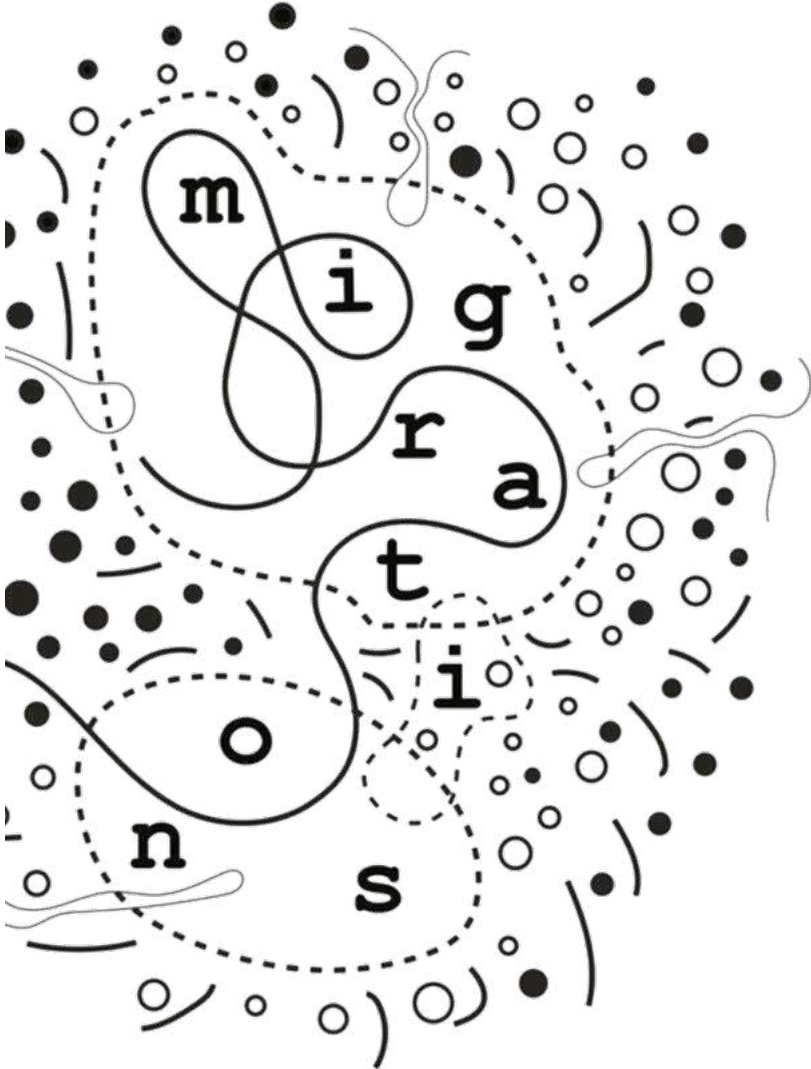


# Migration of Ideas

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## Session 10



## Session 10

# Migration of Ideas. Artistic Theories On The Move

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Not only people and objects migrate, but ideas are on the move as well. Theories roam, spread, and disseminate into new and unknown fields of discourse. Artistic theories that evolved under specific political, social, and cultural conditions can get wider attention and gain impact under very diverse political circumstances and in different cultural atmospheres.

For instance, David Graeber has argued that there never was a West at all and that the idea of democracy, a supposed staple of “Western civilization”, was neither invented nor inherited from ancient Greece, but rather emerged from the “spaces in between” where different societies (involuntarily) came into contact. Such observations can be applied to the history of art and – to be more general – to the history of visual and material culture. There are many examples that the migration of artistic theories caused unpredictable reactions: new artistic paradigms could be embraced or fiercely resisted (e. g. Romanticism), novel practices could be seen as inspiring or refused as subversive and dangerous (e. g. Pop Art). Artistic theories were an important factor in transforming cultural terrain in very different ways, and they helped to shape social and political spheres in earlier centuries.

In our contemporary world, art seems to emerge “between cultures.” Migrating ideas dispersed into “uncertain terrains” (Inge Boer) create discussions and spark conflicts that often challenge the conditions of present-day societies.

The session explores the place and the impact of the migration of artistic theories throughout history and in a global context. It examines the

repercussions that entail the dissemination of artistic ideas in discussing questions regarding

- I. the circulation of artistic treatises within a global network;
- II. the appropriation and rewriting of artistic theories produced in different geographical zones;
- III. the valuation and devaluation of artistic paradigms;
- IV. the creation and popularization of artistic canons; among other aspects of the geographical and chronological transit of artistic theories.

Mieke Bal's idea of "traveling concepts" was a constant presence on the debates, setting a view on theoretical migrations in terms of circulation and assemblage rather than one-way fluxes from one instance to another. The journey of theories and treatises is not only a movement in geography, as in Jesse Lockard's research on the dynamics of local and global architectural languages through the emergence of the postwar concept of "habitat", but also migrations of physical support and aesthetic languages, (for example Sugghanda Tandon's paper on the crossings between political posters and academic art in Maoist China, and migrations through time (Camilla Froio's investigation on the echoes of Lessing's Laokoon at the United States). These excursions often touched debates on national or regional identity, as in Sofia Vindas Solano's study of the role of OAS in forging and promoting a Central American and Caribbean Art.

A theme that connected several contributions was the conceptualization of modernist canons and their circulation outside Europe, present in Annabel Ruckdeschel, Victor Murari, Marcos Pedro Magalhães Rosa's papers. They all discuss how these Eurocentric conceptualizations were received and negotiated in different cultures. We can see a similar approach in Carolina Vieira Filippini Curi's study of South American Pop Art by women artists: local inflections and negotiations with a foreign model.

The early modern world was also a privileged space of investigation for theory migrations and colonial dynamics, with papers by Marco Silvestri, Clara Habib, Ana Paula dos Santos Salvat and Wenjie Su showing the complex and often the tense character of cultural encounters.

Another key aspect debated during the session was migrations across disciplinary borders, such as Annabelle Priestley's analysis of typology as a concept transposed from science philosophy to art, or Ianick Takaes's reflections on neurology and aesthetics to discuss the phenomenon known as Stendhal syndrome.

The session debates, therefore, highlighted the various modes of theory migration and the richness of the cultural networks that circulate ideas and theories through interactions, translations, reappraisals, adaptations, impositions and resistances.

# From Mexico to Spain: The Constitution of the Plazas Mayores and the Amerindian Roots

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Mexico City main square, officially named the Constitution Square, popularly known as Zócalo, is a potent political and urban cultural space delimited by a representative power architecture. It is also a stage for artistic performances and socio-political demonstrations. However, its configuration is based on Mesoamerican and Iberian urban traditions, which became a unique transcultural experience. Thus, the monumental colonial Mexican Plaza Mayor, a power center constituted in the first half of the 16th century, anticipated, in material and symbolic aspects, the Modern Spanish Plazas Mayores, formed from the second half of the 16th century as an iconic monument of imperial order. This article aims to demonstrate the Mexico City Plaza Mayor's transcultural aspects and connections with the Modern Spanish Plazas Mayores project, focusing on the Amerindian contributions to Western culture.

## **KEYWORDS**

Plaza Mayor; Mexico City; Mesoamerican Urbanism; Iberian Urbanism; Transculturality.

## **Introduction**

This article intends to present, initially, connections between Mexico City's central area in the 16th century with Mesoamerican and Iberian urban traditions, relating their materiality and social aspects. Since this transcultural American square was formed, elements and concepts circulated between the two sides of the Atlantic, indicating that some of them were in the Mexican square before the constitution of the so-called first Spanish Plaza Mayor in Valladolid city. Such ideas are significant in the visual aesthetics of power centers, which materialize and make structures of unequal social relations of strength visible, which demonstrate that certain groups are dominant over others<sup>1</sup>.

Based on the Swedish sociologist Göran Therborn, who points out that "cities are shaped by power"<sup>2</sup>, which defines social relations and identity, this research analyzes the urban space and the elements of its composition, especially concerning the main square area as a center of power. We also take into consideration the reflections of the Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who supports a study of the image in all its scope and representation practices, including "the structure of the urban space and the historical traces that become visible in it."<sup>3</sup> In this way, we establish a relationship between the city's visuality and power, consider space as an image, and contemplate the city's layout, and buildings' placement as expressions of multiple cosmovision.

The main object of my research is Mexico City's power center understood as a transcultural construction from the perspective of the Uruguayan writer Angel Rama<sup>4</sup>. The scholar adapted the concept coined by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz<sup>5</sup> to consider as creative and original experiences and products of the intersection of different cultures. However, it does not mean the absence of conflicts or power relations. Mexico City's Constitution Square (Figure 1), popularly known as Zócalo is a place characterized by the monumental square with more than 200 meters on each side, bordered by buildings of power, such as the Cathedral, to the north; the National Palace, to the east; the seat of the Federal District Government, to the south; and, to the west, the remaining Portal of Merchants. Moreover,

since late 1970s, the ruins of Templo Mayor (or Great Temple), the main power building of the predecessor Mexica city of Tenochtitlan, have come to light. By comparing a city to a palimpsest, we could argue that ancient writings have come to the surface, and dispute a space of affirmation of their identity with the newest text.



**Fig. 1.** Mexico City Zocalo and Metropolitan Cathedral [*Zócalo de la Ciudad de México y Catedral Metropolitana*], 1959, Oblique Aerophotographic Fund / Fondo Aerofotográfico, (FAO\_01\_015484), Historic Collection ICA Foundation / Acervo Histórico Fundación ICA, Mexico City, Mexico.

We will verify both Mesoamerican and Iberian urban traditions in the formation of Plaza Mayor in Mexico City in the early 16th century. Furthermore, we will inspect the characterization of the Spanish Early Modern Plazas Mayores from Valladolid's and Madrid's squares. Contrasting their main characteristics, we will verify the circulation of cultural practices

in materiality and concepts between the two sides of the Atlantic, especially concerning the main squares and the buildings' placements, without focusing on architecture at this point.

### **The center of power in Mesoamerican cities and Mexico-Tenochtitlan**

The square is one of the main urban Mesoamerican elements, which, together with buildings such as royal palaces, pyramidal temples, and ballcourts<sup>6</sup>, constituted, according to the American archaeologist Michael Smith, "the Mesoamerican planning principles"<sup>7</sup>, formed since the Pre-Classic Period (a periodization applied to Mesoamerica from 2.500 B.C. to 400 A.D.). The markets on the square, or in adjacent buildings, indicated the city's economic power and promoted social relations.

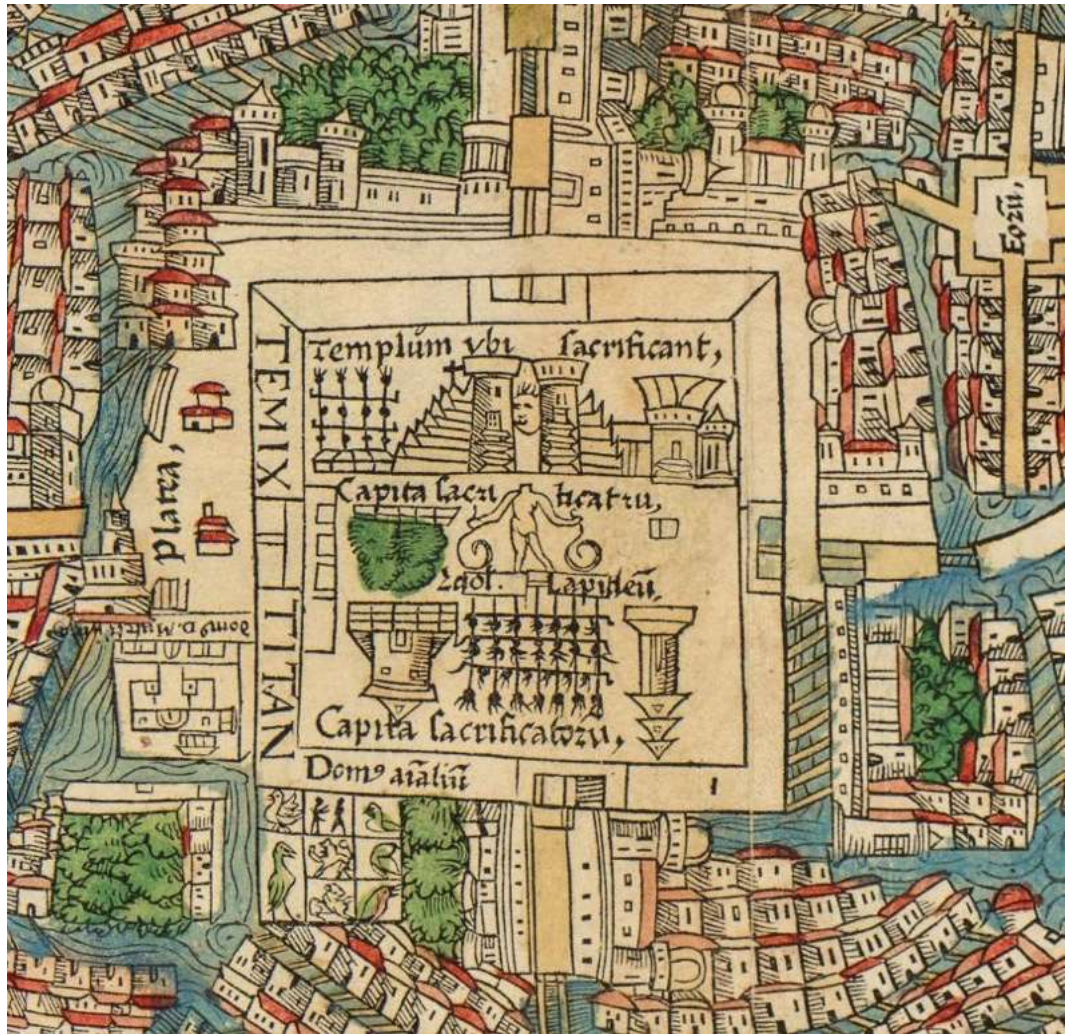
In the central area, urban elements were positioned in a way that reflecting the order of the universe, in a cosmography that put together space and time. In the Mesoamerican cosmovision, space was conceived on different levels as inhabited by all living and non-living beings. The vertical levels were: the celestial (Omeyocan), the terrestrial (Tlalpan), and the underworld (Mictlan), while the horizontal ones were the division of the terrestrial level into a center and four parts. The Great Temple of a city was the *Axis Mundi* and connected all levels, being a symbol of the concentration of political-religious power and cosmology, and was commonly placed to the east of a large square.

Researchers Alanna Ossa, Michael Smith, and José Lobo, all based in the United States, identify five main activities carried out in Mesoamerican squares: "private rituals, periodic markets, mass spectator ceremonies, participatory public ceremonies, and feasts and other popular celebrations."<sup>8</sup> The large squares were generally urban epicenters, so they became fundamental political-religious stages and manifestations of memory and identity.

Although this structure was the basis of the urban tradition of cities in Mesoamerica, some had innovative characteristics. Tenochtitlan, for instance, innovated by moving its epicenter from the square to a sacred precinct. The



city was founded circa 1325 by the Mexica people on an island in Lake Texcoco. Its configuration followed the Mesoamerican cosmivision, designed with a center, which was a large ceremonial area with more than 300 meters on each side and four large divisions demarcated by long causeways.



**Fig. 2.** Map of Tenochtitlan (detail), 1524, Courtesy of the Newberry Library (Ayer 655-51.C8), Chicago, USA.

Although the cosmographic center of the city was the sacred precinct, there was a square to the south of it with a significant extension (over 200 meters on each side). It was delimited by the Palace of Moctezuma – the

Mexica leader when the Spaniards arrived in 1519 – the former palace of Moctezuma's father, Palace of Axayacatl, where the Spaniards stayed as guests -, the sacred precinct to the north, and the Royal Canal to the South. Other buildings pertaining to the nobility surrounded the central region since this spatiality also identified the social hierarchy.

The courts for the ballgame, a ceremonial activity, were within the sacred precinct. According to the Mexican archaeologist Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, it is likely that, in its initial stages, the Great Temple had a square and a market in its surroundings<sup>9</sup>. With the growth of the city and the Temple itself, and the configuration of the sacred precinct as a separate place, the market may have been transferred to a square outside the ceremonial center. Presumably, it was located in the buildings that we can see on the detail of the Map of Tenochtitlan (Figure 2), which is oriented to West, in the area identified as *Platea* (on the left), due to its location close to the Royal Canal through which boats circulated with products.

### **Mexico City's Plaza Mayor: A new epicenter**

After the fall of the twin cities Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco, in 1521, Cortés commissioned Alonso García Bravo to carry out a project on the Spanish part of the city in the center of ancient Tenochtitlan, which had a regular layout with streets, navigable canals, and a square with administrative buildings. The most significant change was the destruction of the sacred precinct for ideological and religious reasons and the replacement of the square as an epicenter and political stage. Without the sacred precinct, the square was immense, about 240 by 350 meters<sup>10</sup>, including the area where the Main Church was built. The colonial aspect of the new city's central area can be observed on the detail of the West-oriented map made by the middle of 16<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 3).



**Fig. 3.** Alonso de Santa Cruz (assigned). *Map of Mexico City* (detail), c. 1550, parchment, 75 x 114 cm. Courtesy of Uppsala University Library, Sweden.

The spatial distribution of residences around the central area favored groups of so-called conquerors and other elites, such as Spanish government officials. In the first documents of the municipality, there was a determination for the owners of buildings around the square to have their land expanded by 6.5 meters via the construction of portals that ennoble the place, as justified by law, but which also created order and defined pathways<sup>11</sup>.

In 1524, the municipal administration was installed in the former Palace of Axayacatl, which also became the residence of Cortés and seat of the Viceroyalty of New Spain from 1535 to 1562. In 1527, the City Hall began to name the large square as the "Plaza Mayor of this city,"<sup>12</sup> a space that went beyond the Spanish medieval plazas mayores, which had the function to accommodate the market. In Mexico City, the Plaza Mayor concentrated the buildings and performances of different powers. In 1532, the City Hall moved to the south of the square. In 1551, the first university in Mexico was created



and opened two years later in a building northeast of the square. In 1562, the seat of the Viceroyalty was moved to the building on the east side, over the former Moctezuma Palace, now the National Palace. The Main Church, to the north, was built between 1525 and 1532, and in 1573, the construction of the current Cathedral began, which was completed in 1813. Commercial activities extended to practically the entire square: to the southwest, at the Merchants' Portal (on which the building of the colonial official Rodrigo de Albornoz was located); to the southeast, on the Flores' Portal (on which the residence of Marina Flores Gutierrez de la Caballería and treasurer Alonso de Estrada was located). Shopkeepers' tents were also installed in Plaza Mayor and Volador Square.

The square presented religious celebrations, bullfights, parties, official announcements, protocol parades, royal celebrations, markets, theaters, executions of sentences on the roll and the gallows, installed next to the water fountain, thus demarcating the space as a place of communication for a new order, its justice, and its way of life. There was also an aesthetic concern with the appearance of the square with municipal determinations that valued cleanliness, the alignment of buildings, and, as already mentioned, the construction of portals on the ground floor of the buildings of those who had residences facing the square.

The enormous open space in the city center as the main political, religious, and social stage, was non-existent in Europe but recurrent in Mesoamerica. In the Iberian context, the main square was derived from other trajectories and cosmovision.

### **The square in the medieval Iberian context**

Orderly cities with a central square with government and religious buildings and markets around it were not unknown to the Spaniards. The religious motivation of this ordered urban design in the Christian context would be the image of the heavenly Jerusalem described in the book of Revelation and the Hippodamian model of Patmos, the Greek island where John, the evangelist, would have written the biblical text<sup>13</sup>.

In Iberia, some of the central squares were built when the region was occupied by the Romans, who applied a reticular model mainly to their colonies, in which a square (forum) was usually formed at the intersection of the main roads. From the 11th century onwards, new urban configurations emerged in the north of the Peninsula that resumed an orderly spatial organization to populate territories reconquered by Christians from the Islamic occupation. The news of the discovery of the apostle James' relics in the ninth century created a pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela that collaborated to boost the development of the northern region<sup>14</sup>.

In the 13th century, the square had become the guiding element of urban design, located at the orthogonal intersection of the two main axes originating from the four doors opened in the wall. The main medieval Iberian squares usually had a mainly commercial, but also an administrative vocation, and the surrounding buildings had portals on the ground floor to house commercial activities. It could be of regular format, including the church building or religious activities, but not necessarily. Among the other squares in the city, it became the largest, the Plaza Mayor, a denomination that would have another meaning from the 16th century onwards.

### **The Spanish Early Modern Plaza Mayor**

Since the second half of the 16th century, the Spanish Plaza Mayor is defined as a square with a regular quadrangular plan delimited by buildings with ordered façades and portals<sup>15</sup>, which may also be of a closed model, in which the architectures are mirrored. In addition to commercial and social functions, these squares were also places of stage and scenery for popular and official performances such as religious and union proceedings, entrances and royal weddings, proclamations, tournaments, games of reeds, comedies, sacramental *autos*, and bullfights, as much as a place of punishment and executions, with the roller and the pillory<sup>16</sup>. The buildings of power were partially present or nonexistent, making the performances a symbolic indicator of power.

The Plaza Mayor of Valladolid is considered the first Plaza Mayor in Spain to have this formal concern and this concept of multiple functions.

According to the Spanish art historian Alejandro Rebollo Matías, it served as a model for all of Spain, making the term Plaza Mayor "be confused with the notion of an urban and uniform square, with the idea of the center, that becomes the very symbol of the city."<sup>17</sup>

Since the 13th century, an intense commercial activity had been developing in a square that had earned relevance by forming a merchant district in Valladolid. In the 15th century, the Court decided to transfer the seat of the municipal council from Santa Maria Square (now University Square) to the then Market Square, also attributing political functions to that place with the irregular layout that became the city's political center.



**Fig. 4.** Bentura Seco. *Valladolid* (detail), 1738, ink on paper, 110 x 80 cm. Courtesy of the Municipal Archive of Valladolid / Archivo Municipal de Valladolid – Ayuntamiento de Valladolid (sig. 20.01 – PL 90), Spain.

In 1561, a fire of significant proportions reached a part of the city, including Market Square. Francisco de Salamanca carried out the



reconstruction project and the new Plaza Mayor was only finished in 1592 by Juan Herrera. The renovation enlarged the square, making it, approximately, 85.5 by 128 meters<sup>18</sup>, and the buildings and the portals around it were standardized, highlighting the new building for the city council to the north. The nearby streets were enlarged and converged to the square as far as possible. Valladolid's Cathedral of Our Lady of the Holy Assumption, designed by Herrera and inaugurated in 1585, was built 400 meters away from Plaza Mayor. The detail of the 18<sup>th</sup> century map shows the regular square standing out amidst the city of winding streets (Figure 4).



**Fig. 5.** Tomás López de Vargas Machuca. *Geometric plan of Madrid dedicated and presented to the king, our lord Carlos III, by the hands of the honorable lord Count of Floridablanca [Plano geométrico de Madrid dedicado y presentado al Rey Nuestro Señor Don Carlos III por mano del excellentísimo Señor Conde de Floridablanca]* (detail), 1785, ink on paper, 68 x 98 cm. Courtesy of the National Library of France, department of Maps and Plans / Bibliothèque Nationale de France, département Cartes et plans (GEC-9301).

Valladolid's project is credited to the Renaissance ideals concerning geometry, order, proportion, symmetry, and uniformity values which, in the second half of the 16th century, had already found echoes in the Iberian Peninsula.

In Madrid, which became the royal capital in 1561, the Plaza Mayor was built in the place of an old medieval market square outside the city walls, with an irregular layout, the former Arrabal Square. It began to be built in the 1560s and was only completed in 1622, when it reached 94 by 129 meters<sup>19</sup>, a Juan Gomez de Mora's project, as can be seen on the detail of the 18<sup>th</sup> century map (Figure 5). Due to its configuration, entirely enclosed by an uniform architecture, it became a large courtyard of the city, a place that served as a stage for the Court, where official, civil, commercial, and religious activities took place<sup>20</sup>.

However, Madrid's square did not contain any royal, government, or religious buildings in its perimeter, accentuating the space's symbolic and scenographic character. It is considered the outcome of experiences that took place in Valladolid, even though it had Plaza Mayor of Mexico City as a predecessor, which was constituted even before the Renaissance had crossed the Atlantic.

### Final Considerations

Regarding the characteristics of the main square and its surroundings as a center of power in the examples discussed, we can summarize them in the table below:

**Table: comparative features of the Main Square in Mesoamerican and Iberian traditions**

Features of the Main Square	Mesoamerican Tradition	Mexico-Tenochtitlan	Mexico City Plaza Mayor	Medieval Iberian Plazas Mayores	Valladolid Plaza	Madrid Plaza
Urban epicenter	X		X	X	X	X
Geographic center	X	X	X	ocasionally		
Monumental space	X	X	X		the largest in town	the largest in town
Rectangle shape	X	X	X	ocasionally	X	X



Commercial area	X	X	X	X	X	X
Main religious building	X		X	ocasionally		
Political building	X	X	X	Local	local	
Diversified activities	X	X	X	X	X	X
Monumental architecture	X	X	X			
Uniform façades					X	X
Portals			partially	X	X	X

Thus, based on the data above, we can verify that:

- the Plaza Mayor in Mexico City brought together the elements of Mesoamerican tradition, even those that disappeared in Tenochtitlan, such as the presence of the main religious building in the large square and its constitution as the urban epicenter;
- the presence of seats of political power, such as local administration, also appeared in the Mesoamerican tradition, in Tenochtitlan, and in the Spanish medieval Plazas Mayores. They were common in early modern Plazas, but non-existent in Madrid, where official ceremonies made political power present through performances;
- the main building of the spiritual power of the city can be occasionally found in the Iberian Plazas Mayores perimeters, but it is always present in the Mesoamerica and majestic in Mexico City;
- the portals on the ground floor of the buildings around the square, a typical commercial element of the Spanish medieval and early modern Plazas Mayores, are partially found in Mexico City;
- in terms of the monumentality of open spaces, Iberian cities no longer had space for immense squares, but was preserved in Mexico City as a Mesoamerican heritage;
- in the Iberian Plazas Mayores, commercial activities were the starting point for the main squares' configuration. However, in the Mesoamerican and Mexican contexts, the square has been the meeting place of power since the beginning.

