artists], though in practice, it was actually the Centro Argentino de Arte Cerámico [Argentine Center for Ceramic Art]. The exhibition was set to feature 50 pieces. Since the same text appeared in multiple newspapers, it is evident that it was a press release sent to newsrooms, providing basic information to attract the public.

Founded in 1958, the Centro Argentino de Arte Cerámico (CAAC) was established to unite ceramic artists and create a National Ceramics Salon to promote and elevate ceramic production in the country. Still active today, as soon as it was established, it quickly began organizing salons and traveling exhibitions.⁴⁹⁴ Thus, Mar del Plata in 1959 and Rio de Janeiro in 1961 were the first destinations to which the CAAC sent the works of its members.

The *Grupo Sur*, in turn, originated from a gathering of friends and non-figurative artists who shared a common studio in the southern part of Buenos Aires, in the Barracas neighborhood—a working-class area rich in chronicles and legends of the city. Formed in the early 1950s by artists from the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes [National School of Fine Arts], the group's name was suggested by Rafael Squirru, and they first presented themselves as a collective in 1959.⁴⁹⁵ The members were Carlos Cañas, Aníbal Carreño, Ezequiel Linares, Mario Loza, René Morón, Pérez Román, and Leo Vinci—the group's sculptor. In 1961, the

493. "Artes plásticas" [Visual Arts] *Tribuna da Imprensa*, Nov. 18-19, 1961. 2nd Section, p. 2.

494. Under this designation—Centro Argentino de Arte Cerámico (CAAC)—the Center was established in 1976 and, since 2000, has been part of the *Salón Nacional de Artes Visuales* [National Salon of Visual Arts], organized by the Secretaría de Cultura de la Nación [National Secretariat of Culture]. However, other salons have been organized by the Center at different times. For more information on the CAAC and the salons it has organized, visit: <https://arteceramico.org.ar/>

495. Schoo, 1961.

friends undertook a study trip through Europe, and Pérez Román settled in Paris, where he lived and worked until his death.

A few days after the November inauguration, Antonio Bento,⁴⁹⁶ in his column in *Diário Carioca*, highlighted the “cultural efforts” of the Argentine Embassy in Brazil, emphasizing the Grupo Sur exhibition as one of the most noteworthy initiatives. To discuss the artists and the formation of the group, Bento referred to two texts: one by Rafael Squirru, who wrote the catalog introduction, and another by critic Samuel Paz.⁴⁹⁷ He concluded that, “as a whole,” the group presented “a more contemporary and refined art than that of many of their compatriots” who had previously exhibited in Rio.⁴⁹⁸

Newspapers were no longer publishing critiques of these shows, and there was little commentary on the ceramics exhibition in particular. Unlike the painters of Grupo Sur, who had received press coverage even before the opening, only a few ceramists were mentioned by name in a report from December 13, near the end of the exhibition. This report appeared in the column “Itinerário das Artes Plásticas” [Itinerary of the Visual Arts] in *Correio da Manhã*. However, on this occasion, it was not signed by the journalist Jayme Maurício but was instead attributed to “Interim.”⁴⁹⁹ It is in this column that we also find a photograph of the opening of the *Ceramistas Argentinos* [Argentine Ceramicists] exhibition.

496. Antonio Bento de Araújo Lima participated in the founding of the MAM Rio, serving on its first board of directors as Deputy Secretary. Alongside Raymundo de Castro Maya, Gustavo Capanema, Manuel Bandeira, Marcelo Roberto, Josias Leão, Rodrigo Melo Franco de Andrade, Maria Barreto, Barão de Saavedra, Quirino Campofiorito, and Lúcia Miguel Pereira, he signed the museum’s founding charter. ATA DA CONSTITUIÇÃO DO MUSEU DE ARTE MODERNA DO RIO DE JANEIRO [FOUNDING CHARTER OF THE MUSEU DE ARTE MODERNA DO RIO DE JANEIRO] Rio de Janeiro, May 3, 1948. 5f.

497. Samuel Paz was part of the editorial team of the magazine *Ver y Estimar* (1952–1955) and was closely associated with Romero Brest. Between 1963 and 1970, he served as Deputy Director of the Centro de Artes Visuales at the Instituto Di Tella, and from 1972 to 1980, he also worked as a curator at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires.

498. Antonio Bento. “O Grupo Sur no MAM” [The Grupo Sur at MAM]. *Diário Carioca*, Dec. 7, 1961, p. 4.

499. “Ceramistas Argentinos” [Argentine Ceramicists]. *Correio da Manhã*, Dec. 13, 1961. 2nd Section, p. 2. Column: Itinerário das Artes Plásticas [Itinerary of the Visual Arts].



Fig. 67. *Correio da Manhã*, Dec. 13, 1961, 2nd Section, p. 2.
 Photograph: Author unidentified.

The image, of low quality due to the newspaper's printing and subsequent digitization, shows Aloysio de Paula, then executive director of MAM Rio; writer Rodrigo Octávio Filho; and unidentified artists visiting the room where the ceramics exhibition was being inaugurated. We know that some Argentine artists attended the opening. Six days after the inauguration at MAM Rio, Carlos Manuel Muñiz, the Argentine ambassador, hosted a reception in honor of the Grupo Sur artists.⁵⁰⁰ Furthermore, in MAM Rio's Research and Documentation sector, there are photographic records featuring Aníbal Carreño, Mário Loza, and Carlos Cañas, all members of the group.⁵⁰¹

If newspapers do not provide all the answers we seek, neither does MAM Rio's documentary archive offer enough material to address many questions. For now, the only available records for both exhibitions are their catalogs and a shared invitation.⁵⁰² Let us then proceed to analyze the sources we do have: the catalogs!

500. G. de A. Argentine Embassy. *O Jornal* (Rio de Janeiro), Dec. 2, 1961, p.2.

501. These images also identify Carmen Portinho, Deputy Executive Director; Aloysio de Paula; Rodrigo Octávio Filho; Ramón Avellaneda; Lauro Escorel; and Carlos Bartolini.

502. At MAM Rio, it was customary practice to issue a single invitation for all exhibitions opening on the same day. Thus, in this case, the invitation announced the opening of all seven exhibitions inaugurated on November 22 of that year.



Fig. 68. Back Cover and Cover of the *Grupo Sur* Exhibition Catalog, Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1961. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

Starting with the *Grupo Sur* catalog, previously referenced in this text as an introduction to the group, we find that the exhibition was held under the auspices of the Argentine Embassy, represented by Ambassador Carlos Muñiz, and of the Museo de Arte Moderna de Buenos Aires, directed by Rafael Squirru, with the collaboration of Galeria Bonino.

An introductory text by Squirru places the group in the location that identifies them and that inspired their name and identity. Following this brief introduction, each artist is given a dedicated page featuring a black-and-white image of one of their works. In the initial pages, there is a mosaic of black-and-white photos of the group members or excerpts of an artwork, along with their signatures. The catalog also includes two pages of biographical notes. To conclude, there is a text by critic, writer, and journalist Ernesto Schoo, providing a brief history of the group.

It is a small catalog, but one that introduces us to the group while also raising a question. From it, we understand that works by all seven group members were presented to the Rio de Janeiro public, as each has a published biographical note, appears in the mosaic, and has a dedicated page featuring their work. However, newspapers consistently report only six artists, emphasizing that there were five painters and one sculptor. In the catalog itself, Schoo notes that Pérez Román was already living in Paris but remained “spiritually connected to the group” and that the 1959 exhibition had not included him.⁵⁰³

Was it merely a physical absence, with Pérez Román’s works still included in exhibitions alongside the group? Is it possible that the Rio de Janeiro newspapers were mistaken? Or was the catalog meant as an introduction to

503. Schoo, 1961.

the group rather than a direct representation of the exhibition itself? These questions remain unanswered.

Moving on to the catalog of the *Ceramistas Argentinos* exhibition, we notice some similarities in the model adopted for both catalogs.



Fig. 69. Cover of the *Ceramistas Argentinos* Exhibition Catalog, Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1961. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

As with the *Grupo Sur* exhibition catalog, this one also contains only a brief introductory text, followed by a black-and-white image of one work by each exhibited artist. However, since there were more artists, each page is divided between two artists instead of one, and the images are smaller. The catalog concludes with biographical notes for the 24 artists featured in the exhibition: Perla Alemann de Bardin, Mireya Baglietto, Ana Mercedes Bournichon, Carlos Carlé, Jorge M. Centilini, Myriam Francani, Louise Furth, Rosa Esther Gerchunoff, Lucía Gutiérrez, Hilda Dora Hurvitz, Cielo Inaebnit, Lidia Maissa, Rodolfo Mele, Marta L. de Montagu, Juan Nigorra, María Elena Norry, Roberto Obarrio, Ricardo Rilo, Gloria Ingeborg Ringer, Susana Salgado, Leo Tavella, Eros Rubén Vanz, Juan Antonio Vázquez, and Marcelo Zimmermann.

