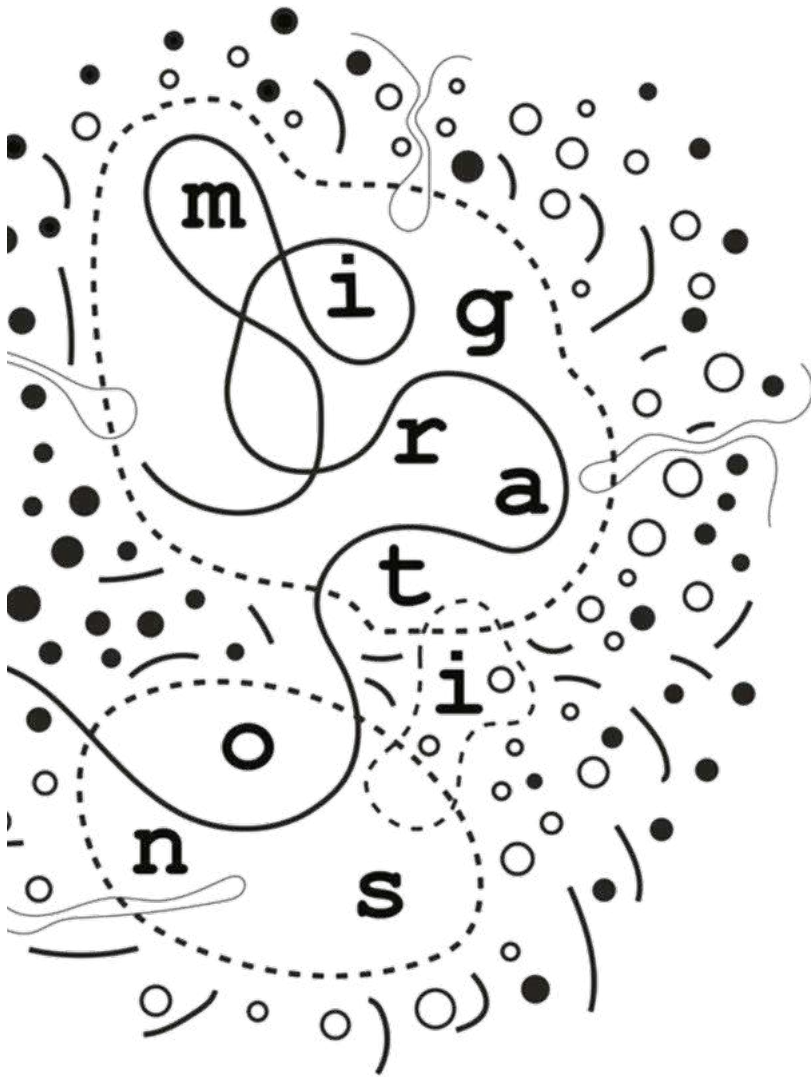


In Transit: Addressing World Art Systems

Session 15



Session 15

In Transit: Addressing World Art Systems

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The circumnavigation of the world provoked displacements of large populations and along with them the permanent removal and dislocation of objects from within their original place and cultural context. The field of art history and art museum collections inextricably controlling their presentation, circulation, research and interpretation, are facing urgent and critical ethical questions of accountability, responsibility and self-determination. This seminar intends to examine the history of museums and their expansion, especially the recent phenomenon of satellite museums, as well as art fairs, biennials, and major international exhibitions as it concerns the idea of migration considered from the point of view of institutions. It evokes the transit of institutional models, such as schools and art academies, whether linked or not to crafts and teaching in workshops. The session also intends to examine the unfolding of the various world art systems in the processes of globalization. Scholars as well as curators and artists, are working to articulate new and better questions, negotiate new truths, formulate and implement new frameworks and theoretical propositions, as a means to broaden the established art historical tradition and re-centre art, artists and their voices.

How do contemporary artists engage with and offer new perspectives in addressing such emotionally and politically charged issues as cultural, physical, social and artistic dislocation and displacement?

What are the ethical and scholarly responsibilities of art historians in dealing with the research, interpretation, exhibition and publication of art that continues to be 'disconnected' from its context and thus in danger to be limited by a Euro-centric lens? What are the new methodological

approaches that offer art historians and curators means to navigate respectfully and insightfully across cultures?

How do institutional models, often based upon a specific set of values and practices, migrate, adapt and ultimately affect the different cultural contexts where they are established? How are art historians and curators questioning and eventually reconfiguring those institutional models?

Those are some of the questions that this session proposes to address.

Migrations of ideas: Lina Bo Bardi's Approaches to Brazilian Culture

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ABSTRACT

This paper focus on some aspects of the performance of Lina Bo Bardi in Brazil, at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, through the analysis of two exhibitions, held between 1968 and 1969, at the opening of its new headquarters on Paulista Avenue: the museum's collection exhibit on the glass easels and "A Mão do Povo Brasileiro" (Hand of the Brazilian People).

KEYWORDS

History of exhibitions; Art Museums; Museu de Arte de São Paulo; Art History in Brazil; Lina Bo Bardi.

Since its inauguration in 1947, Museu de Arte de São Paulo proposed to work beyond the model of museum seen only as a deposit of works of art, a profile still very recurrent in Brazil at that time. In the first decades of its existence, the Museum developed actions through which they experimented different ways of acting. At that time, architect Lina Bo Bardi was responsible for the adaptations of the buildings that housed the institution as well as for expographic projects developed there.

The director of the Museum, Pietro Maria Bardi, and also Lina Bo structured the Museum around diverse forms of extroversion of its collection, among them: expositive experiences, lectures and courses, sections of cinema and music. In this way, the intention was to make the Museum a center of formation in arts, which did not exist in Brazil at the time.

The Museum's new building in Paulista Avenue also underlies its program and the actions resulting from it, by providing material structure appropriate to its development. Pietro Maria and Lina Bo Bardi announced to Brazil and the world their way of seeing art through the exhibitions with which they inaugurated the new Museum, in 1969.

The architecture developed there by Lina dialogued with several areas of knowledge, not only those of university theorists, but also with those of manual doing of the daily life of the people of various localities of Brazil. At the same time as the Museum would be the meeting place of the population, open to all, it also marked an imposing cultural space next to the financial center of the city, which constituted as the most important in the country.

The exhibitions we will analyze here compose with the new building a moment of synthesis of Lina's references, both related to modernist architecture brought from her degree in architecture in Italy and developed in Brazil, as well as the knowledge she acquired during her stay in Bahia between the end of the 1950s and early 1960s - especially with regard to the theme of the popular Brazilian culture.

It is verified throughout the trajectory of Bo Bardi, that her interest in the study of form transcends the architectural form itself and goes beyond pre-established categorizations around human production that separate the

typologies of objects such as: artistic, handmade, functional, ritual, among others.



Fig. 1. External view of MASP, 1970s. Photo: Unknown – Collection of Centro de Pesquisa do MASP – Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand

After finishing her course at the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Rome, Bo Bardi worked in the office of Gio Ponti, director of the Milan Triennale and *Domus* Magazines, who headed the movement of valorization of so-called artisanal production in Italy.

In 1944, Lina, in her article “Disposition of internal environments”, discusses a history of the relationships between art and technique as well as between art and life, when dealing with decoration, once again evidencing her interest in form and bringing the production traditionally associated with the

term “Fine Arts” closer to what would be the so-called “industrial design” in the future.

Lina states that the ancient precepts linked to the Academy of Fine Arts excluded artists from manufactured and industrial production. Over time, especially after the second half of the 19th century, this relationship was broken and there was an approximation between artists and the industrial world.

Probably one of the relationships between Lina and the issues related to human production – contained in the named artistic, industrial and artisanal manifestations – is based on her interest in form – the form elaborated by people from their intellectual and manual/practical activities. Such interest of Lina was possibly an important factor, which led her to focus more closely on Brazilian popular production. This will give rise to the work she developed intensely from the end of the 1950s.

But, Lina would deal with such a production also seeking to understand it from various bias, inserting it in the political and social context of the time, for example.

In taking stock of the history of manual production of popular Brazilian civilization, the architect considers that:

The review of the country's recent history is necessary [...] This balance is not the balance of folklore, always paternalistically supported by high culture, it is the balance 'seen from the other side', the participant balance. It is the Aleijadinho and the Brazilian culture before the French Mission. It is the northeastern that makes the leather [...] it is the black and the indigenous. A mass that invents, which brings an indigestible, dry, hard-to-digest contribution. This urgency, this cannot wait any longer, is the basis of the Work of the Brazilian artist, a reality that does not need artificial stimuli, a cultural invoice at his fingertips, a unique anthropological richness, with tragic and fundamental historical events. Brazil has industrialized, the new reality needs to be accepted to be studied. The return to extinct social bodies is impossible, the creation of artisanal centers, the return to a craft antidote to an industrialization foreign to the cultural principles of the

country is wrong. Because crafts as a social body never existed in Brazil [...] What exists is a domestic pre-crafts [...] The cultural survey of Brazilian pre-handicrafts could have been done before the country went down the path of dependent capitalism, when a bourgeois democratic revolution was still possible. In this case, the cultural options in the field of Industrial Design could have been others, more adherent to the real needs of the country [...]. (Bardi, Lina, 1994, p. 12-13)

The edition of *Habitat* and *Mirante das Artes* magazines and the articles made by Lina for the newspaper *Salvador News Diary*, in Bahia, can be understood as a means of disseminating her reflections on art, design, culture, architecture, among other subjects.