If the characteristics that define Plaza Mayor in conceptual and symbolic terms are related to its functionality as a stage and scenery for manifestations of political, religious, and economic powers that make it a place that goes beyond its merely commercial and social attributes, the Mexican square was already configured that way, but with dimensions which highlighted the importance of the square's monumentality for the visuality of the space of power.

Given this dimension that does not exist in Europe, Mexican architect José Ángel Campos Salgado points out that "the Plazas Mayores, as such, were not created until after the design of New Spain."<sup>21</sup> Mexico City demonstrated the importance of these wide-open spaces in the configuration of a grandiose power visuality with tremendous socio-political potential. This transcultural formation is no longer just Mexica or European but a place of constant social and cultural confrontation.

Going a little further, the Argentine architects Daniela Moreno and Ana Lia Chiarello define the monumental scale, the infinity as a concept, the total urban project, and the conception of public space as a scenery, found in Tenochtitlan and other cities in Mesoamerica, became essential traces to European Baroque by the 17th-century<sup>22</sup>.

In addition to the Plaza Mayor in Mexico City bringing together in advance many existing and desirable elements in early modern Plazas Mayores – as well as in the scenographic projects of future European Baroque cities – it demonstrates the participation of Mesoamerican urbanism in concepts and projects in American and Western cities. Often, the contribution of America and its native peoples to Western culture is presented from the local materials and labor that collaborated in the construction of colonial buildings and artworks. However, we are constituted by different cultures, knowledge, and practices, and they must be approached on equal terms with European collaborations. Therefore, we reinforce contributions, which impacted the circulation of ideas, projects, and achievements in art history, architecture, and urbanism in the past and the present.

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### Endnotes

1. Cf. Michael Foucault, *Microfísica do poder*, trans. Roberto Machado, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1989).
2. Göran Therborn, *Cities of power: the urban, the national, the popular, the global* (New York: Verso, 2017), 12.
3. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Sociología de la imagen: ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2015), p. 22. Original text: *la estructura del espacio urbano y las huellas históricas que se hacen visibles en él* (translated by the author of this paper).
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11. Cabildo de la Ciudad de México, *Actas de Cabildo I - mar. 1524 - sep. 1532* (México: Edición del Municipio Libre, Ignacio Bejarano, 1889), 8.
12. Ciudad de México, *Actas*, 129. Original text: *plaza mayor de esta Cibdad* (sic, translated by the author of this paper).
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### **Acknowledgments**

The author is a Ph.D. candidate at the Post-Graduation Interunits Program in Aesthetics and Art History of the University of São Paulo (PGEHA-USP), Brazil. The research was supported by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel in Brazil / Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) – Finance Code 001, from 2020 March to 2021 October. The Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History currently supports the doctoral research.

# Typology in the Visual Arts: A Traveling Concept Exemplified in Laylah Ali's Typology Series

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## **ABSTRACT**

Genre painting is commonly defined as depicting everyday human life, offering an inventory of social classes, events, and human types. Nevertheless, I will demonstrate that genre painting does not describe everyday life. Instead, I assert that genre painting, and genre scenes in general, are visual languages that create their own reality. Focusing on human types from a racial perspective, I demonstrate how these types are constructed through a differential process between a group of reference and people outside this group. In the first part of my presentation, I introduce Laylah Ali's practice. I posit that the various interactions of black and white characters in Ali's drawings are genre scenes whose meaning needs to be decoded. I approach Ali's drawings as I would any genre scene, observing the types, costumes, and setting as categories of signs that coalesce to create meaning. Taking one example from Ali's Typology Series, I will demonstrate that the artist's technique reveals that the cohesion of a group or a type is constructed from diacritical differences from others rather than a fixed definition of a type. In the second part of my presentation, I analyze *Farmers Nooning* (1836) by William Sidney Mount, which exemplifies genre painting in the United States and illustrates how the racial typing process at work in Ali's contemporary drawings can be applied to Mount's antebellum paintings. I conclude that racial typing and stereotypes are enduring strategies that do not rely on context and, therefore, can travel through time.

## **KEYWORDS**

Types; Stereotypes; Race; Semiotics; Genre Painting.

In the seventeenth century, enlightenment thinkers in Europe introduced the idea that the human condition could be enhanced by reason, resulting in drastic changes in politics, philosophy, science, and communications. At the height of the Age of Reason, French philosopher Denis Diderot published the *Encyclopédie* (1751–77), an extensive compilation of human knowledge. This seminal publication brought to the fore the idea that the universe could be rationally interpreted and cataloged.

This social and scientific revolution is reflected in the arts with the development of genre painting. This new art form is commonly defined as depicting everyday human life, offering an inventory of social classes, events, and human types. Nevertheless, in my paper presentation, I will demonstrate that genre painting does not in fact describe everyday life. Instead, paraphrasing Ferdinand de Saussure and his view on language, I assert that genre painting, and genre scenes in general, are visual languages that create their own reality.

Focusing on human types from a racial perspective, I demonstrate how these types are constructed through a differential process between a group of reference and people outside this group. In the first part of my presentation, I introduce Laylah Ali's work. I posit that the various interactions of black and white characters in Ali's drawings are genre scenes whose meaning needs to be decoded. I approach Ali's drawings as I would any genre scene, observing the types, costumes, and setting as categories of signs that coalesce to create meaning. Taking examples from the artist's *Typology Series*, I will demonstrate that Ali's technique reveals that the cohesion of a group or a type is constructed on diacritical differences from others rather than a fixed definition of a type. In the second part of my presentation, I share examples from William Sidney Mount's nineteenth-century genre scenes in the United States to illustrate that the racial typing process at work in Ali's contemporary drawings can be applied to Mount's antebellum paintings. I conclude that racial typing and stereotypes are enduring strategies that do not rely on context and, therefore, can travel through time.

From a methodological perspective, I will use minimal references to the historical context. As Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson demonstrated in their paper titled “Semiotics and Art History,” the concept of context must be used cautiously when applied to visual arts. As they mentioned, “Context, in other words, is text itself, and it thus consists of signs that require interpretation. What we take to be positive knowledge is the product of interpretative choices. The art historian is always present in the construction she or he produces.”<sup>1</sup> Additionally, art historians can spend time in contextual research without ever exhausting the possibilities and therefore lose sight of the essential object of study in the visual arts, which is, in this case, the work itself. Thus, in the rest of this paper, I will replace “context” with “contextual elements” or “framing,” as per Jonathan Culler’s approach.<sup>2</sup> It is also notable that archival material from the early nineteenth-century United States is in written form. Several states enacted literacy laws during that period that prohibited African Americans from learning to read and write. Therefore, basing an analysis on written material from the time would be biased from the start, as the writings collected would be dominated by white men’s production. A large part of the population would be de facto silenced. Thus, in my paper, I argue that signs in visual arts result from discursive practices, institutional rules, and various value systems, but without losing sight of the sign function within the painting itself.

Laylah Ali was born in 1968 in Buffalo, New York. She is currently the Francis Christopher Oakley Third Century Professor of Art at Williams College in Massachusetts. Ali’s series of drawings depict dystopian worlds that she uses to comment on contemporary times. Her first series was *Brown Heads*. Her style came to maturity with *Greenheads*, a series of over eighty small gouache paintings she produced between 1996 and 2005. These small-scale tableaux with a uniform light-blue background are populated by restless, skinny characters with round green heads and brown bodies. The successive vignettes show them performing ambiguous acts on one another. The interactions conjure both violence and rescue.



With the title of her next series of black and white drawings, the *Typology Series*, the artist introduced the deceitful idea that the meaning of her scenes would finally be resolved by a scientific, anthropologic, or social classification. I found this title and the drawings to be compelling examples to initiate a discussion about the typing process in the visual arts. Starting with a contemporary artist based in the United States was essential to ensure that I did not assign anachronistic values to my initial observations.

In genre scenes, the title is a crucial element to confirm what is depicted. For example, in Mount's *Farmers Noonning*, the title indicates that the scene refers to a group of farmers resting after their midday meal. In contrast, all Ali's drawings from the *Typology Series* are untitled (see 1). The title of the series itself is a combination of two words derived from the Greek, "type" and "logy." The Oxford English Dictionary defines "logy" as an ending for two classes of words, those with the sense of "saying or speaking" and the names of sciences or departments of study. "Type" has multiple meanings related to religion, pathology, numismatics, natural history, mathematics, chemistry, and semiotics, to name a few. Some of these definitions are still used nowadays, while others are obsolete. Interestingly, the artist used a polysemic term whose meaning has changed over time to title this series. Hence in Ali's drawing, there is no straightforward subject matter disclosed, indicating what the viewer should be looking for in the drawing. Instead, one must carefully observe the scene to figure out what is happening. At first glance, the pictures show characters interacting with one another. Therefore, according to this observation and the various possible meanings, we can assume that in Ali's work, "typology" refers to the scientific classification of groups with common characteristics, specifically, the sorting of humans according to shared specificities. Hence, the attention is directed to the drawings as the source of meaning.

Ali's characters stand against a white background. The only identifying information comes to us through their costumes, which reflect a syncretism that blurs their function as identity and social class markers. Instead of revealing information, the clothing conceals physical traits, turning the characters that wear them into exotic yet familiar subjects that resist

categorization. However, the lack of framing does not prevent signification. Looking long enough at the work, a viewer or an art historian can make sense of what they are seeing. The process here focuses on the gaze as a survival function, as defined by J. J. Gibson.<sup>3</sup> Namely, that the gaze is of primary importance to know or interpret visual objects, reducing them to an object already known or resembling a thing we have experienced before. This behavior results from survival needs and becomes automatic.



**Fig. 1.** Laylah Ali, *Untitled from the Typology Series*, 2005. Ink and graphite on paper, 20 ¼ × 17 ¼ in. (framed). The Princeton University Art Museum.

If framing, or the lack of framing, does not help in understanding Ali's system, maybe analyzing the style of the drawing can unfold the rules governing the artist's visual language. Ali does not try to achieve resemblance with real persons. On the contrary, she emphasizes the constructed character of these figures. Their shapes are flat, the contours well delineated with black lines, and the shadows or contouring using colors are nonexistent. But despite the inexistence of depth or any optical illusionistic technique, it would be inaccurate to say that the forms are simplified. A complex network of lines finely decorates the clothing's patterns and shape, and the thickness of the ink plays with the whiteness of the paper support to produce various tonalities of black. Although the oblong headdress, the cloth covering the head, the band that runs across the face, and the tube-like dress seem similar from a distance, they are actually quite different when we take the time to look at them more precisely. Ali uses the same precision in using negative space and the figure's position on the paper. For this drawing, she cut the figures and pasted them onto another paper support to heighten the shapes between them and increase the tension between them.

However, pursuing further the artist's intention would be irrelevant. To paraphrase Roland Barthes this time, once the drawing is completed, the artist, the author of this visual language, dies. Each artwork requires an interpretation, which is achieved once it triggers a reaction from the viewer. In this case, the art historian is not a mere link applying words to images to render them understandable to a larger audience. Any attempt to interpret Ali's artwork engages the author's responsibility in creating a narrative that will reveal the author's interests and assumptions. The same can be said of a viewer experiencing an unmediated interaction with the work. To fulfill the biological need to reduce objects presented to us to known objects, the viewer will build a system in which each sign acquires a meaning that is not universal but specific to their own past experiences and beliefs. When signs reach a similar sense among a linguistic or cultural group, we refer to them as conventions. Using an empirical method, creating typologies and other categorizations derives from this primary impulse.

Intellectual and personal interests nurture my particular interest in looking at the works from a racial perspective. I am French, born in France to Portuguese parents. In 2010, I relocated to the United States with my partner, who is African American. Therefore, I acknowledge that my personal view of the world and my life experiences might influence the elements of the works that I identify as signs.



**Fig. 2.** Fulani artist, *Man's blanket (landaka khasa)*, before 1924. Wool and dye, 92 1/8 x 55 1/8 in. The Princeton University Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Donald B. Doyle, 1953.

One of the conventions that might be directly readable in this drawing is that these two forms might refer to humans. Shapes refer to eyes, mouths, heads, and potentially bodies, even if the arms and legs are not visible. Nevertheless, what prevails in the interpretation is not our potential shared humanity with these characters, but our differences from them. A process disabling a complete reconciliation creates this alienation. The clothing patterns might refer to African cloth. There might be various potential African sources of inspiration for textiles with geometric patterns: Kuba cloth

in the contemporary Democratic Republic of Congo, Ashanti kente cloth in modern Ghana, or Yoruba omolangidi in Nigeria. Sometimes cloth resists geographic localization, such as Fulani cloth produced by nomadic peoples living mainly in the Sahel and Western Africa. But if an element of the dressing bears similarities with Fulani patterns (see 2), another, such as the elongated headdress, contradicts this assumption.

Interwoven threads produce the colorful motifs of Ashanti kente cloth, but the beardlike extension hanging under the chin is foreign to Ashanti dress codes. A small Ethiopian amulet at the Princeton University Art Museum represents two figures wearing similar elongated headdresses (see 3). Therefore, Ali's figures could represent Ethiopian Catholic Church figures, but the band running across the eyes is not compatible with the attire of people living in this region.



**Fig. 3.** Ethiopian amulet, undated. Wood, 2 13/16 x 1 11/16 x 5/16 in. The Princeton University Art Museum.

Some cloths are gendered. Some can be worn by everyday people. Some belong to royal regalia. Some, like the Ashanti kente cloth, a traditional attribute of royalty, evolved to become the national cloth of the entire country, worn by locals and commercialized for exportation. Some patterns have meaning; others are decorative. Some textiles are worn during rituals or ceremonials; others can be worn every day. Tall headdresses are, in various cultures, a symbol of religious or political power. We might think of a king's crown or a bishop's miter. In Ali's drawing, both characters might belong to a high social class. Nevertheless, one can wonder which is the most powerful of the two. This question remains unanswered, as the headdress continues outside the frame. Another assumption could be that they are of the same rank but from different cultures according to the differences in the patterns of their clothing. The information is unavailable to the viewer, and no contextual element is available to confirm assumptions. No landscape or architectural structure in the background could place the scene in a specific geographic and temporal space. Therefore, Ali constructs her characters as visual mosaics composed of signs indexical of different cultures and resisting geographical and temporal localization. This characteristic prevents the viewer's complete reconciliation process between the indexical cultural signs and their own experience of the world. Hence, instead of merging to create an identifiable culture or human being, the various signs coalesce to signify the fundamental difference from the audience.

Similarly, the visible differences between both characters are erased to create a unified signifier of otherness. What surfaces is that their referential diversity is superseded to create a type that owes its cohesion to its fundamental difference from the viewer. The viewer becomes the only stable point of reference. This arbitrary binary contention is crucial to understanding the construction of the self in opposition to others. And the strength of Ali's work resides in showing the observer's responsibility in creating this otherness. After all, the artist inserted signifiers in her work, but she never attributed a positive meaning to them. Nevertheless, Ali does not use the Western conventions of a realistic genre scene, thereby preventing the viewer from identifying with the characters.

Next let us look at Mount's painting, which exemplifies American genre scenes using recognized conventions. If typing is independent of context, and specifically from historical context, the primary conclusions derived from the observation of Ali's drawing should still be relevant when applied to nineteenth-century antebellum genre painting. The differential process to create otherness is verified in Mount's *Farmers Noonning*. Even if contextual elements might explain the dispersion of types and stereotypes in time and space, the observer's interpretation is crucial to keeping types and stereotypes alive.

William Sidney Mount was born in 1807 in Setauket, New York, and spent most of his life in the region until his death in 1868. He had great commercial success with his paintings inspired by everyday life in New York. Contrary to Ali's drawings, Mount's paintings can be framed, and here is my framing proposal: Mount was active from the 1820s to the 1860s, a critical period for constructing the American nation. Racial equality was a subject of much discussion. At stake was the termination of slavery, a significant factor of wealth production in the Southern states. With improvements in printing technology and lower production costs, newspapers became cheaper and available to a large audience in the 1830s. As a result, the number of newspapers and other printed materials such as lithographs, increased tremendously, offering a platform to widely disseminate information, ideas, and ideologies. It was also around that time that minstrel shows gained in popularity. White actors with painted black faces ridiculed African Americans, depicting them as grotesque beings with beaming smiles, irresponsible but talented as musicians and entertainers. While we need to keep this framing in mind when looking at the signs in the painting, especially racial signifiers, we must focus on how racial differences are signaled in the artwork.

*Farmers Noonning* is a five-figure composition showing men resting in a field (see 4). Various signs coalesce to indicate that the black figure symbolizes otherness. Not only is he the sole African American among four white men, but he is also the only one asleep. While all of them are resting, the white men still seem more active. One is honing his scythe; two others are



looking at young male tickling the black man's ear during his sleep. The gazes of the four white men converge on the African American figure.



**Fig. 4.** William Sidney Mount, *Farmers Nooning*, 1836. Oil on canvas, 20 ¼ x 24 ½ in. (unframed). The Long Island Museum of American Art, History, & Carriages. Gift of Frederick Sturges, Jr. 1954.

From a composition perspective, the African American is at the center of the painting, the midday sun shining on his body and enhancing by the contrast between his white shirt and the color of his skin. The three white men rest in the shade of a tree. The body positions imprint oppositional directions as well. A diagonal line could be traced from the lower right corner of the painting to the upper left, following the placement of the three white figures. In contrast, the positioning of the African American and the child imprint a movement outwards. On the left side of the diagonal, we have the



three white men in the shade. On the right side are the boy and the African American man. A container is placed within reach of the black figure.

Once the black figure is identified as the other compared to the group of reference, which is, in this case, the white group, the process of stereotyping can unfold. This black type is similar enough to a real human being to refer to African Americans, but he is not identified positively. Therefore, this black figure becomes a symbol whose meaning is agreed upon by the community and is arbitrary. While the white figure is not a symbol or a racial type, it is the norm, the point of reference. It would be misleading to understand the creation of racial stereotypes as a black versus white binary. Instead, it is an opposition between a normative group and types not belonging to that arbitrary norm, whatever the norm might be at a point in time. Indeed, as Nell Irvin Painter established in her book *The History of White People*, the definition of white has evolved in history, and the black versus white binary is more complex than a simple reference to skin color. It also includes religious differences, for example. As Painter notes, Catholics were not considered whites in the early nineteenth century United States.<sup>4</sup> Since the norm does not have a positive definition, types and stereotypes endure as long as an arbitrary opposition between a norm and anything outside of that norm exists, and the referential group agrees upon the meaning. In *Farmers Noonning*, for example, the white group is composed of various types: the industrious one honing his scythe, the indolent one resting on his stomach, the childish one playing tricks, and the rational one who prefers resting in the shade rather than getting sunburned. But none of these types, taken separately, could become the symbol of whites' identity in general. Such nuance is not granted to the black figure. Using the framing I described earlier, I can attempt to interpret these signs. Pairing the black man with the child might symbolize his childish behavior; his nap could be seen as laziness, and the container as his tendency to drink alcohol and preference for the indulgence of the senses rather than the use of reason. Perched on the pile of hay, the child and the black man seem to perform a scene for the entertainment of the other white males, a reminder of minstrel shows. The interaction between these two figures constitutes a vignette that encapsulates

the visual codes constructing this stereotype. This scene within the painting needn't be seen in relation to any other elements in the painting to create meaning.

Stereotypes are in constant flux to adjust to the norm, and migrations and technical innovations facilitate their dissemination. The visual codes that Mount used in his work existed before him. He adapted them to his visual language. Guy McElroy mentioned John Lewis Krimmel as an inspiration for Mount's characters. Krimmel was himself a German immigrant who had settled in Philadelphia in 1810.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, these same stereotypes potentially existed on the European continent as well, which would mean that types and stereotypes follow human migration and exchanges, transcending the language barrier. Mount himself inspired other artists. James Goodwyn Clonney painted *Waking Up* in 1851, directly inspired by Mount's vignette (see 5). In 1868, Currier and Ives published an adaptation of this scene.

Image dispersion was also facilitated by the production of lithographs made after paintings. These reproductions were very popular in the early nineteenth century United States. Jonathan Sturges, a businessman from New York City, commissioned *Farmers Noonning* in 1836. The following year Sturges lent the painting for an exhibition at the National Academy of Design in New York, and in 1843 the Apollo Association published lithographs of the work that became extremely popular.<sup>6</sup> Mount also collaborated with William Schaus from Goupil, Vibert & Company, a French publisher, who introduced Mount's visual vocabulary to a European audience. Therefore, these arbitrary types were in constant flux between Europe and North America, and re-appropriated by other artists.

Through repetition, a visual sign ceases to be perceived as arbitrary and becomes accepted as natural and unquestioned. And because genre painting uses visual codes commonly accepted as referring to objects or people in the real world, the image itself might be interpreted as delivering positive information. Consequently, naturalized types and stereotypes become invisible as they appear like natural elements of the scene. Nevertheless, like Ali's drawings, Mount's painting is a construct rooted in an association of various signs.



**Fig. 5.** James Goodwyn Clonney, *Waking up*, 1851. Oil on canvas, 27 1/8 x 22 in. The Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Gift of Martha C. Karolik.

The responsibility of scholars and educators cannot be ignored in the dissemination of stereotypes. The example of *Farmers Nooning* demonstrates that signs are not enough to denote or represent what images

stand for. Language and interpretation are required to fill in the gaps. Depending on their interests, scholars select contextual elements to create a framing that will justify their analysis, leading to diverse meanings. According to their perspective, they choose elements in the artworks that they identify as signs to decipher, while other features will be ignored or erased. The black figure is among the most discussed signs in *Farmers Noonning*. Starting with Deborah Johnson's book *William Sidney Mount: Painter of American Life*, we can analyze how scholars enable the perpetuation of stereotypes. In Johnson's perspective, the black recumbent man symbolized Mount's interest in formal exploration and an attempt to emulate eighteenth-century European masters.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, Johnson does not entirely erase the racial component of the painting, but dilutes the artist's responsibility. For her, the picture is inspired by "the visual vocabulary of his contemporary social environment," and she minimizes Mount's responsibility in disseminating such a stereotype by explaining that "these interpretations of African Americans were oversimplified and demeaning, but in general, they were accepted without questioning."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Johnson's interpretation implies that this stereotype of a black person was acceptable because the hegemonic social group co-opted it. Johnson's analysis engages the scholar's responsibility in disseminating and naturalizing stereotypes, especially when she undermines other scholars' interpretations. Albert Boime is among the art historians who Johnson cited briefly before moving on to "a more ambitious interpretation."<sup>9</sup> Boime's analysis points out that "Black people were common victims of practical jokes in early nineteenth-century imagery, emphasizing their humiliating social position and powerlessness."<sup>10</sup> Boime based his reflection on primary sources, i.e., Mount's diary entries. Therefore, Johnson dismissed Boime's interpretation primarily on ideological grounds. Johnson also reformats Elizabeth Johns's writing to fit her perspective. Johns sees the tam-o'-shanter, the Scottish woolen cap worn by the child, as a critical sign in the painting. According to Johns, the tam-o'-shanter constitutes a vital sign that symbolizes a criticism of antislavery speakers:

"The tam-o'-shanter became a transparent reference to abolitionism. Because English and Scottish emancipation societies aided American reformers, such editors as New Yorker James Watson Webb in the *Courier and Enquirer* routinely referred to even local abolitionists as "foreign agitators" who were financed by a "bevy of old maids at Glasgow." Graphic artists adopted the tam-o'-shanter, shorthand for Presbyterian, Scottish, and thus foreign-influenced opinions about emancipation, as a derisive visual symbol of the movement, and virulent political caricatures showed blacks wearing Scotch caps talking about "bobolition"... Ear tickling, the activity of the young boy in Mount's picture, meant filling a naive listener's mind with promises. Indicting antislavery speakers as childlike and irresponsible, Mount couched his critical construction in a deceptively low key."<sup>11</sup>

Johnson redirected selected quotes from Johns's text to fit her ideology. She then concluded that the picture showed that Mount refused "to specify the ideal course of action."<sup>12</sup>

This example shows a few strategies emanating from the academy that perpetuate stereotypes. It includes identifying critical signs worth interpreting while erasing or undermining others, trivializing dissident interpretations even when they are grounded in serious research, and redirecting peers' analysis to fit one's perspective.