The *Ceramistas Argentinos* exhibition, sponsored by the Argentine Embassy in Brazil, comes with a technical sheet that is slightly different from the *Grupo Sur* checklist. It mentions the President of the Argentine Republic, Arturo Frondizi; the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Worship, Miguel Ángel Cárcano; the Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs, Oscar Camilión; the Ambassador of the

Argentine Republic to Brazil, Carlos Manuel Muñiz; and, finally, the General Director of Cultural Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, Rafael Squirru. Based on the list of authorities mentioned on the first page of the catalog, this exhibition appears to have taken a different path than that of Grupo Sur. We can assume it had a more official character. In this case, Squirru is present in his capacity within the Ministry rather than as a representative of the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires. Additionally, he is not the one introducing the exhibition—this role falls to the CAAC itself, the organizing institution of the show.

A brief text, just a few lines long, expresses gratitude to Ambassador Carlos Manuel Muñiz for presenting the work of Argentine ceramists to the Brazilian public and conveys the hope that the exhibition will “contribute to a more profound understanding through the plastic language of clay.”⁵⁰⁴

We see, then, that these two exhibitions differed significantly from the panorama presented a few months earlier, which featured works by a diverse range of artists spanning the past 40 years of Argentine artistic production. Instead, these two exhibitions showcased groups that had only been formally organized a few years earlier and were launching themselves internationally with an established identity. These were not exhibitions that set out to narrate the history of modern art production in the country but rather collective displays of recent works by artists seeking to transform the artistic scene and engage in discussions about languages and forms of artistic expression.

However, when previously discussing the CAAC, I mentioned that this was the first international exhibition organized by the ceramics center at MAM Rio. The second took place just over a year later in Mexico City, with a catalog remarkably similar to the one from Brazil.

Between February and March of 1963, the *Ceramistas Argentinos* exhibition was open to the public in Mexico City. As in Brazil, it was sponsored by the Argentine Embassy, made possible through the joint efforts of the Sociedad de Arquitectos Mexicanos [Mexican Society for Architects] and the Departamento de Arquitectura [Department of Architecture] of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes [National Institute of Fine Arts]. At that time, the Museo de Arte Moderno de México [Mexico’s Museum of Modern Art] was still under construction and would only be inaugurated in September of the following year. Therefore, the exhibition was held at the Sociedad de Arquitectos Mexicanos.

Its catalog follows the same format as the one used for the exhibition at MAM Rio, even reproducing the biographical summaries of the same

504. *Ceramistas Argentinos* [Argentine Ceramists], 1961.

artists.⁵⁰⁵ Since these summaries do not mention participation in the Rio de Janeiro exhibition or any activities in 1962, we can assume that the catalog had been prepared as a template and sent to the responsible embassy for adaptation to the specific exhibition location. Thus, in Mexico, the opening text—the only text in the catalog—was written by architect Ruth Rivera Marín,⁵⁰⁶ then head of the aforementioned Department of Architecture at Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes. She expressed the hope that the exhibition would be received with the interest that every contemporary architect should have for all forms of artistic expression.

Under the title “Propósitos” [Purposes], the text emphasizes that the name of the exhibition is merely a common denominator encompassing all participants, as they share the same technique but differ in artistic approach. The show featured utilitarian objects alongside paintings and sculptures, all made in ceramics. For utilitarian objects, evaluation should go beyond aesthetic value to consider whether their form and technique are suited to their intended function. For non-utilitarian pieces, emphasis should be placed on aesthetics and logical constructive capacity. And, for all the pieces in the exhibition, one should analyze whether they expressed their time and the culture that gave them roots. Ruth Rivera concludes by challenging viewers to assess what she proposed and to make their own judgments, evaluating whether they can perceive the intended communication of the Argentine ceramists.⁵⁰⁷

Ruth Rivera's tone is both instructional and preparatory, guiding the audience toward what they would encounter. While allowing viewers freedom to evaluate, she also introduces the exhibition's diversity, almost as a forewarning of what they were about to see. This was not merely an exhibition of decorative art but an art exhibition where ceramics served as the medium of expression.

Almost as a response to the proposition in the catalog's opening text, Alberto Amador,⁵⁰⁸ head of the Arte y Pensamiento section of *Calli*, the journal of the Colegio Nacional de Arquitectos de México, published his impressions

505. *Ceramistas Argentinos* [Argentine Ceramists], 1963.

506. Ruth Rivera Marín was the daughter of painter Diego Rivera and writer Guadalupe Marín. She was the first woman to enroll in the Escuela Superior de Ingeniería y Arquitectura [School of Engineering and Architecture] at the Instituto Politécnico Nacional [National Polytechnic Institute], and therefore, the first woman to receive the title of engineer-architect granted by that institution.

507. Marín, 1963.

508. Alberto Amador was an architect and a professor of architecture at the time of the exhibition.

of the exhibition in issue 10 of the journal. Beginning his analysis with an excerpt from Ruth Rivera, in which she highlighted the diverse orientations of the works presented, Amador stated that the exhibition indeed appeared stylistically diverse, lacking direction, and far from constituting a cohesive school. In his view, the relationship between the works on display was as weak as their artistic quality. He admitted that, at first glance, forms and textures were visually appealing, but ultimately all the pieces exhibited a certain falseness in technique and execution.

For Amador, except for two cases (left unspecified) whose inspiration came from popular art, the works resembled certain European and American productions based on concepts that had been in use for 25 years (that is, since the late 1930s). He continues his sharp critique by stating that while some pieces were interesting from a decorative standpoint, they fell short of achieving true artistic quality. In conclusion, he asserts that the ceramics on display failed in their intended function: to be useful. Since their dimensions and design stripped them of any practical utility, they remained mere ornamental pieces—simple and unexpressive.⁵⁰⁹

Illustrating his text are four images of artworks: a glazed amphora by Hilda Dora Hurvitz;⁵¹⁰ another amphora (unglazed) by Ricardo Rilo; a glazed vase by Perla Alemán; and a mural by Myriam Francani. From these, it is possible to identify that the first two are the same as those featured in the MAM Rio catalog, while the last, by Myriam Francani, closely resembles the one selected for the catalog—possibly belonging to the same series.

The difficulty in perceiving the exhibited objects beyond their utilitarian nature, combined with the silence regarding the sculptural pieces, paintings, and even murals, leaves us even more curious about other interpretations of the exhibition. Since I have not had access to them, that question must remain unanswered. However, as this was the same exhibition—and considering that our critics and columnists also remained silent about MAM Rio's show—we can at least glimpse the impact of the works put into circulation through the efforts of the CAAC as a unifying center for ceramic artists and a promoter of Argentine ceramic art.

The CAAC aimed to establish an artistic circuit where ceramics would be recognized as art. This path was not simple, but it became possible within a national context of cultural development and modernization, as well as an international climate open to circulation and exchange. The same context

509. Alberto Amador. "Ceramistas argentinos" [Argentine Ceramists]. *Calli*, Mexico City, 1963, v. 10, p. 44.

510. In the image caption, there is an error, as the name is attributed to Ricardo Hurvitz.

allowed Rio de Janeiro to host a diverse array of artistic expressions, schools, and conceptions of art.

And Closing the Year 1961...

Viewed retrospectively and in parallel with an analysis of the international politics of both countries involved (Brazil and Argentina), the three exhibitions examined here present more than just a scenario open to exchange, to the circulation of artists, works, and techniques. They also reveal the circulation of a narrative of Argentine art, which traveled through different countries; a struggle for a place in the international art world; and beyond that, a discourse of modernity and nationhood. Seen from a distance yet in parallel, these exhibitions serve as exemplary cases for understanding the movement of artistic circulation developed by Argentina in the mid-1950s and 1960s, a period of significant transformation in Buenos Aires' artistic landscape.

The year 1961 stands out as exemplary due to the celebration of the *Convênio de Amizade e Consulta* and the numerous exhibitions and events that highlighted not only art but also Argentine culture more broadly. Many other exhibitions took place, featuring both Brazilian artists in Buenos Aires and Argentine artists in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. These events undoubtedly unveil aspects and particularities of the art world and the bilateral relations between the two countries.

The conditions of geographical proximity, a democratic political climate, development programs, and foreign policies in the 1950s and early 1960s facilitated the circulation of modern art and strengthened art institutions through the movement of works, artists, perspectives, and discourses. We have noticed that these exhibitions reached a global stage, renewed themselves, and continued their journey. For us, they left traces of their passage in criticism, in art production, and in the archives.