In the preface to the first *Habitat Magazine*, from 1950, Lina Bo expressed her concern in making a magazine that would help Brazil to know its own reality, highlighting its studies on the specificities of the country:

The history of Brazil remains largely unprecedented [...] Thus, the past so rich in themes for re-recall and the effervescent activity of the present have not yet found a documentation and computerization appropriate to reality and its importance, although day by day increases the desire to know what is done in the country and outside it in matters of art. It is enough to reflect on the extraordinary increase in modern architecture, the impulse given to culture by the new museums, the statements of painting, the outbreak of industrial arts, not to mention the diffusion of music [...] and the enthusiasm with which the problem of theater and cinema is being faced, to evaluate the terms in which Brazil has posed the problem and intends to solve the issue of the arts as an educational factor [...]

The imaginative beauty of a forest, a pau-a-pique hut, a marajoara pot, a baroque church, the Aleijadinho, the goldsmiths of Bahia, the Manueline furniture of Recife, the epiglets of the French mission, the architects of the theater of Manaus and those of the Ministry of Education and Health of Rio, the country painters and renowned artists, ceramists, the gameleiros of the coast, indigenous, African, descendants of conquerors, emigrants, all who

contributed, continue contributing and participate in some form of art in Brazil will have their activities disseminated in 'Habitat' with the commitment of those who know how to appreciate what the country has most characteristic. (Bardi, Lina, apud Pereira, 2008, p. 37-38)

In addition to the activities developed in Habitat Magazine and during her stay in Bahia, Lina came to São Paulo and conceived, in partnership with Martim Gonçalves, representative of the Theater School of the Federal University of Bahia, the exhibition "Bahia", held between September and December 1959, at Ibirapuera Park, next to the V Bienal de Arte de São Paulo.

The exhibition aimed to problematize the limits of what was considered as "Art", with a capital "A". The text in the catalogue begins by raising these questions:

What is generally defined as 'popular art', 'folklore', 'primitive art' or 'spontaneous', implies that tacitly in an art classification that, excluding man⁴, considers the same art as something individual, abstract activity, privilege. Where does art start and end? What are your borders? This 'no man's land', which limits man in the expression of his total humanity, depriving him of one of the most necessary and profound manifestations, such as aesthetics, this boundary between Art and art, is what this Exhibition suggests.

What is the place occupied in the graduation (explicit, implicit or 'condescending'), of the Arts, by the so-called popular art, spontaneous, primitive?

What does it mean? Why is there popular art, not that of civil servants, engineers and bankers? What is called 'people' is the only class not inhibited by 'cultural' schemes and concepts, the only one perhaps that preserves the habit of natural explanations of aesthetic man.

The term 'folklore' defines – seen and classified by 'cult' men – the need and the capacity for aesthetic manifestations of culturally 'isolated' man (whenever the term 'culture' is used in the traditional sense). But art seems to claim today its human values, abandoning schemes and seeking, beyond art itself, the fullness of its expression. From the return, of the desire for self-annulment, begins a time when the totality of human values, in its material

expression, is linked to a critical lucidity and an autonomy, which no longer admits divisions in watertight categories or compartments, a time that can no longer deny man, in the name of any creed and no myth, the right to live in this fullness. (Bardi, Lina; Gonçalves. In: Ferraz (Org.), 1993, p. 134)

It is not by chance that "Bahia" was presented to the city of São Paulo parallel to an International Art Biennial, which was and is seen as one of the most important shows about world-renowned artistic productions, considered historical or contemporary icons of "Art".

The text of the catalog of "Bahia" returns art to its condition of simple human manifestation, seeking to remember that its origins are inherent to human life. The dialectic between art and life is in man. Only the human being sees, thinks and makes art. Aesthetics exists because of it.

In the exhibition, popular objects, handmade, rustic, everyday, ritual and decorative use, appeared exhibited in the same environment in which were capoeiristas, baianas serving typical food and also, following certain exhibition patterns similar to those used in exhibitions dedicated to "Art" with "A", such as those used in the Biennial to display paintings, drawings and sculptures.

To clarify the context of the conception of "Bahia" and the exhibition "A Mão do Povo Brasileiro", we will briefly discuss the period in which Lina Bo Bardi lived in the Northeast.

In April 1958, Lina was invited to give lectures on the problem of space in architecture at the School of Fine Arts of the Federal University of Bahia. In August of the same year, the architect would return to Bahia to teach three months of course on Theory and Philosophy of Architecture, at the same university.

In her writings for the first class of the course, Lina Bo Bardi characterizes the definition of an architect:

[...] is a skilled worker who knows his office not only practice as theoretically and historically, and is aware that his humanity is not an end in itself, but is composed, in addition

to his own individuality, of other men and nature. [Bardi, Lina, 1958. In: Rubino; Grinover (Org.), 2009, p.82]

It is observed there, among other aspects, a concern to instruct future architects about a line of action that would link theoretical knowledge with practice. This would be an urgent problem that would derive precisely from the end of the craft era: the split between technician and executing worker.

Still in her class, Lina talked about the care that the architect must have in carrying out work that establishes dialogues with the needs of the place where it is being made. Lina's short teaching period reveals a dedication to convey to her students the principles and concerns that permeated her own architectural works, for example, in the projection and construction of MASP.

As a kind of solution to the problem of the rupture between the technician and the executing worker, Lina proposes in the article "Industrial art" the creation of a museum:

The central subject could be placed at the immediate collecting of all the ancient and modern handmade material existing in each country, in the creation of a large living museum, a museum that could be called Crafts and Industrial Art and that constituted the root of the historical-popular culture of the country.

This Museum should be completed by a school of industrial art (art in the sense of craft, in addition to art) that would allow contact between technicians, designers and performers. To express, in the modern sense, what was handicraft, preparing new generations, not for future utopias, but for the reality that exists and that everyone knows: the plank architect who does not know the reality of the work, the worker who does not know how to 'read' a plant [...]

We do not want to devalue the official aid work for artisanal groups. This help is a transition, a necessary transition phase, while the popular artist is a pure artist and cannot suffer directed influences

Ours is a collective time [...] men must be prepared for this collaboration. No hierarchical distinction between

designers and performers. [...] Collective and no longer individual participation; the technical result of the craftsmanship of our day: the industry. (Bardi, Lina, 1960. In: Rubino; Grinover (Org.), 2009, p.111)

This care pointed out by Lina, in the excerpt, regarding the study and presentation of the objects and the contents that involved them can be observed in the exhibition "Bahia". There was evidenced this concern that the museum, proposed in her text, should have with regard to the collection of old handmade material and the present.

Still in this article, the architect defines the differences between the terms crafts, craftsman and popular artist who will guide her speeches at this moment:

What is handicrafts? The expression of a time and a society, a worker who owns a modest capital, which allows him to work the raw material and sell the finished product, with material profit and spiritual satisfaction, being the project designed and executed by himself.

What's a craftsman today? He is an executor, a specialist without capital who lends his own service to those who provide him with the raw material, that is, owner or client, and receives a salary in exchange for his own execution work [...]

What is folk art when true? It's Art, with capital A. [Bardi, Lina, 1958. In: Rubino; Grinover (Org.), 2009, p. 107-108]

The museum proposal described by Lina in the text "Industrial Art" was worked on the activities she developed with the Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia (MAMB) and the Museum de Arte Popular do Unhão, in the early 1960s. These institutions sought to become centers of cultural meeting and also training centers, always related to aspects of the work developed in the MASP.

MAMB was founded on January 6th, 1960, and Lina took over as director. The Museum occupied the space of the former Castro Alves Theater, located in the center of Salvador and adapted by Lina.

The last project planned by Lina in 1963, in Bahia, was a School of Industrial Design and Handicraft, which would be constituted next to the Museu Solar do Unhão and aimed to place designers (students of architecture and engineering) together with master craftsmen, so that, intellectual and practical knowledge of both groups could be exchanged. However, with the military coup in 1964, her projects were foiled and Lina returned to São Paulo.

The construction of the MASP occurred between Lina's stay in Bahia and São Paulo, during 1957 to 1968. Lina constituted on Paulista Avenue what she called a *modern popular museum*: on the one hand, a center conceived from the experiences obtained with Brazilian popular culture - which helped her in the search for simple and economic solutions to the forms and the materials used in the construction of the Museum - and, on the other hand, that had popular projection and was frequented by the people.

The Trianon region was considered by Lina as the ideal place to receive the new building of the institution, precisely due to the ease of access. The architect intended to make the Museum a meeting point for people, which was open not only to cultural manifestations, but to any collective manifestations.

