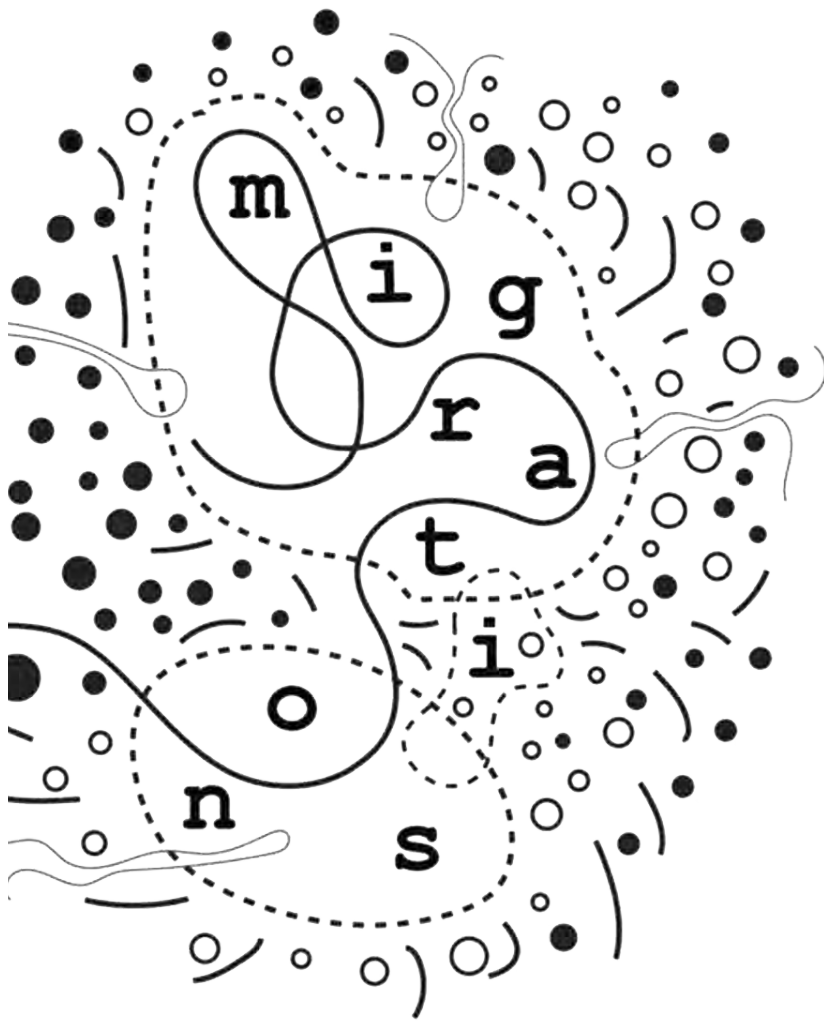


# Voyages Between Brazil and Italy

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## Session 16



## Session 16

# Voyages between Brazil and Italy\*

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Considering the main theme of the 35th World Congress of the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art – Motion – this special session was conceived both in continuity and as a connection between two different CIHA Italy-Brazil meetings that took place – the first in Florence, in 2019, focusing more specifically the concept of motion, the second in São Paulo, in 2022, which discussed migrations. Between the two meetings, the world changed in an unexpected and difficult way: the Sars Cov-19 pandemic, ironically, suspended temporarily both motions and migrations worldwide. Uncertainties postponed the Brazilian Congress a few times; when it finally took place, mobility was still a concern, as motion was not freely possible worldwide. In spite of all the problems, the Congress was held, our session occurred, and it was warmly welcomed by the speakers and the public. Technology once again shortened distances, allowing virtual voyages and meetings.

In this session our goal was to discuss the concepts of voyage and/or migrations, besides their possible derivations, with specific focus on the artistic and cultural exchanges as well as migrations between Italy and Brazil (either as part of Portuguese territory or as an independent nation). Scholars in different fields, from various institutions, presented their ideas on the concepts of “Voyage” and/or “Migrations”, focusing the many relations between Brazil and Italy, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We hoped to discuss the journeys of artists, critics or cultural

promoters, as well as the circulation of objects, concepts, visual recordings and written sources.

As a result, we were bestowed with wonderful presentations that reinforced the artistic connections between both countries at least since the nineteenth century, when the Prix de Voyage was given to students from the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts (Academia Imperial de Belas-Artes – AIBA) in order to study in Rome (Paris, in fact, was not the only destiny aimed by Brazilian artists). The history of travel governed by academic institutions was addressed here using new historiographical points of view, as in Mazzarelli's talk, which focused on the practices of sojourning in foreign lands and on the exercise of copying from ancient art as a way of socializing and sharing patterns and tools. Two talks on Pedro Américo, the traveling artist par excellence in Brazil (from 1866 until his death in 1905), showed how multifaceted may be the new iconographic, stylistic, and theoretical references acquired through Italian sojourns. Almeida and Scapol Monteiro have enabled us to unravel this complex matter.