Raquel Forner and Alicia Penalba: The Trajectory of Two Argentine Artists and Their Solos at MAM Rio

RENATA GOMES CARDOSO

In addressing the discussion axis of women, art, and art history, Griselda Pollock argues that a study on women cannot focus solely, precisely, on individualized trajectories of women but must consider the “social systems and ideological frameworks” that perpetuate power relations and gender hierarchies.⁵¹¹ Pollock views art and circulation as a socially conditioned *practice*, emphasizing the need to analyze cultural systems in which “social relations which form the conditions of the production and consumption of objects designated in that process as art.”⁵¹²

As Simioni has analyzed,⁵¹³ understanding this process of circulation and recognition within art systems depends on various factors—ranging from the lifespan of artworks, understood through the different layers of their reception, to the very “oscillation of recognition” of female artists across different times and spaces, which determines their specific positions in art history, particularly in relation to their significance in the development of trends, movements, etc. Among these factors, participation in both collective and solo exhibitions serves as a “privileged place of investigation for analyzing how women artists constructed—or at least tried to construct—their identity as professional artists within different cultural and institutional contexts,” as Alkema and Dossin highlight.⁵¹⁴

511. Pollock, 2015, p. 26.

512. *Idem*, p. 27.

513. Simioni, 2022, pp. 20-21.

514. Alkema; Dossin, 2019, p. 6

In this recognition process, participation in well-established or emerging institutions—such as the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro during the specified period—must be examined as part of these strategies. This is particularly relevant provided that access to such institutions is shaped by artistic and cultural geopolitics and their various agents.

Among the international exhibitions held at MAM Rio between 1948 and 1978, approximately eleven were solo exhibitions by women,⁵¹⁵ with a particular emphasis in the museum's early years on the circulation of artists from South America, including Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia. This text will examine the exhibitions of Argentine artists Raquel Forner (1960) and Alicia Penalba (1962), focusing on the trajectories they followed in their respective countries and analyzing the process through which their works gained recognition, leading to their international projection—achieved both through participation in international biennials and their solo exhibitions at the Rio de Janeiro museum.

For Brazilian women artists during this period, records indicate exhibitions by Maria Martins (1956), Lygia Clark (1963), Lygia Pape (1968), and Tarsila do Amaral (1969). The group of South American exhibitions by women artists is further complemented by shows featuring Argentine artists Lucrecia Moyano (1957) and Fridl Loos (1958)—both analyzed by Patricia Corrêa in this book—as well as those by Chilean artist Roser Bru (1964)⁵¹⁶ and Bolivian artists Marina Nuñez del Prado (*Sculptures*, 1966) and Nilda Nuñez del Prado (*Jewelry*, 1966).

In addition to these artists, MAM Rio held a solo exhibition by Yolanda Mohalyi in 1965 as part of this series of South American exhibitions. Mohalyi was a European artist who settled in Brazil in 1931 and won the Best National Painter Award at the 7th São Paulo Biennial in 1963. Following these early exhibitions, the museum organized solo shows by Ann Szulc (*Painting*, 1966), a Polish artist who emigrated to Brazil in 1946 in the context of the war; Renée Sintenis (*Sculpture*, 1966) from Germany; Anita Bucherer (*Drawings*, 1975) from Germany/France; and Constance Brenner (*Photography*, 1978) from the United States. In some sources about the Brenner exhibition, the artist is described as “based in Brazil” or “currently residing in Brazil,” occasionally

515. This number has been determined based on a listing of exhibitions held at MAM Rio between its founding and the fire that occurred at the museum in 1978. According to additional documentation and catalogs, some exhibitions from this period, which had more generic titles in the museum's records, were identified in the group's research as solo exhibitions by women, classified under the category of decorative arts. This is the case for the exhibitions of Lucrecia Moyano and Fridl Loos, analyzed by Patrícia Leal Azevedo Corrêa.

516. See Cardoso, 2024, for further discussion on Roser Bru's exhibition.

with the continuation of her surname as Veira da Cunha in parentheses. On the MoMA platform, she is identified as Constance Brenner Vieira da Cunha.⁵¹⁷

The presence of these artists in exhibitions in Brazil was tied to institutional relationships established between their countries of origin and Brazilian institutions, each revealing different agents and organizations involved in shaping their circulation as part of the highlights of local artistic production. In the case of Argentina, for example, there is a longstanding history of initiatives and exhibitions between the two countries that predates the first solo exhibitions of women artists at MAM Rio. These efforts have been examined in research focused on the formation of institutional networks that facilitated the circulation of artists across museums, galleries, exhibitions, and major art events. Such studies also emphasize the role and influence of Jorge Romero Brest in shaping this cultural exchange.⁵¹⁸ The first collective exhibition of Argentine art at MAM Rio, as part of this process, was inaugurated in 1953, organized and introduced by this author. Its catalog reveals the presence of two women artists—Lidy Prati and Sarah Grilo—both associated with the development of abstract and geometric art in Argentina. However, neither was later featured in a solo exhibition at the museum.

An analysis of the two solo exhibitions of the aforementioned Argentine artists must consider the institutional relations between Brazil and Argentina during this period. In other words, it is essential to understand the trajectory established throughout the 1950s and 1960s that enabled this process of internationalization—driven not only by collective exhibitions but also by solo shows—in a neighboring country that gained greater international prominence with the establishment of the São Paulo Biennial.⁵¹⁹ This premise also requires understanding the positions and disputes within the Argentine art scene during this time, particularly in the efforts to promote artists on the international stage. Andrea Giunta highlights, for example, Raquel Forner's position in the political disputes within the Argentine art scene between the Peronist period and the *Revolución Libertadora*, particularly in relation to the gradual acceptance of artistic paradigms within an official art circuit.⁵²⁰ In this context, she notes the challenges Forner faced amid these cultural and geopolitical transitions. Giunta argues that the selection criteria for international exhibitions of Argentine art

517. The international exhibitions listed have been the subject of my research, and their approaches are being organized for future publications.

518. See, in this case, the publications by Amaral (2006), Giunta (2001), García (2004, 2011), Couto (2014, 2016), and Varela (2017).

519. See Couto, 2023, for further discussion on this topic.

520. Giunta, 2001, pp. 85-94.

increasingly favored a “new art,” determined by age rather than aesthetic principles—prioritizing the work of “young” artists.

An initial connection between the artist and these disputes can be examined through the organization of the Argentine delegation for the 2nd São Paulo Biennial. According to the biennial catalogs and information from the Fundación Forner-Bigatti, Raquel Forner participated only in the 2nd São Paulo Biennial in 1953, before receiving an homage at the 6th Biennial edition in 1961, which will be discussed later. However, the catalog for the 2nd Biennial indicates that the artist was included in the “spontaneous foreigners” section, designated for “foreign artists, non-resident in Brazil, who spontaneously presented themselves to the selection jury.”⁵²¹ Forner’s exclusion from Argentina’s official delegation in its first participation in the São Paulo Biennial in 1953 warrants further investigation, particularly considering the broader context of how Argentina’s delegation was organized from the biennial’s inaugural edition.

According to María Amalia García, the absence of the Argentine delegation at the 1st São Paulo Biennial was due to miscommunications, political clashes, and institutional conflicts between MAM SP, the Argentine Embassy, and the Instituto de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires. The dispute stemmed from the São Paulo museum’s insistence on securing the presence of “modern art” in the biennial’s inaugural edition, as there was a risk that Argentina “could be represented according to the curatorial criteria of government bureaucracy,” leading to the exclusion of key figures from that period, such as “Emilio Pettoruti [and] Jorge Romero Brest, who had been dismissed from their governmental and academic positions following the Peronist administration.”⁵²²

Between the first two editions of the São Paulo Biennial, Argentina underwent a significant political and artistic transition, resulting in a “tacit agreement” in which abstract artists came to occupy a prominent place in official exhibitions by 1952.⁵²³ Andrea Giunta analyzes how, following this transition to an official status, abstract art came to dominate the organization of the Argentine delegation for the 2nd São Paulo Biennial, serving as “a temporary political instrument that the government used to present itself on the international scene.”⁵²⁴ Before the biennial, an Argentine art exhibition was organized at MAM Rio in 1953, “featuring artists from the Argentine

521. Catalog of the 2nd Biennial of the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo, 1953, pp. 50-54.

522. García, 2004, pp. 2; 4.

523. Giunta, 2001, p. 74.

524. *Idem*, p. 76.

concrete group [...] as well as other abstract artists.” This exhibition can be seen as a preview of the biennial delegation, given that “of the ten members [of the MAM Rio exhibition], only Clorindo Testa was not part of the Argentine delegation for the Second São Paulo Biennial.”⁵²⁵ Raquel Forner submitted to the Biennial jury the works *Estandartes* [Banners, 1951]⁵²⁶ and *A Mentira* [The Lie, 1953],⁵²⁷ which the Fundación Forner-Bigatti identifies as part of a series developed by the artist between 1937 and 1957, “inspired by the tragedies that devastated humanity: revolution, war, dictatorship.”⁵²⁸ These works are characterized by an expressionist, “symbolic and surrealist” style.⁵²⁹ According to this chronology, Forner’s shift towards informal abstraction would take place only in the subsequent phase of her work, which would later be exhibited at the 6th São Paulo Biennial in 1961.