According to Freire (1997), the Trianon's vocation to be a social meeting point was pointed out in the writings of Mário de Andrade, from the early 1920s, who met there together with other intellectuals and artists. In 1950, the Belvedere of Trianon was overthrown and hosted the first São Paulo Arts Biennial the following year. According to Freire (1997, p. 269), "the news that the São Paulo Museum of Art would occupy the trianon site caused a positive reception from those who knew it in their aureous times".

Thus, a building of "seventy meters of light", as Lina Bo Bardi said, basically consisting of concrete and glass was erected.

I looked for a simple architecture, [...] that could immediately communicate what, in the past, was called a 'monument', that is, the sense of 'collective' [...]. I took advantage of the experience of five years in the Northeast, the lesson of popular experience, not as folk romanticism but as an experience of simplification. Through a popular

experience I came to what I could call Poor Architecture [...] I think at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo I eliminated cultural snobbery [...] opting for direct solutions [...] (Bardi, Lina, 1997, s/p.)

The huge free span, achieved through the suspension of two floors of the building, supported by four pillars, was the solution found to respect the requirement of the donors of the land, to keep the view to the city center.

On the second suspended floor, Lina exhibited part of the paintings of the museum collection hanging on crystal easels. These were arranged throughout the entire length of the huge room, so that the front of each painting could be seen from the entrance of the room and the verse, which contained the technical information and explanations about the work, could only be observed if the visitor surrounded the easel. The rectangular exhibition room had two of its four walls made of glass, through which one, inside the room could see the outside, and one from the avenue could see some art pieces.



Fig. 2. View of the picture gallery of MASP on Paulista Avenue, 1960s. Photo: Unknown – Collection of Centro de Pesquisa do MASO – Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubrind.

The collection was not presented in accordance with the traditional chronological linearity of art history. Paintings of the most diverse localities, eras, styles and movements were gathered there.

This peculiar organization of the art pieces emphasized the idea of art being a unique production – it would depend on the human creative act to exist and would not need, because of this, hierarchies or time or stylistic distinctions etc.

The meeting of works of different periods, techniques, styles and materials rescues the discussion raised by Malraux (2000, p. 10), in *The Imaginary Museum*. For him the museum is "[...] a confrontation of metamorphoses".



Fig. 3. View of the picture gallery of MASP on Paulista Avenue, 1960s. Photo: Unknown – Collection of Centro de Pesquisa do MASP – Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand.

It is understood, from the analysis of his text, that the works of art undergo metamorphoses throughout history; these metamorphoses can be related to several aspects: to the studies that are made of them and that can

change the way they are perceived, or to the new conditions in which they are placed, when museums were raised in the 19th century, for example, and a new relationship was imposed between spectator and work.

In Malraux's perspective, this exhibition is exemplary, because it provided, through the use of transparency, an environment that proposed an intense confrontation between the various metamorphoses evidenced by the works exhibited there.

This exhibition space was created in such a way as to involve the visitors, allowing them to freely pass through the works trapped in the glasses, being able to observe them individually, but, at the same time, also being able to look at them as a set. The spectators were not guided by the exhibition, on a one-way path, but was free to make the route they desired, with associations or even dissociations, that appeared during their stay there. Lina declares that placing the paintings on easels was an effort not to present a sacred object, but a work done by a person.

This reflection resembles the work of art of any other piece produced by a person. And it is in this sense that the crystal easels pointed out many of the issues raised by Lina in her work in relation to popular production. This facet of the work developed throughout Lina's career was also present in the inauguration of the new MASP's headquarters with the exhibition "A Mão do Povo Brasileiro".

The exhibition was organized by Lina and Pietro Bardi, Martim Gonçalves and Glauber Rocha and was set up in the temporary exhibition space on the first floor of the building. Hundreds of objects from various localities in Brazil and of various natures were presented there together: ritual use in religions such as Candomblé, Catholicism and indigenous cults, household, furniture, toys, decorative objects, archaeological pieces etc. The objects were not collected directly from their original environments, but from private and institutional collections.

Since the objects displayed in the show were borrowed from collections, it is considered that they were removed from their original contexts and functions, because, when they entered in private and institutional collections they acquired a new category.



Fig. 4. View of the exhibition “A Mão do Povo Brasileiro”, 1969. Photo: Unknown – Collection of Centro de Pesquisa do MASP – Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand.

This temporary exhibition room consisted of white walls that prevented the dialogue between the internal space of the Museum and the city, as occurred with the pinacotheca’s room. The lighting was artificial. An exhibition environment was created that did not interfere so significantly in the contemplation of the pieces presented, which brought it closer to that related to the term white cube.

However, the exhibition furniture was made of reused wood, which, according to Lina, set dialogues with the original environment of people’s day by day, more rustic, such as that of the fairs, for example.

The room had a rectangular shape and the show was designed in a way that from the entrance of the room one could see three parallel rows of low rectangular bases, which served as support for objects of various sizes; on the two side walls of the room were placed species of bookshelves and panels to support smaller objects.

The combination of the characteristics of the exhibition environment in which the show was made – closer to what is defined as a white cube – to the specificities of the works presented – pieces of collections – associated the objects exhibited to an institutionalized environment.

At that time, Bo Bardi no longer claimed the place occupied by popular production in the categorizations made by the traditional methodologies of Art History, as we observed in her writings:

We talk about crafts and folk art. At the Museu de Arte de São Paulo we set up an exhibition that includes all these problems. To this exhibition the director of the Museum gave the title of 'The Hand of the Brazilian People': it is a tribute to the People of Brazil.

The exhibition is just a presentation of creativity and possibilities. It is not an exhibition of Art as consolation, we did not want to be interpreted in this sense, it is not an invitation to overvaluation of a production that expresses difficult living conditions. We are convinced that everything that can make misery compatible must be destroyed. (Bardi, Lina, 1969. In: Ferraz (Org.), 1993, p. 192)

Behind the arrangement of the objects in the show was the idea of systematization, recording and dissemination of information related to such production. But still, there were gaps as some authors point out, pieces produced in different contexts, with different functions appeared close, suggesting homogenizations that were not always real.

The pieces also appeared without information about authorship or production contexts, different from those present in glass easels, which most often had well-explained European authorship.

This kind of critics and others have been taking part of the discussion about Bardi's legacy and become evident the importance to revisit documentations and bibliographic collections in the art museums, as well as the museological collections. One research work that follows this path was made by Paulo Tavares (2021).

Lina's concern at the peculiarities of Brazilian culture, especially those related to what was called for her *popular* culture, led to the MASP such

problematic, which opened up the Museum even more to the dialogue with the social environment in which it was. But of course with many gaps, that would happen at that time, and that were pointed more recently by researchers like Helio Meneses (2017) and Ana María León.

The search for freedom may have been a theme of life for Lina. From the beginning of her professional practice she followed ideals of a libertarian character when using, for example, precepts of modern architecture in her works. However, her gaze in search of freedom seems to have been in fact fed in Bahia.

In MASP already appear, among the most programmatic freedom associated with modern architecture, the solutions that the architect learned in her encounter with the Brazilian popular universe, when she elaborated, for example, the term “poor architecture”, to define the simple architectural solutions she found for the design of the Museum, inspired by the simplicity of the solutions seen in popular productions. The scenic architectures of the exhibitions, analyzed here, were also thought from the simplicity in the use of materials and drawings.

In a statement to FAU USP, in 1989, Lina supports this inference that elements of her encounter with freedom already appear in the conception of the MASP building and the exhibitions developed there in the late 1960s, stating that:

When the musician John Cage came to São Paulo, passing through Paulista Avenue, he stopped the car in front of MASP, went down and, walking from one side of the belvedere, his arms raised, shouted: 'It's the architecture of freedom!'. Accustomed to the compliments of the 'largest free go in the world, with permanent load, covered in plan', I thought that the judgment of the great artist might be able to communicate what (I) meant when I designed the MASP: the museum was a 'nothing', a search for freedom, the elimination of obstacles, the ability to be free in the face of things. (Bardi Lina. In: MASP: the color of passion for art. São Paulo: MASP, 1990, s/ p.)

The MASP, since its physical structure, has worked with the issue of freedom. The possibility of appropriation of the Museum took place from its

free span, designed in such a way as to be used by the population in various ways, as Lina said:

I finally tried to recreate an 'environment' in the Trianon. And I'd like the people to go there, see outdoor exhibitions and discuss, listen to music, watch tapes. Even children, go play in the morning and afternoon sun. (Bardi, Lina, 1997, s/p.)

The staircase and elevators gave direct access to the Museum through this free space, inviting people to enter there ². The pinacotheca's room expanded into the city or let it in, establishing a dialogue between the works of art presented there and the life of the city that took place outside. To those who wanted to know more about the art works, the Museum provided information on the back of the easels that exhibited the pieces so as not to interfere in their contemplation. The realization of exhibitions such as "A Mão do Povo Brasileiro" showed an attentive look directed to the local Brazilian specificities, expanding this care with the collective of Brazil.

The broad set of actions of the Museum at that time was based on taking care of the arts by the bias of the collectivity, that is, to try to consider some of the multiple characteristics that artistic productions can have, as well as the varied specificities of the audiences to which the museum should turn.