Still, in the nineteenth century, this movement between Italy and Brazil was particularly reinforced with the arrival of Teresa Cristina of Bourbon, the Italian princess who became Empress of Brazil. Regarding this interesting figure of a sovereign of the Bourbon family, born in Naples, a lover of art and archaeology, art and antiquities collector, we were fortunate to listen to speeches by both Italian and Brazilian scholars (Ruga and Azevedo). Here, too, the crossing of gazes and historiographies ensured a fuller understanding of the topic. On the one hand, emphasizing the sovereign's starting point, her background, her family's artistic commitments; on the other hand, following the developments, the changes that took place in Brazil in the encounter with her spouse and the local arts and museum system.

Migrations from Italy to Brazil, in the last years of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century, were especially of people who brought their culture and experiences to a new country. This process reinforced liaisons between both countries, and sustained artistic connections throughout the twentieth century, which were made evident, for instance, in several events. It is, in fact, no coincidence that many speakers at our session dwelt on expositions, congresses and exhibitions, such as the

Commemorative Exhibition of the 50th Anniversary of Official Immigration, in São Paulo, in 1937 (Marinho), the first Brazilian participation at the Venice Biennale in 1950, the first Bienal Internacional de São Paulo, in 1951, known as the first modern(ist) exhibition outside the well-established geographical axis between Western Europe and United States of America, in which the Italian section was one of the largest. Or even concentrates on the Extraordinary International Congress of Art Critics, held in the same city in 1959, concomitant to the Biennial (Caputo). Iamurri and Casini addressed for us the analysis of key figures of these artistic exchanges, mediators and critics such as the already well-known Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, Lionello Venturi, Pietro Bardi, Lina Bo Bardi.

All these events stress the artistic and political importance of the Italian presence in Brazil. The figures of Buzzi (with his three Brazilian Rooms), Di Prete e Buffoni have been the focus of analysis by Nigro, Freitas and Rocco, and the network of relationships between artists of both countries (Cordeiro, Dias) was the center of investigations for Espada and Guimarães Martins, as the circulation of an artistic movement in Italy show: the Brazilian Concrete Poetry throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Perna).

We were glad to realize the connections between different papers that were presented during our session, which give us hope that it may have new developments in the future, in seminars or new interconnected researches.

*\* Connecting session between Firenze 2019 and São Paulo 2022, in collaboration with the Italian scientific committee*

# Brazilian Artists in Italy in the 19th Century: Visiting Museums, Copying the Great Masters

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the context of the change of Italian Museum system during the Nineteenth century, as a place increasingly open to the public of travelers and tourists, this paper intends to question itself on the comparison created by Brazilian painters with the reality of the museum as a whole: spaces but also its "actors" - from the custodians to the Directors - the other artists, from all provenance, who simultaneously attend the rooms of the museums visited by the Brazilians, the impact with the system of regulations and, last but not least, the comparison with the selected works of art selected as reference models. The "experience" of Rome also of Brazilian artists is reconstructed in its complexity as a shared experience: artists from Europe and the Americas chose Italian cities, Rome, Venice, Naples and Florence in particular, as privileged places of comparison with different and cosmopolitan realities. Privileged sources are the "licenses" for access to museum to copy: an often underestimated documentation connected with the disciplines that regulated entrance to the Museums and which is extremely interesting for the study in question.

## **KEYWORDS**

Copie; Voyage in Italy; Visiting Museums.

This paper proposes a different view on the theme of the journey to Italy by artists from the Americas and Brazil in particular during the Nineteenth century. Focusing on the mobility of people, objects and ideas, and on the osmosis of artistic and cultural transfers, the theme of migration will unfold from two points of view: that of the encounter of Brazilian artists with a complex institution typical of the Italian reality, museums and academies in particular, and that of the migration of models considered exemplary by the artists who copy them in Italy.

The copy itself can be understood as a form of "movement" of the original object from a twofold perspective: it transforms it, re-elaborates it also in formal, stylistic and technical terms, but it is also a material migration since, as happened in the same years for many other Academies in Europe and World, the copies reproduced in Italy by Brazilian painters are in fact destined to the greater part of the cases to increase the collections of the Academy of Rio de Janeiro and to contribute to the construction of a national art school, especially for history painting.<sup>4</sup>

The case study I am proposing, should be seen in the context of a broader research question. The theme of travel in Italy between the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries also raises questions about the experience of the first public museums: what forms of museum use were being defined in this period? Which publics are admitted, which are excluded in relation to a new notion of "open museum" but also to the Regulations that the institutions are simultaneously implementing? In this perspective, I also intend to look at and therefore re-read the copying and study practices of the artists admitted to the Museum, and I intend to try to "enter" the spaces, reinterpreting them from a transnational point of view: the Museum is therefore also intended as a space of encounter and confrontation not only between artists and artefacts studied and copied, but also between artists and institutions, as well as between artists and artists coming from multiple cultures and geographies.