Born in 1902, Raquel Forner’s early artistic career was shaped by her training in drawing at the Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes de Buenos Aires [National Academy of Fine Arts of Buenos Aires] in 1922 and her involvement with the Argentine artist group in Paris, *El Grupo de París*. In 1930, for instance, she participated in the *First Exhibition of the Grupo Latino-Americano de París* at the Zak Gallery, alongside artists such as “Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, Joaquín Torres García, Víctor Pissarro, Pedro Figari, and Juan Del Prete.”⁵³⁰ Comparing her trajectory with that of the artists featured in the MAM Rio exhibition and the 2nd São Paulo Biennial, it becomes clear that Forner belonged to a different generation, engaging with modern art movements, the *avant-garde*, and abstraction. Her work navigated the interplay of expressionism, surrealism, and informal abstraction. Consequently, she remained distinct from the premise of constructive

525. Couto, 2023, p. 42.

526. The Fundación Forner-Bigatti provides information about the *Los Estandartes* series, presenting three works from the collection that are part of the Forner-Bigatti Collection in its digital archive: *El diálogo* [Dialogue, 1951], *Eclipse* (1952), and *Cometas* [Comets, 1952]. A reproduction of a work titled *Estandarte*, dated 1951, is available on an auction website alongside other works by Forner: <https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Estandarte/DBAE4CACD12EACEAFE1C67B18D28B0C7>.

527. No references were found regarding the work’s location in collections. The Fundación Forner-Bigatti also provides information on the *La Farsa* [The Farce] series (1948-1952), to which the work may have been linked.

528. Chronology of Raquel Forner’s works available on the Fundación Forner-Bigatti digital platform, unpaginated. Available at: <https://forner-bigatti.com.ar/raquel-forner-2/>.

529. *Idem, Ibidem*.

530. Falabella *et al.*, 2020, p. 107.

abstraction, which, during those years, was central to Argentina's approach to international exhibitions, such as the aforementioned.

The organization of the Argentine delegation for the 1956 Venice Biennale can also serve as a lens for analyzing the choices and exclusions that shaped Argentina's approach to international circulation during the artistic and political transition that began in 1955. To contextualize this period of transition, Andrea Giunta highlights the *Gran Premio de Honor* [Grand Prix of Honor] award received by Raquel Forner at the *XLV Salón Nacional de Artes Plásticas* in 1956, "from the hands of General Pedro Eugênio Aramburu, president of the nation of the self-styled *Revolución Libertadora*."⁵³¹ The context of this award "had the flavor of a reparation,"⁵³² considering the work displayed at the *Primer Salón Independiente* [First Independent Salon] in 1945, titled *Liberación*, dated the same year. The work that earned her the 1956 award was *El Envío* [The Delivery],⁵³³ now in the collection of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. According to Giunta, while the 1945 painting "represented an appeal for lost freedom, the award now given to her was understood as a symbol of regained freedom."⁵³⁴ Having maintained a strong presence in various national salons throughout this period, it is useful to revisit Forner's own testimony, as cited by Giunta, to better understand the artistic disputes leading up to 1945, which ultimately resulted in the creation of the so-called *Salón Independiente*.

My work was a form of protest, and I had much to protest about. All the artists who did not join the movement, who did not affiliate with the unions "by decree," who renounced our teaching positions—I avoided this because I didn't have any—who didn't present ourselves at the official salons, lived simply as exiles in our own homeland. It was very difficult to adopt this course of action, renouncing everything that by right belonged to us. For those of us who were no longer beginners, it was a sacrifice to remain buried for so many years; we lost much contact with the public and all contact with the outside world.⁵³⁵

This resurgence of artistic policies during the period, as Giunta analyzes, was marked by an emphasis on novelty, youth, and internationalism, which,

531. Giunta, 2001, p. 86.

532. *Idem, Ibidem*.

533. Falabella *et al.*, 2020, p. 131.

534. Giunta, 2001, p. 86.

535. Forner, 1955. *Apud* Giunta, 2001, p. 85. Original translation by the author into Portuguese; our translation into English.

in turn, influenced the selection of works for international exhibitions throughout the 1950s.⁵³⁶ While Raquel Forner was included in the Argentine art exhibition organized at the National Gallery in Washington in 1956—a show Giunta identifies as the first in the post-political transition process of internationalization—she was not selected for the Venice Biennale. The two exhibitions had distinct profiles. The Washington exhibition aimed to present a broad panorama of Argentine art from the 19th to the 20th century, whereas the Venice Biennale, despite the delegation organized by Jorge Romero Brest and Julio E. Payró ensuring the presence of “figurative, concrete, abstract, and independent” trends, prioritized what was considered “new, young, and exultant,” focusing on more recent artistic productions. Giunta further notes that the exclusion of older, already established artists provoked reactions, including a letter sent to the Minister of Education and published in *La Nación*, in which artists expressed their dissatisfaction with the selection criteria. Raquel Forner was among the signatories. Giunta examines her case specifically:

For an artist like Raquel Forner, who during the years of Peronism had felt marginalized from spaces of recognition, it would be frustrating to be excluded not based on quality, but because of something as superficial as “youth.” [...] Erased by Peronism, these artists were once again isolated due to generational causes, which, as Romero Brest explained in the catalog, had been decisive in the selection he made with Payró, while the young artists were tasked with “building the spirit that the country would have in the coming decades.”⁵³⁷

Despite the disputes surrounding the internationalization of Argentine art during this period, Raquel Forner ultimately participated in the Venice Biennale in 1958. Her chronology indicates substantial involvement in both national and international collective and solo exhibitions, earning awards that reflect a continuous process of recognition in prestigious artistic spaces. While her participation in the São Paulo Biennial was relatively limited, her inclusion in collective exhibitions of Latin American art in the United States was particularly significant. Forner took part in several international exhibitions organized by the Carnegie Institute and the Pan American Union, among other group shows.⁵³⁸

In May 1960, Raquel Forner participated in the inaugural exhibition at Galeria Bonino in Rio de Janeiro, a newly established artistic and cultural space that became a key promoter of market relations between Argentine

536. Giunta, 2001, p. 86.

537. *Idem*, pp. 93-94.

538. Falabella *et al.*, 2020.

art and potential Brazilian collectors, aiming to strengthen the exchange and circulation of Argentine artists beyond the Biennials. A significant aspect of Forner's trajectory was her successive solo exhibitions at Galeria Bonino in Buenos Aires from 1952 onwards. The gallery's impact on Brazil-Argentina artistic relations can also be measured through its coverage in the press: newspaper reports at the time about the opening of Forner's exhibition at MAM Rio were accompanied by mentions of the gallery, publicizing its Argentine art exhibitions alongside information about other concurrent exhibitions at the Rio de Janeiro museum.

Raquel Forner's solo exhibition at MAM Rio, inaugurated in November 1960, followed her participation in the 1958 Venice Biennale. The catalog for Forner's exhibition at MAM Rio presents only her name as the title, with the subtitle *30 óleos de Raquel Forner* [30 oils by Raquel Forner] [Fig. 70 and 71], followed by a list of works and an overview of her extensive career. At the Venice Biennale, Forner exhibited "the first five works of the *Las Lunas* [The Moons] series,"⁵³⁹ which were also included in the MAM Rio exhibition, along with additional pieces. However, the catalog makes no reference to the artist's participation in the 2nd São Paulo Biennial, despite its inclusion in the chronology of her career, as compiled and published by the Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero.⁵⁴⁰

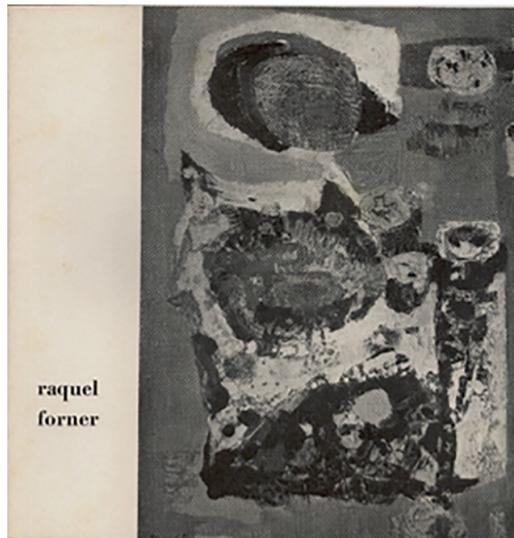


Fig. 70. Cover of the *Raquel Forner* Exhibition Catalog, Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1960. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