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Endnotes

1. The vocabulary "man" or "men" is used in the period to refer to humanity, human beings.
2. At the time there were no glass panels that currently surround the entrance to the Museum.

Migration Heritage, Contemporary Art and Archives: Representations, Memories and Identities

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ABSTRACT

Archives are generally viewed as ordered collections of historical documents that record information about people, objects, places and events. They are the main tools used by historians and other researchers to analyze society. Nevertheless, this definition of the archive obscures a crucial element: the archive is primarily concerned with representations, memories and identities. Museum's collections are invested by political categories and practices — be they ideological constructions, questions of visibility and representation, or the various ways in which power is exerted, contested or actualized in cultural practices. How recognizing memories can empower groups and minorities that have been subjugated or suppressed like for example in the case of migrant communities? Another important question is how contemporary artists use and disrupts the function of the archive as a foundation for their creative process, in doing so how do they highlight the internal dynamics and politics that are in creating/producing archives? The aim of this article is to highlight the different processes of displaying migration and archiving of the "memory" of different immigrant communities and how the contemporary artworks presented in the museum interact and dialogue with it.

KEYWORDS

Migration; Museums; Contemporary Art; Archives.

Archives are generally viewed as ordered collections of historical documents that record information about people, objects, places and events. They are the main tools used by historians and other researchers to analyze society. Nevertheless, this definition of the archive obscures a crucial element: the archive is primarily concerned with representations, memories and identities.

Museum's collections are invested by political categories and practices — be they ideological constructions, questions of visibility and representation, or the various ways in which power is exerted, contested or actualized in cultural practices.

How recognizing memories can empower groups and minorities that have been subjugated or suppressed like for example in the case of migrant communities? Another important question is how contemporary artists use and disrupt the function of the archive as a foundation for their creative process, in doing so how do they highlight the internal dynamics and politics that are in creating/producing archives?

The aim of this article is to highlight the different processes of displaying migration and archiving of the "memory" of different immigrant communities and how the contemporary artworks presented in the museum interact and dialogue with it.

Staging Migration in Museums: How to display movement?

Migration museums are confronted with the challenge of how to put on display a non- static phenomenon by nature: the continual displacement, the non-place. How to create a museography that shows the inconstancy of migration?

The moving frame: how to follow a mosaic of destinies to contribute, despite everything, to go from a plurality of crossed memories to a shared memory?

If the reference to a national narrative is not always as explicit in migration museums, those responsible for the museography were always conscious of the importance of the overall story these institutions were

seeking to tell. Narrative and display on migration museums are essential to create a more understanding society regarding migration.

Refugees and forced displacements are likely to become a defining issue of the 21st century.” says Alexander Betts, director of the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford (from 2014 to 2017). Mass migration, driven by conflict, oppression, political upheaval, economic distress and environmental disasters have been described as defining issues of this century along with climate change and the need to think of sustainable solutions in our cities and communities.

These traumatic relocations reshape the lives of the people who are displaced and of their new host communities, and ignite both the best and the worst of human behavior. Museums can use their influence to build bridges between established residents and newcomers: easing fears, building trust, and finding common ground to create a more united society. And new migrants can help museums reexamine their relationships to belonging, to heritage, and to social and ecological transformations. As members of museums’ communities, migrants and refugees bring their own particular needs, notably to remember and preserve their history and culture even as they settle into their new country.

Recent work in critical museum studies, has shown that migration museums can use objects and strategies of display to transmit positive representations of migration, promoting diversity and a more inclusive national identity as propagating a better knowledge of the subject. The idea is to see the museum as a space for transmission of images and representations: What is the representation of migration that is given to see in these museums?

In this paper, I will present different topics that are recurrent when analyzing the permanent exhibitions of different migration museums to try to identify its common structural points and to show how migration is represented.

The idea is also to see the museum as a space for perception of images and representations: What is the representation of immigration that is given to see in these museums?

Staging and displays are essential to understanding the production of museum discourse. It is the whole spatial arrangement, the layout and presentation of the objects and documents as well as all the texts (and the catalog) that produce a message, a speech to be interpreted by the visitor. In the exhibition, meaning is therefore intrinsically dependent on staging and space as the arrangement of things in order to allow access. Therefore, one can assume that, in examining the exhibition design, it is possible to identify some recurring elements that structure and characterize their display and narrative.

Recurring themes structuring the museum itinerary

The exhibitions analyzed here (1) include different scenographies but the topics discussed remain the same when we talk about migration: the departure; the journey (and border crossing); arrival and sorting process with local authorities (medical visits, refusal or acceptance of entry into the host country); adaptation (or not - 'rooting or not') in the host country and contemporary migrations.

These themes basically function as threads for the museum's narration recounting the experience of migrating. Maps and chronological context (such as timelines) are also presented to the visitor as historical support. Oral history is a strong feature in these museums as allied with testimonial objects it can bring plural narratives and memories to life. By adding these multivocal narratives the museum brings a more immersive and empathic approach as we will see further in this article.

The permanent exhibition (*Repères*) of the *Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration* - MNHI focuses precisely on "small objects slipped into the pocket" before departure. A strong emphasis is placed on individual memories and personal narratives of departure and travel: the migration experience is presented at an individual level (especially when we look at the Galerie des Dons). (2)

Different from the permanent exhibitions of the Ellis Island Museum in New York and the *Museu da Imigração* de São Paulo, which support their museum narrative on the building history and the path of the immigrant upon his arrival in these places of passage that constitute these institutions (the governmental institutions of “sorting” immigrants), the *Repères* exhibition, is organized around concepts, of key words one could say, which guide the migratory experience. Thus, it is logical that the exhibition has as a starting point the very idea of *Departure*.

1. The Journey

Another master theme central to the migrant experience (3) is the grand narrative of the journey. The voyage is the ‘rite of passage’ that transforms and conditions the very status of the individual who migrates. To migrate is to cross a sea, an ocean, a desert, a mountain: the journey, sometimes dangerous, to reach a new unknown land (which will become his new home). Like the myths in which the hero makes an initiatory journey: even if he returns to his point of departure (his native country), he is profoundly transformed by this experience.

For example, in the Ellis Island Museum there is a ‘grand’ narrative focused on the voyage. But is not a chronologically consistent one as visitors travel through different times before and after through the different permanent exhibitions that the museum presents.

Still, the narrative the museum conveys most powerfully is the drama of passing the inspection process and making it through Ellis Island’s gate. The inspection drama begins as visitors climb the restored stairs to the Great Hall, which immigrants climbed on their way in to be processed, observed as they climbed by doctors looking for possible weakness of heart, limb, or mind.

Another museum that structures its exhibition around the path of a migrant from its departure to its arrival in the new country is the *Galata Museo del Mare*. There we can find scale reproductions of the housing where migrants used to live in Genoa, passing through reproductions of the ships

accommodation during their voyage and the houses they would live before and after the “crossing”.

2. Human Diaspora or Immigration as a Human phenomenon

The perspective of migration as part of human nature is often presented to the public to highlight the “natural” origin of the phenomenon. By doing so, the museums are looking to find common ground in between visitors that never had the experience of migrating and those who have. It shows that moving and changing cities, countries or continents is part of human history and should be perceived as a common phenomenon that is part of humanity’s behaviour.

The *Museu da Imigração* starts its permanent exhibition with this theme under the name of ‘*Diaspora Humana*’ (‘Human Diaspora’). They present a video where the visitor can see the different migration routes that humanity used since prehistoric times to populate the earth.

The Red Star Line Museum also presents a chronology from antiquity to today to show how human migrations have always existed and how cultural exchanges are essential for humankind.

3. Workforce - Labor

The theme of Labor is also central in migration museums since the vast majority of a paid position of regular employment. Workplaces, formal or informal, remain the most important places of integration for migrants and refugees in their new country. Therefore, it is an important theme when displaying migration history.

In its permanent exhibitions the *Musée national de l’Histoire de l’immigration* and the *Museu da Imigração*, show the importance of work in creating a new network for the newly arriving migrants. By presenting working tools among other artifacts, these museums point to the relevance of migrants as a working force helping to build economic prosperity in their new home country.

4. Iconic objects: the importance of the object as a memorial support

These themes presented above are often linked visually to the staging of a series of iconic objects, usually personal items such as luggage, travel documents (e.g. passports), migrants' letters, clothes or toys for babies and children. These objects are frequently used for their effective visual impact and their immediate connection with the themes of the exhibition. They are rarely of historical or artistic value in themselves still they embody the memory of migration and have a strong visual impact.

In exhibitions dealing with the theme of migration, whether temporary or *mise-en-scène* that evokes the "migrant experience". This presentation of objects is characterized by a desire to immerse the visitor in the museum narrative and thus create a sensory link between the displays and the visitor.

The suitcase remains the iconic object of immigration *par excellence*: whether presented alone or in support of interactive devices, it represents the 'magic box' that contains the objects chosen by the immigrant during his departure and who will accompany him on his journey to always remind him of his origins.