In this paper, I demonstrated that the process of constructing types relies not on contextual elements, but rather on identified signs of difference between a specific group and another group of reference, creating simplified binaries. Nevertheless, the determination of signs of difference and their interpretation goes through the interpreter's ideology filter, which is also socially constructed. I did not expand on this point in this paper because I focused on producing and disseminating types and stereotypes instead of their ontological characteristic. As Ali's drawing highlighted, signs are not sufficient to create meaning. Viewers need to identify the signs and proceed to a mental reconciliation involving their perspective and lived experiences to make sense of what they see. Despite being often described as depicting everyday life, the analysis of Mount's painting demonstrated that genre

painting, are constructed realities based on visual conventions. Their idealized vision of the world facilitates the dissemination of stereotypes when the visual codes are socially accepted, reproduced, and circulated with the help of human migration and technological innovations. Nevertheless, the role of scholars and educators should not be minimized in this process of stereotype dissemination. As the small study of Johnson's essay showed, narratives are indexical of the author's ideology. Stereotypes can be reinforced when their importance is minimized, or the space for diverse interpretation is negated. This research could further investigate the relationship between the concept of ideology as a social construct and the evolution of stereotypes, which are also social constructs. Finally, Ali's drawings question the need to categorize everything, including human beings, and the associated risk of objectification, probably appealing to what Édouard Glissant called the "right to opacity."

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## Endnotes

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# Notes on the Critical Reception of G.E. Lessing's *Laokoon* in 19th and Early 20th-century America

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## **ABSTRACT**

When Clement Greenberg wrote his essay, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," a homage to G.E. Lessing's *Laokoon* (1766), he was not fully aware of the complex cultural constructs he was dealing with. His general perception of the treatise resulted from a long and complicated phenomenon of cultural appropriation and negotiation. Around the second half of the 19th century, an intense migration of symbols and paradigms from Germany to America took place, and Lessing's *Laokoon* was an important part of it. This mobility of ideas was favored by the migration of scholars, who played the role of physical vehicles of new paradigms and cultural values. Most important were the intersections and negotiation processes: during this age, Lessing's theories conformed to American cultural needs and expectations. This phenomenon paved the way to the canonization of a precise mythology, as the treatise gradually became the symbol for the strict logic for the separation of the arts. At the beginning of the 20th century, this tradition was canonized by Irving Babbitt's *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (1910): here, the author revised and reshaped Lessing's ideas in order to adapt them to the case of modern art.

## **KEYWORDS**

Clement Greenberg; Irving Babbitt; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing; *Laokoon*; John Ruskin.



### **Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Irving Babbitt, and Clement Greenberg: A Common Narrative**

In the summer of 1940, Clement Greenberg wrote one of his most emblematic essays on the condition of modern culture, particularly the state of the arts, namely his well-known essay “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” published in the pages of the *Partisan Review*.<sup>1</sup> Greenberg reappraised the original German treatise written by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerey und Poesie* (1766): following Lessing’s main argumentation, the critic noted that modern times were witnessing a debilitating tendency towards the confusion of the arts, a noxious effect of the Romantic revolution, and called for a more strict and rigid separation of each artistic media. As the title of Greenberg’s article highlights, the critic implicitly agreed with one of the most controversial reappraisals of Lessing’s late *Laokoon*, that is the long essay published under the title of *The New Laocoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (1910), written by Irving Babbitt, the leader of the ultra-conservative literary movement known as New Humanism. Babbitt advocated the separation between the arts as an antidote to what he felt as a state of cultural chaos originated by the so-called impressionist literature and, of course, by the avant-garde.<sup>2</sup>

Compared to other essays written by Greenberg, the critics have always found the “Laocoon” the most difficult to decipher: the author’s argumentations around the necessity to set rigid boundaries between literature and the visual arts, are articulated and clear, but the effective meaning of Greenberg’s reference to his sources (Lessing and Babbitt), has always appeared hard to interpret and to understand in its entirety. As Michael Leja pointed out in his well-known study *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (1993), Greenberg’s references to Lessing as well as to Babbitt are almost absent, even though the title of the essay suggests a close relation to both authors and a direct comparison with their respective treatises.<sup>3</sup> As I articulated in a recent contribution published in the *Getty Research Journal*,<sup>4</sup> Greenberg’s “Laocoon” should be reconsidered in light of the existence of three drafts of the essay,

which reveal that originally Greenberg's ideas and argumentations were quite different in their scope as well as in their content. Following my research and analysis of Greenberg's personal papers, held by the Getty Research Institute,<sup>5</sup> the "Laocoon" has to be regarded as the result of a series of endless revisions demanded by the editorial board of the *Partisan Review*. According to the editors' opinion, the text, as Greenberg originally outlined it, could not fit for the purposes of the magazine, a politically engaged publication addressed to a Marxist-oriented reading public. As a matter of fact, Greenberg formerly intended to trace back the historical and cultural origins of the confusion of the arts, epitomized by Horace's simile *Ut pictura poësis*, which eventually led to Lessing's treatise and, two centuries later, to Babbitt's argumentations. In his personal correspondence with his friend and confidant, Harold Lazarus, Greenberg lamented the radical changes demanded by the editor, Dwight Macdonald, who found the essay too involved in matters concerning aesthetic theory and literature, hence not in line with the journal's political agenda;<sup>6</sup> therefore, the young author was forced to abandon his initial plans and to reconfigure the structure and the conceptual framework of the essay, gradually giving form to the definitive version of his new "Laocoon."

The original drafts of Greenberg's essay, as well as other annotations, proved that the origins of the critic's ultra-conservative position, on one hand, has to be related to Babbitt's argumentations around Lessing's original statements, and, on the other, should be traced back to the literary culture of the second half of the Nineteenth century, when an intense migration of symbols and paradigms from Germany to America took place.<sup>7</sup> Across the century, American culture turned its gaze outward, and the creation of a native artistic and literary canon was actively mediated by the valuation and appropriation of the European heritage. This mobility of ideas was favored by the migration of scholars, who played the role of physical vehicles of new paradigms and cultural values. Most important for the present context, was the processes of intersections and negotiations: during this age, Lessing's theories on the relation between visual and verbal arts were conformed to American cultural needs and expectations. The present paper intends to demonstrate that Greenberg's peculiar choice to reappraise the German

classic at the end of the 1930s was partly due to Lessing's traditional and enduring popularity in America during the second half of the Nineteenth century and the beginning of the Twentieth. Moreover, assuming a wider perspective, I would like to underline a peculiar aspect of the critical reception of Lessing's *Laokoon*, that is the role played by politics and related contextual interests which actually oriented the interpretation of the text: the *Laokoon* then, as we will see, had always been perceived rather as a *tool*, adaptable to the partisan argumentations and ideological orientations of its American commentators, including Babbitt and Greenberg, who effectively legitimized their positions by referring to Lessing's unquestionable and established authority.

As stated at the very beginning, the transcultural mobility of ideas should be firstly regarded as a material process of migration: in the case of the critical reception of Lessing's *Laokoon*, and its further consequences and effects on the future development of American literary and art criticism, the phenomenon should be considered against the backdrop of the migration of young American scholars to Germany in the first half of the Nineteenth century. Men such as George Ticknor, Edward Everett, and George Bancroft formed the earliest group of American-born intellectuals who completed their education at the University of Gottingen, Germany, becoming not only the most competent critics of German literature overseas but also, and foremost, the pioneers in the introduction of German thought in the United States. Their journey abroad was guided by a strong passion for German history and culture, and mostly derived by the reading of a monumental publication of the time, namely Madame de Staël's *On Germany (De l'Allemagne)*, Paris 1813), which held an exceptionally privileged position in the wide framework of the reception of German literature in America.<sup>8</sup> After the return of the first group of American scholars from Europe, a progressively growing number of reviews, essays, and translations of the most prominent German authors, gradually appeared in the pages of notable American magazines, especially the *American Quarterly Review* and *The New York Review*, reaching the peak in the 1840s and 1850s, with the birth of the first mass circulation press. At the beginning of the century, the passion of the

American scholars for German culture was partly mirroring the political climate originated by the end of the so-called War of 1812: as Merle Curti underlined in *The Growth of American Thought*, 'the enthusiasm for German culture' was to be primarily interpreted as the effect of a collective reaction against Great Britain's politics and, by extension, against its culture.<sup>9</sup> Born as a form of fascination for a 'non-British culture' and as an answer to a sudden 'cultural void,' the interest in German culture gradually took the shape of a genuine and shared admiration for the enchanted ground that gave birth to such men as Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Lessing.

The unique openness to the European cultural models and the birth of a mass market of magazines and books are strictly entwined: shared optimism, intellectual curiosity, and openness mostly characterized this *époque*, soon to be disillusioned by the brutality of the Civil War (1861-1865). What defines the Fifties was the effort to actively reach European standards, a collective attitude evidenced by the enthusiastic promotion, for example, of itinerant and comprehensive exhibitions of European art. In this regard, two landmark exhibitions were inaugurated at the end of the decade: the major exhibit of European Art hosted by the National Academy of Design of New York (1859), anticipated by an exhibition of English paintings that toured the major American cities and which included notable Pre-Raphaelite artworks, such as Holman Hunt's *Light of the World* (1851-1853) and Ford Madox Brown's *An English Autumn Afternoon* (1852-1853). In addition, these years were marked by the publication of the first American treatise devoted to the visual and verbal arts, *Lectures on Art, And Poems* (1850), written by the painter Washington Allston. This decade witnessed an unparalleled interest in the *Laokoon*: a canon for the reading and of interpreting Lessing's statements was soon to be established, and a better knowledge of the treatise, its sources and contents, was gradually spreading among the American reading public. Two magazines in particular, *The American Whig Review* and *The Crayon*, attempted to provide a new and accessible synthesis of the *Laokoon*, whose main argumentations were interpreted, as we will see, according to the magazines' respective cultural and political agendas.

### **Lessing's *Laokoon* According to *The American Whig Review***

The first one is an article published in the pages of the *American Whig Review* under the title of “Lessing’s Laocoon: the Secret of Classic Composition in Poetry, Painting and Statuary,” written by one of the editors, James Davenport Whelpley, in 1851.<sup>10</sup> The *American Whig Review*, the official organ of the conservative Whig party, was originally founded in 1845 and run without interruption until 1852, the year of the Whig’s political defeat, immediately followed by the disbandment of the party.

As James E. Mulqueen highlighted, ‘Political conservatism was a determining factor in Whig literary criticism,’

The Whigs stressed unity and harmony in politics and in art, espousing the organic theory for both society and literature. The true center of moral, intellectual, and social life was held to be religion, an opinion which influenced much of their literary criticism. Stability and reverence for the past involved literary critics in the problem of imitation versus originality.<sup>11</sup>

Values such as wisdom, steadiness, and obedience to the rules represented a common ground for the critics, while unity, harmony and imagination, were regarded as the leading virtues of artistic creation. The American painter Henry Inman, for instance, was strongly praised in the magazine's pages, being the perfect embodiment of these exact values in art as in life.

The clear echo of the organic theory of art, espoused by the Whig critics, is found in the review of Lessing’s *Laokoon*: Whelpley spelled out precisely the German moral and social function of the German treatise, eventually portraying the German author as the true emblem of Whig values. Every aspect of the *Laokoon*, with its declared reverence for Homer and Virgil, was interpreted as the mirroring of the character of its author, who was guided by a unique sense for morality and clarity. ‘Lessing was neither a mystic nor a transcendentalist – Whelpley asserted – His characteristics are perspicuity and judgment, and an understanding very free of prejudice.’<sup>12</sup> As we immediately perceive from these words, Whelpley, being a true

representative of the Whig party, strongly rejected every aspect that could be related to the Transcendentalist movement: the German writer was depicted as a champion of balance and judgment, and a potential guide for all the young artists and poets who sought success and collective praise by devoting themselves to discipline. Moreover, an additional feature characterizes Whelpley's essay, namely its recognizable pragmatic attitude: the critic actually translated the treatise into a handbook addressed to the painter who was looking for a rule of thumb on how to represent figuratively the words of two of the most popular American poets of the period: William Cullen Bryant and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

**A Highly Romanticized Interpretation of Lessing's Treatise: The Case of *The Crayon***

The second article devoted to Lessing's *Laocoon* was published in 1856 by a journal devoted to art and literature, *The Crayon*; even though anonymous, it was quite possibly written by John Durand, the son of the landscape painter Asher B. Durand and one of the magazine's editors.<sup>13</sup> Originally founded in 1855, *The Crayon* was addressed to readers interested in the visual arts and art criticism in general, and particularly to readers of John Ruskin and to those sympathetic with the sentimental vein of the Pre-Raphaelite art movement.<sup>14</sup> Both Durand and his colleague, the photographer William J. Stillman, were devoted advocates of Ruskin's thought overseas during a time when the ideas of the English writer gained unprecedented success among the American reading public: as a matter of fact, *The Crayon* was profoundly committed to the popularization of Ruskin's most notable writings through the publication of selected excerpts from, for instance, *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*, which were enthusiastically received by the readers.<sup>15</sup>

Since its beginnings, *The Crayon* was strongly influenced by the main tenets of New England Transcendentalism on one side, and by the Unitarian doctrine on the other, which went hand in hand with a profound, almost pantheistic, sensibility for nature. Both editors, especially Durand, fell under the sway of the highly romantic and religious atmosphere that permeated the middle of the Nineteenth century: a spiritual thread run through the essays

and reviews published by Durand and Stillman, which often tended to emphasize the sacred bond between God, man, and nature.<sup>16</sup> In this regard, the journal fully absorbed the new tendencies in American art and literature, which saw nature as a gate that opened upon a transcendental and invisible reality.

A section of the journal was dedicated to German philosophers and poets, and hosted a remarkable review of Lessing's *Laokoon*, introduced by the following encomiastic words:

We do not apologize to our readers for introducing another man of letters into our literary temple devoted to the Fine Arts. The more the influence of Literature upon Art is understood, the better will it be both for poets and artists. Lessing in his *Laocoon* – the same *Laocoon* from which Ruskin quotes so copiously – alludes to the saying of Simonides, that 'Painting is silent poetry, and poetry is a living picture', but, at the same time, he demolishes the brilliant commonplace of the versatile Greek, that, like Voltaire in his days, and Macaulay in ours, loved a dazzling antithesis much better than he loved truth.<sup>17</sup>

The comparison between Lessing and Ruskin is fully characteristic of Durand's rhetoric: the writer portrayed the German author as a poet guided by an indefinite mystical sentiment, which inspired him to recognize and to celebrate the existence of an inner fellowship between the arts. As commonly known, the *Laokoon* was, on the contrary, a treatise that theorized the necessary separation between the visual and the verbal arts; Durand, instead, read the treatise as a Romantic-infused work of literature, both evocative and poetic, which emphasized the sisterhood between the arts, to be interpreted, still according to Durand, as a metaphor of the necessary unity among men.

Moreover, the author advocated the existence of a spiritual affinity between Lessing and Ruskin: as he declared, 'Lessing was of the Ruskin stamp of mind. *Immensely suggestive*',<sup>18</sup> and he seized the opportunity to address those critics of Ruskin who were unable to understand the existence of a



common, spiritual thread that united men such as Ruskin and Lessing. As written by Durand,

The Ruskins and Lessings are the pioneers of Art and Literature. But the labor of our own backwoodsmen in Kentucky, compared to the labor of Ruskin in the Anglo-Saxon land, and of Lessing in the Rhine and Elbe land, is mere child's play. They stood only in danger of a neat little Indian narrow, but they stood upon a virgin soil. But look at Ruskin, with the clumsy, savage, myriad arrows of ignorance darted against his ideal aspirations, and standing upon a soil polluted by prejudice, and vitiated by time-brassened stolidity.<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion

The conditions surrounding the formation of a collective opinion on the *Laokoon* in America in the middle of the Nineteenth century are quite contradictory: on one hand we find a deeply rooted ultra-conservative account, voiced by the *American Whig Review*, while on the other, an alternative key of interpretation is provided by a completely opposite type of journal, a strong advocate of John Ruskin's thought, mostly inspired by the main tenets of Transcendentalism. The essential fact is the simultaneous emergence of two antithetical views of the *Laokoon*, brought forth by two groups of individuals committed to engaging and extending their respective cultural agendas, and who saw Lessing as the emblem of their political, cultural, and aesthetic values. The formation and promotion of a distinct image of the *Laokoon* tended to be, as I tried to demonstrate, as one process.

At the conclusion of my presentation, I would like to make clear that my intent was not to imply that Greenberg, when he conceptualized his new, American "Laocoon" at the end of the 1930s, was actively influenced by the two essays I just illustrated: quite possibly, he was not even aware of their existence. My reflection here is more of a methodological nature: every act of cultural motion and every step of migration of ideas from one continent to the other, should always be questioned and reconsidered as an act of transmission but, most of all, as an act of cultural negotiation. If Greenberg's



early criticism's most controversial and conservative aspects are viewed against this background, these elements might appear with greater clarity, even though they may remain questionable.

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## Endnotes

1. Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon," *Partisan Review* 7, no. 4 (July-August 1940): 296-310.
2. Irving Babbitt, *The New Laocoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (Boston-New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910). About the sources of Babbitt's treatise and for an analysis of its contents, see: Camilla Froio, *Verso un Laocoonte modernista: temi, immagini e contesti del Laocoonte di Clement Greenberg* (Florence: Angelo Pontecorboli Editore, 2020): 19-91. Apropos of Babbitt and the New Humanist movement, see also Thomas R. Nevin, *Irving Babbitt: An Intellectual Study* (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1984); George A. Panichas, *The Critical Legacy of Irving Babbitt: An Appreciation* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 1999).
3. See Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993): 222-225.
4. Camilla Froio, "An Unreleased Laocoon: The First Draft of Clement Greenberg's Towards a Newer Laocoon," *Getty Research Journal* 13, no. 1 (January 2021): 203-217.
5. See Clement Greenberg Papers, 1928-1995, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 950085.
6. Froio, "An Unreleased Laocoon," 203-204.
7. For a detailed analysis of the reception of Lessing's treatise in America during the Nineteenth century, see Camilla Froio, "La cultura nord-americana e il Laocoon di Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: premesse di una fortunata ricezione critica (1840-1874)," *Studi di Memofonte* 24 (2020): 23-60.
8. Madame de Staël's *On Germany* gained recognition in America mostly thanks to the reviews published on prestigious literary reviews of the time, such as the *Quarterly Review* of New York and the *Analectic Magazine* of Philadelphia. See Froio, "La cultura nord-americana e il Laocoon di Gotthold Ephraim Lessing," 25.
9. See Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New Brunswick-London: Transaction Publishers, 2006): 233-234.
10. J.D.W. (James Davenport Whelpley), "Lessing's Laocoon. The Secret of Classic Composition in Poetry, Painting, and Statuary," *American Whig Review* 37 (1851): 17-26.
11. James E. Mulqueen, "Conservatism and Criticism: The Literary Standards of American Whigs, 1845-1852," *American Literature* 41, no. 3 (Nov. 1969): 356.
12. Whelpley, "Lessing's Laocoon," 17.
13. John Durand, "Lessing," *The Crayon* 11 (1856): 325-330.
14. On this regard, see Susan P. Casteras, *English Pre-Raphaelitism and its Reception in America in the Nineteenth Century* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990); Janice Simon, "The Crayon 1855-1861: the Voice of Nature in Criticism, Poetry, and the Fine Arts," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1990); Roger B. Stein, *Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America, 1840-1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967).
15. For a thorough study of Durand's article on Lessing and the context that surrounded its publication, see Froio, "La cultura nord-americana e il Laocoon di Gotthold Ephraim Lessing," 33-37.
16. On the relationship between *The Crayon* and the emergence of landscape painting in America, including the influence of Ruskin's thought, see Marion Grzesiak, "The Crayon and

the American Landscape,” in *The Crayon and the American Landscape*, ed. Marion Grzesiak (exh. cat., Montclair: The Montclair Art Museum, 1993), 7-24.

17. Durand, “Lessing,” 325.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

# Pop Art in South America: Differences and Dissent

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## **ABSTRACT**

Pop Art was one of the most important artistic movements of the late twentieth century, being widely studied and theorized. The movement had different inflections, related to the political, economic and social conditions of the geographical spaces where it emerged.

Through the analysis of works by women artists who explored Pop visuality in Brazil, Argentina and Peru (Marta Minujín, Teresinha Soares and Teresa Burga), this paper aims to discuss how Pop Art developed in South American countries, which dealt with issues very different from those of the United States and England. In addition, the work discusses the formation and transformation of the Pop Canon in the past years.

This paper is an integral part of a more comprehensive, ongoing doctoral research project aimed at investigating women artists in Brazil, Argentina and Peru who worked with Pop visuality during the sixties and seventies, with special focus on the circulation, contact networks and professional circuits that supported their productions at the time.

## **KEYWORDS**

South American Art; Women Artists; Pop Art; Nova Figuração; Pop Canon.

The Pop Art phenomenon and the discussions about the circulation of Pop ideas and the formation of its canon gained prominence in recent years. Several publications and exhibitions focused on women artists associated to Pop Art and their marginalization, as well as on the so-called Global Pop, which sought to present Pop as a global category. These recent researches aimed at expanding the understanding of Pop by including works that had been excluded from the formal history of the movement. Despite the inclusion of women artists and artists from South American countries in these studies, there is still much to investigate and discuss about South American women artists associated with Pop Art and Nova Figuração. In this paper, I will discuss the creation and reinterpretation of the Pop canon through the inclusion of women artists and artists from South America in an expanded canon of Pop Art. I will also discuss the reception of the Pop Art movement in Argentina and Brazil. Finally, I will analyze the works of three South American women artists to better understand how Pop Art and Nova Figuração developed in the region in a unique way. .

From the mid-1980s and early 1990s, the Pop phenomenon started to be reviewed by authors such as Marco Livingstone and Hal Foster, who proposed new ways of conceptualizing the phenomenon and started to expand the geographical limits of the movement beyond the United States and England. However, this expansion only incorporated Western European and male artists. The exhibition entitled *Pop Art*, organized by Livingstone in 1991 at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, for example, included only French and German artworks in addition to the already well-known North-American and English ones. Moreover, as highlighted by Kalliopi Minioudaki (2009), the exhibition included the work of only one woman, the French Niki de Saint Phalle, among 202 works on display.

In her dissertation entitled “Women in Pop: Difference and Marginality”, Minioudaki shows how the main publications on Pop Art published in the first decade of the 2000s also remained focused mostly on male artists production. In his 2001 book entitled *Pop Art*, David McCarthy argues that “a survey of Pop artists on both sides of the Atlantic will turn up no major women within the movement.” (MCCARTHY APUD MINILOUDAKI,

2009, p.12). The book *Pop*, by Mark Francis and Hal Foster, published in 2005, also focused on the production of male artists, mentioning a few women in only two footnotes<sup>1</sup>. It was only after the 2010s, when a renewed interest in the movement took place, that a greater number of publications and exhibitions started to discuss the art of women associated with Pop, and that works by South American artists started to be included in major international exhibitions and publications about the movement.

The exhibitions *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958-1968*<sup>2</sup> and *Power Up – Female Pop Art*<sup>3</sup>, both from 2010, are considered the two first major exhibitions dedicated to examining the role of women artists in Pop. They did not include artists from South America. Nonetheless, they were important, as Sue Tate points out, to show that:

The history of interaction between popular culture and modern art, and *Pop Art* itself, is an important aspect of our time and the abandonment of the pop arena to a monocular, male vision and the occlusion of women's affective experience of mass culture is symptomatic of a deep and damaging gender imbalance in our culture that needs addressing. (TATE, 2010, p. 200).

As Kalliopi Minioudaki highlights, despite the obstacles encountered at their time, some women artists had visibility, “though partially and inconsistently” (MINIOUDAKI, 2009, p.30), within the Pop Art scene. Therefore, it was in the construction and consolidation of the Pop canon that the exclusion of women artists really asserted itself, causing them to be forgotten in subsequent decades.

In 2015, two major exhibitions presented Pop Art as a global category: *The World Goes Pop* and *International Pop*<sup>4</sup>. Both displayed works by women artists and by South American artists. *The World Goes Pop* included fourteen artists from Brazil and twelve from Argentina. Among the fourteen Brazilians in the exhibition, only two were women<sup>5</sup>, and among the twelve Argentinian, only three were women<sup>6</sup>. But in *International Pop* the numbers were different. Although among the nine artists from Brazil included in the exhibition only three were women<sup>7</sup>, the other South American countries

contemplated (Argentina, Peru and Colombia) were represented only by women artists<sup>8</sup>.

It's important to look at these numbers to reflect on who was and who was not included in Pop reinterpretations, and how new research and exhibitions have redesigned the canon. Recent studies have revealed the need for a deeper investigation of the works and trajectories of South-American women artists. Furthermore, it alerts us to the necessity of looking for other women associated with Pop Art and Nova Figuração that were not yet acknowledged. The problem of replacing an old canon by a new one is that artists are still left out as we standardize the analyses. That is why it is important, as pointed out by feminist art historians such as Griselda Pollock, not only to expand the canons, but also to question the formations of the canons, and to take the local contexts of the productions into consideration.

To discuss Pop artworks from Brazil and Argentina, for example, we must consider how Pop Art as a term and as an artistic concept was received in these spaces, and the specificities of these works. As Rodrigo Alonso (2012) points out, Pop and Nova Figuração artists from South American countries dealt with very different contexts, when compared with those of North America and England. He observes that the very notion “popular”, which gives its name to the pop phenomenon, was different in these spaces. In the United States and England, the word “popular” became related to capitalist mass culture of production and consumption, and no longer to tradition and popular culture. In South American countries, however, that had a different economic reality and industrialization process from those of the United States and Europe, the transformation of this notion of the “popular” is incomplete.

(...) it is clear that the meaning of popular implicit in the acronym “pop” resonates in different ways in the north and south of the planet. If in England and the United States it is identified almost without conflict with the imaginary of the thriving mass cultural industry, in South America the gap between the exaggeration of the consumer media and the political and socioeconomic realities of its inhabitants gives rise to a phenomena of

displacement that promotes from parodic deviations to critical resistance (ALONSO, 2012, s/n).