539. According to Fundación Forner-Brigatti.

540. Falabela *et al.*, 2020, p. 129.

38 ÓLEOS DE RAQUEL FORNER

1 Torre y Astrómeros	130 x 200	1960
2 Tierra y Luna	130 x 200	1959
3 Astrómeros y Luna	130 x 200	1959
4 Torre de Astrómeros	097 x 155	1960
5 Torre 3	085 x 185	1960
6 Torre 2	082 x 184	1959
7 Hombres y Luna	085 x 160	1959
8 Imágenes	160 x 066	1959
9 Translación	075 x 160	1959
10 Fuga	160 x 120	1958
11 Torre Trunca	080 x 120	1960
12 El Viaje	090 x 125	1959
13 El Encuentro	046 x 140	1958
14 El Rapto	120 x 120	1960
15 Traslón	120 x 120	1960
16 Ybor	090 x 125	1960
17 Traslónar	080 x 116	1960
18 Luna y Tierra	030 x 115	1958
19 Luna y Larvas	073 x 100	1960
20 La Lucha	100 x 075	1960
21 Nueva Luna	070 x 100	1960
22 Astrómer 1	106 x 074	1960
23 Astrómer 2	100 x 074	1959
24 Astrómerier	060 x 097	1960
25 Astrómer con Lunas	060 x 065	1960
26 La Calda	100 x 200	1958
27 El Milagro	075 x 160	1959
28 Transmutación	117 x 132	1958
29 Nacimiento Espacial	116 x 074	1958
30 La Presa	103 x 075	1960

Fig. 71. Page from the *Raquel Forner* Exhibition Catalog, Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1960. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

According to Marcelo E. Pacheco, this phase of Raquel Forner’s work was strongly influenced by her exploration of the relationship between the spatial phenomenon and the human experience, shaped by the impact of the so-called Space Age, which emerged in the late 1950s amid the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union:

The date set is 1957, with the beginning of the satellite launches into Earth’s orbit. The awe and curiosity captivated Raquel Forner, who, in that same year, concluded her so-called “earthly cycle” in perspective, to begin her series focused on the *space cycle*. The titles of her new paintings are clear: *Fim-Início* [End-Beginning], *Satélites* [Satellites], *Órbita* [Orbit], *Astronauta* [Astronaut], and *Lua* [Moon], as well as those of the series that group them, including *As Luas* [The Moons], *Aqueles que Viram a Lua* [Those Who Saw the Moon], *Labirintos Espaciais* [Spatial Labyrinths], and *Os Astronautas* [The Astronauts].⁵⁴¹

The artist’s profound interest in these relationships, as reflected in her works, led to the organization of the exhibition *Raquel Forner: Revelações Espaciais: 1957-1987* [Raquel Forner: Space Revelations: 1957-1987], held

541. Pacheco, 2023, p. 15.

at the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Argentina from November 2022 to February 2023, curated by Marcelo E. Pacheco. In addition to an extensive selection of works and texts, the exhibition catalog includes black-and-white photographs of Raquel Forner at NASA's Space Center in Houston, dated 1974.

The catalog accompanying Raquel Forner's 1960 exhibition at MAM Rio, which featured several black-and-white reproductions of her works, includes a text by Rafael Squirru, a key figure in the renewal and internationalization of Argentine art and the founder of the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires.⁵⁴² In his introduction, Squirru emphasizes the importance of institutional relationships in facilitating the circulation of Argentine artists at MAM Rio. He acknowledges Niomar Moniz Sodré to reaffirm the prestige of the Rio de Janeiro museum among Argentine intellectuals and artists, which, combined with Raquel Forner's artistic merit, leads him to open the catalog text with a "tribute to the fighting spirit of the American woman." Squirru also explores the concept of the "woman artist," referencing a tradition in art criticism that assessed women's works through gendered stereotypes, often emphasizing a supposedly "feminine" aesthetic. He thus aimed to challenge this reductive perspective, which was characteristic of traditional art criticism from the late nineteenth to the early 20th century.

Georgina Gluzman contributes to the understanding of the persistent critical framework surrounding Raquel Forner's work, tracing it back to her prominence at the Argentine Salon in 1924. In a review by José Maria Lozano Moujá, Forner was ascribed a "double valence"—recognized both as a virile renovator and a sensitive woman—a characterization that "would become a constant in national artistic literature."⁵⁴³ This perspective was also recurrent in Brazilian art criticism when discussing the works of women artists, as analyzed by Ana Paula Simioni in *Profissão Artista: Pintoras e Escultoras Acadêmicas Brasileiras*.⁵⁴⁴

In the 1960 catalog text, Squirru states, "Raquel Forner's painting has nothing feminine about it, just as the work of a good male painter has nothing masculine. I insist on this point because there is an excess of 'feminine painting' used as an unfair accusation against the authentic woman artist." By distancing himself from a critical framework that, to some extent, diminishes such artistic production within a male-dominated artistic context, Squirru reaffirms, in his analysis of Forner's painting, a notion of autonomy through

542. Giunta, 2001, pp. 153-156.

543. Gluzman, 2018, pp. 59-60.

544. Simioni, 2008, pp. 35-84.

a focus on informal abstraction: “With an alert consciousness, the plastic message of new trends was not indifferent to her [...] the informalist tone is incorporated, not at the cost of detachment, but with the determination of increasingly intimate contact with herself.”

Raquel Forner’s solo exhibition at MAM Rio received significant attention at the time, within the broader context of the debate, dissemination, and circulation of Argentine artists discussed earlier. This exchange would intensify in 1961 with the 6th São Paulo Biennial, where Forner and sculptor Alicia Penalba were featured in special rooms within the Argentine delegation, with Penalba receiving the Best International Sculpture Award. Forner’s presence in the Rio de Janeiro art scene was addressed by Ferreira Gullar, for example, in at least two articles published in *Jornal do Brasil*: the first, on November 13, 1960, featuring an interview with Forner, and the second, on November 19, 1960, offering a more analytical and critical perspective. This second article appeared alongside news about the organization and realization of the *// Exposição Neoconcreta* [2nd Neoconcrete Exhibition] in Rio de Janeiro. In this article, Gullar begins by analyzing what he calls “a strange aloofness” in Brazil-Argentina artistic exchange, noting that while Forner had already exhibited in the United States and Europe, her work was only then beginning to circulate in Brazil.⁵⁴⁵ He attributes this distance to the “isolation” of Argentine artists during the Peronist period. At this point, the critic underscores the importance of initiatives aimed at strengthening relations in the visual arts between the two countries, supported by official bodies that sponsored, facilitated, and enabled such exchange.

Following this reference to state support for the circulation of artists, Gullar delves into Raquel Forner’s trajectory and work, offering an analysis befitting the discussions that shaped the debate on art and painting during the period, particularly in relation to Abstract, Concrete, and Neoconcrete art. His articulation demonstrates how deeply his observations were imbued with these debates in Brazil. As discussed, between 1957 and 1960, Forner moved from an expressionist-leaning style—one that Gullar associates with the spread of Mexican muralism—to a new abstract approach, characterized by “allegorical and participatory painting that seeks to express the anguish of contemporary man in the face of war and regimes of terror.” In this new phase, however, in the critic’s view, Forner seems to respond to the artistic debate characteristic of the early 1960s with “a more direct, less allusive language,” grounded in “the internal relationship of plastic and chromatic

545. Ferreira Gullar. “Raquel Forner no MAM Rio” [Raquel Forner at MAM Rio]. *Jornal do Brasil*, Nov. 19, 1960, Sunday Supplement, p. 3.

elements, in the tensions established between the nuclei of forms [...] [whose] evident quality lies in the inner movement that organizes the elements in an inevitable way.”⁵⁴⁶ Gullar concludes by comparing this organization of forms to “primitive magical symbols,” shaping a coded language reminiscent of German artist Wols, among others, whose works were rooted in this “primitive spirit.”

Raquel Forner’s solo exhibition at MAM Rio in 1960, following her participation in the 1958 Venice Biennale and in light of the aforementioned disputes within the Argentine context, reinforces the notion that her claims were met, recognizing her significance within the Argentine art scene. In July 1961, MAM Rio also hosted a new group exhibition of Argentine artists titled *Arte Argentina Contemporânea* [Contemporary Argentine Art], organized by the Argentine Embassy in Brazil, as stated in the exhibition catalog’s introduction. This exhibition, analyzed in this book by Moema de Bacelar Alves, took place before the opening of the 6th São Paulo Biennial later that same year. Both events highlight the role of institutional mediation in selecting specific artists in this process of promotion and dissemination. At MAM Rio, the exhibition included several representatives from the Argentine government and artistic institutions, such as the previously mentioned Rafael Squirru, who had been directly involved in Forner’s exhibition and now appeared as the “General Director of Cultural Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship of Argentina.” The catalog also lists the President of Argentina, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Undersecretary, and the Ambassador of Argentina to Brazil. The introductory text was once again written by Jorge Romero Brest. In the specific case of Alicia Penalba’s 1962 solo exhibition, it is essential to consider the July 1961 collective exhibition of Argentine artists at MAM Rio [Fig. 72] to understand her prominence, both in her solo show and at the São Paulo Biennial later that year, where she received the Best International Sculptor Award.