The moment of departure is crucial for those who decide to leave their country and to embark on the unknown that is the 'journey', dangerous in many cases, to access a new life. Once the sorting of memories and objects to bring with oneself, the suitcase presents itself as the "sacred" receptacle of these precious memories of a world which will remain in the past of those who leave. Thus, the suitcase would be this container that contains "memory objects" chosen by their personal symbolic importance, real relics that are supposed to recall and, to a certain extent, put in contact with the one who possesses them with his past and his family. The crossing to the unknown is done with his suitcase and the relics it contains: symbol of the traveler and also that of the immigrant, the exile.

Museums can ask visitors: What would be the object they would choose to bring with them if they were to leave their home and country forever? (4) This choice is very personal and intimate but some objects are quite common such as: family photographic albums.

The architectural context of migration museums often complements the visual communication of displays. These museums are usually located in places that have a history related to migration, such as docklands, border or departure and museums are located at historical buildings connected with stories of migration and bearing itself a memory of migration, making them very emblematic buildings.

It is necessary to historicize these *lieux de mémoire* (memorial spaces) and *lieux de passage* (transit spaces such as ports, train stations, airports but also temporary constructions created to hold and control migrants) while releasing their deep socio-anthropological sense. These places where migrants were processed and had their destinies changed forever are now 'monuments' to the memory of migration. It is very paradoxical to have those impressive buildings, once abandoned facilities, turned now into Museums dedicated to the history of migration (a *non-lieux* phenomenon).

5. Contemporary art: a strategic solution to dealing with sensible histories?

We would like to end this presentation by briefly evoking the importance of contemporary creation in museums of society and in our more specific example of the Museu da Imigração. As Noémie Drouguet points out: "Contemporary creation is regularly invited to participate in the "society" exhibition. Many museums now call on artists or integrate works to evoke societal aspects, in particular the most delicate issues to deal with. Does the artist replace the museographer/scenographer when the latter does not dare to address certain subjects? (Drouguet, 2015: 170).

The work of contemporary art, which has been disseminated since the 1990s in society museums (Yves Bergeron, 2010: 45), is also another source of immigration museums, because it makes it possible to open up yet another perspective on the subject matter. The contribution of contemporary art finds its relevance in the nature of a testimony of another order. Through the subjectivity of the artist, the visitor is invited to see the question of migrations from another angle and to confront his own perceptions on the subject with those of someone else. We must not forget that a work of art can

have a multitude of interpretations since the spectator, the one who observes it, is in co-creation with the artist of its meaning.

In 2015, the Ellis Island Immigration museum had an art installation by the contemporary French artist JR in the old hospital buildings that were never renewed. The process of creating this art installation had JR going through the archives of the museum looking for photographs and letters of migrants that have passed through Ellis Island. What were their hopes and dreams? But also their fears and regrets?

The name of the installation, “The Ghosts of Ellis Island”, says a lot about the idea of finding the traces left by those who passed through the walls of the abandoned hospital. The art installation was also the thematic of a short movie called *Ellis (5)*, where Robert de Niro reads the passages of letters found in the archives of Ellis Island and walks around the old hospital installations that are just ruins now.

The art installations of JR not only bring the “*lieu de mémoire*” memorial aspects of the building but also the importance of the archives (photos, letters and personal documents) to create art. This is a perfect example of how artists disrupt the function of the archive as a foundation for their creative process. The “appropriation” of historical documents to create an artwork that brings to life personal memories forgotten and by doing so, brings a new light onto the “migrant experience”.

Other migration museums also invite contemporary artists to create artworks that dialogue with their collections and permanent exhibitions. At the Museu da Imigração in São Paulo, since the reopening of the museums in 2014, contemporary artists were invited to create artworks that would create a dialogue with its permanent exhibition “Migration: experiences, memories and identity.” From 2014 to 2018, visitors to the Museu da Imigração began their journey with the work of Brazilian artist Nuno Ramos, placed at the entrance to the permanent exhibition, which is also the center of the exhibition, the central nerve, by the spatial arrangement of the building and thanks to its impressive size, it attracted the attention of the visitor: a lorry compartment filled with bricks tilted to the side to symbolize the question of work but also of migrations.

The title of the work is a question, thus the visitor is invited to ask himself questions at the beginning, to continue his reflection in the middle of his journey (and perhaps to question what he has been able to see until present) and, at the end of his visit, confront what he saw in the exhibition with the central idea of the artist: the question “Is this a man? » therefore remains central to the reflection on the permanent exhibition. The truck used in this work is often used to transport immigrant workers or migrants from the northeast of the country. The bricks symbolize those workers who helped build the economic wealth of the State of São Paulo. Thus, when the truck is overturned on its side, and the bricks break on the ground, they symbolize the fragility of the bodies of the immigrants transported by these trucks. The precariousness of the lives of these people who work in very difficult, sometimes subhuman conditions, is therefore highlighted by this work of strong visual impact.

The question of the humanity of the immigrant is therefore posed by this contemporary work of art, but the final interpretation is left to each visitor. The latter is free to give meaning to the installation of Nuno Ramos, each using his directory. It is a kind of prelude, prologue, preface and epilogue which announces and concludes the main theme of the exhibition: work.

When we analyze the symbolic choice of the artist, who was commissioned by the State of São Paulo and the new management of the museum to create this monumental work, it is clear that representing a truck which is not only used to transport building bricks but also immigrant workers from other regions of the country, mainly from the North-East, brings the question of the immigrant labor force to the center of the work. Whether immigrants from Europe, Asia or other regions of the country, the question of work is at the heart of these migrations since on their arrival they were directly assigned to the coffee plantations, to the emerging industry or even small trades in the city of São Paulo.

Since February 18, 2020, a new work of contemporary art has bridged the gap between the two parts of the exhibition: a videographic installation *SobreNomes*. This work uses the technique of mapping where a video is projected on a wall of thirteen meters at the entrance of the permanent exhibition. The central question posed to the visitor is: "What does your last name mean to you?"

With this question, the visitor is led to wonder about the heritage represented by his family name (6), as well as the origins to which he sheds light. As with the work of Nuno Ramos, work was at the heart of questions about immigration, with this new video-installation, the museum wants to highlight the heritage and the intergenerational nature of immigration.

To a certain extent, visitors are quite often more attracted to a subject where they can recognize themselves or if they feel concerned (or even exposed). This new work of contemporary art could invite visitors to recognize themselves in the exhibition. What is exhibited by the museum would therefore be constituent elements of his own family culture perhaps (if the visitor has immigrant origins) and therefore speak to him more, triggering more emotional reactions in him. Patrimonial emotions (Fabre, 2013: p. 10) provoked following the identification felt at the sight of memory objects or listening to the testimony from an immigrant, can be stronger than any academic analysis on the subject. Thus, the contribution of this work of art, combined with a museographic journey that favors oral history and witness objects, affirms the museum's desire to dialogue directly with its public and to lead it to feel empathy (Landsberg, 2009: 221) towards the comments and memories shared and exposed. The history of immigration is thus recognized on a more personal level and therefore appropriated by the visitor.

The latest artistic residency in progress at the museum has invited the artist Paulo Chavonga, who has worked directly with museum researchers to create an exhibition of portraits of people considered invisible in Brazilian society, "Rostos invisíveis da imigração no Brasil". In discourses on immigration to Brazil, the memorial and celebratory aspect of the old waves of immigration of European origin is often favored, but contemporary migrations from Africa or other Latin American countries as well as people of

indigenous origin and Syrian refugees, are "forgotten" and ignored. The importance of creating a space of visibility for these people from contemporary migrations is at the heart of this temporary exhibition project. Thus, this artistic residency is in direct harmony with the contemporary questions of the museum and the guidelines for creating a space for reflection on current debates within Brazilian society.

Nuno Ramos & Paulo Chavonga are both presenting artworks that deal with the invisibility of (poor) migrants that leads to high levels of exclusion (psychologically, physically and socio-economic exclusionary systems). The "fragility" of the bodies of migrants and their situation are shown through these two examples of contemporary artworks.

To finish this article we would like to comment on some of the artworks that were presented at the Cité nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration (CNHI), since 2013 Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration (MHI). This is a museum that presents a historical and cultural approach to immigration as well as contemporary works of art dealing with the theme of immigration.

A particular feature of this museum is the lack of a pre-existing collection, in other words, the current collection was "created" according to the guidelines in the scientific project. The collection follows three main guidelines: an historical axis with archives documents on immigration, an ethnographical axis based on objects that are donated by immigrants to the museum and a contemporary art axis with art works. The contemporary art collection at the focuses on artists from different backgrounds that have as their main subject migrations, post-colonialism and the concept of "transnationality".

The contemporary artworks and digital performances in relation to the archives on migration present at this museum are very important not only in the permanent exhibition *Repères*, but also in temporary exhibitions such *J'ai deux amours* (2011-2012); *Persona Grata* (2018-2019). We are going to analyze below some of the most significatives artworks in this museum collection.