Alonso also emphasizes that the cultural and political contexts of Brazil and Argentina, which were dealing with dictatorships and severe control of public information, recent expansion of television, and high rates of illiteracy, created artworks that were different from those of the canonical pop. In Brazil, for example, the artworks from the 1960s that are usually associated with Pop Art were known in the country as part of the movement Nova Figuração. There was a resistance on the part of Brazilian artists and critics to use the term Pop to characterize the works made in the country. As Claudia Calirman points out, artists such as Rubens Gerchman and Antonio Dias, while recognizing the importance of the output of some Pop artists, tried to make it clear that they had different motivations:

It is time to put an end to this nonsensical perception that we have been influenced by U.S. Pop art. A few U.S. Pop artists such as Larry Rivers, Jasper Johns, and Oldenburg are important for us, indeed, in the sense that they revealed the potential use of new materials and new subject matters; however, their influence has been exerted individually, not as a group or school (GERCHMAN APUD CALIRMAN, 2015, p. 120).

The artist Anna Maria Maiolino also addressed the subject, stating that the desire of the artists at that time was “to develop an autonomous national art, far removed from external patterns and models. Unlike American Pop art, in Brazil the incorporation of the popular was linked to an interest in everything political and social. We dreamt of a free and autonomous Latin America” (MAIOLINO APUD CALIRMAN, 2015, p. 120).

In Argentina, however, the situation was somewhat different. While in Brazil the effort in general was to create concepts and theories that distanced themselves from Pop, in Argentina critics, curators and even the media focused on defining Pop Art. Oscar Masotta and Jorge Romero Brest were among the main intellectuals to theorize Pop Art in the country. Masotta gave



lectures on Pop Art at the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, and published in 1967 the book *El Pop Art*. As Maria Fernanda Pinta points out, Massota “studied pop as an exemplary reflective and critical art from in which it is possible to see the mediations of languages and the social structures in the relationship between man and the world and, at the same time, as a catalyst for the historical change in taste” (PINTA, 2015, p.01). Masotta, however, will make some distinctions between Pop produced in the US and Argentine works, and will define the production of some Argentine artists such as Juan Stopanni as *Camp*, or *Imajneros*. Romero Brest, on the other hand, incorporated the term “Argentine Pop Art” to describe the works of several artists from Argentina, pointing out differences between these works and those made in other spaces:

in Argentina, pop art was at first more similar to pop in Europe than in the United States, but the consequences were different. In any case, the Americans and the others have allowed the freest creations of the present time, liberating us from the hydra called rhetoric and bringing art closer to life. (BREST, 2007, p.14)

Among the artists working with Pop Art and Nova Figuração in South American countries, several were women. Some of them, like the Peruvian Teresa Burga and the Brazilian Teresinha Soares, saw their works marginalized for decades. When they received attention, it was from an individual perspective. There are few studies that approach these works as a collective, considering the particular conjunctures derived from their gender condition. By adopting this perspective, it is possible to note that Pop and Nova Figuração works by women artists from South America were frequently discussing female subjectivity and sexuality, as well as denouncing the objectification of women by the media and by society. Another commonality were artworks that violated the canvas boundaries, encouraging the public to participate, a remarkable characteristic of the South American productions of the period. Such characteristics can be seen in works of the Argentinian Marta Minujín, the Brazilian Teresinha Soares and the Peruvian Teresa Burga. The work *¡Revuélquese y viva!* (Wallow and live!), was created by Marta

Minujín in 1964. The artist, who lives and works in Argentina, was born in Buenos Aires in 1943. She is one of the most important Pop artists in Argentina and has achieved international recognition. *¡Revuélquese y viva!* was built in fabric filled with foam and painted in strong colors that formed the stripes that were very common in mattresses of that time.



**Fig. 1.** Marta Minujín, *¡Revuélquese y viva!*, 1964. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. Private collection.

The artwork *Ela me deu bola (Camas)* (She hit on me (Beds)), from 1970, was created by Teresinha Soares, a Brazilian artist born in Minas Gerais, who worked actively in the 1960s and 1970s. She quit her career in the visual arts in 1976, and her works have circulated very little in these forty years that separate the end of her career and its resuming in the last years. Three wooden beds put side by side composed the work *Ela me deu bola (Camas)*. The bedframes have flaps that move and, when closed, form naked female

silhouettes in provocative poses. In the lower part of the flaps there are images of Brazilian football idols, such as Pelé.

Teresa Burga, a Peruvian artist also active in the 60s and 70s, created *Untitled*. She quit her career in the visual arts in 1981 due to “the difficulty in obtaining financial support for her initiatives, as well as the lack of institutional interest in her experimental methodologies” (LÓPEZ, 2014, p. 48). Her works were not exhibited from from 1981 to the beginning of the 2000s, when Latin American curators reassessed them. In her 1967 solo exhibition *Objetos* (Objects) organized at the *Cultura y Libertad Gallery*, she presented an environment that represented a bedroom. The room was assembled with a bed placed in the center of the space, with a half-naked woman painted on the bedhead, pillows and sheet.



**Fig. 2.** Teresinha Soares, *Ela me deu bola (Camas)*, 1970. Painted wooden bed frames, wooden panels and mattresses. Dimensions variable/Destroyed work. ©Teresinha Soares.



**Fig. 3.** Teresa Burga, *Untitled*, 1967. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. Work restored in 2007. Photo: Lorenzo Pusterla.  
©Teresa Burga and Galerie Barbara Thumm.

The work presented bright colors and simplified, flattened figures, focusing on corporality and encouraging the participation of the public. Cacilda Teixeira da Costa and Maria José Herrera defined these characteristics as typical for Pop art productions from Brazil, Argentina and Peru. The three works use beds and mattresses as support for the representation of the body, and as pretext for public participation. As Maria José Herrera observes:

the invitation to participate aimed at expanding the traditional concept of contemplation of the work of art. To participate meant, in a way, to retrace the artist's experience and thus extend the experiential field of the contemplator, who became an active participant (HERRERA, 2015, p.12).

It is important to emphasize that the body was not being investigated only by women artists or South American artists. In the 1960s, as Andrea Giunta (2018) observes, new ways of representing the body emerged and, along with them, "a radical iconographic turn away from established traditions" (GIUNTA, 2018, 29). In the context of discussions on sexuality and on the different systems body control addressed, for example, by Michel Foucault and psychoanalysis, the body "affected by stereotypes, or even by taboos linked to patriarchal structures of heterosexual and normative modernism, came to be intensely questioned and investigated" (GIUNTA, 2018, 29). Although artists from different countries investigated the body, in the work of South American artists it appeared as a means of showcasing censorship, torture and repression by military dictatorships. For many women artists the body frequently stands for female sexuality and for the objectification of women by the mass media.

Although in *¡Revuélquese y viva!*, Minujín avoids a direct representation of the body as we see in Burga's and Soares' beds, the volumes coming out of the mattresses refer to body members and could allude, according to Maria José Herrera, to "bodies during a sexual act". Furthermore, the red entrance of the installation alluded to the shape of a vagina. Through this opening, the public penetrated the installation, and could lie down and interact in a space of intimacy. They were invited, as the title of the work suggests, to wallow and have fun. The installation also had background music, which contributed to the atmosphere of intimacy and seduction. The work was created as a space for the affirmation of sexual freedom, advocating a blameless exploration of desire, eroticism, and sexuality.

In Burga's work, the woman lying on the bed with her arms touching the floor seems to be dead. She is not being simply represented on the bed, she is herself the bed, the pillow, the sheet. She appears dissolved in the furniture and in the architecture, as a decorative object and a fetish to be used to satisfy the man's desire. The woman's half-naked body stretched out on the bed does not appear as an image of affirmation of female sexuality and pleasure, as in Minujín's work, but as a passive and subjected body, in a criticism of the invisibilization of women and their imprisonment to the

domestic sphere. The house is not represented as a space of protection and pleasure, but of repression and submission. The house “as a place where material goods were put on display, sanctioning the status of the owner” (FRIGERI, 2018, p. 97), including the woman's body among these goods.

Teresinha Soares also used the bed and the female body as a tool to discuss the objectification of women and accepted notions of femininity. In the work *Ela me deu bola (Camas)*, the bedframes with flaps represent the world of soccer on one side, considered at that time as an exclusively male sport, with its idols celebrated as national heroes. The other side of the flaps shows the hyper sexualized and objectified female body, in sensual poses. This representation of sport and the female body relates to the image of Brazil sold abroad: Brazilian football, with its famous players, and the stereotyped image of erotic Brazilian woman, with her advertised and commercialized body. The work invited the public to lie down on the bed and make contact with the other, taking part themselves in the seduction game.

Works by Marta Minujín, Teresa Burga and Teresinha Soares were extremely important in the context of the avant-garde at that time, blurring the borders between high and low culture and discussing the impact of mass communication on individual, mainly women's, lives. Working in a political context marked by repression and conservatism, these artists produced extremely powerful works that are still relevant. They help us think about society, politics and the struggle of women not only in the 60s but also in the present. By proposing an investigation of South American artists associated with Pop art poorly recognized until the present, this paper reaffirms the constant need to expand the art historic canon and question the mechanisms through which several productions were marginalized.

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## Endnotes

1. C.f. MINIOUDAKI, Kalliopi. *Women in Pop: Difference and Marginality*. New York: New York University, 2009.
2. The exhibition *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958-1968* was curated by Sid Sachs at the *Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery* of the *University of the Arts* of Philadelphia. It was also exhibited at the *Brooklyn Museum* (New York) and at the *Tufts University Art Galleries* (Medford, Massachusetts).
3. The exhibition *Power Up – Female Pop Art* was curated by Angela Stief at the *Kunsthalle Wien* (Vienna). It was also exhibited at the *Phoenix Art/Stiftung Falckenberg* (Hamburg) and at the *Städtische Galerie* (Bietigheim-Bissingen, Germany).
4. The exhibition *The World Goes Pop* was curated by Jessica Morgan and Flavia Frigeri at the Tate Modern, in 2015. *International Pop* was curated by Darsie Alexander and Bartholomew Ryan at the *Walker Art Center, Minneapolis*, in 2015. It was also exhibited at the *Dallas Museum of Art* and the *Philadelphia Museum of Art*.
5. Wanda Pimentel and Anna Maria Maiolino.
6. Marta Mijunín, Delia Cancela and Dalila Puzzovio.
7. Anna Maria Maiolino, Teresinha Soares and Romanita Disconzi.
8. The Argentines Marta Minujín and Delia Cancela, the Peruvian Teresa Burga and the Colombian Beatriz González.

# Norms in Motion: Migration of Ideas Between the Italic and Iberian Peninsula Through the Treatises of Gabriele Paleotti and Francisco Pacheco

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## **ABSTRACT**

The debates about Christian images were intensified by the 16th-century Schism, which split the Church of the East into the Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism in its various forms. The Roman Church needed to affirm the legitimacy of the use of images. The question of image was the subject of discussion only during the last session of the Council of Trent in December 1563. In this scenario we highlight the work of Gabriele Paleotti, Cardinal and Archbishop of Bologna who had actively participated in the sessions of the Council. In 1582, Paleotti published the first version of his treatise *Discourse intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*. The art theory produced from the Council has migrated to other regions of Europe, having great assimilation in the Iberian Peninsula. The treatise tradition in Spain took a severe character of attempted iconographic control through the *Arte de la Pintura* by the painter and writer Francisco Pacheco published in 1649. This essay seeks to present the relations between *Discourse intorno alle immagini sacre and profane* (1582) by Italian Gabriele Paleotti and *Arte de la Pintura* (1649) by Spanish Francisco Pacheco in the context of the migration of ideas in Europe marked by religious reforms.

## **KEYWORDS**

Council of Trent; Sacred Images; Treatises; Gabriele Paleotti; Francisco Pacheco.



The debates about Christian images were intensified by the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Schism, which split the Church of the East into the Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism in its various forms. In 1517, Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* were affixed to the doors of Wittenberg Abbey, questioning above all the practices regarding plenary indulgencies by the Roman Church. Other motivations that resulted in the Reformation include important debates about the Eucharist and about ecclesiastical celibacy, but also the condemnation of the cult of images, which is the subject of this paper. After the Protestant Reformation, religious art and church decorations were therefore generally condemned in officially protestant regions, to the point of causing outbreaks of iconoclastic acts, such as those of Wittenberg in 1520.

The Roman Church responded to this new scenario with the convocation of the Council of Trent in 1545, which would last until 1563, due to its many interruptions. It was imperative for the Church to defend its dogmas, undertake an internal reformation, fight so called 'protestant heresy', and reaffirm the legitimacy of its religious use of images.

Since Italy had not been as severely hit by waves of iconoclasm as other European regions, religious art was not, at first, of the greatest concern for the Roman Church. As a result, it was not until the last session of the Council in December 1563 that religious images were debated. The decree approved by that session reaffirmed the legitimacy of the production and use of Christian images against the recent accusations by the Protestants, as long as certain criteria were observed. The Council of Trent, however, did not propose a great many changes in relation to what had been previously established by the Second Council of Nicaea in 787.

One of the most important topics of the Tridentine debates about images was reaffirming their legitimacy and clarifying that they ought not to be the object of adoration or superstitious uses. According to the Council's decrees:

[...] the images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints, are to be had and retained particularly in temples, and that due honour and veneration are to be given them; not that any divinity, or virtue, is believed to be in them,

on account of which they are to be worshipped; or that anything is to be asked of them; or, that trust is to be reposed in images, as was of old done by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols; but because the honour which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which those images represent.<sup>1</sup>

Within the Tridentine Church, images served the purposes of inciting faith and piety, remembering the life of Jesus and the saints, and teaching the Scriptures. This takes us to a crucial point of the internal reformation of the Church: the pedagogical function of images.

The Tridentine Church rescued the pedagogical function of images as a means of legitimising them, looking back at the authoritative concept by Pope Gregory I of the image as the *Bible of the illiterate*. This meant that, in order to effectively teach Christian stories, their representations should be clear, decorous, and free of elements that could lead to wrong interpretations of the Scriptures. The Church could thus protect itself from the accusations made by the Protestants regarding the adequacy of its images. As per the decrees of the Council:

[...] if any abuses have crept in amongst these holy and salutary observances, the holy Synod ardently desires that they be utterly abolished; in such wise that no images, (suggestive) of false doctrine, and furnishing occasion of dangerous error to the uneducated, be set up. And if at times, when expedient for the unlettered people; it happen that the facts and narratives of sacred Scripture are portrayed and represented; the people shall be taught, that not thereby is the Divinity represented, as though it could be seen by the eyes of the body, or be portrayed by colours or figures.<sup>2</sup>

As we can observe, their deliberations regarding images were objective and generalised, mostly repeating those of the Second Council of Nicaea. While they reaffirm the presence of images in the church, establishing their functions and preventing possible abuses, the decrees do not specify which heresies and abuses could come out of the improper use of images or the incorrect iconography.

With the exception of some more extreme cases, Rome did not enforce specific regulations for the arts as it had done for literary production with its *Index librorum prohibitorum*, but left to the bishops the responsibility of controlling and guiding the use of images in their dioceses. According to Paolo Prodi, this resulted in different regulations for the images in each region:

The responsibility assigned by the Council of Trent to the bishops, the absence of any norms emanating subsequently from Rome for them to implement, and the lack of any ecclesiastical jurisdiction at all regulating the figurative arts (in contrast to the regulation of books and publishing through the *Index librorum prohibitorum* and the establishment at Rome of a cardinalatial congregation to run it) compel us at this point to narrow our focus to individual dioceses. The way the bishops applied the Tridentine decree could vary widely from place to place.<sup>3</sup>

As a result, clerics, theologians, and other intellectuals took charge of expanding the Tridentine deliberations in treatises that were, in practice, true manuals for the figurative arts after the Council of Trent. As stated by Ruth Noyes,

Attesting to the anxiety and consequence that religious and artistic constituencies attached to image-related issues left unresolved by Trent is a veritable explosion of treatises on art theory and reform published during the years that followed the council.<sup>4</sup>

Works of this kind are numerous in artistic literature, and their most paradigmatic examples are perhaps *Dialogo degli errori della pittura*, written by Giovanni Andrea Gillio and published the year after the conclusion of the Council of Trent; *De Picturis et Imaginibus Sacris*, by Johannes Molanus; *Instructionum fabricate et suppelletilis ecclesiasticis*, by the archbishop of Milan, Carlo Borromeo; *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*, by the archbishop of Bologna, Gabriele Paleotii; and *De Pictura Sacra*, by Federico Borromeo. In the Iberian Peninsula, it is also worth mentioning *Arte*

*de la Pintura*, by Francisco Pacheco, and *El pintor Christiano y erudito*, by Juan Interián de Ayala.

For David Freedberg, the decrees of the Council of Trent were “*taken up by most of the writers in the later half of the sixteenth century, including non-ecclesiastical theorists such as Lomazzo*”<sup>5</sup>. I would like to add to this that the reverberation of conciliar decrees also sprawled beyond the sixteenth century, especially in the Spanish context.

In the case of Italy, I mentioned the role of Gabriele Paleotti, for he was the archbishop of Bologna and a cardinal, who had actively taken part in the sessions of the Council of Trent. It is notable that in 1579 he recounted in a letter to the archbishop of Milan and treatise author Carlo Borromeo that he had read Molanus’s treatise and wanted to be aware of the situation in Milan<sup>6</sup>. This account testifies not only to Paleotti’s own awareness of the debate about images in different European regions, but also to how those ideas were circulating between them.

A first version of his treatise *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane* was published in 1582, consisting of two volumes in vernacular language and an index for three following ones, which he was writing but were later destroyed in a fire before they could be published. In 1594, the circulation of this work in Europe was made possible by its publication in Latin in Ingolstadt.

The first volume paves the ground for the treatise as a whole, by addressing more general topics in relation to images, such as their origin and legitimacy, or the difference between sacred and profane images. The second volume expatiates on the different abuses commonly found in sacred and profane figurative arts, such as scandalous, heretical, or apocryphal images. According to Paolo Prodi, the underlying concept of this book is that ‘all images are a divine expression, whereas evil arises only out of how they are used’. The unpublished third volume was meant to be about lascivious and indecent images, while the fourth one would have contained guidance on how to depict various subjects. The final volume would have consisted of instructions and advice for clerics, commissioners, and artists, so as to

stimulate the production of art in accordance with Catholic sensibilities during the Reformation.

Some points of Paleotti's treatise are particularly useful for our debate. In the very first chapter of Book One, where its intentions are explained, his defence of images is in line with the Tridentine precepts. From the premise that images are originally sacred but potentially corruptible through their misuse, he concludes that the Catholic stance on them could avoid what he considered to be two extremes: the pagan adoration of images and their denial by the Jewish, Muslim and Protestant religions.

[...] we can perceive a spectrum with two extremes and a middle. At one extreme stands the pagan, attributing more to image than he ought, adoring them as God. At the other extreme stands the heretic and other like him, suppressing images to excess, indeed getting rid of them altogether. At the midpoint stands the Catholic Christian, who does not banish images but does not adore them as divine things either. Gazing at an image, the mere resemblance of the prototype, the Catholic moderates his veneration to a suitable standard and to the prescriptions of the sacred canons and councils.<sup>2</sup>

These considerations are followed by Paleotti's acknowledgment that Catholic images had nevertheless been frequently abused, compelling him to propose a reformation of images and their uses in his treatise.

Such a reformation should be supported by a reflection on the importance and functions of images in the heart of Tridentine Catholicism. Grounded on humanistic knowledge and on the authoritative arguments of John of Damascus and Saint Gregory, Paleotti's argument emphasises the didactic function of images, based on the idea that, like rhetoric and written text, they should have the triple purpose of teaching, delighting, and moving. Images, however, could reach a larger audience, as they could also be understood by the illiterate and the ignorant. In the fifth paragraph of Book One, Paleotti says:

Let us add, however, that although the end may appear to be the same for both, the effect that issues from this end turns out to be much broader, and to propagate much more rapidly, with pictures than with books, at any rate when pictures can express what books contain, for the reason that books are read only by the intelligent, who are a minority, whereas pictures speak universally to persons of every sort.<sup>8</sup>

The Catholic painter had, in consequence, a greater responsibility, for their works would be 'read' by a wider variety of people.

This may serve for now as a reminder to Christian painters to remember that they are composing books for the people, to read in public for everyone's salvation, and to struggle and strive all the more to form images that correspond to such a lofty and glorious goal.<sup>9</sup>

This helps us understand the importance given by Paleotti to an intensive reformation of images, which he then judged to be widely abused and misused.

Paleotti starts his second volume by blaming the Demon for the abuses that permeated the figurative arts of his time. Unable to eliminate sacred images, the Demon would have befouled the arts so that they would serve Evil rather than Goodness, taking advantage of their powerful teaching capabilities to pervert its effects in Christianity. In Paleotti's own words, "*He cannot make images cease to exist, but at least he injects into them so many abuses that images can do more harm than good, if steps are not taken.*"<sup>10</sup> The author ends the first chapter wishing that painters could perceive the Demon's strategies and redirect their work to the original, pure state in which the arts had been conceived. This reinforces what he had discussed in the first volume, where he affirms that images are originally sacred, but corruptible. It is clear that Paleotti believed in the effectiveness of his treatise as an instrument for the restoration of the purity of images.

Supported by the homology between written text and image – extensively evoked by painting theory – Paleotti's treatise defended that what was appropriate for a book could also be appropriately depicted in an image.

Consequently, it proposed that the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, created by the Council of Trent to control written production, could also be used as a guideline to produce images. Like books, some images should be condemned by Christian law, whereas others should be tolerated despite their inadequacy.

When reading Paleotti's treatise, one notices how he was trying to create the grounds for the regulation of both the production and use of images. It is important to bear in mind, however, that he did not initially intend those regulations to be applied universally, in every European city, but only in Bologna or, at most, as a model for other clerics who wished to develop their own regulations for their dioceses. To quote Paleotti's own words:

Let us recall that this treatise, by order of monsignor our illustrious bishop, has been composed for use by the people of his city and diocese. Hence, just as he cannot prescribe regulations for other places, he correspondingly has no intention of taxing their customs or playing the censor of usages they may have that differ from those of Bologna. Nor indeed is it his intention to ascribe everything that may be reprehended in this book to mortal sin on the part of his people. He means to leave everything under the same prohibitions and the same penalties of mortal sin, or venial sin, or simple imperfection, already imposed on them by the sacred canons, in the knowledge that, just as there are degrees of human error, which can be graver or lighter, the defects in painting and sculpture range from major to minor.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of Paleotti's diplomacy and his zeal to avoid imposing his theories outside his own diocese, he displayed some pessimism at the end of his life, when little had been done thirty years after the Council of Trent to truly reform the arts and prevent the abuses regarding the production and use of images. According to Prodi, not long before his death, Paleotti issued a request to the ecclesiastical authorities that universal precepts should be established to control the use of images or even that an *Index* should be created at the example of *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*<sup>12</sup>.



Several elements of his treatise were assimilated in the Spanish context, notably through the treatise written by Francisco Pacheco, testifying to a true migration of ideas between different European regions.

We cannot deny that, even before the Council of Trent, there was indeed a higher concern in Spain about the decorum of sacred images. According to Juan González García, the establishment of the Tribunal of the Holy Office in 1478 had created the ‘veedor’, a person who was in charge of ‘[...] *inspecting and approving religious works destined to public display and removing or correcting the dishonest, heterodoxic, uncommon or poor-quality ones*’.<sup>13</sup>

With the Council of Trent, the attention given to religious images in Spain naturally increased. According to González García,

In the end, it was the bishoprics and not the republics that, following the pastoral normative from Trent, enforced the inquisitorial censorship with the ecclesiastical *visitadores*. The role of such surveyors was not only that of inspecting the quality and themes of images – by modifying costumes, reverting inappropriate restorations and changes, expurgating figures and inscriptions, and rethinking their display in the temple – but also that of listing and categorising objects belonging to the diocese, in order to ascertain their existence, their loan, or in the worst case, their loss. The opportune moment for this task was usually the pastoral visit, an inspection of the spiritual and material state of the towns that depended on the prelate, which had to be undertaken by the bishop himself or by an assigned *visitador*, should he not be able to do it. The pastoral consisted in accessing each church, hermitage, or chapel, one by one, and reviewing their altars.<sup>14</sup>

The resolutions of the Council of Trent about sacred images were thus reaffirmed in Spanish territories through a series of regional Councils and Synods, whose decisions were put into practice by *visitadores*, as has been observed by González García. However, the detailing of such precepts was, to the example of Italy, developed by writers in treatises of art. Indeed, the Spanish treatise tradition after the Council of Trent is marked by attempts at

a severe iconographic control, notably in the case of the painter and treatise author Francisco Pacheco.

Pacheco is known for having been the master and father-in-law of Diego Velázquez, and for having conducted a supposed art 'Academy' in Sevilla. His 'Academy', in fact, consisted of more informal reunions of clerics, artists, and scholars of his circle who contributed to his work, rather than an institutionalised school. In this case, the contribution of members of the clergy, especially the Jesuits, to Pacheco's writings is certainly the most notable. According to Cañedo-Argüelles, '*Pacheco is the prototype of the post-conciliar Catholic painter who accepts and seeks the collaboration of theologians in his work*<sup>15</sup>. For this paper, we should look with a particular interest at his treatise *Arte de la Pintura*, written in 1638 and published posthumously in 1649.