546. *Idem, Ibidem.*

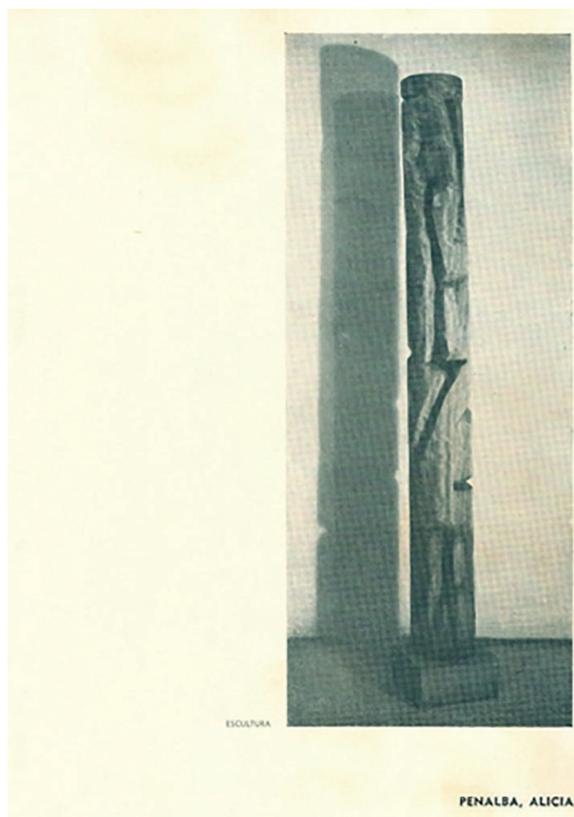


Fig. 72. Sculpture by Alicia Penalba reproduced in the *Arte Argentina Contemporânea* [Contemporary Argentine Art] catalog. Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1961. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.⁵⁴⁷

In relation to Argentine art, Alicia Penalba's trajectory differs significantly from that of Raquel Forner. Born in 1913 in San Pedro, Buenos Aires Province, Penalba began her studies at the Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes Ernesto de la Cárcova between 1934 and 1935, with limited participation in the National Salons of Fine Arts before relocating to Paris to further her studies.⁵⁴⁸ It was during this move and her subsequent stay in Paris, where she remained until the end of her life, that Penalba shifted her focus to sculpture, a medium she

547. Despite the considerable number of black-and-white reproductions of the works featured in the exhibition and the inclusion of short biographies of the artists at the end of the catalog, there are no details provided regarding the materials, techniques, or dimensions of the pieces presented.

548. Ferreiro, s. d, pp. 1-4.

began studying alongside printmaking. In the field of sculpture, she trained under Ossip Zadkine, a Russian-born artist based in France, starting in 1950.

An important aspect highlighted in the biographical note organized by Jimena Ferreiro is the artist's relative distance from the Argentine art scene until the late 1950s, alongside her growing prominence in the French and international artistic circuits, marked by her participation in salons such as *Jeune Sculpture* [Young Sculpture] and other exhibitions open to young artists.⁵⁴⁹ According to Ferreiro, Penalba's contact with Argentine artists occurred only at the International Exhibition of Contemporary Sculpture, held at the Musée Rodin in 1956, where, in addition to Penalba, Alberto Carlinsky and Marino de Teana—both also active in France—were present. On that occasion, Alicia Penalba presented the work *Hommage à César Vallejo*.⁵⁵⁰

Another milestone in her career during this period was her first solo exhibition in France, held in 1957 at the Galerie du Dragon, with which she signed an exclusive contract. The exhibition resulted in a catalog that "included the first monograph on the artist, written by Patrick Waldeberg," as well as receiving some commentary in the Argentine press.⁵⁵¹ From that moment on, Penalba's career gained increasing international recognition, with participation in exhibitions in the United States and an invitation in 1959 to take part in the 2nd documenta in Kassel. As Ferreiro highlights, Penalba was "the first Argentine artist to participate in this prestigious international exhibition," an invitation that was extended again for the 3rd documenta.⁵⁵² This international exposure coincided with Argentina's growing institutional efforts to support this strategy, particularly through initiatives by the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes and the Museo de Arte Moderno.⁵⁵³ Ultimately, it drew greater attention from the Argentine art scene to Penalba's trajectory.

In this regard, Ferreiro highlights a letter from Jorge Romero Brest, then director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, received by Alicia Penalba in 1959, inviting her to hold an exhibition at the said museum in 1960.⁵⁵⁴ Ferreiro further emphasizes that this letter was "the first formal proposal from an Argentine institution to hold an exhibition in her country."⁵⁵⁵ However, the exhibition never took place. Ferreiro attributes its failure to materialize to budgetary constraints

549. *Idem*, p. 5.

550. *Idem, Ibidem*.

551. *Idem, Ibidem*.

552. *Idem*, p. 6.

553. Giunta, 2001, pp. 153-156.

554. Ferreiro, p. 6.

555. *Idem, Ibidem*.

within Argentine institutions, as Romero Brest acknowledges in the letter that, since he “knew the expenses would be substantial,” he needed Penalba to indicate in her response “the approximate number of works she could send” so that, with “more precise information, he could seek the necessary funds.”⁵⁵⁶ Alicia Penalba’s work was only exhibited in Argentina posthumously, “in private galleries,” following her tragic death in a car accident in 1982.⁵⁵⁷

In 1960, the artist held her second solo exhibition in Paris, accompanied by a publication regarded as her first biographical book, authored by Michel Seuphor. With this expanding international trajectory, Alicia Penalba participated for the first time in the 1961 São Paulo Biennial, where she was featured in a special room, as was Raquel Forner. Since Argentina, for budgetary reasons—as noted by Ferreiro—was unable to organize a solo exhibition of the artist in her home country, efforts were instead directed toward securing her presence at the 6th São Paulo Biennial. The text introducing the Argentine delegation in the biennial’s catalog was written by Rafael Squirru. Although he stated that the exhibition sought to present “a group of artists that [Argentina] considers representative of the current language in which the inner messages of our national being are interwoven,” Squirru makes no mention of the special rooms dedicated to two artists who had been gaining recognition throughout their long careers.⁵⁵⁸ On that occasion, Alicia Penalba received the Best International Sculpture Award. That year’s Biennial also awarded Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, a Portuguese-born, naturalized French artist, with the Grand Prize, as well as Lygia Clark in the National Sculpture category.

Alicia Penalba’s solo exhibition took place in 1962 at MAM Rio, following her notable presence in Brazil in 1961, which was heightened by her participation in the São Paulo Biennial. A note in *Correio da Manhã* indicates that Penalba’s exhibition at MAM Rio featured all the works she had presented at the 6th Biennial, along with an additional piece from MAM Rio’s own collection. The exhibition was organized by the artist, sculptor, and painter Zélia Salgado.⁵⁵⁹ According to newspaper reports, Penalba’s exhibition was held simultaneously with an exhibition showcasing projects, photographs, and models by architect Affonso Eduardo Reidy, which received significant attention in the press.

With the São Paulo Biennial held between September and December 1961, Penalba’s exhibition at MAM Rio followed shortly after, running from

556. Letter from Jorge Romero Brest to Alicia Penalba, Jun. 30, 1959. *Apud* Ferreiro, n. d, p. 6.

557. *Idem, Ibidem*.

558. Squirru, 1961, p. 120.

559. “Escultura, Arquitetura e Cartazes no Museu” [Sculpture, Architecture, and Posters in the Museum]. *Correio da Manhã*, Apr. 27, 1962, p. 1.