The artwork “Climbing Down” by Barthélémy Toguo is exhibited since 2007 (the opening of the museum) in the “Lieux de vie” section of the permanent exhibition *Repères*, this work refers to housing for immigrants where the lack of privacy and the overcrowding of bodies is part of their daily reality. It was an impressive installation that caught the eye and attention of the visitor, wondering why this monumental bunk bed is at the heart of the exhibition. It makes the visitor reflect on the reality of the spaces where migrants sleep when they first arrive: most likely they will share a bedroom with a dozen other migrants and even sometimes the bed. Once again through the archival documents and the real objects presented in this section, the visitor is invited to reflect on the reality of the “migrant experience” when confronted to the impressive scaled bunk bed created by Barthélémy Toguo.

Another artwork that uses archives as a source of inspiration is the “Grand Ensemble” by Mathieu Pernot that presents a large set that brings together three series of photographs around the same subject. The title of the work, in the singular, refers both to the iconographic ensemble that constitutes the images and to the social housing districts integrated on the outskirts of major French cities from the 1950s to the 1970s. Here archival documents and old postcards serve as a way of documenting the implosions of HLMs (*habitation à loyer modéré* or low-rent housing in English) but also the anonymous witnesses that were immortalized in the pictures.

This large-format photograph is from a series taken between 2000 and 2006. It presents, quite frontally, the destruction of a building, as part of urban renovation operations. The building disappears under the heavy wisps of dust raised by the implosion. The photographer's lens then freezes the building in a moment of spectacular violence, the moment of its collapse and disappearance.

These enlargements of postcards, made by the photographer, bring out the imprecise silhouettes of the inhabitants of these places. The enlargement seems to have allowed the emergence of these figures. The tiny scale of these existences contrasts with the immensity of the places that house them. These characters often appear in a state of observation, “as if they were witnesses to something happening”, comments Mathieu Pernot.

This is the case, for example, of a woman and her daughter, who seem to be turning towards the lens at the moment of the shot.



Fig. 1. Artwork by Nuno Ramos at the Museu da Imigração, São Paulo, 2015.

Conclusion

There are a series of questions and points that emerge when talking about migration museums (or other museums that present other cultures): What are the spaces of representation inside museums and what is the relationship with the representation of minority communities? The question of "editing" or Editing History is also present since the exhibitions always present a discourse constructed from a unique perspective. The question also of the mobility of exhibitions (mobile museum?) And permanent exhibitions which are renewed more frequently to "refresh the discourse" on the migratory phenomenon which is constantly changing. It is for this reason that many museums recently opened (like, for example, the Migration Museum in London and the new Immigration Museum in Brussels) offer temporary

exhibitions that are renewed more quickly than creating a permanent museography route.

The question of the representation of other cultures, which we mentioned in the questions related to immigration museums (at the start of this presentation), is central to creating a more inclusive exhibition that can raise and encourage a real dialogue between cultures. Memory and contemporary art are also central in the construction of exhibitions on immigration.

Artworks, personal items, audio-video testimonials, real scale reconstructions, common iconic objects such as suitcases and passports, and highly scenographic and interactive displays, are often used in the *new museography* presented by immigration or emigration museums. Their visual impact makes it easier to understand and remember what's on display. All these exhibit solutions are largely characterized by the intention to **stimulate empathy** in the visitor toward the story told and aimed at achieving a greater visitor involvement.

Also, the visual language adopted is different when the exhibition deals with contemporary migrations rather than with historical migrations. Museums dealing with contemporary migration frequently resort to more temporary displays where artworks, videos, and graphic design play an important role. On the other hand, museums presenting historical migrations, the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, would involve more permanent galleries and full scale.

Both undoubtedly work in creating a strong synergy with the museum narrative and the collection. Nevertheless, by repeating the same thematic approaches and using the same iconic topic of migration deserves. Hence, migration museums should encourage more multivocal projects and exhibitions, engaging different migrant communities to collaborate with them.

Finally, museums dedicated to the history of immigration remain recent initiatives in the international museum landscape, but as the theme is gaining in importance in the international political scenario, due to the current migration crisis, they are gaining space in contemporary discussions

on heritage and social inclusion. Even though some museum professionals argue that the ideal scenario would be to include the history of immigration in national history museums instead of having a museum dedicated to immigration itself, at the moment it is essential to have a platform to discuss and reflect on immigration as well as on the migratory phenomenon in our contemporary societies. With the growing role of museums as social actors, immigration museums could turn into a platform for discussion on the socio-economic inclusion of immigrants and refugees.

When talking of the museology of reconciliation, we have to think of how Migration museums are trying to create a link between the different communities (sometimes around the area of the museum, e.g. the Migration museum in Sao Paulo) and the museum space. Thus, opening up to become a space that fosters “social justice” and dialogue between different cultures and social backgrounds.

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Endnotes

1. This article is based on my PhD research that focused on three Migration museums: the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York, the Museu da Imigração in Sao Paulo and the Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration in Paris. But during my research I also had the occasion to visit and analyse other museums that have exhibitions dedicated to migration (e.g. Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp and the Galata Museo del Mare in Genoa).

2. The exhibition *Repères* and the *Galerie des dons* was officially closed in December 2020.

3. Here we use the expression “migrant experience” as these museums try to create an immersive experience for the visitors, thus inviting the visitors to experience its visits through the point of view of an immigrant. That is what we can experience at the Ellis Island Museum in New York, the Deutsches Auswandererhaus in Bremerhaven, the Epic museum in Dublin or the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp for example.

4. This is the main question asked to the visitors at the 19th Princelet Street project in Spitalfields, London. I had the occasion to visit and to interview the conceptors of this very unique project at the heart of a multicultural neighborhood in London and close to the famous Brick Lane from Monica Ali's book.

5. The short film is available on Youtube :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqLFqzWOOog&t=787s>

6. Here again the archives of the museum are used by the artists to create their artwork as the last names used in this installation are all the ones they found in the archives of arrivals that are still conserved at the museum.

Laughter, Shame, Regret: Performance Art and the Social Recognition of Rape

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the issue of rape focusing on three performances held in the 2010s. In *If I Wanted Your Opinion, I'd Remove the Duct Tape*, poet, performer, and criminal appellate attorney Vanessa Place presents over 200 rape jokes. The Clifford Owens episode, during the *Anthology* exhibition held by MoMA PS1 from November 2011 to May 2012, involves a performance proposal written by Kara Walker that entailed the threat of forced sex. *Elegy*, by Gabrielle Goliath, honors one or more raped and murdered women through a chorus of lyric singers who, one after another, sustain a single musical note for one hour.

KEYWORDS

Performance Art; Body Art; Rape; Violence in Art; Contemporary History of Art.

In 2017, an AI sex doll robot was on display for some hours at the Ars Electronica Festival in the city of Linz, Austria. The robot's name was Samantha and it/she was developed by Synthea Amatus, a Barcelona-based firm, with 11 sensors designed to respond to the user's touch and a thermoplastic elastomer outer layer designed to feel like human skin. The press material released at that time¹ states that "the doll may be touched and has different modes of interaction such as 'romantic', 'sexy' and 'family'."

At Ars Electronica Festival, Samantha was wearing clothes — a white cropped t-shirt and shorts, a pair of sneakers — and was displayed sitting on a couch. Her creator, Sergi Santos, expected the visitors to talk to her, feel her skin, maybe hold one part or another to test the consistency of the artificial body. Instead, attendees mounted her breasts, legs, and arms, and broke two of the doll's fingers, all while being watched by others. Sergi Santos said at that time that Samantha was "heavily soiled", and that the audience acted "like barbarians".² This was unexpected behavior in a technology fair named "Ars Electronica", specialized in artificial intelligence, which presented 1,000 artists and scientists from over 40 countries and brought together a hundred thousand visitors that year.³

Although Samantha is a robot, unable to feel (as far as we know), the incident shows how the public can become sexually abusive when the need for consent is not socially implicit. A similar situation took place in 1974 at Studio Morra, a gallery in Naples, when Serbian artist Marina Abramović performed one of her most famous works, *Rhythm 0*. It consisted of Abramović standing still in a room with a table, where 72 objects were disposed, including a rose, a feather, perfume, honey, bread, grapes, wine, scissors, a scalpel, nails, a metal bar, a gun, and a bullet. The proposal of the action provided by the artist at the time was:

Instructions

There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired.

Performance.

I am the object.

During this period I take full responsibility.

1974

Duration: 6 hours (8pm–2am.)

Studio Morra, Naples

(Reproduced in Abramović, 1998: 80.)

Art critic Thomas McEvelley (apud Ward 2012, 120), who was at the gallery, described that moment:

It began tamely. Someone turned her around. Someone thrusts her arms into the air. Someone touched her somewhat intimately. The Neapolitan night began to heat up. In the third hour all her clothes were cut from her with razor blades. In the fourth hour the same blades began to explore her skin. Her throat was slashed so someone could suck her blood. Various minor sexual assaults were carried out on her body. She was so committed to the piece that she would not have resisted rape or murder. Faced with her abdication of will, with its implied collapse of human psychology, a protective group began to define itself in the audience. When a loaded gun was thrust to Marina's head and her own finger was being worked around the trigger, a fight broke out between the audience factions.

According to Abramović's own testimony (The Museum of Modern Art 2009), when the six hours ended and the artist started to recover the movement, "[...] naked and with blood, and tears in my eyes", the audience literally ran out of the gallery.