In *Arte de la Pintura*, his knowledge of texts of the classical era is displayed mainly through second-hand quotations from ecclesiastical writers and Italian treatises from the fifteenth century onwards, with a clear affiliation with the image theory of the Counter-Reformation. According to Bonaventura Bassegoda i Hugas, '*Pacheco knew very well everything that could be read about painting up to January 1638*<sup>16</sup>. We should highlight his knowledge of the treatises written by Dolce, Molanus and Paleotti, whom he quotes numerous times. One of the most remarkable traits of his writings is therefore his observance of the directives stipulated by the church since the Council of Trent and a desire to put them into practice in painting.

The treatise is divided into three volumes. *Book I* is devoted to the definition of painting as a liberal art, its origin, and its antiquity; the superiority of painting in relation to sculpture; the uses and functions of painting in the Catholic church. *Book II* is devoted to the parts that compose painting, namely decorum, drawing, proportion, and colour. Lastly, *Book III* addresses the material, formal and iconographic practices of painting, with an important section, called '*Adiciones a algunas imágenes*', consisting of iconographic recommendations. I would like to highlight some points of the book which are of particular interest to this paper.

In the ninth chapter of *Book I*, Pacheco attests to the functions of painting and its use by the Church in accordance with the ideals of the Counter-Reformation, quoting a word-to-word translation of Paleotti's treatise. For Pacheco, the supreme purpose of painting was to serve the worship of God, teaching and remembering divine things. One of the most important roles of the painter would be that of guiding the people to religion, through his painting, for an image could more efficiently move and touch the spirit than speech. Pacheco ensured in this manner the importance of the use of images by the Church, supported by the discourse of priests, theologians and treatise writers. He translates into Spanish a passage of Paleotti's *Discorso* that says:

[...] painting, which had the original purpose of resembling what it imitates, now takes, as an act of virtue, a new and rich surcoat; besides resembling, it ascends to a supreme purpose, gazing at the eternal glory; and, endeavouring to remove men from vice, it compels them to the true worship of Our Lord.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the iconography, in *Book III* Pacheco seems to have taken further what Paleotti never managed to achieve in his unfinished works. According to Bonaventura Bassegoda I Hugas:

This enunciated but non-written treatise by Paleotti is the only possible model for Pacheco's discourse, which derives from the epistolary manner as a justification for a concrete painting – like an erudite ekphrasis – to reach the *Tractatus*.<sup>18</sup>

Since the eleventh chapter of *Book III*, Pacheco devotes himself to detailed recommendations for an appropriate and decorous pictorial depiction of important passages of the Scriptures, the life of the Virgin and of Christ, and the iconography of the saints. These precepts are significantly more detailed than the general recommendations of Paleotti, perhaps because Pacheco was motivated by his practical experience as a painter.

There is, however, no concrete evidence of the assimilation of the iconographic recommendations from *Arte de la Pintura* in Spanish or even

Sevillian workshops. The iconographic instructions of the treatise should not be taken as orthodox norms which were to be severely applied through control or censorship of the images, even if Pacheco's desire to approach the Inquisition is considered. It is known that on the seventh of March 1618, the Inquisition conceded him a commission to '*view and visit paintings of sacred things that were in tents and public places*'<sup>19</sup>, but according to Bassegoda i Hugas little is known about the activities that effectively took place when he occupied that position:

[...] nothing is known of the so called 'commission', nor are any prosecutions or reprimands to painters known in relation to iconography. We can deduce, consequently, that this title was simply an honorific title without any concrete repercussions in Sevillian painting at the time. We do not have any concrete data to suppose that the orthodoxy of the production of images was threatened, or that a singular vigilance had been necessary.<sup>20</sup>

We can conclude, especially after the comparison between the treatises of Gabrielle Paleotti and Francisco Pacheco, that the normative for the image production in the Tridentine context was in movement. Even if the Council of Trent itself had not defined any unified directives for the production of images, the principal treatises circulated and were assimilated in different regions of Catholic Europe.

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# “Heart Mysteries There” — Notes on the Stendhal Syndrome

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## **ABSTRACT**

A recent cardiovascular event at the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence in December 2018 involving an elderly Tuscan male gathered significant media attention, being promptly reported as another case of the so-called Stendhal syndrome. The victim was in the Botticelli room when he lost consciousness, purportedly gazing at the *Birth of Venus*. Medical support was made immediately available, assuring the patient’s survival. Taking the 2018 incident as a case study, this paper addresses the emergence of the Stendhal syndrome (as defined by the Florentine psychiatrist Graziella Magherini from the 1970s onwards) and similar worldwide syndromes, such as the Jerusalem, Paris, India, and Washington syndromes. Their congeniality and coevality favor their understanding as a set of interconnected phenomena made possible partly by the rise of global tourism and associated aesthetic-religious anxieties, partly by the migration of ideas concerning artistic experience in extremis. While media coverage and most art historical writings have discussed the Stendhal syndrome as a quizzical phenomenon (one which serves more or less to justify the belief in the “power of art”), my purpose in this paper is to question the etiological specificity of the Stendhal syndrome and, therefore, its appellation as such; and raise questions about the fraught connection between health-related events caused by artworks and the aesthetic experience.

## **KEYWORDS**

Stendhal Syndrome; Stendhal; Art Appreciation; Embodied Aesthetics; Art Theory.



In December 2018, an elderly Florentine man suffered a sudden cardiac arrest in front of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* at the Uffizi, and everyone was ready to cry wolf. Fast-paced news coverage, amped up by social media, quickly settled on the cause of the incident: clearly, it must have been another case of the Stendhal syndrome, that quizzical psychosomatic condition triggered by intense exposure to exceptional art<sup>4</sup>. What else, if not the vague notion that artworks of great beauty and value have some elusive power over their beholders, could have broken the man's heart?



**Fig. 1.** Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, ca. 1485, tempera on canvas, 185.5 x 285.5 cm, Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

When asked for his thoughts regarding the incident, the director of the Uffizi, Eike Schmidt, replied somewhat circumspectly. He began equivocating, stating that he was not a doctor and therefore unqualified to opine on the matter; but then he added that, to the best of his knowledge, “visiting a museum like [the Uffizi], which is so full of

masterpieces, can certainly cause emotional, psychological, and even physical stress.” As a matter of fact, remarked Schmidt, such incidents were not that unusual at his institution—not so long ago, for instance, someone had fainted in front of Caravaggio’s *Medusa*<sup>2</sup>. Perhaps a warning sign to visitors to the Uffizi is in order as a marketing tool? Jests aside, the gist of what the art expert is saying correlates with the other two appellations for the Stendhal syndrome, that of Florence syndrome and hyperkulturemia<sup>3</sup>. By referring to the Tuscan capital, the former resounds with Schmidt’s assumption that a highly charged artistic environment can have a disturbing effect on visitors. The latter, hyperkulturemia, roughly translatable as “excess of culture in the blood,” implies that cases of extreme psychosomatic reactions to aesthetic experience have something to do with the twin notions of measure and intemperance. Too much art and culture, the experience of a room “so full of masterpieces,” and the unwary museumgoer can go kaput.

The begged question here may well be: “if so, why?” If indeed the direct experience of powerful artistic environments can send the human sensorium into overdrive and wreak havoc on the beholder’s psychosomatic structure, how does that occur in neuroscientific terms, and under what conditions? A verdict here is difficult to come by<sup>4</sup>. And mainly beyond the pale of this paper. What is perhaps of greater interest to us—“us” in the humanistic side of the equation—is the extent to which the Uffizi cardiac arrest seems to have exhumed a widespread soteriological hope in contemporary aesthetics: the faith that in an increasingly digitalized visual culture, in which sensory dissociation has become the unspoken norm, there is still room for heartfelt sympathy between the situated observer and the analog artwork. After all, is it not possible that the acute psychotic attacks attributed to the Stendhal syndrome result from

late-twentieth-century desiderata for self-revelation rooted in early nineteenth-century extreme sentimentalism?

This condition, let us not forget, is named after the French writer who purportedly experienced dramatic dizziness and extreme pleasure when visiting Volterrano's *Sybils* in the Santa Croce during a brief visit to Florence. Stendhal's is a fascinating, performative account, intertwining vision and discourse like a double helix spinning around his body. As such, it demands a close reading.



**Fig. 2.** Baldassare Franceschini (Il Volterrano), *Incoronazione della Vergine e Sibille*, 1680-1683, fresco, Florence, Santa Croce (Niccolini Chapel).

### Magherini's Stendhal Syndrome

Says Stendhal in the revised edition of *Rome, Naples et Florence*, the memoir of his Italian travels published in 1826, that Volterrano's frescos gave him "the most vivid pleasure that he had ever felt with painting." Admittedly, the very idea of being in Florence, close to the great men whose tomb he had come to visit, had already put him in a "sort of ecstasy." Nevertheless, "absorbed by the contemplation of sublime beauty, [he] could see [Volterrano's *Sybils*] up close, [he] could touch it, so to say. [He] had arrived at that emotional moment where one encounters the celestial sensations offered by the fine arts and passionate sentiments." Leaving Santa Croce, Stendhal felt that his heart was beating way too fast, that his vitality had deserted him, that he trod around afraid of falling. It was only by sitting on a bench in Piazza Santa Croce and re-reading some verses by Ugo Foscolo that the Frenchman was able to recover his bearings. Two days later, a fully recovered Stendhal reminisced about the incident in a sassy fashion. One is happier, he wrote, to have a heart like his than to be a member of the upper classes—"il vaut mieux, pour le bonheur, me disais-je, avoir le cœur ainsi fait que le cordon bleu."<sup>5</sup>

What I find immediately striking in Stendhal's account is a certain disregard for the source of the experience. We are informed that what set off the disturbing psychosomatic chain reaction are the Santa Croce's *Sibyls*, but there is not much in terms of ekphrastic excitement. (As a matter of fact, the reader is left unsure of what exactly in the artworks caused such aesthetic rapture in him.) The object of the gaze, the gazee, is merely a spur, almost an afterthought. It can be argued that this interest in the embodied effects of the artistic experience is itself part of the ekphrastic tradition: from Pseudo-Lucian's fictional account of the rape of Praxiteles' Cnidian Aphrodite in the early third century BCE, to Master Gregory's

enthralment by a statue of Venus in mid-twelfth-century Rome, up to Vasari's telling of lascivious reactions to a Saint Sebastian by Fra Bartolommeo in the 16th century, there has been in art literature an undercurrent of quasi-scandalous types of reaction to artworks<sup>6</sup>. They are all, just like Stendhal's, much more focused on the gaze's aftermath than on the gazee itself (and, more often than not, also concerned with whatever kind of moral sanctions have been imposed on the transgressive gazer). But Stendhal differentiates himself from his predecessors in at least two significant aspects: he tones down the libidinal, agalmatophilic features in favor of self-transcendent parlance and he also transvalues embodied reactions from a moralizing anecdote into something that can be visualized and exemplified.

By giving precedence to Stendhal's fascinating account, I have been forestalling a proper introduction to the syndrome and its theoretician for way too long. In her 1989 book *La sindrome di Stendhal*, the Italian psychiatrist Graziella Magherini took the French novelist to be the patient zero of a series of psychosomatic attacks ostensibly caused by artistic experiences in Florence from 1977 to 1986. The documented cases present a panoply of psychopathologies whose symptoms include thought imbalances, affect disorders, and somatized anxiety; stronger cases have also presented odder disturbances, such as euphoria, hallucinations, remembrance of past lives, autoscopy, vertigo, immobility, feelings of atemporality, iconoclastic impulses and cardiac arrest. Supported by her clinical experience with 106 patients, Magherini developed her pioneering diagnosis: the combined effect of sentimental journeys—nearly all her patients were tourists visiting Central Italy for self-edifying reasons—and the intense artistic experiences offered by Florence could, somehow, engender an uprush of repressed instinctual energies with disturbing psychosomatic effects. According to Magherini, this



occurred because the experience of traveling through a foreign land such as Italy, populated with paramount instances of sublimated libidinal energies (i.e., Freudian artworks), could abruptly lead to what Pierre Janet dubbed *l'abaissement du niveau mental*. That is, a reduced state of ego control over the psychic whole and the overruling of super-egotistic constraints, thus allowing for the violent uprush of a-symbolic conflicts. Based on such a theoretical framework, Magherini has argued for the therapeutic potential of the Stendhal syndrome: If the patient can consciously process the unconscious content brought to the fore during the psychosomatic crisis, then they will have successfully integrated negative instinctual energies that were up to that moment harmfully latent in the id portion of the psyche. Consequently, such a disturbing experience can be an outstanding opportunity for the afflicted individual to mature—that is, to replace the psychic mechanisms ruled by the childish pleasure principle with those governed by the mature reality principle<sup>8</sup>.

Following the book's publication, the term caught media and public attention worldwide. Enthused by the reading of Magherini's book, the Italian master of *giallo* cinema, Dario Argento, made a homonymous thriller in 1996 that captures the odd mixture of morbidity, allure, and high culture that seems to undergird the syndrome's public appeal. Gradually, the Stendhal syndrome became a buzzword to describe every abnormal reaction to a piece of art. Notwithstanding the popularity of the term and the fragility of Magherini's conceptual armature, the criticisms leveled against this psychopathological classification over the decades have been few—and yet highly effective.

### **Criticisms to the Stendhal Syndrome**

One of the most incisive critical remarks came from a security guard at the Uffizi. When asked in 1986 what he thought of the Stendhal syndrome, he replied that “sure, a few people faint every year and we have to call an ambulance, but how do I know whether it’s the paintings that do it? They don’t shout ‘it’s the art, it’s the art’ as they go down.”<sup>9</sup> More than thirty years later, in 2014, such kind of skepticism was substantiated by a group of Italian neuroscientists, who denounced the Stendhal syndrome for its lack of psychopathological specificity, meaning that the wide range of causes and symptoms associated with the condition should invalidate its appellation as a syndrome. For instance, contrary to Magherini's jingoistic aesthetics—who claimed that most cases of the Stendhal syndrome took place in Florence due to the sheer concentration of Renaissance art in the city—they noticed that similar cases abound worldwide with minor etiological and symptomatologic variations<sup>10</sup>. This very fact bespeaks a much broader problem, which is both globally spread and context-based—and yet to be studied in-depth as a set of interrelated phenomena.

Indeed, we seem to live in the age of the city syndromes. A cursory list includes psychopathological conditions named after Jerusalem (characterized by religious delusion while visiting the Holy City), Washington (delusions, this time political, by visitors to the US-American capital), Paris (psychosomatic disorders caused by a disappointment with the City of Lights, which chiefly affects Japanese tourists), and Venice (foreigners, mostly Germans, decide to off themselves in La Serenissima—too much Thomas Mann may be to blame here)<sup>11</sup>. The common denominator to these conditions seems to be the experience of depersonalization and derealization provoked by



the stress and anxiety caused by intense tourism—and not necessarily the self-disturbing experience of that radical Other, the artwork.

As a matter of fact, were we to take a cynical view of Magherini's postulations, we could say that they contain *ab ovo* a penchant for tourism marketing. If you have the means, the subtext says, do go to Florence. Who knows? Maybe the contact with the city's many masterpieces can discharge repressed emotional content, and, once the psychosomatic crisis has been overcome, the whole ordeal will have made a better person out of you (not to say a more polished one). A 2015 article titled "Le emozioni e la città: dalla Sindrome di Stendhal all'emotional *city marketing*" lays bare such thorny, profit-oriented overtones: emotions spurring from the contact with a sumptuous material culture are themselves a sort of immaterial heritage to be monetized by the tourism industry and real estate market<sup>12</sup>. The trick being played here is that the Stendhalian framework renders the emotional life, the life of the spirit, visible by mapping it into embodied reactions—a bit like stigmata. The artistic experience thus becomes a corporeal fact. And a commodity as well.

The previous fault-finding notwithstanding, perhaps the most incisive objection to the Stendhal syndrome comes from literary quarters. In his 2008 memoir, *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*, the British writer Julian Barnes unearths a valuable piece of information. Following a visit to Grenoble's municipal library, Barnes found out that there is a discrepancy between Marie-Henri Beyle's diary entry of his 1817 visit to Florence and the published account in 1826 of that same experience under the pen name of Stendhal. While the famed version by the *nom de plume* highlights the dramatic dizziness and extreme artistic pleasure after seeing Volterrano's *Sybils*, the unknown scribbles of the traveling writer mention nothing of the sort. After stating that through such comparison, "all reliable evidence for Stendhal's

Syndrome effectively dissolves before our eyes,” Barnes tries to salvage the Beyle *contra* Stendhal debacle. According to the British writer, sharp divisions between memory and memoir ignore the emotional increase and change of focus brought about by time. Both the man and the author are being truthful in their own manner.<sup>13</sup> To a certain extent, I reckon Barnes is right. For Stendhal did fictionalize himself, some fifteen-odd years after the fact, as the patient zero of the syndrome that would be named after him more than a century and a half later.

Perhaps that is precisely the central issue. Perhaps it is far more productive to understand Stendhal’s account and syndrome as an archive of post-nineteenth-century approaches to artistic reception. Perhaps, by resisting an overdetermined reading of Stendhal’s reaction, a more complex picture of its clinical appropriation by Magherini begins to take shape. For several questions here accrue: Is it possible to historicize the museum visitor as a subject inflected by literary history? What has been expected of the artistic experience as a pedagogical and self-forming project? Moreover, how can we conceptualize the interaction between observer, artwork, and the mediating experience of our embodied reactions?

### **After Stendhal’s Heart**

Since I began with matters of the heart, let us take a closer look into Stendhal’s own. In the account of his encounter with Volterrano’s *Sybils*, the novelist refers to his heart, his *coeur*, twice. The connotations differ, certainly: first, he mentions the tachycardia resulting from the artistic experience; later, the worth of that same arrhythmic organ, privileged seat of passions, in contrast to an external sign of the French aristocracy, the *cordons bleu*<sup>14</sup>. But we should not be fooled here by a facile opposition between an anatomic and metaphoric sense. The clinical visceroreception is the spectacle and

proof of an underlying rhetorical apparatus that surfaces, wily, as an afterthought. For the strong contours of the beating heart envelop a discourse that seeks to supplant established social hierarchies by extolling subjective development. Stendhal thus transvalues his organ into a refinable seismograph of self-cultivation. In doing so, he also offers an aesthetic speech unmoored to the elitist chains of the ekphrastic and philosophical traditions.

The connection between the novelist's account and the syndrome named after him is not merely onomastic and pathological. Stendhal's published experience is rather both an event and a discourse that helped form, alongside other subsequent discourse-events, the observing subject that would be afflicted by the syndrome named after him from the mid-twentieth century onward. To this end, the European intelligentsia has contributed plenty. From Robert Vischer onward, empathy-based theories of artistic reception have emphasized pre-cognitive, embodied reaction to aesthetic stimuli. Meanwhile, psycho-analytical art theory has generally posited some level of catharsis through sustained engagement with the sublimated artwork. Broadly applied, both trends lionized subjective approaches to the artistic experience. On the literary front, luminaries such as Proust and Dostoyevsky have adopted Stendhal's blueprint: their accounts of their own odd artistic reaction, ranging from dizziness and tachycardia to severe paralysis, have helped define a morbid model for high aesthetes, whose suffering in front of the artwork serves as an index of their heightened sensibility<sup>15</sup>. When observed in the larger public, these weird phenomena have oft been medicalized and the object of media fascination. For instance, the intense frenzy for Frans Liszt's music in the 1840s led Heinrich Heine, in one of his musical reviews, to coin the term "Lisztomania"; later, the German writer would argue that the causes for such fan hysteria were

beyond the pale of aesthetics and should rather be sought in “the domains of pathology.”<sup>16</sup> The same suffix, “-mania,” was applied more than one century later to the craze for Picasso’s art in Britain. Following the massive success of the artist’s first retrospective in the U.K. in 1960, journalists coined terms such as “art blockbuster” and “Picassomania” to describe the intermingling of British society that flocked to see the exhibition<sup>17</sup>. Notably, the term “mania” had a much stronger medical connotation in the 1840s than in the 1960s, when it became synonymous with “strong fad,” but in both cases, it marks out abnormal social events and imbues them with a pathological subtext: an excess of art can, somehow, drive you mad<sup>18</sup>.

Epitomized by the Stendhal syndrome, what these processes of psycho-pathologization have also done is to cordon off acute psychosomatic reactions to artworks as either para-aesthetic events or artistic epiphenomena. As with instances of iconoclasm, they are thus stripped of their power to challenge theoretical frameworks still based on some sort of immanence in the artwork and normative modes of artistic engagement, which emphasize physical immobility and emotional detachment in tailor-made environments (such as museums and galleries). Moreover, by treating such acute reactions as essentially pathological or overly idiosyncratic means ignoring social attitudes to these very events, which are part and parcel of the history of artistic reception. Say, to what extent do contemporary museumgoers expect embodied evidence of their refined sensibility? As with the purportedly pure clinical gaze, undergirded by an a priori conceptual armature, the contemporary artistic gaze might well contain a troubled genealogy and an elided set of expectations.

### **Two Wild Hypotheses**

As I have hinted at the beginning, one of these elisions lies in the fact that the digital Anthropocene seems to have made a norm of the post-historical, disembodied eye, whose primary source of stimulus is the circulation of products and not their inherent value. The backlash to this process, a kind of nostalgia for embodied affects, is evident in a series of events that falsely reassure contemporary subjectivity of its inherent corporeality and somatic splendor in an age of mass communication, global surveillance, and the onslaught of luminous information.

Hence the marginal yet exciting appeal of the Stendhal syndrome to the newsfeed and social media. Most newspaper articles reporting on the 2018 sudden cardiac arrest express a wistful tone, as if, despite all of our civilizational *malaises*, Botticelli and *bella compagnia* can still strike a man down. As one of the articles reporting on the Uffizi cardiac arrest states, the Florentine geniuses of the Italian Renaissance have “left an afterglow you can still feel despite the tour guides and overpriced cafes.”<sup>19</sup> So be it.

To conclude, a word of caution. I may have been exceedingly skeptical thus far (not to say too cynical). While a critique of the Stendhal syndrome might dent its credibility as a nosological fact, it is hard to explain away the incidents themselves. There seems to be a hardcore of truth in the clinical records that none of my scholarly parlor tricks can do much to spoil. Patients who have been diagnosed with the Stendhal syndrome have experienced hallucinations with angels and demons at the Convento di San Marco, suffered from paralyzing euphoria in the Boboli Gardens, experienced inexplicable sexual urges against their sexual orientation when faced with Caravaggio's *Adolescent Bacchus*, felt themselves dissolving to the point of collapsing onto the floor after seeing the Massacios in the

Cappella Brancacci, and had their gazes somehow reciprocated by Donatello's *David* in the Bargello<sup>20</sup>. Here, one might bear in mind William James' admonition regarding odd phenomena. Remarking on the pioneering results brought about by the founding fathers of psychotherapy, the US-American pragmatist noted that while their "clinical records sound like fairy tales when one first reads them, yet it is impossible to doubt their accuracy." He concludes: "They throw [...] a wholly new light upon our natural constitution."<sup>21</sup> Perhaps these exact words of caution apply to the cases reported by Magherini in *La sindrome di Stendhal*. The question is how to integrate such disturbing reports into the fold of our theories of artistic reception.

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# Japanese-Brazilian Painting in São Paulo in 1950: Intergenerational Shift and a New Confluence of Forms and Foreign Ideas

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## **ABSTRACT**

Created in São Paulo during the 1930s, the Seibi-kai group was comprised of artists immigrants from Japan who aimed to potentialize their training within modernists parameters. It worked as a route for international references and techniques, linking the art worlds of Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo, São Paulo, and Paris. The Seibi-kai gained a new generation of artists in the 1940s, formed by the students of the group's elder members. The first half of this paper describes the interrelation between these two generations, the interchange of international references, and how their balance was disrupted with the emergence of São Paulo's Biennial and the abstract art scene in the 1950s. The second half of this text follows Manabu Mabe's trajectory: initially a member of this second generation, he would later make experimentations with abstract forms presented in the Biennials. Mabe was awarded in the V Biennial and was considered one of the greatest Brazilian painters of the period. That was the first time a member of the Seibi was consecrated, which made him a new master to be followed by the other painters of the group.

## **KEYWORDS**

Seibi-Kai; Manabu Mabe; Japanese Brazilian paint; Brazilian modernism; São Paulo Biennial.

Although the canonical narratives about Brazilian modernism do not take immigration into account, the characters selected by them invite the researcher to analyze the movements and experiences of foreigners in our country.<sup>1</sup> From Anita Malfatti, whose parents were Italian and North-American, to the heralds of concretism such as Franz Weissman and Waldemar Cordeiro, the pantheon is full of immigrants or sons of immigrants, like Lasar Segall, Victor Brecheret, Cândido Portinari, José Pancetti, and Alfredo Volpi. Even among the patronage, their presence was remarkable, like that of Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, creator and president of the Museum of Modern Art and the Biennials of São Paulo.

For this subject, the 1930s was a remarkable period: it was when the young artists started to organize themselves into associations aiming for training in modernist art<sup>2</sup>. The Bernadelli Nucleus was founded in Rio de Janeiro, then the federal capital, in the National School of Fine Arts basements<sup>3</sup>. In São Paulo, an association composed mostly of Italians and Italian descendants was entitled Grupo Santa Helena and the Japanese immigrants created the Seibi-kai<sup>4</sup>.