April to May 20, 1962. The attention surrounding her participation in the Biennial, along with her award and the institutional relations that facilitated her appearances, is reflected in a 1961 note published in *Diário de Notícias*:

The Argentine ambassador, the very kind Carlos Manuel Muniz, gathered a small group of writers to meet Alicia Penalba, who had just received the first prize for foreign sculpture at the 6th São Paulo Biennial.⁵⁶⁰ She is a charming dark woman, a resident of Paris for twelve years, with a very cheerful simplicity. When I asked her how she felt upon hearing about the prize, she laughed heartily: “I was next to my mother; we were both naturally pleased. It’s a pity Alicia won’t stay long in Rio: she came from São Paulo, is heading to Brasília, and must rush back to Paris, where an exhibition of hers is being announced.”⁵⁶¹

The exhibition was accompanied by the publication of a catalog, with its cover featuring one of the works in black and white [Fig. 73]. The introductory text was written by the same Michel Seuphor—the Belgian artist, critic, and author of the 1960 book on the artist, as previously mentioned. In the catalog, Seuphor observes that in Penalba’s works, “nature is not absent; it appears musicalized, intentionally impoverished, reconstructed with few elements,” consisting of “two or three themes,” reflecting a “science of element reduction,” akin to the approach seen in “Brancusi and Pevsner.”



Fig. 73. Cover of the *Alicia Penalba* Exhibition Catalog. Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1962. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

560. There is an error in the newspaper note, as it incorrectly states and refers to the 4th Biennial.

561. *Diário de Notícias*, Sept. 19, 1961, p. 2.

Seuphor’s comparisons can be linked to key moments in Alicia Penalba’s career in France. The catalog includes a section titled “biographical data” following Seuphor’s text, which mentions her studies with Zadkine. According to information from the Alicia Penalba Research Center, other prominent modern sculptors—Hans Arp, Brancusi, and Giacometti—also figure in her biography within this field. The brief biography in the catalog concludes by highlighting the prize she received at the São Paulo Biennial the previous year.

Next, the catalog presents the list of works, totaling 21 [Fig. 74]. Another note in *Correio da Manhã* highlights that the artist, who, as mentioned, lived in France, was deeply upset for not having “been involved in the organization of the exhibition,”⁵⁶² as she was unable to travel to Brazil due to the unavailability of tickets—unlike in the context of the Biennial, where she was present.

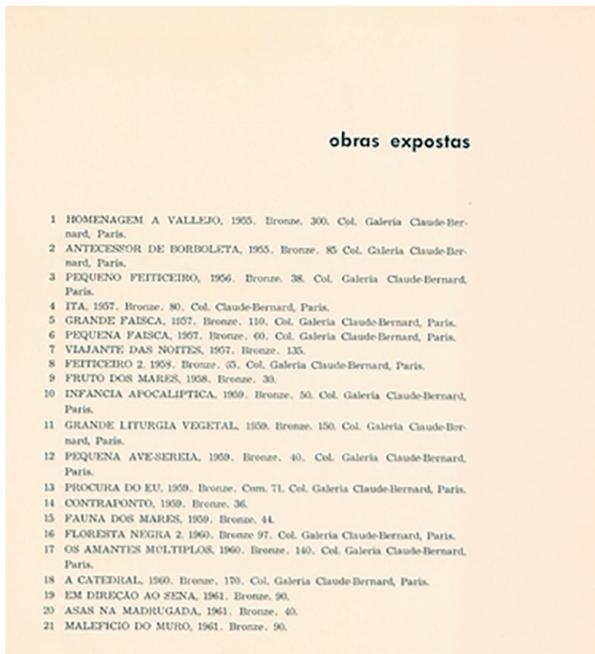


Fig. 74. Page of the *Alicia Penalba* Exhibition Catalog. Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, 1962. Collection: Research and Documentation MAM Rio.

Due to its proximity to the 6th Biennial of São Paulo, Brazilian art criticism at the time primarily focused on the inauguration of Penalba’s exhibition

562. *Correio da Manhã*, Jun. 7, 1962, 2nd Section, p. 2.

at MAM Rio, viewing it in the context of the prize she had received at the Biennial.⁵⁶³ Regarding the award, prominent figures in the Brazilian art scene of the period—such as Lourival Gomes Machado, Geraldo Ferraz, Mark Berkowitz, and José Roberto Teixeira Leite—published texts or gave interviews in 1961, offering commentary, discussions, and controversies surrounding the Biennial’s decisions. These debates extended not only to Penalba’s case but also to that of Lygia Clark. Teixeira Leite defended Penalba’s award as a well-deserved recognition in sculpture:

I have been a jury member before, and for that reason, I would like to emphasize that outside opinions may not always correspond to reality. In any case, even without having seen the Biennial, I am familiar with the work of some of the awardees and can speak about them. Isabel Pons has neither the past nor the present to justify the prize she received. I saw her works from three years ago, and I saw her recent ones: nothing has changed. They lack definition and importance. Lygia Clark is in the same situation, though above the other [Pons]. I believe other artists were more qualified. [...] The international prizes [...] were excellently awarded to Vieira da Silva and Alicia Penalba, two renowned artists. As for the others, only by seeing them.”⁵⁶⁴

Lourival Gomes Machado, on the other hand, argued that the prize should have been awarded to Nicolas Schöffer, a Hungarian artist based in France, rather than to Alicia Penalba. He claimed that the jury had overlooked Schöffer’s work, asserting that “it would have been impossible to award the international sculpture prize to Penalba” had they considered it.⁵⁶⁵

In a September 1962 interview with Diva de Múcio Teixeira, published in *Diário de Notícias* after the closing of the exhibition, Alicia Penalba reflects on her experiences at the São Paulo Biennial and MAM Rio:

— Regarding that, after the prize at the São Paulo Biennial, you held a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro. What is your impression of these two encounters with Latin America?

—I have the impression that Latin America was much less interested in my work than Europe... I can say that the desire to understand is different

563. On the awarding of prizes to women sculptors at the Biennials, see, for example, Cerchiaro’s 2020 dissertation.

564. *Apud* Paolo Maranca. “Notas de Arte – Cristo acalma a tempestade” [Art Notes – Christ Calms the Storm]. *Correio Paulistano*, Oct. 6, 1961, p. 4. Maranca includes José Roberto Teixeira Leite’s critique in its entirety in his column.

565. Lourival Gomes Machado. “Bienal: aí está Schoffer” [Biennial: There’s Schoffer]. *O Estado de S. Paulo*, Oct. 21, 1961. Literary Supplement.

from understanding. I was greatly honored and respected because I came with a name established in France, but I fear that this name could never have been made in my country if I had stayed there.⁵⁶⁶

Next, the journalist asks about the possibility of her returning to her home country, prompting an intriguing response from Penalba regarding the Biennial prize:

- Having lived in Paris for 14 years, do you still plan to stay here?
- For the moment, I am firmly attached to everything happening here. Besides feeling that my work is appreciated, the collectors interested in my pieces are all in Europe or North America. [...] Argentina and the other South American countries have never sought out my work. I can only assume they do not appreciate what I do.
- That’s unfair. Just a year ago, you received the top sculpture prize at the São Paulo Biennial.
- The São Paulo jury included a German, a Frenchman, a Pole, a Belgian, an American, a Japanese, an Italian, and a Russian, and there was also an Argentine and a Brazilian. I fear that if the jury had been solely Latin American, I might not have had the same luck.⁵⁶⁷

The artist’s statement connects the success of her work and her artistic relevance to an international conception of sculpture at the time, which may help explain the stance of certain critics regarding the prize awarded to her. Both Geraldo Ferraz and Marc Berkowitz mention in their press articles that the most talked-about artist expected to receive the international award at the time was the British sculptor Lynn Chadwick. However, he was ineligible to compete because he had already been awarded at the Venice Biennale, a point that Berkowitz highlighted as the justification given by the jury.⁵⁶⁸ In both critiques, there was no direct criticism of Penalba herself but rather of the jury and its selection process. Instead, both critics analyzed her work in broader terms. Berkowitz mentioned it was “reasonably good.” In Geraldo Ferraz’s case, his commentary reflected on Alicia Penalba’s position between Argentina and France:

566. Diva de Múcio Teixeira. “Alicia Penalba: 1º Prêmio Internacional de Escultura” [Alicia Penalba: First International Sculpture Prize]. *Diário de Notícias* [Reports from Europe, Interview for the Literary Supplement of the *Diário de Notícias*], Sept. 30, 1962, p. 3.

567. *Idem*, p. 5.

568. Marc Berkowitz. “Marmelada na Bienal” [Marmelade at the Biennial]. *Tribuna da Imprensa*, Sept. 12, 1961.

The Sculpture Prize went to Alicia Penalba from Argentina, an artist based in Paris, belonging more to the “new school” of sculpture in Paris than to Argentina. But Penalba is Argentine by birth. [...] Since sculpture was not very well represented [at the Biennial], Penalba’s work deservedly received the prize, which could have gone to an artist like Lynn Chadwick. But granting an award to a Latin American artist such as Penalba is something that can be readily understood.⁵⁶⁹

Ferraz, however, suggests that the prize was awarded largely due to the overall lack of impressive sculpture entries. Combined with Berkowitz’s report that the jury’s preferred artist was ineligible, Geraldo Ferraz’s statement inevitably diminishes the significance of Penalba’s achievement and her work in the Biennial jury’s decision-making process.