It might be argued that displaying a table with 72 objects and assuming responsibility is already a consent for the acts that happened in that room at Studio Morra. One might argue that exhibiting a sex robot, or the very existence of a sex robot, is a consent for the assault in *Ars Electronica*. In both cases, the actions of the audience were collective — or, as Frazer Ward (2012, 123) states in his analysis of *Rhythm 0*, "[...] it generated an amalgam of the

exposure of gendered fantasy and the adumbration in the negative of an ethical community. It did so in almost as aversive a form as it is possible to imagine [...]. Both approaches only stopped because the object of submission was taken from the audience. The object, in both cases, was a female body.

The objectification of the female body in Western cultures, argues the philosopher and feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz (1994), dates back to ancient Greece and is consequence of a correlation that associates the separation of mind and body with the opposition between men and women. According to Grosz (1994, 5), Western philosophy has been affected by a "profound somatophobia" since Plato — one that claims the body as "[...] a betrayal of and a prison for the soul, reason, or mind", that should be ruled by reason to enable a harmonic relation within the state, the family, and the individual. Aristotle distinguished matter or body from form, relating the shapeless matter of the body to women and maternity — establishing, therefore, "the binarization of the sexes, the dichotomization of the world and of knowledge" (Grosz 1994, 5).

Within Christian tradition, the separation between mind and body was related, respectively, with what is immortal (sacred) and what is mortal (lustful, sinful). This opposition, Grosz sustains (1994, 6), was intensified after Descartes detached soul from nature by distinguishing, in human bodies, a thinking substance (*res cogitans*, mind) and an extended substance (*res extensa*, body), the latter governed by nature's physical laws and ontological exigencies. "This exclusion of the soul from nature [...] is the prerequisite for founding a knowledge, or better, a science, of the governing principles of nature, a science which excludes and is indifferent to considerations of the subject." (Grosz 1994, 6).

Still according to Grosz (1994, 13-14), the connections between mind, reason, and male, and between body, nature, and female, have been consolidated for centuries in Western cultures — relying on essentialism, naturalism and biologism to stablish a common sense that women are somehow more biological, more corporeal, and more natural than men. Such premises justify misogynist assumptions about women's secondary social

position, due to their supposed vulnerability, weakness, and unreliable behavior.

The coding of femininity with corporeality in effect leaves men free to inhabit what they (falsely) believe is a purely conceptual order while at the same time enabling them to satisfy their (sometimes disavowed) need for corporeal contact through their access to women's bodies and services (Grosz 1994,14).

Transmitted as the truth throughout generations and societies, the notion of female bodies as someone else's property and responsibility became common sense, as well as the idea that sexual violence indirectly affects the property or the honor of a third party (a father, a husband, a group, or a nation). According to the Argentinian anthropologist Rita Segato (2014), sexual crimes against women must be understood as crimes of domination and submission. She defends the demystification of the rapist as a person who practices violence for sexual pleasure. Rape has existed as a mean of domination and humiliation since early civilizations, and its understanding as a crime against human life is relatively recent, a notion assimilated by Western countries over the past century.

This unconsciously shared belief, among others, explains the existence of rape jokes — those in which the concept, the action, or simply the word “rape” are mentioned with humorous intention. Most of these jokes are narrated by men, usually the rapist or the husband, while victims are often women and children. When such joke is told, it is usually by a man surrounded by male friends, although occasionally a humorist breaks this implicit rule to attract attention or to shock others.

The gender of the joke teller, therefore, is one of the sources of discomfort operating in the performance *If I Wanted Your Opinion, I'd Remove the Duct Tape*, by the poet, performer and criminal appellate attorney Vanessa Place. The artwork, which has been presented in museums, galleries, and festivals since 2016,⁴ consists of the reading of over two hundred jokes in a monotone voice for 45 minutes. Vanessa Place, the reader, wears a

suit and neither greets nor thanks the audience. The spotlight is on the crowd, while she remains in the shadows.

The performance's text was published in the book *You Had to Be There: Rape Jokes* (PowerHouse Cultural Entertainment 2018). Place has significant experience with the subject of rape — as a defense appellate attorney, she represents indigent convicted sex offenders, the ones that can't afford a lawyer.⁵ Based on Freud, the artist (2017) states that a joke is a sudden discharge of repression — often sexual, often kind of obscene — and, in this sense, it ends up having the same structure as rape: a violent discharge of repressed sexuality.



Fig 1. Vanessa Place. *If I Wanted Your Opinion, I'd Remove the Duct Tape*. Performance. NU Performance Festival 2016, Tallinn, Estonia. Courtesy of the artist.

As the lights are on the audience, spectators become aware of laughing and are watching their neighbors, which are also watching them. Vanessa Place⁶ believes that, at some point, the performance becomes less about what she is saying and more about the reactions.

By collecting these jokes and reading in public what should be restricted to small groups of male adults, Place shows how objectifying some bodies and the possibility of rape adhere to the social repertoire to the point

that the narrative of some cases is not understood as revolting but as laughable. This alien is admitted, to a large extent, because the content is understood as something in the field of imagination. The situation changes when the chance of being raped is more palpable, even though it remains in the artistic sphere.

An uncomfortable approach

During the *Anthology* exhibition held by MoMA PS1 in 2011 and 2012, Clifford Owens challenged himself to present 26 performance scores — written or graphical instructions for actions. The propositions were provided by a multigenerational group of African American artists to highlight the contribution these artists have made to the history of performance art and of contemporary art.² For 10 months, on a weekly basis, Owens performed the scores in various locations of the building, which were documented in photographs and video for the exhibition. One of them overcame the interest of the others: it was Kara Walker's piece. A longtime researcher on suffering inflicted on the bodies of African descents during the slavery period in the United States, including the exploitation of bodies by the white landlord, Walker delivered to the exhibition a performance score that involved the possibility of forced sex, with Owens as the perpetrator.

The executions of Kara Walker's proposition happened in a studio, where the audience was instructed not to sit down, but to stand along the perimeter of the room. Christopher Y. Lew, Assistant Curator of MoMA PS1 and the exhibition's organizer, started by reading the score as Owens paced the room trailed by a photographer and camerawoman. A description by the performance artist, writer, and curator Marissa Perel (2011) explains the dynamics of Owens' performance:

We are all lining the hallway of the 3rd floor in front of the *Anthology* exhibition at PS1. Owens hands Walker's score to curator Christopher Lew, and asks him to read it aloud. "Score: French kiss an audience member. Force them against a wall and demand sex. The audience/viewer should be an adult. If they are willing to

participate in the forced sex act abruptly turn the tables and you assume the role of victim. Accuse your attacker. Seek help from others, describe your ordeal. Repeat.”

Owens then saunters up and down the hall, eyeing people, pausing, considering the bodies of different audience members. From my vantage point, I am only able to see one side of the performance. Owens seems to prefer approaching white women. He goes up to one woman repeatedly and lightly touches her hip, the outline of her ass. She holds her body tenuously, allowing the touch but turning her head away from his gaze. He backs away. He turns toward another woman standing against the opposite wall. They kiss and he begins to feel up her shirt. I don't know what initiates the breaking apart, whether she says no, turns her head, or he senses that she can go no further.

Owens advances toward another woman who is not white. She crosses her arms and keeps them crossed. He plays with her scarf, she stands still with a steely look in her eyes. He continues on to a woman who appears to be in her 50's, distinctly older in age than the majority of his choices thus far. This gets steamy. They make out for a while and she, unlike the other women, wraps her arms around him and brings his body close. He touches the lining of her pant-zipper and she appears to be deciding whether or not to permit more. She says “no,” and they hold each other's gaze for an instant before he stops. In between each new advance on different audience members, Owens asks Lew to re-read the score aloud, which serves to build suspense among the audience via the persistent language of coercion. Owens wears an affect of confidence as he takes time to gaze at everyone; there is a sense of power in his gait, and a force driving his experiment that fills the space with a subtle sense of terror.

During the exhibition season, Clifford Owens performed only the first part of Kara Walker's score. A video and photographs of Owens's previous performances lined one wall of MoMA PSI, so the audience members had the chance to see how others had reacted during the previous iterations. They were therefore supposed to be aware of the performance's unfolding.

However, there was always a veiled risk, as the score reminded the audience repeatedly.

In March 2012, by the end of his residence at PS1, Owens declared in an interview⁸ that he was nervous because he would execute Kara Walker's whole score on the last presentation of the season. On the following day, Walker sent a note to Owens withdrawing the score from the exhibition.⁹ "Your interpretation of my score, which I composed as a hypothetical, a 'modest proposal' in the Swiftian sense has pushed at the boundaries of what I deem acceptable. [...] Challenging and highlighting abusive power dynamics in our culture is my goal, replicating them is not." (apud Jovanovic 2012).

Later that Sunday, when Owens entered the room, Kara Walker joined him.¹⁰ As he approached the audience, she was beside him, watching both the performer and the visitors. He ended up kissing only two people, his hands tight firmly behind his back. The participation of Kara Walker, allegedly invited by Owens, completely changed the way the score was performed.