The Seibi was strongly active during the 1940s and 1950s and sustained a periodic Salon during the 1960s<sup>5</sup>. As recorded in their founding minutes, it aimed, among other things, the art education of its members and subsidize their contact with non-Japanese intellectual groups<sup>6</sup>. As a network, it linked Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Paris, New York, Tokyo, and Mexico City among other places. It featured at least 3 generations of artists, who supported each other and who had in their elders the masters with whom they should learn and whom they had to surpass. This paper focuses on the dynamic between the first and the second generation of this group, their international links, and the impact caused by the Biennial and the abstract art on the internal balance of the group. I argue that the dynamics of this group marked by immigration, sustained reception, and implementation of modernist ideas and forms in São Paulo.

The first generation was trained in vocational Schools in São Paulo, such as Escola Profissional Masculina do Brás, but also in São Paulo's School of Fine Arts, which was inaugurated in 1932 in the neighborhood of Liberdade.

Tomoo Handa was the first Japanese-born student of this art school, where also studied Shigeto Tanaka, Hajime Higaki, Yoshiya Takaoka, and Yuji Tamaki<sup>7</sup>.

According to Handa, members of Seibi discussed, in the 1930s and 1940s, the works of painters associated with the history of Parisian art, such as Van Gogh, Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, and the style they used to practice would be impressionism<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, the group and the impressionists shared an interest in the same topic, especially Tomoo Handa, who painted landscapes aimed to represent the urban peripheries and rural spaces of São Paulo state, especially the capital and the town of Lins, which held one of the largest Japanese community at the time. Both cities were connected by the Railboard Noroeste do Brasil<sup>9</sup>. Cecília França Lourenço also identified the Vangoghian formula of the parallel strokes in Takaoka's painting, specialty in his autoportrait<sup>10</sup>.

Takaoka and Tamaji lived in Rio de Janeiro when the SEIBI was founded. They took part in Bernadelli Nucleo. Their network went beyond the Brazilian borders, reaching Japanese painters living in Paris, who later eventually resided in Rio. Two of them were Tsguharu Fujita, who lived in Portinari's apartment, and also Tadashi Kaminagai, a painter with sympathy for the fauvism, who arrived in Rio in 1941, with a recommendation letter from Fujita, especially addressed to Portinari<sup>11</sup>.

When Kaminagai arrived in Brazil, World War II made his return to Japan impossible. He lived in Rio for 14 years and founded a Frame Shop in Santa Tereza neighborhood, where he usually received young painters eager for training<sup>12</sup>. Handa, Kaminagai, and specially Takaoka will be the masters followed by the second generation of the Seibi Group.

The number of racist aggressions against the Japanese grew exponentially in Brazil during the war. Their language was forbidden and their freedom of assembly was banned. That made it impossible for Seibi to continue with its public activities. With the end of the war, the members of the group created parallel associations, which aimed to approximate themselves to the Brazilian community, including non-Japanese among their members. One of these associations, The Guanabara Group outstands. It was

settled in Fukushima's house, who returned to São Paulo after studying with the Bernadelli Nucleo and with Kaminagai in Rio. It worked between 1950 and 1959 and congregated some of the Seibi's members and other young artists eager for training in arts, such as Wega Nery, Manabu Mabe, Flávio Tanaka, Arcangelo Ianelli, Alizira Pecorary, and Ismênia Coaraci<sup>13</sup>. All those painters would be later recognized for their contribution to the development of abstract art in São Paulo. The Japanese would be regarded as part of Seibi's second generation.

If the carrier of the first generation was developed with the Paulista Salon of fine arts, founded in 1933, the second generation would be deeply shaped by the São Paulo Biennial, inaugurated in 1951.

One of the main architects of the Biennials, Lourival Gomes Machado considered the Salon's system hostile to the new artists, who were supposedly forced to follow the taste and the guidelines of the elders. Lourival considered the Salons consequently inadequate to modern art, which was supposedly marked by the constant changes in styles and by the free experimentation by the artists<sup>14</sup>. The Biennials were created, therefore, as an intervention in the Brazilian arts. It aimed to bring an upgrade to local production following international standards. As a new system, it shared primes of the best Brazilian artworks, following the decisions of a Juri composed of nationals and foreign persons, mostly art critics. As it is obvious, a considerable part of these judges was ignorant of the Brazilian art context and the trajectory of the artists. A lot of times, their only resources for establishing the national values were the one offered by the Biennial itself - the expographic narrative, renewed every two years, which created, by one side, a Brazilian art panorama, and by another, the international parameters, inferred in the way the artworks were launched, or as a new experience or as a modernist canon. In this new system, Brazilian artists competed against each other. Firstly in the admission process, which selected the artworks to be exposed. Secondly, within the chosen group, during the exhibition, having the international panorama as a background. Firstly in the admission process, which selected the artworks to be exposed. Secondly, within the chosen group, during the exhibition, having the international panorama as a background. As Brazilian

artists sought to gain international recognition; making works that blended with Biennial international oeuvres was a goal for a lot of the artists of the period. As a strategy, they didn't want to produce artworks considered outdated or qualitatively worse than the international ones.

The Brazilian exhibition in the first Biennial, in 1951, presented a universe of still-lives, landscapes, and portraits marked by more or less evident deformations. The international background was also characterized by eclecticism, with different styles equally exhibited, and included the abstract painting as a real and valuable possible experience. Gradually, during the 1950's Biennials, this new style predominated and became a synonym of modern art for part of the Brazilian artists.



**Fig. 1.** Manabu Mabe. *Composição B* (1956). 120 x 120 cm. Oil on canvas. Lost artwork.

This development became completely evident in the IV Biennial, in which abstract art dominated the Brazilian artwork selections, almost all geometrical. Lourival Gomes Machado, a member of the admission jury of that edition, said that the figurative artists roughly applied for the competition<sup>15</sup>. In the same year, the reglementary prizes for Brazilian art were given, for the first time, just for abstract artworks made by artists without projection before the beginning of the Biennial. That is, for the younger artists, for whom Lourival wished the Biennial were directed.



**Fig. 2.** Alberto Texeira, member of Ateliê Abstração. *Intensidade* (1954). 72,6 x 72,6 cm. Oil on Canvas. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts.



The first generation's masters of the Seibi made figurative artworks and nourished the social concerns that were common in the Brazilian production of the 1930s and 1940s. Their works were refused in the second Biennial and they gave up on applying for the following competitions<sup>46</sup>.



**Fig. 3.** Manabu Mabe. *Vitorioso* (1958). 130 x 162 cm. Oil on canvas. Lost artwork.

The new generation sought to renew their work according to the new parameters. At this moment, a group of artists joined the *Ateliê Abstração* for training in abstract art with Samson Flexor, a West-Europe-born artist, naturalized French, who resided in São Paulo since the 1940s. In a testimonial, Wega Nery said that her proximity with Fléxor happened because she wanted to be up to date with the Biennial parameters<sup>47</sup>. Manabu Mabe lived in Lins during this period and never was officially a student in the *Ateliê Abstração*, but some of his paintings resemble the works of the atelier's



members. A clipping of a local newspaper from Lins, in Mabe's possessions, dated August 25 of 1957, informs about Mabe's moving to São Paulo following a Fléxor invitation<sup>18</sup>.

Mabe began his experiments with abstraction in 1955 but will be nationally and internationally recognized by a specific style developed after 1957, in which we can recognize an appropriation of the foreign styles highlighted in the IV São Paulo Biennial.

His works, from 1958 and 1959, are characterized by large, decisive, dark, and intercrossed brushstrokes detached from the background. The composition resembles Japanese ideograms: an association highlighted by the press and critics of the period and common until today.



**Fig. 4.** Manabu Mabe. Profeta (1959). 110 x 130 cm. Oil on canvas. Lost artwork.

Mabe, in turn, operated against this interpretation in his interviews for the newspapers. He also declare his dislike for Japanese painting, which he considered excessively technical and without emotion<sup>19</sup>. He refused the label of a tachist painter and associated his work with “abstract expressionism”<sup>20</sup>.

Abstract expressionism was exhibited by the United States of America in the latest Biennial, in 1957, next to Jackson Pollock’s retrospective, which was settled in a Special Room, the type of place usually reserved for the canonical styles or artists. It was the first time that a non-geometrical abstraction received this status in the São Paulo Biennials. Thus, this kind of painting represented a novelty for the Brazilian artists, whose impact was yet to be evaluated. The United States organized his exhibition, which Pollock in a Special room and just the abstract expressionism in the main exhibition, in such a way signaling that it was not merely a historical style, but a consolidated tendency for contemporary art, headed to the future of modern art. This message was also reaffirmed by the reglementary primes distributed among the Brazilian artists in that edition: all addressed to abstract artists, three non-geometrical, in a total of five.

On this same occasion, three international jury members were interviewed by a Brazilian newspaper; one was reticent against the geometric abstraction, and the other two were frankly hostile. Alfred Barr Jr, one of them, said that Frans Krajcberg was awarded the best Brazilian painter because he refused geometry<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, the change in Mabe’s styles was towards the direction pointed as the most promissory tendency among that presented by the Biennial.

Franz Kline seems to be the main reference for these works of Mabe, who also makes experiences with the black and white palette which is characteristic of the North American painter. In some of their works, it is also possible to recognize the use of drippings, an obvious reference to Jackson Pollock. Mabe used it to make more dynamic the use of the texture and the material of the background.



**Fig. 5.** Manabu Mabe. *It Oriental* (1958). Oil/canvas. 122 x 150 cm. Private Collection.

With these artworks, Mabe won the Leirner Prize in 1958, the São Paulo Biennial of 1959, and was awarded in the Biennials of Paris and Venice. His success led him to a distinguished position among immigrant artists. The Japanese painter Kazuo Wakabayashi moved to Brazil in 1961 and asked for Mabe's help. Mabe received the new painter in his own home and introduced him to his local network<sup>22</sup>. The same attitude was taken by the first generation of the *Seibi* when the second emerged.

### **Conclusion**

The carrier of the Japanese painters of São Paulo was conditioned by a solidarity network, which gave them (1) transit in the art world and access to

non-Japanese groups; (2) Artistic training for those who wanted to be part of the art world; (3) Access to foreign ideas and forms.

The internal balance of this network was profoundly changed by the development of the São Paulo Biennial. The system in which the masters of the first generation were trained became outdated. Those artists did not have the disposition or the necessary knowledge to make the paint valued by the Biennial.

This network resisted, despite the changes brought by the Biennial. Mostly due to the second generation, which quickly adapted to the new parameters and expectations, by finding new masters and by metabolizing the international references launched by those seasonal exhibitions. Manabu Mabe was consecrated at this moment, raising the Japanese-Brazilian paint to the national and international pantheon of recognition.

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# **Cities Made of Silver. The Impact of Migration Processes and Architectural Theory on the Urban Planning of Early Modern Mining Towns**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the wake of the silver boom in the 16th century, countless silver towns sprang up in Europe and Latin America. An analysis of different migration processes involving individual actors, as well as media, shows that distinct urban spaces emerged in silver mining regions across the globe. In contrast to the prevailing view that these were unplanned settlements, this paper demonstrates how early modern concepts based on the interconnection of architectural theory and regulatory policy found their way into urban design of mining towns and merged with traditional and local forms.

## **KEYWORDS**

Mining City; Urban Planning; Urban Design; Potosí; Annaberg.

The early modern world was characterized by profound changes in the socioeconomic structure. This included the expansion and consolidation of ever more complex global trade relations, an influx of silver from Latin America, and the steady expansion of urbanization.<sup>1</sup> The European occupation of the Americas led to an increasing interconnection of different markets. Transatlantic and transpacific trade activities based on the monetary economy grew. The period between 1450 and 1600 is also referred to as “[t]he great age of silver”.<sup>2</sup> Silver formed the basis for strong economies and served as currency money to stabilize economic cycles.<sup>3</sup> The most important sources of silver, existing and new, were mines in Tyrol and Croatia, renewed mining in the Ore Mountains of Saxony and Harz mountains, and the silver deposits exploited by the Spanish in the two viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru. Mining developed a reputation as the non-agricultural industry par excellence and was the most urbanized of all the economic sectors of the 16th century.<sup>4</sup> As a result, mining towns sprang up all over the world, but especially in Spanish-influenced areas, Saxony and in the Harz.

Research into urban history has focused on mining towns as a distinctive type of town that emerged in Europe in the 12th century. The word *Bergstadt*, however, is not a recently coined term; early New High German dictionaries cite evidence of its use as far back as in the 14th century.<sup>5</sup> In Spanish, the terms *ciudad minera*, *real de minas* and especially *asiento de minas* are used extensively in contemporary sources.<sup>6</sup> Pierre Levadan, for example, spoke of the *ville montaigne*. He emphasized that the complex topographical situation of mining towns made it difficult to apply geometrical layouts.<sup>7</sup> In German-language research, the classification of the mining town as a distinctive type went hand in hand with a narrowly defined focus on its function.<sup>8</sup> Studies of Latin American towns usually resulted in a one-dimensional assessment of urban design. Mining towns were basically considered unplanned settlements in the so-called *modo irregular*. Their layout was subordinate to their function as well as the institutions and business activities of the mining industry.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the focus was predominantly on the technical, legal and social history of these towns. Issues

related to urbanism and architecture were usually only dealt with in monographs.

In this paper, I will show how in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, newly founded silver mining towns on both sides of the Atlantic were, as population magnets, integrated into a far-reaching trade network and equipped with the necessary financial means to participate in innovations in urban planning and architecture — innovations that could be applied here largely due to the fact of the towns being newly established. The diffusion of architectural theory and the vocabulary and development of architectural forms is complex since both were rarely documented and many of the buildings have since been lost. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, architectural theory and forms spread either by means of architectural treatises<sup>40</sup> and engravings or through individual traveling agents. Here, connections across the Atlantic occurred on a meta-level, for example, through tendencies in regulatory policy or architectural theory, which were based on the same early modern political principles and architectural models. The activities examined here are the subject of heterogeneous migration processes, like the ones of the early modern period described, for example, by Casallila.<sup>41</sup> These will be analyzed with a focus on the chains of processes that shaped the urban planning of the mining towns under examination. How did rule-based urban planning unfold on the basis of writings on the theory of architecture and in interaction with sovereign regulatory policy? Did it merge with local urban planning traditions? What was the influence of the agents involved? As a result of examining these questions, a more differentiated picture of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century mining town emerges, contributing to an updated global assessment.

Schneeberg, in the Ore Mountains, is thought to be one of the earliest large mining settlements of the “long 16<sup>th</sup> century.” When the discovery of silver was first reported around 1470, miners began settling on the spot. In 1477, the landholders issued the first mining regulations, and that same year, parts of the area were enclosed by barriers. Fifty-six mines were located within this zone, and in 1481, the settlement was granted town privileges and mining rights. It was not until 1492 that attempts were made to put a stop to the haphazard building activities and introduce measures to structure the



development. Space was cleared for a central marketplace, but it was not until 1527, when the town hall was built, that a more defined square was created.<sup>12</sup>

A similar development occurred in one of the oldest mining towns on the other side of the Atlantic. Zacatecas was founded in 1546 in what is now Mexico but was, back then, the viceroyalty of New Spain. By 1551, 409 houses had already been built, but there were no municipal institutions.<sup>13</sup> Only gradually did a main church, convents of the religious orders active in New Spain, a hospital, and a town hall appear on the *plaza mayor*. In the center, we can make out the rudiments of a city structure. Here, two large inner-city squares were created around the main church, with the church-oriented towards the iconic Cerro de la Bufa and its mines. Overall, however, the city fits the “classic” image of a mining town created through uncontrolled growth.<sup>14</sup> Comparable developments can be seen in the mining towns of Guanajuato, New Spain, Clausthal and Zellerfeld in the Harz, and Joachimsthal in the Ore Mountains. A challenging topography, a potential that was difficult to predict, legal disputes, and cautious territorial or local administrations resulted in fast-growing settlements for which subsequent replanning was near impossible.

Annaberg in the Ore Mountains and Potosí in Bolivia marks a transition to the development of a new type of mining town. Annaberg was founded in 1497 by Georg Wettin, the Duke of Saxony, and was immediately granted town privileges. This included instructions to create orderly urban structures and build “fine” houses.<sup>15</sup> The planning process was supported by well-educated and well-connected officials, miners, and the duke himself.<sup>16</sup>

The design was based on both local traditions and early modern principles of town planning. An almost circular layout was created, featuring an elaborate, medieval-looking wall and a central marketplace with a town hall. The residence of the territorial lord was located at the edge of the settlement, and the church was placed away from the market on the most important transport route. At the same time, the grid-like layout of the streets, the rectangular marketplace, the elevated positioning of the church, and the location of the hospital and cemetery outside the gates show an

awareness of concepts of early modern urban planning. The placement of the cemetery and the hospital, both problematic in terms of hygiene, prevented the prevailing westerlies from carrying harmful vapors into the city. The orientation of the streets was designed to minimize exposure to the winds, as had been recommended by Vitruvius, for example.<sup>17</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Anonymus, Plan of Schneeberg, circa 1750, drawing (above) ©Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek - Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden (SLUB), Adelung, Johann Christoph, Kartensammlung, Signatur/ Inventar-Nr.: SLUB/KS A14540. Bernardo Portugal (drawing), Jose Simon de Larrea (engraving), Descripción de la muy noble, y leal Ciudad de Zacatecas, 1799, engraving (below). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, John Carter Brown Map Collection, 4960-000



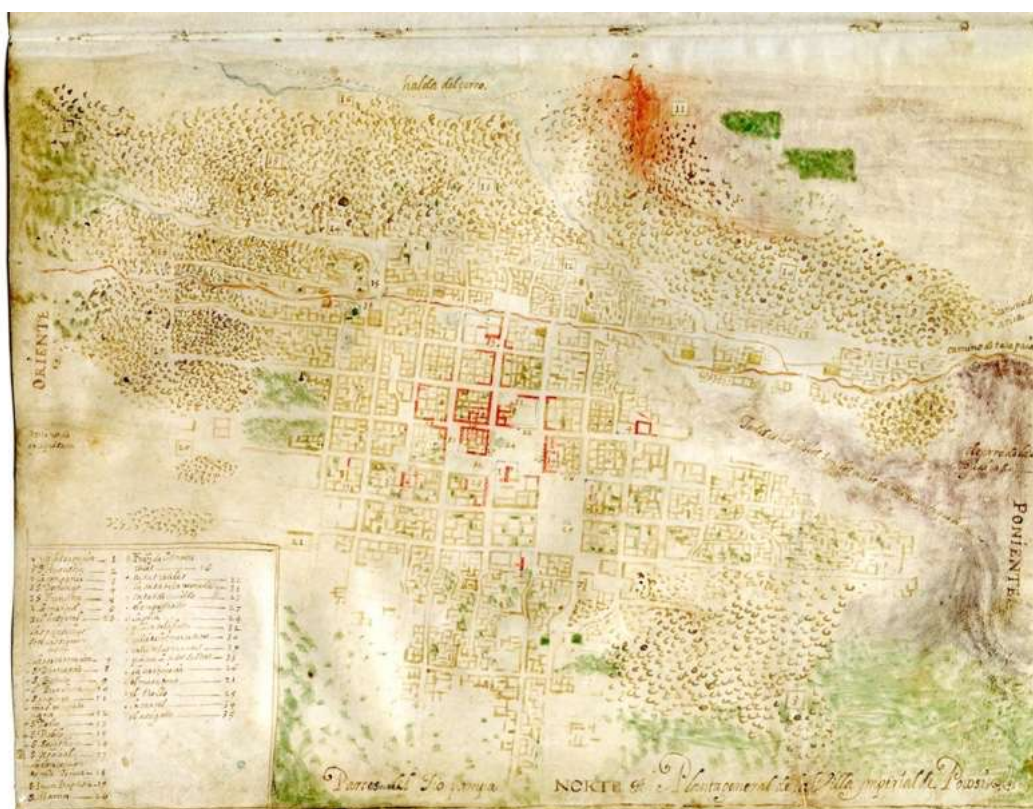


**Fig. 2.** Annaberg, city plan, about 1592, in: Paulus Jenisius, *Annaebergae Misniae Oppidi Historia*, Annaberg 1592, ink on paper ©Bibliothek Städtische Museen Annaberg-Buchholz, Erzgebirgsmuseum

Potosí, on the other hand, like Schneeberg, was founded spontaneously in 1545 on the slopes of the Cerro Rico in the immediate vicinity of an Indigenous settlement. Within a very short time, the silver deposits turned out to be extremely profitable, so that the *asiento de minas* grew quickly. The initial focal point was the *qato*, a huge inner-city marketplace based on the Indigenous Andine model.<sup>18</sup> But by 1559, after the rich upper class of miners had petitioned the Crown for elevation to the status of town, the inner city had been restructured extensively.<sup>19</sup> This led to the implementation of a grid plan based on what was the convention of Spanish-colonial urban planning.<sup>20</sup> In Potosí, the new main square consisted



of the *iglesia mayor*, the *casas reales* and the town hall. The monasteries of the main orders were built along the main roads near the nucleus of the city. But distinct remnants of the earlier Indigenous settlement can still be identified in the remaining large inner-city marketplaces — now clearly defined — and in the areas populated by Indigenous people that surrounded the grid-like nucleus of the city.



**Fig. 3.** Planta general de la Villa Ymperial de Potosí, around 1600, ink and watercolor on paper. © Library of the Hispanic Society of America, New York

Toribio de Alcaraz, a well-traveled and experienced stonemason, had likely been responsible for planning this transformation. We know that he was involved in other building projects throughout the town.<sup>21</sup> He came from an influential family of stonemasons in Alcaraz in the Albacete region<sup>22</sup> and had traveled to Potosí via Seville, Lima, Arequipa, and La Plata (now Sucre, Bolivia). There, he had been in charge of the restructuring of the central

square and for constructing almost all of the surrounding houses that were furnished with imposing facades.<sup>23</sup>

From 1559 onwards, conventions of urban planning were codified in the ordinances introduced by the viceroys Andrés Hurtado de Mendoza, Marqués de Cañete and Diego López de Zúñiga y Velasco, conde de Nieva. These determined the placement of the different institutions in the city (the town hall, *casas reales* and the main church were to be located on the central, rectangular square) and the distribution of the different convents. They also prescribed the construction of uniform streets and rectangular blocks modeled on Lima.<sup>24</sup> In 1567, Juan de Matienzo, an influential judge in the administration of the Potosí region, completed his book *Gobierno del Peru*. It included a city plan that, for the first time, illustrated this codified form of urban planning.<sup>25</sup> Both the written territorial regulations and the built architecture drew on Spanish tradition as well as on early modern architectural theory that had been disseminated in Spain since the beginning of the 15th century through Diego de Sagredo's *Medidas del Romano* and various editions of Vitruvius.<sup>26</sup>

The next phase saw new towns being established based on consolidated planning specifications. In 1519, silver had also been discovered in the vicinity of Annaberg. Numerous miners and fortune seekers flocked to the region. The area was under the control of Duke Heinrich von Wettin, the brother of the founder of Annaberg. In 1521, he instigated the planning, surveying, and building a uniformly structured, square city. The city was aligned around a square marketplace featuring a mining office and town hall, with four streets dividing the layout into uniform quarters of rectangular blocks. The mastermind behind the plan was Ulrich Rühle, one of the region's most important humanists who had made a name for himself as a mathematician, doctor, and mining expert and had written one of the first mining guides north of the Alps.<sup>27</sup> During the planning, he drew on this knowledge and, most likely, on Fra Giovanni Giocondo's first illustrated edition of Vitruvius from 1511. Like urban planning, mining was based on the exact and skilled measurement of tunnels and calculations of the drift as well as of ownership rights. Rühle had included this knowledge in his guidebook

and was now able to apply it to surveying the city. That he knew of and adopted Vitruvius's ideas is shown by his designs for a sundial<sup>28</sup> which pick up on Vitruvius's division into the cardinal points.<sup>29</sup> If we compare the urban structure of Marienberg — streets arranged in the form of a grid divided into blocks and turned on a corner so as to protect the city from the prevailing winds — with Giocondo's illustrations of the layout and orientation of the Vitruvian city,<sup>30</sup> we can see several similarities.



**Fig. 4.** Adam Schneider, *Ichonografia Maribergensis*, Marienberg, detail of the city center, 1689, ink on paper. ©Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, 40044 Generalrisse, Nr. 1-E18460

The tendency towards formalization is now also found in Mexico and Peru. After extensive preparatory work, Philip II issued the famous *Ordenanzas de Descubrimiento nueva población y pacificación de las Indias* for the colonies in 1573. The *Ordenanzas* contained the most detailed town planning regulations of the time.<sup>31</sup> It quoted whole passages of Vitruvius, such as specifications for the structure of the central square, which should consider the city's expected growth and be equipped with arcades or the general alignment in accordance with the main winds. At the same time, the *Ordenanzas* integrated forms of the medieval Spanish city that incorporated knowledge from antiquity and had been handed down since the Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup> The *Ordenanzas* transformed into norms generally accepted principles to be applied across the empire. An urban planning system had now been introduced and written into law that made it possible to establish settlements and cities almost anywhere in a simple and uncomplicated way by implementing rational and orderly concepts, creating uniformity while still allowing for flexibility.