The process of recognition and prestige of Forner and Penalba during this period can be understood through the importance placed on the organization of their exhibitions and the successive reviews published in the Brazilian press. Their prominence within the Argentine artistic scene is also reflected in their participation in numerous exhibitions that continued to circulate across many countries. The significance of these artists can also be measured by the presence of their works in various public and private collections. However, a very modest number of their works can be found in Argentine museum collections, such as the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, MALBA, and the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes. The first holds two works by Forner but none by Penalba, while the latter two each have only one work—one by Forner and one by Penalba—in their collections. On the other hand, there are institutions specifically dedicated to preserving and studying their trajectories and works, such as the Fundación Forner-Bigatti in Argentina, the Alicia Penalba Research Center, and the Centro de Estudios Espigas-UNSAM.⁵⁷⁰ These institutions maintain digital platforms and

569. Geraldo Ferraz. “VI Bienal, o maior acontecimento mundial artístico do ano” [Sixth Biennial, the greatest artistic event in the world that year]. *A Tribuna* (São Paulo), Sept. 17, 1961, p. 26.

570. When this research began, between 2021 and 2022, only the platform of the Alicia Penalba Research Center (<https://www.alicia-penalba.com/>) was available. In addition to offering a biography and a catalog of works, the site—based in Belgium—claims to be involved in the identification and authentication of artworks. As the research progressed, in 2024, a second platform dedicated to the artist’s career, documentation, and body of work was identified. This site, indicated as the official one (<https://penalba.com/>), is based on Alicia Penalba’s documentary archive and is affiliated with the Centro de Estudios Espigas, which is connected to UNSAM [Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Buenos Aires] and the Fundación Espigas. The biography used in this study, compiled by Jimena Ferreiro, was made available on this latter, institutionally managed platform.

collections. The Fundación Forner-Bigatti, founded by Forner herself, has been operating since 1982, holding information and materials about her and her husband, the artist and sculptor Alfredo Bigatti, in the house where the couple lived.

The chronology of Raquel Forner and Alicia Penalba's participation in international exhibitions—many of which included awards—reflects the recognition of their careers within their respective artistic contexts. The circulation of their works in Brazil, as outlined in this study through their participation in collective and solo exhibitions at MAM Rio and the São Paulo Biennial, is closely tied to the artistic transitions that shaped the 1950s and 1960s, highlighting key processes and developments. The detailed articulation of institutional and international networks involved in organizing such exhibitions, presented throughout this chapter, provides a broader understanding of the institutional conditions, trajectories, and contributing factors that shaped the individual artistic projections of these artists within the framework of artistic-cultural geopolitics, while also serving as a foundation for future approaches and analyses.

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About the Authors

Dária Jaremtchuk - Associate Professor at the School of Arts, Sciences, and Humanities (EACH/USP), where she teaches Art History in undergraduate programs. She is also affiliated with the Graduate Program in Visual Arts at ECA/USP. She served as a visiting professor at Emory University, Atlanta, having been selected by the Fulbright Program for the Chair in Brazilian Studies in 2019. She is a CNPq Research Fellow. Among her publications are the books *Políticas de atração: relações culturais entre Estados Unidos e Brasil (1960/1970)*, São Paulo: Unesp, 2023, and *Annabella Geiger: passagens conceituais*, Belo Horizonte: C/Arte, 2007.

Emerson Dionisio de Oliveira – Associate Professor at the University of Brasília (UnB). Holds a PhD in History from the same institution and a master’s degree in Art and Cultural History from Unicamp. He is editor of *Revista MODOS* and a CNPq Research Fellow. He leads the research group *Musealization of Art: Poetics in Narratives* and is a member of the groups *MODOS; Museology, Heritage, and Memory*; and *Institutional Geopolitics: Art in Dispute Since the Postwar Period*. He is the author of *Museus de fora: a visibilidade dos acervos de arte contemporânea no Brasil* (Zouk, 2010). In addition to his work with the Graduate Program in Visual Arts at UnB, he is also affiliated with the Graduate Program in Information Science at UnB.

Maria de Fátima Morethy Couto – Full Professor at the University of Campinas (Unicamp), where she teaches modern and contemporary art history in both undergraduate and graduate programs at the Institute of Arts. She holds a PhD in Art History and Archaeology from the University

of Paris I (Panthéon-Sorbonne), France (1999). A CNPq Research Fellow, she leads the research groups *MODOS* and Institutional Geopolitics: Art in Dispute Since the Postwar Period. She served as president of the Brazilian Committee of Art History (CBHA) from 2010 to 2013. She is the author of *Por uma vanguarda nacional. A crítica brasileira em busca de uma identidade artística – 1940/1960* (Ed. Unicamp, 2004) and *A Bienal de São Paulo e a América Latina. Trânsitos e tensões (1950-1970)* (Ed. Unicamp, 2023), as well as articles and book chapters on Brazilian *avant-garde* art, 20th-century Latin American art, and postwar abstraction. She is chief editor of *Revista MODOS*.

Maria Luisa Luz Tavora - Full Professor of Art History in the Graduate Program in Visual Arts (PPGAV) at the School of Fine Arts, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (EBA/UFRJ). She holds a PhD in Social History from IFCS/UFRJ and completed postdoctoral studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. Her research focuses on the history of Brazilian printmaking in the 20th century, with extensive publications on the subject. She is a member of the Brazilian Committee of Art History (CBHA), ANPAP, and ABCA/AICA, and a CNPq Research Fellow.

Michiko Okano - Associate Professor of Art History in both undergraduate and graduate programs at UNIFESP, and affiliated with the Graduate Japanese Language and Culture Program at the University of São Paulo (USP). She leads the research group *Art Asia*. Author of the books *Ma: entre-espaço da arte e comunicação no Japão* (2011) and *Helena e Riokai: entre Brasil e Japão*, Paris (2021), among other publications. She curated *Olhar InComum: Japão Revisitado* (2016) and *Transpacific Borderlands: The Art of Japanese Diaspora in Lima, Los Angeles, Mexico City, and São Paulo* (2017/18).

Moema de Bacelar Alves – She holds a licentiate and bachelor's degree in History from the Federal University of Pará (UFPA), with a specialization in Cultural Heritage from Fórum Landi/UFPA. She holds a master's and a PhD in History from the Graduate Program in History at Fluminense Federal University (UFF), with research focused primarily on exhibition practices, the circulation of art, and the formation of collections. Since 2019, she has held a research position at the Research and Documentation Center of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio). She has published articles in various books and academic journals and is the co-editor, alongside Aldrin Moura de Figueiredo, of *Tesouros da Memória: história e patrimônio no Grão-Pará* (2009).

Patricia Leal Azevedo Corrêa - She holds a master's and a PhD in History from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), with doctoral research conducted at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University (USA), and a specialization in Art and Architecture History from the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (Spain). She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Art History and Theory at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), where she teaches in both the undergraduate Art History program and the Graduate Program in Visual Arts. Her writings have appeared in books and in journals such as *Arte & Ensaïos* (UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro), *Perspective* (INHA, Paris), *VIS* (UnB, Brasília), *Ars* (USP, São Paulo), and *Modos* (Unicamp, Campinas).

Renata Gomes Cardoso - She is a faculty member at the Arts Center of the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES), specializing in Art History. She coordinates the research group *History of Art and Women Artists: Circulation, Reception, and Contemporary Themes*, which encompasses research projects in both undergraduate and graduate programs. Her research focuses on gender studies and ethnic-racial issues, particularly in relation to their intersection with Art History.

Renata Cristina de Oliveira Maia Zago - She is an Associate Professor of Art History at the Institute of Arts and Design (UFJF), where she teaches in both the undergraduate and the Graduate Program in Arts, Culture, and Languages (PPG-ACL) at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF). She holds a degree in Fine Arts (both bachelor's and licentiate) from the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), and a master's and a PhD from the Graduate Program in Visual Arts (UNICAMP). She is the leader of the research group *Art History as the History of Exhibitions*, a member of the group *Institutional Geopolitics: Art in Dispute Since the Postwar Period* and a member of the Brazilian Committee of Art History (CBHA).

Vera Beatriz Siqueira - She holds a PhD in Social History and is a Full Professor at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), where she teaches in both the undergraduate and the graduate programs, specializing in modern and contemporary Art History. She is a CNPq Research Fellow. She is the author of several books, including *Arte no Brasil: anos 20 a anos 40* (Barléu, 2021), *Burle Marx* (Cosac Naify, 2001 and 2009), *Iberê Camargo* (Cosac Naify, 2009), and *Wanda Pimentel* (Silvia Roesler/Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro, 2012), in addition to numerous articles in books and journals. She was a visiting fellow at the Getty Research Institute in 2012 and 2020.