Walker became a worldwide known artist in 1994, when she started presenting installations such as *Gone, A History of a Civil War as It Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of One Young Negress and Her Heart* (1994), a parody of the famous *Gone with the Wind* with silhouettes of compromising master-enslaved relationships. Walker's silhouettes illuminate the racist political and social histories of the United States and other colonized countries and denounce the perpetuation of racist stereotypes and domination through sexual violence within literature, material histories, and the Western art historical canon. The context addressed by Walker adds a layer to the previously mentioned inequalities between mind and body, reason and nature, male and female: the one that is established, through domination, between Europeans and native peoples from other continents; the latter are understood by the invaders of their lands as intellectually inferior and thus should receive orders and be subdued.

According to this logic, African bodies, as well as those of indigenous people on the American continent and Oceania, lost their freedom during the colonization process and were exposed to inconceivable torture. Europeans and landowners raping enslaved women and women in indigenous villages

was a current practice for up to four centuries, and forced miscegenation is inscribed in the DNA of populations such as Brazilians.¹⁴ “Rape and the act of possessing and violating the Black female body were common practices, as was the lynching of Black men accused of having had sexual relations with white women or merely having spoken to, whistled at or tried to approach them” (Kilomba 2010, 96).

The assumption of a subservience of these bodies, and the supposition that they are predisposed to wild attitudes, have made them a frequent target of various types of prejudice and violence, including sexual, until the present days. Coco Fusco (2001, 10) states that even between modern 20th century artists and ethnographers in Europe and the United States, “[...] the desire for black bodies was derived from perceptions of them as repositories of transgressive energies which would serve as antidotes for a white society suffering from excessive rationality and spiritual emptiness”. Concerning Native women in United States, Sarah Deer (2015, XX) reports:

The oft-repeated statistics reflect a grim reality that rape has become the “norm” in tribal communities. Yet skepticism about the accuracy and reliability of hard numbers has at times threatened to eclipse the larger concern about the harm rape does to tribal societies. I argue that too much emphasis has been placed on “proving” a human rights crisis that Native women have been documenting and explaining for generations.

Among the multiple aspects that are involved in the construction of the social convention that some bodies are hierarchically inferior to others, a considerable role is played by the naturalization of certain images through art. The aggressive and sexual approach to women, often personified by the supposed heroes of an era, is pervasive in the history of art and visual culture from Hellenistic Greece to modern times. Mythological themes expressed by Greeks and Romans in sarcophagi, paintings, and sculptures, also known as “heroic rapes” — such as the rape of Cassandra by Ajax the Lesser, the abduction of Persephone, the rape of Lucretia by Tarquin the rape of Proserpina, and the rape of the Sabine women — inspired painters and

sculptors since the Renaissance, reinforcing such acts were not only as acceptable, but as worthy of appreciation. A similar approach can be found among visiting or resident artists of the colonies in the 15th to 19th centuries when portraying indigenous or enslaved descendants of Africans. Acts of violence inflicted on them, and sometimes subtle indicatives of sexual violence, became part of museums and domestic environments, rarely accompanied by a critical reading.

Theorists like Aby Warburg and, more recently, Georges Didi-Huberman and Stephen Eisenman, have discussed how visual repertoire influence the way people feel authorized to certain attitudes, including violent acts. In his book *The Abu Ghraib Effect* (2007), Eisenman analyzes photographs taken by United States soldiers of various tortures at the prison of Abu Ghraib, in Iraq, and finds astonishing visual proximities between those images and famous works of art, like paintings by Michelangelo, Caravaggio and Edouard Manet, and engravings by William Hogarth and Francisco de Goya. Mentioning Warburg's concept of an artistic *nachleben* (afterlife) of images, Eisenman (2007, 53) argues that the photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib are part of a much bigger group of images over the history and can be seen as the product of a "heritage stored in memory".

They are the expression of a malevolent vision in which military victors are not just powerful, but omnipotent, and the conquered are not just subordinate, but abject and even inhuman. The presence of the latter, according to this brutal perspective, gives justification to the former; the supposed bestiality of the victim justifies the crushing violence of the oppressor. (Eisenman 2007, 17).

The concept of *Nachleben der Antike* (afterlife of Antiquity) was proposed by Warburg in 1893 to comprise the ways in which certain characteristic motifs of pagan art and literature were identifiable in paintings from the 15th and 16th centuries — not necessarily as figurative topics, but as psychic forces activated by cultural memory, crystalized for long periods and then released in an unexpected manifestation. Eisenman demonstrates in his

book how this aesthetic information is fluid and easily accessible in our days, being reproduced by US soldiers probably not conscious of possessing this visual repertoire informed (and formed) by Manet, Caravaggio, Goya, and much older references. Following the same parameters, people in Western cultures with access to masterpieces suggesting rape and violence against women get used to this idea as something shameful, yet still part of life.

Mourning as a politic act

Given this load of a past that sustains the existence of rape in Western society, artworks that mention the theme critically, and through the body, can serve as an antidote to a growth of consciousness on the subject. Indignation with what seems inevitable is the motivation for the performance project *Elegy*, started by South African artist Gabrielle Goliath in 2015. For this work, a delegated performance, Goliath hires seven lyric singers to take turns projecting a musical note, a natural B, over the course of an hour. All singers are dressed in black. Each should climb the stairs of a small platform, project the note with the breath of her lungs and come down when she can no longer hold the note, when she is replaced by the following singer in line, with the effect of a continuous sound.

The *tour de force* is preceded by the reading of a brief statement, which informs the audience that the presentation is a mourning for one or more South African women. Gabrielle Goliath invites female writers to honor the memory of women killed after suffering extreme violence. Among them are Louisa van de Caab, an enslaved woman killed by her intimate partner in 1786; Kagiso Maema, a transgender woman murdered in 2018; and the couple Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Masooa, murdered after a corrective rape in 2007.

The singers, previously oriented by Goliath, project their voices keeping in mind the story of the women they honor and of others they might have known who were under similar situations, granting them the love and dignity they were denied in life. The labor is physically and emotionally exhausting, what is visible during the presentation. By this continuous lamentation, Goliath establishes an event where pain and sorrow are vocalized

and turned into other sort of disruptive release — maybe as uncontrollable as the laughter.

This effect was potentialized when the video documentation of seven *Elegy* performances became an open-sound installation in 2019. Seven video screens were disposed in a vertical position, describing a semicircle, each showing a one-hour presentation. This installation, also called *Elegy*, was released in Venice by the time Goliath was awarded a Future Generation Special Prize.



Fig. 2. Gabrielle Goliath. *Elegy – Eunice Ntombifuthi Dube*. Performance. The Centre for the Less Good Idea, Johannesburg, 2018. Photo by Stella Tate. Courtesy of the artist.

Gabrielle Goliath's piece is a long run, and the natural B sound persists in the audience's ears for a long time; but some honoring actions can be brief and last for life. In 2015, Brazilian performer Hilda de Paulo had a name tattooed above one of her eyebrows: Gisberta. The act figures as an artistic tombstone to Gisberta Salce, a transgender Brazilian woman who lived in

Portugal and was raped, tortured, and murdered by 13 teenagers in 2006, while she was living on an abandoned building.



Fig. 3. Hilda de Paulo. *Me, Gisberta*, 2015. Photography + Text-Manifesto, 100 x 100 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Hilda, also a Brazilian “travesti”¹² living in Portugal, denounces the silence of the Portuguese court, which has not condemned any of the 13 people involved in the murder. According to the artist (2022), “in *Me, Gisberta* — as well as in other body art works performed through tattooing —, I

maintain an uninterrupted exhibition on my own body, which operates as a relational aesthetic, permanently bringing to light the dark history that surrounds Gisberta Salce [...]. *Me, Gisberta* is a discreet call that stays on Hilda's face, a fear for the same fate, a protest for the end of transphobia and of the colonial power that still interfere in the lives of people from the former colonies.

Throughout this overview, I hope to have shown how performance artworks can raise an intimate identification and encourage a deeper reflection on prejudice, co-responsibility, and conditions for the permanence of this practice in different contexts. Since our eyes are impregnated with a not so honorable past, perhaps the other senses can help to get us out of this vicious circle and establish non-violent parameters of coexistence.

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Endnotes

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11. Preliminary results of the research DNA in Brazil, conducted by the University of São Paulo Institute of Biosciences, through the complete sequencing of the genome of 1,247 volunteers, attests that 75% of the genetic burden from Brazilian ancestors come from Europeans and 0.5 %, indigenous. As for the genetic load that maps the exclusively female lineage, 34% come from indigenous people and 14%, from European. Adding female percentages, 70% of the genetic load of the Brazilian population comes from African and indigenous people, and 75% of the paternal load was provided by Europeans.

12. The denomination "travesti" (transvestite) is used by Hilda de Paulo and by Brazilian authors such as Leticia Nascimento (*Transfeminismo*, Ed. Jandaíra, 2021) to give visibility to this socially marginalized gender identity, recalling the aggressions historically suffered by these women and the resistance of ancestors who made room for their inclusion in society.