In 1583, capitán Miguel Caldera, of Spanish and Indigenous descent, and Juan de Oñate, from Zacatecas, established a Guachichiles settlement in New Spain called San Luis.<sup>33</sup> In 1592, rich silver and gold deposits were discovered at Cerro de San Pedro close-by and subsequently the pueblo de San Luis Minas de Potosí was founded. It featured a hybrid layout that combined an earlier Indigenous settlement — consisting of large squares — with a New Spanish city. Since there were no decrees on urban planning, it must be assumed that the planners were in part guided by the *Ordenanzas* of 1573. The oldest known city plan from 1593 shows 19 blocks and an open square — a structure that basically follows the specifications of the *Ordenanzas*.<sup>34</sup> The *casas reales* and the granary, as well as the prison and a simple parish church were placed on the eastern side of the square. The convents of the main ecclesiastical orders were situated at the corners of the city nucleus.<sup>35</sup> A more recent plan from 1794 shows two inner-city squares of different sizes and blocks of different dimensions. It illustrates a combination of two concepts of urban design: the agriculturally dominated, larger blocks



that originated from the Indigenous settlement and those of the Spaniards that were smaller and intended for commercial use.<sup>36</sup>

San Felipe de los Austrias, founded in 1606 in the viceroyalty of Peru north of Potosí, also complied with many of the requirements of the *Ordenanzas*. After more and more reports that silver had been found in the region were received by the regional administration authority of Oruro, the *Audiencia* in La Plata (today's Sucre) sent *licenciado* Manuel Castro y Padilla to the region. His task was to find a place near the recently rediscovered mines that met the necessary conditions for the founding of a town: a good climate, good air and soil, timber and pasture. Padilla had studied at the Colegio San Bartolomé in Salamanca and knew the legal ordinances of the Crown very well. At the site, he analyzed the location of the miners' simple huts. The miners had taken advantage of the shelter provided by the two mountains that enclosed the site in a crescent shape and protected it from the winds of the altiplano. There was a good source of drinking water and since all the necessary conditions for a town were met, he chose this location. He then commissioned Alvaro de Moya and Pedro Maleta to design the layout. The miners' huts were removed, and plots were dissolved in order to redistribute the land. The city of Villa de San Felipe de Austria y Asiento de Minas de Oruro was founded on November 1.<sup>37</sup> The block to the north of the main square remained in possession of the city for municipal building projects. As was customary, plots of land were distributed on the condition that possession was taken by December 8 and that they were built on within two years. Otherwise, ownership would revert to the city. The founding act basically provided for the construction of all the institutions required by the *Ordenanzas* of 1573. As was often the case, the Indigenous people were left with only the *rancherías* or the option of returning to their *repartimientos*.<sup>38</sup>





**Fig. 5.** La Noble y Leal Ciudad de S[an] Luis Potosí, dividida en Cuarteles de Orden Superior del Excelentísimo Señor Virrey Marqués de Branciforte, 1794. (above) ©España, Ministerio de Cultura y Deporte, AGI, MP-MEXICO,456BIS Oruro, city plan, 1781, ink and watercolor on paper, (below) ©unknown

Subsequently, several such *reales de minas* were founded throughout the Zacatecas region,<sup>39</sup> their architecture based on the principles mentioned above. In the Ore Mountains, too, we can find tendencies towards standardization with the founding of Elterlein and Scheibenberg,<sup>40</sup> and with the systematically planned mining towns of St. Andreasberg (founded in 1537) and Zellerfeld (built in 1672 after a devastating fire in Clausthal) in the Harz mountains.<sup>41</sup>

In relation to the planning of the newly founded mining towns, I would like to propose a three-stage process. To start with, the improvised boomtowns postulated in the history of research predominated. Then, territorial lords and the viceroys countered these developments by imposing stronger planning regulations and incorporating new concepts. In the last stage, these concepts can be considered as established and found expression, among other things, in a tendency towards standardization. Reducing these towns to their mining function and simply characterizing them as provisional “mining camps” falls well short. Vitruvian architectural theory and humanist thinking were introduced by town planners and mediated by the regulatory policy of the territorial lords. As a result, considerations such as choosing the ideal settlement site and observing hygienic preconditions and climatic factors became more and more important. Chessboard-shaped inner cities emerged. This process resulted from the knowledge of well-trained humanists and experienced architects and the distribution of texts. Architectural treatises and legal ordinances became the vehicles for consolidating ideas around urban design.

Local traditions, however, continued to play an important role in structuring towns and found their way into the planning process. In this way, the new cities met early modern hygiene requirements and complied with European principles of order, and at the same time, took into account local or traditional designs for a town square or the placement of individual buildings. I suggest that further research be undertaken into the interplay between territorial and municipal efforts to regulate urban planning and the continual integration of theoretical architectural concepts. Moreover, researchers are only now approaching the question of the role played by Indigenous people

in the urban planning process. The migration of ideas and concepts, carried and received by agents who were attracted by the opportunities offered by the fast-growing cities, expressed itself in a complex architectural hybrid. As Peter Burke proposes, we can here draw on an approach that has emerged within Renaissance studies and is largely based on the assumption of a “mixing” of different components.<sup>42</sup> Such a “mixing” occurred mainly in contact zones like cities, the court and border regions.<sup>43</sup> As far as Latin America is concerned, we should also not forget the problematic colonial context of hybridity in general<sup>44</sup> and the urban strategy of the conquest in particular.<sup>45</sup> We have to surpass the notion of the architecture of conquest,<sup>46</sup> as has already been suggested by Dean and Leibsohn with their concept of the invisibility of hybridity.<sup>47</sup> In European mining cities, new or foreign models were implemented and merged with traditional planning and architecture. Locally trained craftsmen still played a big part in the cities’ realization and their designs were reflected, for example, in the materials and building techniques used. The same applies to the examples discussed from Latin America. In Potosí<sup>48</sup> and San Luis de Potosí,<sup>49</sup> Indigenous masters and officials executed the architectural work and, in both cities, Indigenous and European urban concepts were merged. Further research in this field is needed to better understand the movements, changes and amalgamations of architecture and urban design beyond the universally known and much-studied cultural centers. This will allow us to include less familiar but nonetheless influential members of the building industry in the still rather hermetic art historical canon, and to further analyze migration movements and their effects in accordance with the requirements of the methodological discussion.

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# The Evolution of Socialist Realist Style in Chinese Political Propaganda Posters (1949-1976)

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper reassesses the artworks produced during Mao's era (1949-1976) from the perspective of complexity in their creation and collection practices. Although the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), foregrounding the term "culture", was of great significance, there is a dearth of research on this aspect. Existing works contextualize the significant shifts and changes of the Maoist years. Studies dealing with propaganda posters are rare, and their analysis as a sociological phenomenon is more so. Therefore, the artworks are ubiquitously seen as just propaganda, with complete condensation of the artist's position, accompanying practices or institutional spaces. This paper attempts to fill that lacuna by providing a constellation of the given epoch's diverse social, cultural, and aesthetic assemblage. It follows the trajectories of academic artists in China who worked with Konstantin M. Maksimov, the Soviet Art Educator. This academic training in socialist realism transgresses the contours of painting as a medium with foundational continuity visible in posters. Therefore, posters produced during this time are incredibly diverse in themes, and some are easily mistaken for paintings. This study examines the transition of art style from "importism" to developing a unique vocabulary separate from the Soviet model. A close analysis of these collections reveals the departures from earlier Soviet influences to a more contextual language specific to China.

## **KEYWORDS**

Chinese Propaganda Posters; Socialist Realism; Cultural Revolution; Visual Studies; Chinese Art.

### Introduction

Was Socialist Realism a quaint art theory during the twentieth century, or was it a way to disseminate political ideology? Did it follow the same framework in countries outside the Soviet Union regardless of the time period? Or was it more of a local phenomenon, moulded by the country's specific cultural setting and time period?

In *Art and Illusion*, Gombrich (1984, 148) states that art is closely entwined with its tradition, whether accepted, rejected, or modified. The question of an artist's adoption or rejection of an alien form or theory entirely depends on fulfilling their essential needs. Said (1983, 243), in the theorization of 'travelling theory', points out that theories are assigned meanings according to "where, when and how they are deployed". He categorises the whole process of movement of ideas into four stages. First, the circulation of theory leads to a break from the place of origin, thereby leading him to question further whether, after transmission from one place and point of time to the other, the theory serves the same vigour for which it was created. Second, a theory is constantly subjected to modification; hence, it is a perpetual work in progress. Third, the new historical and political ethos, local axioms, and taboos influence this modification or adaptation. Fourth, this theory now acquires a new ethos, thereby becoming a tool to interpret the local social reality.

However, there is a dearth of critical studies on Socialist Realism in China. Most of the existing research focuses on Socialist Realism in the Soviet. *Totalitarian Art* explores the commonalities between the art policies of the Soviet and Germany. PRC is seen as an extension of Soviet style Socialist Realism. Galikowski (1990) does a focused study on PRC. Still, the overarching theme is similar to the totalitarian perspective, where the focus point is the ideological and hierarchical control the party exerted on art institutions in PRC. *Socialist Realism Without Shores* offers a fresh perspective on the theory as it combines analysis from a myriad of authors covering different nations like China, France, the United States, and Hungary. In the book, both Groys' essay "A Style and a Half: Socialist Realism between Modernism and Postmodernism" and Zhang's essay "The Power of Rewriting:

Postrevolutionary Discourse on Chinese Socialist Realism” reiterate a similar argument that socialist realism is a form of modernism. Although the last couple of decades has enabled the sinologists to view the complicated relationship between politics and art and view socialist realist art within modernity, Chinese propaganda system is still seen as extension of Leninist rhetoric. Andrews and Shen (2012) in their book, only deals with general stylistic elements of Soviet Socialist Realism incorporated by Chinese artists.

This paper evaluates the paradigm shift, accelerated by escalation and later a decline of specific stylistic aspects, which led to the creation of new artistic cannons, characteristic of making national formations in art. This shift is studied by employing the methodology of John Clark (2014, 70) where artworks are seen as an interaction of exogenous (external) phenomenon with endogenous (internal) forces. It further attempts to map the complex internal or endogenous forces that played an imperative role in developing the theory of Realism to Socialist Realism to Mao's Revolutionary Realism. Xudong (1997, 290) attributes PRC's complex political, revolutionary, and cultural histories as a prelude to Socialist Realism's theory. This could be one of the reasons why some scholars refer to Socialist Realism in the PRC as a "Cultural folklore."

The formulations of the Soviet Writers Congress only served as a relevant historical guide for Chinese Socialist cultural policy. There is no denying that in the beginning, the Soviet was treated as an archetype for modernization and Soviet aesthetics worked as a framework to provide validity to achieve world progress. In the early 1950s, the Soviets functioned as the epitome of progress and modernity not only for the CCP but also for the people. Therefore, Soviet values and aesthetics worked as ideological frameworks to achieve massive industrialization. However, the political and social mobilizations<sup>4</sup> paved another way for the Socialist Realist style. The Socialist Realist style after that was steeped with "revolutionary romanticism whose function was to register the ongoing revolutionary fervour which included the local cultural and symbolic imagery. Thus, "revolutionary romanticism" is a point of departure in the Chinese variant of Socialist Realism. This "revolutionary romanticism", when combined with

"revolutionary realism", resulted in a utopian space where the historical telos is manifested by displaying the completion of ongoing socioeconomic and ideological construction. This space is where Mao's idea of "continuous revolution" is merged with socialist realism's principle of depicting reality as timeless spatialization.

### Types of Siting of Artist

Other than the Soviet Writers Congress and Yanan Talks, the Socialist Realist style owes its escalation to decline to certain artistic styles. This deconstruction is imperative to pave the way for imaginative renewal. Based on the empirical model of John Clark (2014, 70-73), a comprehensive mapping of art cohorts with their artworks and epochs is done by forming chronological categories which are interlaced with their stylistic trajectories. These are:

Categories	Type one	Type two
	The ones who went abroad to learn the techniques.	Artists have not visited outside and are in contact with the alien style through foreign teachers in educational institutions. (Students of Maximov)
<b>Foreign influence and realism</b>	USSR: Li Tianxiang, Chen Zunsan, Lin Gang, Quan Shanshi, Xiao Feng, DengShu (nianhua artist), and Li Jun France : Xu Beihong, Yen Wen-liang, Hsu Pei-hung, Pang Xunqin, Liu Haisu and Lin Feng-mien	
<b>Socialist Realism</b>	USSR: Yan Han, Jiang Feng and Cai Ruohong	Hou Yimin Jin Shangyi Zhan Jianjun Wu Dezu
<b>Transformation into Maoist revolutionary Realism</b>	Vietnam: Dong Xiwen	Hou Yimin Jin Shangyi Zhan Jianjun Wu Dezu

### Foreign Influence and Realism

Among the plethora of isms introduced to China in the twentieth century, Realism garnered the most attention from reformist artists and intellectual circles. Thinkers like Hu Shi, Ch'en Tu-hsiu and Li Dazhao were against the traditional culture and referred to it as *jing* (passive). (Li 1993, xi) Chen Duxiu, and Lu Xun, favoured reforming the traditional literati painting. Other than that, Kang Youwei, Chen Duxiu, Xu Beihong, and Cai Yuanpei, one of the most influential figures in the intellectual circle, agreed that art had stagnated. They delineated the reasons behind the fall of literati painting as its inability to depict the objective reality. In *Far Eastern Art*, Sherman Lee notes the repetitiveness of painting in China since 1800. "Although interesting work surfaced from time to time.... these add nothing to a general survey of the field". The May Fourth Movement played a pivotal role in activating the *dong* (active) aspect of the western model of art, which had a physical engagement with reality.

Huang Binhong hoped for the development of traditional literati art as a process where its classical language would be transformed into a modern one. However, with an urge toward development, a cultural debate emerged between artists who wanted to modernize the language and those who wanted to replace it altogether. Xu Beihong, an artist who studied in France, was part of the latter group advocating replacing "disengaged" literati painting aesthetic with Realism.

Beihong cannot be credited for introducing European art forms to PRC. Western stylistic aspects are seen in artworks of the seventeenth century, possibly transmitted through the ports in Shanghai and Canton. However, when it comes to formal education, from 1906 to 1909, a western art department began to operate in Nanking Normal School. (Clunas 1989, 100) This is also the period for Chinese students<sup>2</sup> visiting the Tokyo School of Fine Arts to learn the art. Nevertheless, the art scene of Japan was itself a result of Japanese artists introducing European style after returning from France. In 1919, due to the rise of anti-Japanese sentiments, the young Chinese painters preferred Europe over Japan.



Therefore, France became the most favoured destination for Chinese students. Many artists chose to relocate themselves in order to acquire knowledge first-hand. Realism was not the only style that engaged the intelligentsia and the artists. Artists who went abroad were also exposed to Surrealism and Impressionism. Sullivan (1973, 167) elaborately documents the Chinese artists in France and their career trajectory on returning to China. Chou Ling, founder of *the Association des Artistes Chinois en France*, was one of the artists who went to France to learn the art. Among those who returned and taught on similar lines in China were Yen Wen-Liang, Hsu Pei-hung, Pang Xunqin, Liu Haisu and Lin Feng-mien. (Sullivan 1973, 167)

These artists, on returning, set up art schools<sup>3</sup> on the École des Beaux-Arts model, emphasizing on drawing, sculpture and oil painting and introducing new trends in the art world. They, therefore, stressed primarily western art styles. This curriculum, widely implemented in Lin Feng-mien's school (currently called as Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts) was met by opposition and hostility. The opposing views were discussed in The First National Art Exhibition of 1929, which played an indispensable role in this discourse on modernization. The exhibition consisted of artists who had studied from both Tokyo and Paris. It opened up a debate about the structure of modernity in China. Artists like Xu and Li Yishi, ardent supports of Realism, were met by fierce resistance by champions of artistic freedom like Xu Zhimo, Lin Fengmien and Liu Haisu, who supported a plethora of styles from Impressionism to Cubism. Goodman (2012,171) labels the latter as supporters of Modernism or avant-garde. The debate later ended with the undisputed supremacy of Realism.

Parallel to Realism and debates of Modernism was Lu Xun's "Woodcut Movement" in 1930. The style depicts people's suffering and is characterized by a strong fighting spirit. In contrast to Modernism, Woodcut Movement was full of a "spirit of engagement with the world". This movement introduced German Expressionism and Soviet Socialist Realism, paving the way for Expressionist aesthetics.

### **Socialist Realism**

In the following decades, the influence of Soviet art increased dramatically. It was also the time when art leaders, primarily from the East China campus of CAFA, visited Moscow. Among them was Yan Han with his cohorts, Jiang Feng and Cai Ruohong, who spent considerable time in the USSR during 1954. During the same time, many academically trained artists<sup>4</sup> were chosen to enrol in the six-year course at Repin Art Academy in Leningrad. These artists were mainly from the families of soldiers, workers and peasants and had an impeccable record of allegiance to the party. (Andrews 1994, 151)

The training of these Chinese artists in the USSR transformed the Chinese oil painting scene of the 1950s. The administrators of the art field, on returning back, produced extensive reports on things learnt in the host nation. The first batch included professors from CAFA like Luo Gongliu and his colleague, Wu Biduan. On completing a special three years in Repin Academy, they returned with books that served as a repository for students eager to adopt the western style. These imported books included realist works of the Tsarist era, too like *Peredvizhniki* or “The Wanderers”<sup>5</sup>. (Sullivan 1996, 135) Amongst them, Ilya Repin and Vasili Surikov were among the most endorsed artists in PRC. Repin was applauded for being “people's artist”, and Surikov was referred to as an artistic genius in the realm of Realism. (Hung 2007, 788) For the depiction of the revolutionary aspect of work, neoclassical painter, Jacques David, achieved wide acclaim for the portrayal of political events of the French Revolution.

This avid recognition of the Socialist Realist style led to the invitation of the Soviet art educator Konstantin M. Maksimov to teach oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, in 1955. The students selected for this course, around twenty in number, were chosen to bear in mind the geographical diversity and academic and vocational balance. It was an amalgamation of artists from national art academies<sup>6</sup> to those having a background in publishing houses<sup>7</sup>. Apart from this, cohorts from the People's Liberation Army<sup>8</sup> were selected as well. The course, organized by the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with CAFA, lasted two years and provided a postgraduate degree.

The study of artworks was not limited to Russian artists in the class. (Carroll 2016, 132) This was perhaps why the focus areas in teaching methods had glaring similarities with the European academic oil painting training. These areas produced myriad compositional styles by exploring the interaction of light with space and form, with European verisimilitude in draughtsmanship and techniques. The subject matter should be based on real-life events only.



**Fig. 1.** Hou Yimin, *Underground Worker*, 1957. Oil on canvas. Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing.

These qualities are clearly observed in *Underground Worker* (fig 1), 1957 and *Chairman Mao with Auyuan Mine Workers*, (fig 2) date unknown, by Hou Yimin. *Underground Worker* depicts a group of young people printing propaganda work before the liberation. The central figure (young Hou himself) is seen instructing a lady in front of him in the background whereas the figure in the background is writing matter for the posters and the figure in front (Zhou Sicong) is printing them. This incident is based on his early life (1948), when Hou the head of an underground party at Beijing Art School, was responsible for organizing a group for academy teachers and students and producing handbills. These propaganda posters were printed in *Xinminbao* and were distributed after the nationalists surrendered. (Andrews 1994, 88) This painting served as a precedent for the series of historical paintings, including *Auyuan Mine*, which he painted during his later years. *Auyuan Mine Workers* is based on a trade union launched by CCP to fight against unjust working conditions. Mao visited to investigate conditions at the Anyuan coal mine. This painting is interesting because of many reasons. First is the portrayal, which is so starkly different from the painting of Liu Chunhua, titled *Chairman Mao goes to Anyuan*, 1968. In Chunhua's painting, Mao is dressed in a scholarly mandarin collar gown, carrying an umbrella under his right arm. However, in the painting by Yimin, we see Mao dressed in a pair of trousers<sup>9</sup>, which seem more suitable for forays in mining pits. I use the word foray because there is a figure of an amputee in front of him. This figure, combined with the frail bodies of workers, could also be an indication of poor working conditions in the mine. Another difference is the color scheme. Chunhua's painting has cool colors whereas Yimin's artwork employs more of warm undertones. There is, however, one common aspect in both paintings. Mao has a clenched fist in both artworks, which might be employed to show determination.



**Fig.2.** Hou Yimin, Chairman Mao with Auyuan Mine Workers. Oil on canvas. The National Art Museum of China.

Coming to the artworks of Hou Yimin, in both the paintings, *Underground Worker* and *Chairman Mao with Auyuan Mine Workers*, the central figure, highlighted through the interplay of light and shade, is in a seated position and engaged in action, which is a new characteristic of a painting of PRC. In addition to this, Mao is highlighted in the painting by his posture and the aura around him, where people in the foreground are looking up to him, and workers in front of him are listening intently to what he has to say. Both the compositions have a similar depiction of the central figure, where the figure is situated in the middle ground. The mathematical spatial mapping is evident in the depiction of Mao, who is placed on the left side of the painting. The illuminated face of the central figures and the dullness of edges towards the painting leads the painting to be perceived as a square format work instead of the rectangular frame it occupies. A high level of draughtsmanship is visible in Hou's depiction of workers in *Chairman Mao*



with *Auyuan Mine Workers*. Contrasted to his earlier painting, the spontaneous brushstrokes, a characteristic of traditional Chinese painting, have been replaced by a realistic portrayal of the naked, frail and bent bodies of the workers. This aspect shown in multiple ways is also brought forth by the amputated arm of a worker in front of Mao, with the arm resting on an agricultural tool.

The color palette is limited to warm colors in the above two paintings due to the light source. However, diverse exploration of the interaction of light with space can be seen in the artworks of other students like Jianjun Zhan. Zhan's graduation painting, *Starting Out*, 1957, effectively handles outdoor lighting. This painting is too backed by personal experience. Zhan, moved by the heroic spirit of these workers spent time with them in Beijing Youth Wasteland Reclamation Base. The painting depicts a group of young workers in the Great Northern Wasteland preparing the land for cultivation despite the harsh weather conditions. It is painted mostly in warm colors; however, the occasional use of cool color is equitably distributed throughout the painting, be it the foreground, middle-ground or background.



**Fig. 3.** Zhan Jianjun. *Starting Out*. 1957. Oil on canvas. 140 x 348 cm. Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing.

This soviet influence in oil painting is visible in the paintings between the late 1950s to the mid-1960s where the Central Academy of Fine Arts served as a laboratory for experimentation with this art form. The career

trajectory of these students, on completion of the course, remained similar to the artists who returned to PRC after travelling extensively to Europe, predominately, France. On returning back, they assumed relevant positions to disseminate the teachings of class. Notes taken during the class and the progress of the students were published by the Party in Central Academy's journal, *Meishu yanjiu* and the national art journal, *Meishu*. (Andrews 152) Their works were displayed in prominent national exhibitions and some of the paintings were reproduced extensively in the form of posters.

### **Transformation into Mao's "revolutionary realism"**

The iconography changed during the Cultural Revolution when Mao's wife Jiang Qing dictated the guidelines for artworks. Although rendered with the same realist draughtsmanship, the subject matter was altered to the depiction of the heroism of the army and farmers, accompanied, by Jiang's "red, bright, and shining" aesthetics, meant to induce revolutionary fervour in the masses. This led to borrowing stylistic elements from the New Year paintings (*nianhua*). Since *nianhua* paintings were festive in nature, it was argued that incorporating them could help extol the triumph of the Revolution. "Maoist sublime" comes into play at this juncture where the works of art exude an overwhelming intensity and power of life-crushing nature". (Wang 2004, 238) This further leads to emotional transformations in viewers and purification in artists, quintessential for political idealism achieved during this Revolution. PRC favoured this nationalist fervor after the decline of Sino-Soviet relations, and it separates this style from the earlier discussed Soviet model. CCP majorly commissioned revolutionary themes and artworks of historical importance.

Dong Xiwen's *The Grand Ceremony of the Founding of the People's Republic of China*, 1953, (fig 4) demonstrates the above-mentioned qualities in vivid style. Depicting the establishment of the PRC in Tiananmen square, the central figure (Mao) stands on a raised stage, surrounded by party officials on the left and cheering crowds with flags, at a distance, on the right. The space between the central figure and officials enhances the aura of Mao. The banality of the lantern flying in his direction adds to the visual trope. On a



symbolic level, his authority is illustrated by making him face the Zhengyang Gate, which functioned as a main entry point for the imperial palace.



**Fig. 4.** Dong Xiwen. *The Founding Ceremony of the Nation*. ca. 1967. Oil on canvas. 230 × 405 cm. National Museum of China, Beijing.

The sublimity is exhibited by the color red used in lanterns, carpets, and columns. In the background, the city walls are too painted red, adding to the festive atmosphere. The blue color of the sky, in sharp contrast with the warm colors, is a characteristic borrowed from the folk-art terminology. Dong explains his selection of colors in 1953 "The Chinese people like bright, intense colors. This convention is in line with the theme of *The Founding Ceremony of the Nation*. In my choice of colors I did not hesitate to put aside the complex colors commonly adopted in Western painting as well as the conventional rules for oil painting. If this painting is rich in national styles," he continued, "it is largely because I adopted these [native] approaches." (Hung 2007, 809)

A vast expanse of the sky is represented in the background, uninterrupted by the red columns on the right of Mao, which, if compared to

the original photograph of Tiananmen square, is missing in the painting, depicting the creative liberty exercised by the artist.



**Fig. 5.** Reproduction by Jin Shangyi, Zhao Yu, and Yan Zhenduo of Dong Xiwen. *The Founding Ceremony of the Nation*. ca. 1979. Oil on canvas. 230 × 405 cm. National Museum of China (formerly Museum of the Chinese Revolution), Beijing.

Although labelled as "pure propaganda" by scholars, Zhang Shaoxia and Li Xiaoshan were the only art historians who appreciated the composition and the color palette of the painting. (Andrews 1994, 80) Xu, however, categorized the color scheme, under the subheading of a poster, not a painting. Nevertheless, the painting was a mammoth success, as Mao personally endorsed it. The success can partially be attributed to its sponsorship too since a nationalized museum commissioned it. It resulted in becoming a template for the new nationalized form of art. A million copies were produced by the Fine Art Publishing House, alone, in addition to it being published in school textbooks. However, it was seen as more of a development in *nianhua*, as subsequently, it functioned as one of the interior essentials sanctioned by the party. (Andrews 1994, 80)

This painting became ubiquitous in the PRC, which led to a series of changes according to changing demands from the party. First, the artist was

asked to eliminate Gao Gang, the figure in a blue suit on the extreme right, which was occupied by the surrounding background, flowers and cityscape. Later, in 1972, it was decided that Liu Shaoqi's presence would be erased as well for what was perceived as his “right wing” views. Since Liu’s figure was in the middle of a horde of party officials, his face was replaced with the person behind him. Fairly nearing the exhibition, another change was ordered, for Lin Boqu, the secretary-general, depicted on the far left of the group, had been removed from his position. With the deteriorating health of the artist, his student, Jin Shangyi, took over and offered to make a replica of the painting with the suggested changes (fig. 5). Both the paintings form a part of the permanent collection in the National Museum of China.

### **Conclusion**

The aesthetics and concepts employed in this paper are primarily derived from 20<sup>th</sup> century Modernism and Post Modernism. This period was also when postcolonial, global and transnational were binding concepts for art practice. The paper employs ‘worlding’ as a phenomenon that applies interpretive frames to global art discourse, occluded by the Euromericans perspective. Therefore, instead of seeing art styles employed in Chinese propaganda posters as something completely dependent on external, this study oversees the development of style as a collaboration of exogenous with endogenous discourses. This collaboration enables us to find an intermediate zone where a local repositioning of these discourses occurs. It is in these intermediate zones that we observe massive cultural and aesthetic transitions visible by the rejection of the existing system and adoption or adaptation of a new one. These transitions have engendered a unique form of Chinese art embroiled with its cultural dialect. Therefore, Chinese propaganda art during the given epoch, which is often viewed as an extension of Soviet style art, is actually an attempt to develop their own national art form.

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#### **Endnotes**

1. Korean War, 1950–53, The First Five-Year Plan (1953–57) and Great Leap Forward, also known as Second Five-Year Plan (1958–62)
2. Gao Jianfu, Li Shutong, Chen Baoyi, He Xiangning. The names are taken from the website CAFA named CAFA ART INFO. <http://www.cafa.com.cn/en/opinions/reviews/details/8325814>
3. Yen Wen-liang in Soochow, Hsu Pei-hung in Nanking and later Peking, Lin Feng-mien in Hangchow. Lin Feng-mien's school later became, with that in Peking, one of the two national art academies and the centre of the most progressive art movements in China.
4. Among the students who were sent to the Repin Art Academy were, in the first group, Li Tianxiang, a 1950 graduate of CAFA, and Chen Zunsan, of Liaoning. The 1954 group included Lin Gang, a young professor at CAFA, and two artists from CAFA's East China campus, Quan Shanshi and Xiao Feng. In 1955 Deng Shu, who had attained considerable recognition for her nianhua in the early 1950s, was dispatched. Li Jun, a young teacher at Beijing Normal University, went to Leningrad as part of the last group in 1956.

5. In 1870, a group of artists formed The Society for Traveling Exhibitions (Obshchestvo peredvizhnykh vystavok), and became known as the Peredvizhniki (The Wanderers or Itinerants in English). This society had as its goals not only to create art that presented an accurate representation of contemporary life in Russia, but also to bring art out of the capitals and into the countryside—to the people—to create an art for the nation.

6. The list is taken from the book by Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the PRC*, 416. JinShangyi, Hou Yimin, Feng Fasi, Zhang Wenxin, and Shang Husheng were selected from CAFA. Others included Ren Mengzhang from the Lu Xun Academy of Arts in Shenyang; Wang Xuzhu and Yuan Hao from the academy in Wuhan; Wei Chuanyi from the academy in Sichuan; Zhan Beixin, from the academy in Xi'an; Lu Guoying, from the Nanjing College of Arts.

7. Wu Dezu, from the People's Art Press Creation Studio in Beijing; and Qin Zheng, from Tianjin. Yu Yunjie, who worked at a publishing firm in Shanghai, was added as a special student in 1956, the only representative of his city. For more information, read Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the PRC*, 152.

8. Gao Hong and He Kongde belonged to PLA according to Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the PRC*, 416.

# Giorgio Morandi between Italy and Brazil: Proposals to Modern Art

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to address the way through which the artist Giorgio Morandi contributed, even if indirectly, to the consolidation of two proposals for modern art. The first one concerns the Italian attempt to overcome a political regime in search of proposing new dialogues with the centers of modern art worldwide. The second one, which concerns Brazil, focuses on efforts trying to assert itself as one of the relevant centers of modern art. For this, we will consider the biennials of São Paulo and Venice, as well as the position of art critics such as Mário Pedrosa and Lionello Venturi and the art historian Roberto Longhi.

## **KEYWORDS**

Giorgio Morandi; Bienal de São Paulo; Biennale di Venezia; Italian Criticism; Brazilian Criticism.



The arguments presented in this paper derived from parallel research to the doctoral thesis “Between the criticism and the form: reflections on the works of Giorgio Morandi in the MAC-USP collection”, presented to the Aesthetics and Art History graduate program at the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC-USP), in 2022. During this period, the research focused on systematizing the relationship between two still life paintings by the artist Giorgio Morandi, and the collection of Italian paintings owned by that museum. In the course of the research, some information regarding the circulation of the artworks of the Italian painter in Brazil began to take on relevant proportions, which, for reasons related to the structure of the research, should be explored outside the *corpus* of the thesis. With that in mind, this paper is the result of that second effort.

The 1940s and 1950s meant a period of great political, social, and cultural transformations to both Brazil and Italy. If, on the one hand, the European country, which had just emerged from the war, was striving to regain its position of reference in the world art circuit, the South American country sought to reach a place never previously occupied. The Bolognese painter Giorgio Morandi certainly participated in both projects, and despite having never left Italy, enabled the two countries to engage with other great centers of modern art.

Before investigating the particularities of such matter, it is worth noting that Giorgio Morandi was not the only agent of this process, much less the only artist to be part of this endeavor. However, what we propose here is an accurate cut that takes into consideration the leading role of the Bolognese artist in Brazilian and Italian environments between 1945 and 1957, as well as the performance of agents involved in the production of the Venice and São Paulo Biennials. For this, in addition to the contextualization of the artist himself, we will focus on some events, such as the Venice and São Paulo Biennials, as well as the intellectual production of critics and art historians, more specifically with regard to the figures of Roberto Longhi, Lionello Venturi and Mario Pedrosa.

Regardless of how clear the post-war historical context is to many readers, given the international character of this publication, it is essential to

point out some of the issues that guided the political and social life of that period. Being aware of such factors may help in the process of understanding motivations, concerns, reactions etc. In relation to Italy, both the economy and politics faced moments of crisis. Inflation reached very high figures and the country's infrastructure, such as roads, ports and railways, had been hit hard by the war. In matters pertaining to politics, King Vittorio Emanuele III, deemed to be among the ones responsible for the ills of recent years, is replaced by his son Umberto II who, in turn, is deposed by a popular vote that opted for a republican political regime, just after two months of reign. As far as culture is concerned, Italian cinema got to know one of two major expressions, the New Realism, or Neorealism. Filmmakers like Rossellini, in the film *Roma, Città Aperta*, or de Sica, with *Ladri di Biciclette*, showed the public the hardships of a country struggling to rebuild itself. In the field of diplomacy, the United States instituted the Marshall Plan, which provided assistance for the economic recovery of the countries involved in World War II, without neglecting, of course, the massive propaganda against the USSR and the communist parties in Italy.<sup>1</sup>

Brazil, on the other hand, remained neutral throughout practically the entire war. Only in 1942, after the visit of the US president to Rio de Janeiro for the Inter-American Conference, did the country take the side of the allies and broke trading relations with Italy and Germany. During this period, Brazil was engaged in a modernization project proposed by what was known as *Estado Novo*, or the third republic, whose central figure was Getúlio Vargas. This regime lasted from 1937 to 1946, when Vargas was deposed by a military coup. With the end of *Estado Novo*, the country's modernization project continued at an accelerated pace, culminating in the construction of the country's capital in Brasília in 1960. This modernizing project even affects the Brazilian cultural and artistic environment, especially with regard to the creation of cultural institutions, such as the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP), in 1947, and the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (MAM-SP), in 1948. Another example of a relevant cultural institution is the *Bienal de São Paulo*, which will be explored more closely in the lines below.

As far as Giorgio Morandi is concerned, the 1940s and 1950s represent a strong internationalization of his name. The North American art historian Janet Abramowicz,<sup>2</sup> for instance, mentions that in the 1950s it was practically impossible to see Morandi in Italy except for works that belonged to private collections. This statement is relevant if we take into account the historical context in which it was inserted. So, as previously mentioned, Morandi, who was seen by critics and art history as a withdrawn, isolated artist, oblivious to political conditions, has his name internationalized precisely at the moment when Italy needs to detach its image from the fascist regime.

The position alien to the fascist regime can be seen on the occasion of the third edition of the *Quadriennale di Roma*, in 1939. By then, Morandi was already an artist of great circulation in Italy, therefore, that year he was invited to exhibit in a *Special Room*, which contained sixty works, including paintings, drawings, and engravings. Still, regarding the historical context of that period, the year 1939 is marked by the beginning of World War II. With the invasions of Poland by Germany and Albania by Italy, the war atmosphere takes over the Italian intellectual environment thoroughly. As a result, ultranationalist militants begin to demand that artists take part in this discussion in support of the fascist policy. At the very beginning of the *Quadriennale*, Giuseppe Bottai, who then held the position of Minister of Education, to which the *Quadriennale* was subordinate, says:

There must be a reciprocal connection between political facts and artistic ones... artists must participate in the history of our time... (Abramowicz 2005, 158)

It seems that, because of the criteria adopted by the jury, the selection of artists and the award itself followed very specific standards regarding the political positions of those involved. This issue stood out even with respect to technical criteria. At the end of the event, being considered as one of the possible winners, Morandi was forced to take a stand against the accusations of being a bourgeois artist. Romano Romanelli, a sculptor and alleged friend of Morandi's, wrote a letter to Bottai warning the minister about giving the grand prize to Giorgio Morandi. Part of the letter says:

In certain moments of history, we must describe the essential themes of our times in a masculine manner. It would be a terrible misfortune for Italian art if we were to allow the opinions of those dregs [quisquillie brandiane o longhiane], of critics such as Brandi and Longhi to prevail... if they do prevail, our art will end up more tragically than French art did after impressionism, when every form of decadence was let loose in the name of feelings. [...] “action be taken by the Minister’s office to put the brakes on [those] thoughtless young men [Brandi and Longhi] and stop them, for they don’t know where their exaltation of the decadence will take them. (Abramowicz 2005, 160)

Romanelli ends the letter by saying that Morandi was not a real painter. As it is already known, the Bolognese artist did not win that *Quadriennale*, however, the support received by the artist was quite important in the following years, mainly by names such Roberto Longhi, Cesare Brandi and Lionello Venturi. Furthermore, his attitude towards the event ensured that critics and art historians could rely on his name, as one of the artists who had made it through the fascist regime unharmed.

More important than Giorgio Morandi's biography is how his image circulated in the artistic and intellectual environment of that period. Seen as an isolated artist, alien to the artistic avant-gardes, Morandi was considered by many to be the best living Italian artist. In addition to the fact that he was considered an artist of excellence, and unlike most Italian artists of that period, the Bolognese artist assumed his French influences, mainly Cézanne’s and Chardin’s. Furthermore, his proposals for art were completely devoid of any poetic or metaphorical sense. For this reason, some points in his biography started to become attractive to those who sought to argue about the pertinence of the engagement of Italian art with the most modern art being produced.

In order to clarify the extent to which the position of critics and art historians contributed to the consolidation of the image of Giorgio Morandi and given the Italian action in the sense of proposing a dialogue with the centers of modern art, two figures, art history professor Roberto Longhi and

art critic Lionello Venturi, stand out. Certainly, other names acted to promote the name of the Bolognese artist in international contests. However, Longhi and Venturi, by adopting completely different positions in the understanding of the role of art, represent a good alternative to what we propose to discuss in this paper.

Roberto Longhi taught art history in the city of Bologna, the same city where Morandi was born and lived throughout his whole life. In his first lecture, when he assumed the chair of art history at the university, Longhi uttered the following words:

And I end up not finding it entirely accidental that, even today, one of the best living painters in Italy, Giorgio Morandi, while navigating the most dangerous shoals of modern painting, always knew how to direct his journey with a meditated slowness, with a studied affection, typical of those pioneering a new path. (Longhi 1935, 3-4)

Like other art critics, such as Cesare Brandi, for example, Longhi avoided associating Morandi with 20th-century painting. For Longhi, Morandi was the artist capable of re-establishing ties with the tradition of academic painting, even if he broke it, out of his own free will. Despite having dedicated few texts exclusively to Morandi, Longhi was able to construct a historical narrative favorable to humanist conceptions, which he was so fond of, avoiding any kind of relationship with abstraction. The conclusion of this work can be seen in the publication of the volume *Da Cimabue a Morandi*.

Lionello Venturi, on the other hand, in his 1945 book *Pittura Contemporanea*, attributes to Giorgio Morandi a very different role from what Italian art critics had been doing until then. According to Venturi, Morandi would have contributed decisively to Italian abstract painting. The importance that Venturi acquires in Morandian art criticism goes far beyond his interpretation, it is, as it should be, a creation of its own time. In other words, that means that thanks to Venturi's critique, Morandi extrapolates the first half of the 20th century and, even looking at the Italian classical tradition, manages to influence a whole new range of abstract artists. From

Venturi's standpoint, Morandi approaches abstraction because he is keen on composition rather than representation. Even though his roots lie in the art of the previous century, it is still modern. In the book *Pittori di Ieri e di Oggi*, Venturi says:

Regardless of the roots in the 19th-century Italian tradition, oblivious to any presumptuous cultural reference to the ancient art - his connections with them are all about nature and blood - Morandi's painting is, by instinct and will, absolutely modern; and it seems that, at birth, he breathed such modernity lingering in the air, so, indirectly, as already mentioned, were the influences he suffered, as already been mentioned: the more sensitive one, of Cézanne, who is moreover at the origin of Morandi as that of the broader currents of contemporary painting. (Venturi 1949, 91-92)

Therefore, in short, we find two antagonistic figures. However, in one way or another they converge to crown Giorgio Morandi as one of the protagonists of 20th century Italian art. All this convergence becomes even clearer when we take into account the XXIV *Biennale di Venezia*, from 1948, known as the reopening biennial. On that occasion, Lionello Venturi, Roberto Longhi, Giorgio Morandi, Pio Semeghini, Felice Casorati, Nino Barbantini, Antonio Gnan, Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, Carlo Carrà, Domenico Varagnolo, Rodolfo Pallucchini and Marino Marini took part in the organizing committee of the event which, among other things, presupposed a greater influence from the United States, mainly in the figure of the collector Peggy Guggenheim.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, a lot of international attention was directed to the event, as world-famous names would be present. In line with the questions raised by the jury, the Italian collegiate crowned Giorgio Morandi the winner of the award for the best Italian artist. In other words, Giorgio Morandi's choice as the best national artist is not fortuitous, since, in addition to the technical aspects, the Bolognese artist was able to synthesize the tradition of the Italian classical painting, approach abstract painting, as well as keep himself away from the political narratives so costly to the history of Italian art.

It is not possible to conceive the creation of the *Bienal de São Paulo* without thinking about the *Bienalle di Venezia*. Far from trying to distance itself from this relationship, the *Bienal de São Paulo* insisted on reinforcing it. Thus, the first fact that we must take into account is precisely the nature of the creation of such event. To do so, we must go back to 1948, when the couple Ciccillo Matarazzo and Yolanda Penteado celebrated their wedding going on a trip to Europe. On the occasion, the consorts visited the *XXIV Biennale di Venezia*. The visit to the Venetian Biennial inspired the couple to create a Brazilian version of the event. In the catalogue for the *I Bienal de São Paulo*, art critic Lourival Gomes Machado writes:

By its very definition, the Bienal should fulfill two main tasks: to place the modern art of Brazil, not in a simple confrontation, but in a live contact [sic] with the art of the rest of the world; as for São Paulo it would seek to conquer the position of world artistic center. The reference to Venice was inevitable; far from escaping from it, we tried to have it as a lesson worthy of study and, also, as an encouraging stimulus. At that moment it was necessary to put the Museum of Modern Art to a hard test because, if it did not assert its reputation abroad, it would be better to abandon its daring project. (Machado 1951, 14)

In the same catalogue, a few pages ahead, Giovanni Ponti, president of the *Bienalle di Venezia* at that time, responds:

The Venice Biennale, which celebrated half a century of existence six years ago, welcomes the I Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil, which was inaugurated on the initiative of the Museum of Modern Art, with purposes and characteristics similar to those that inspired the activity of the Venetian entity. Just like Venice presents a vast panorama of the world's art to a mostly European public, we hope that the Bienal de São Paulo can do the same to South America, where a life rich in talents and multiple and fruitful achievements is eager to conquer its role in the field of culture, in which defined and appreciated testimonies have already been distinguished. (Ponti 1951, 124)



The international recognition of Brazilian efforts was not limited to Italy. The United States, especially with regard to the MoMA curator, Alfred Barr, were also present in the editions of the *Bienal de São Paulo*. In the fourth edition of the Biennale, in 1957, Barr, who at the time was a member of the international jury, said:

The Bienal de São Paulo is as important as the one in Venice and it seems to me to be better proportioned. The various foreign delegations are better represented here than there – with rare exceptions – and in a fairer proportion. I just think there should be more Brazilian art. (Barr 1957, 17)

Giorgio Morandi, in turn, exhibited in five editions of the Brazilian biennials, being the *IV Bienal de São Paulo*, in 1957, considered by art historians as the most representative one<sup>4</sup>. This representativeness results not only from the fact that it had won the Grand Prize for Painting with a *Special Room*, but also because it was a reference for a series of other exhibitions that took place after that edition. At the time, there was a strong controversy involving the grand prize, given that a significant part of the public, composed of Brazilian intellectuals and even the artists themselves, considered that Marc Chagall should be the winner. The argument sustained by the ones who defended Morandi was related to the modern aspects of the Bolognese artist's painting. The idea of modern painting should be highlighted, as the Brazilian artistic environment would rely on it to deal with the works of the Italian painter. In other words, the idea that Morandi is a representative of the modern values of art will be present in the arguments used by both art critics as well as curators who, even nowadays, deem the artist's work to be a suitable example to propose transitory relationships. Such relationships are often more visible than the formal matters regarding painting.

An example of art criticism based on the idea of modernity is that of Mário Pedrosa. Far beyond the sheer exercise of criticism, Pedrosa maintained a cordial friendship with Morandi, whom he affectionately called

the Bolognese master. For the critic, Morandi managed to be simultaneously a modern artist and the most archaic of them. In other words, according to the Brazilian intellectual, to understand the works of the Italian artist, one should be able to understand the process of recreating objects of daily use, while maintaining the tranquility necessary for a discoverer.

Furthermore, Pedrosa understood the history of art from a process that began in the Renaissance and culminated in abstraction. This process would favor the dismantling of naturalism or, as the critic described, of the “illusion of matter and the absolute color of the object”, towards an anti-naturalist and tectonic vocation of art.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in the essay *Panorama da Pintura Moderna*, Pedrosa establishes a careful analysis in which the modern project would be accomplished by means of abstract art.

In one of his most ambitious essays, “*Panorama da Pintura Moderna*”, Pedrosa concluded, in a judicious immanent analysis of the history of art ever since the Renaissance, that the modern project would be carried out by means of abstract art: “A program of indirect and gigantic preparation to reshape, through moving vision, manners of perception and feeling, and to lead to new ways of living.” With its liberation from the structures of representation, in Modernism time is no longer a decisive point: “The crux of the matter is now space.” (Arantes 2000, 13)

Given what was said in the previous paragraph, Giorgio Morandi seems to clearly be the type of artist who contributes to the perception of the exhaustion of figurative art, since he was free from the structures of representations, circumvented time and dealt with space-related issues. Such conception was never bluntly stated in Pedrosa's critical essays, however, when we observe the relationship established between the Bologna painter and Cézanne, the place Morandi should occupy both in the scale of values and in the history of art idealized by the critic becomes evident. According to Pedrosa, Cézanne's 'primitive' experiments were somehow accomplished in Morandi's objects. Said another way:

None of his contemporaries broke with the pictorial tradition of his country more bravely than he did. Being, however, the purest of modern artists, he is, at the same time, the most archaic of them, because his artisanal soul, entirely devoted to the daily recreation of flasks and bottles, requires, however, the gifts, wisdom, and patience of the discoverers. (Pedrosa 1947, 11)

The attentive reader must have noticed that Mário Pedrosa's positions are quite similar to Roberto Longhi's, regarding the classic Italian tradition, but, at the same time, they are also close to Lionello Venturi's when it comes to the rupture with the illusion of matter and liberation from the structures of representation in search of reflections on space. This position was fundamental, especially when Pedrosa justified the grand prize at the IV Bienal de São Paulo. According to the critic:

[...] the prize awarded to the Bolognese painter marks a turning point in the behaviour of the international jury, putting the Bienal de São Paulo in the place of an institution that 'now, between poetry and plastic, the international jury opted for the last one: Chagall, the very incarnation of imagination, of dreams, of poetic values par excellence, was passed over by Morandi, the artist who, alone and in obscurity, never subordinated the pure plastic values or any other, because for him just the values are valid on paintings, including poetic ones, that result from the pictorial work, that is, are products of the specific means of painting itself. (Pedrosa 1957, 11)

And still:

If one thing can be said about the prizes awarded this year by the Bienal de São Paulo, it is that the grand prize awarded to Giorgio Morandi marked the work of the international jury. Of all the awards granted, among national and foreign ones, this was the most important. [...] One can state that the consecration of Morandi was in fact a courageous act. The jury might not have been aware of what it was doing; the truth, however, is that with this the jury opened the way to a

revision in the scale of the values of the world great painting. Preferring the modest painter from Bologna to Chagall's brilliant name, the jury projected him among the greatest, and somehow, placed him in the front row, comprised of world-famous names. Up until then he had lived, acted, and improved apart from the great international current, and on the margins of the decisive axis Berlin -Paris - New York. (Pedrosa 1957, 6)

In short, the *Bienal* Grand Prize presents itself as a kind of consecration of Mário Pedrosa's art history project. If the path that art must follow is the "liberation of the structures of representation", towards an anti-naturalist, tectonic and abstract vocation of art, then the "courageous" award to Morandi: "[...] opened the way to a revision in the scale of the values of the world great painting." In this sense, Mário Pedrosa's prerogatives even contributed to the institutionalization of Morandi's works. Such evidence can be found in the exhibitions held at MAC-USP<sup>6</sup>, at the Reina Sofia Museum<sup>7</sup>, in Spain, or in the publication Mário Pedrosa: Primary Documents, by MoMA.

To conclude, it must be clear that the intense exchange of ideas between Italy and Brazil during the transition from the first to the second half of the twentieth century contributed decisively to the reinsertion of Italy and the insertion of Brazil into the international artistic environment. If on the one hand, Giorgio Morandi was an artist capable of rescuing classical values, on the other hand, he proposed a dialogue with the new abstract art. It should be borne in mind that, while Brazil contributed to the acceptance of Italy by the great centers of the world art, Italy likewise strived for the success of the Brazilian initiative.

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### Endnotes

1. The United States played a decisive role in recognizing the Italian effort to overcome the closure imposed by the fascist regime. Proof of that is the exhibition Twentieth-Century Italian Art, organized by MoMA in 1949. The episode was detailed in: Raffaele Bedarida. *Operation Renaissance: Italian Art at MoMA, 1940 – 1949* (Oxford: Oxford Art Journal, 2012), 147-169.
2. “In the 1950s it was almost impossible to view his paintings in Italy except in private collections, because few museums owned any of his work; discriminating collectors in Milan, such as Vitali and Gianni Mattioli, often opened their homes to allow others to see their collection.” Janet Abramowicz, *The Art of Silence*. (Yale: Yale University Press, 2005, 194.
3. The North American collector presented to the Biennale a pavilion composed only of pieces from her private collection. Among them were names like Dalí, Picasso, Rothko, Pollock, the latter making his debut in Italian exhibitions. Out of curiosity, the Guggenheim Museum in the city of Venice was built from this collection exhibited at the Biennale.
4. I Bienal, 1951; II Bienal, 1953; IV Bienal, 1957; XV Bienal, 1979; and, finally, at the XXXIV Bienal, 2021.
5. His critical activity would start from there to understand the History of Art in a great process in which, at least since the 19th century, art would move towards abstraction (which means a path to freedom), privileging the moments in which the progressive dismantling of naturalism, of the “finished detail”, of the “illusion of matter and the absolute color of objects is presented”. A critique, in short, that was guided by “a clearly anti-naturalist vocation, therefore tectonic and abstract”. Otília Arantes, *Modernidade Cá e Lá, Textos Escolhidos IV*. (São Paulo: Edusp, 2000), 13.
6. Unfortunately, the exhibition Homage to Mário Pedrosa: Commented Artists left no records. However, it is assumed that the two MAC-USP paintings were exhibited.
7. The exhibition The Affective Nature of Form, was on display at the Reina Sofia Museum between April 28 and October 16, 2017.