The starting point is Rome during the Restoration period, i.e. between 1814 and 1870, for two reasons: firstly, because following the return of

artworks from France, as is well known, the existing museums were renovated, while new institutions were also set up; finally, there were numerous campaigns for the restoration and protection of ancient and modern monuments.

Moreover, studies conducted in recent years on the arts system in this phase of the Papal capital's history have amply highlighted the peculiar cosmopolitan dimension of Nineteenth-century Rome, thanks to the structural role that this city continued to maintain throughout the Nineteenth century as a capital for the education of artists, which made it a privileged ground for reading art history from a transnational perspective.<sup>22</sup>

What sources can be used to answer these initial questions? On the one hand, we will use the artists' correspondence and, on the other hand, a less explored but extremely interesting documentation: the requests for licences to study and copy in museums, regulated by papal legislation since the mid 18th century.

In both cases, these sources testify to how complex it was for an artist to move around in a city like Rome, especially if he or she was a foreigner and needed to build up a solid education and, possibly, a remunerative profession in the cosmopolitan capital of the arts. The "licences", in particular, tell us about the evolution of the systems, generated by the opening of the Museums, of "disciplining" the public admitted (or excluded) and, more generally, of the different forms that the experience and enjoyment of the City with its monuments, churches, palaces and antiquities takes in the age of the first and second Restoration. They also allow us to interpret this system in a dialogical perspective: from the point of view of the artists in relation to the institutions and, vice versa, from the perspective of the progressive actions of protection of the monuments implemented by the Papal State during this period, as well as to "network" the many actors involved, from the Academies to the European and World diplomacies. In a certain sense, this documentation allows us to "map" the world in Rome and, at the same time, offers precious indications on the directions in which models were exported from Rome to the world. These materials allows us to record that multiplicity

of geographies which we have mentioned above and which coexists in Rome and often finds a meeting point in the Museum, as well as in the Academies.<sup>33</sup>

For example: from requests submitted between the 1840s and 1860s: we find the Mexican Primitivo Miranda, who had come to Rome as a student at the Academy of San Carlos, asking to enter the Pinacoteca Capitolina in 1842 with a declaration of eligibility signed by Giovanni Silvagni, a professor at the Academy of San Luca; in 1855 there is a request from the sculptor Shaksper Wood, "a citizen of S. M. Britannica" commissioned, according to the request, by the Academy of Fine Arts "which has just been established in Madras in the East Indies, to take castings of all the most remarkable works of statuary and architecture existing in this Metropolis";<sup>44</sup> and again it was for a Crucifix to be sent to Montevideo in Uruguay that Vincenzo Podesti asked to copy "the Crucifix by Guido Reni in the church of San Lorenzo in Lucina "having been commissioned by the Papal Consul".<sup>55</sup> In 1868 there is a request from "Augusto Chatelain" who "having been commissioned to make a small copy of Pietro Bianchi's Conception for a church in New York [...]".<sup>66</sup>

It is therefore from these assumptions that I propose some reflections on the journey to Italy by Brazilian artists. The historical-political context is the one following 1840 and the coronation of Dom Pedro II which, as we know, coincided with the definition of the national character of the Empire and the unity of the state guaranteed by the monarchy: Brazil, definitively separated from Portugal, assumed from that moment on the character of a specifically American nation. The journey in Italy of Brazilian artists represents an essential step in academic education, particularly since 1845 when the Brazilian government decided to support the Academy's students with a scholarship for a stay in Italy and in Europe, largely inspired by the French model of Prix de Rome.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, it is interesting to recall the exhortation speech to the students presented by the director F. Emile Taulnay as early as 1834 which, as noted by Luciano Migliaccio, clearly highlights the desire to give the Academy a priority role in the construction of a public and an art market in the capital, creating a national art project starting from the dialogue with foreign travelers.<sup>88</sup> It may be interesting to recall how the words "migration/movement" are

programmatically solicited in this discourse as a synonym of a modernity to be pursued, of a progress based on mutual exchange with Europe:

The spirit of association is fervent. Communications are opening up... steamships, canals, roads, railways, the immense arteries of the great empire, are showing you productive activity and entrepreneurial genius on all sides. And you, in order not to be left behind in this noble progress, which magnifies the future of the arts, to the artists who will bring the current of immigration from Europe, you will have to offer, with the help of generous hospitality, the participation in the observations that, for the benefit of the arts and for the honour of the Brazilian school, a brilliant and happy experience will have suggested to you.<sup>99</sup>

It should also be noted that in this context, the stay in Rome remained the most sought-after destination in the programme of training trips to Europe proposed by the Imperial Academy; a stage, that of Rome, reserved only for the most promising artists. The papal capital was clearly seen as an essential resource for this exchange aimed at the advancement of the arts, not only because of the models of artistic tradition on which to draw but also as a forge of social, cultural and material avant-garde experiences. Next to Paris, the pontifical capital of the Restoration, represents infacts a point of reference for Brazilian artists formed in this time frame: from Agostinho de Mota and Victor Meireles who arrived in the early 50s to Zeferino de Costa, Prix de Rome in the 1868 where he studied with the painter Cesare Mariani.<sup>100</sup>

For these artists their stay in Rome was a fundamental stage in their training but also in their subsequent role within the Brazilian artistic school. An example of this comparison with the cosmopolitan reality of the city is, for example, Agostino José de Motta's frequentation of the French painter Benouville in Rome, where he resided from 1851 to 1859. He was therefore in close contact with the artistic environment of the Academy of France at the Villa Medici, directed at the time by Jean Alaux, and with the cosmopolitan community of landscape painters present in the city, as is well testified by the

painting, the *View in Rome* today in RdJ clearly related to the contemporary landscapes of Benouville himself.<sup>11</sup>



**Fig. 1.** Agostino de Mota, *Vista de Roma*, 1851-55, Rio de Janeiro, Museu Nacional de Belas Artes

However, among the cases mentioned above, I would like to focus in particular on Victor Meirelles, a well-known artist whose influence as a teacher of history painting in Brazil was to last until the early decades of the 20th century and on whom research by Jorge Coli and Luciano Migliaccio, among others, has already contributed to clarifying the importance of his Italian sojourn.<sup>12</sup>

But the training path of this artist, who won the Prix de Rome for travelling in Europe in 1852, allows us to reflect on the theme of interest in this paper in a number of ways. As mentioned by the first biographers, after entering the Academy of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro in 1847, Meirelles moved

to Rome in 1853, where he studied under two of the main masters active in the papal capital; figures of reference for the cosmopolitan community of artists present in Rome, also due to the academic and institutional positions they held: Tommaso Minardi and Nicola Consoni. They both were among the most influential figures in the city, with key roles as professors at the Accademia di San Luca; Minardi at the height of his prestige, in 1854 had been forced to leave teaching at the Accademia and move his studio from the Palazzo Colonna to the Palazzo Doria following a stroke of apoplexy but by 1858 he had received the important role of Inspector of Public Paintings and further important government appointments. But many of the teaching posts had passed to Nicola Consoni, the 'new' Raphael, who had his studio in via dei Pontefici and was active in all the major artistic projects patronised by Pope Pius IX.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, it should be noted that the name of Minardi as Meirelles' first master is part, as recalled by Andre Tavares, of the long duration of the diffusion of what could be called Roman Artistic Taste and its impacts on the Portuguese and Brazilian context. An example of this is the fact that the Portuguese painter Domingos Siqueira, who died in Rome in 1837 as a member of the Accademia dei Virtuosi del Pantheon and whose funeral eulogy was delivered by Tommaso Minardi himself, took root in Rome from the 1820s in Minardi's circle. The fact that the image of the Minardi alumnus was already canonised within the walls of the Academy of Rio de Janeiro in the formative years of the young Meirelles is also proven by the presence in the academic collections of the Portrait of Tommaso Minardi painted by the artist Francisco Nery from the original at the Accademia di San Luca by Gaspare Landi, to which I will return shortly.<sup>14</sup>

It is interesting in this regard - and this is also a phenomenon of "migration" - what image of the "Roman school" was conveyed by the 19th century Brazilian historiography dedicated to the construction of a history of national painting. Gonzaga Duque in 1888, for example, described Tommaso Minardi as "a lover of drawing, an idolater of line". Meirelles, Gonzaga Duque continues, attended Nicola Consoni's classes and was recognised as one of his most regular students: "he devoted himself to the study of art with the

enthusiasm of a fanatic. Drawing... drawing was his greatest concern, his love! He was always studying: in museums, at the academy, in his free time. Minardi and Consoni educated him rigorously”.<sup>15</sup>

It is a biographical model, that which we derive from these words, truly canonical: it could have been written in Rome by a Giovan Pietro Bellori and two centuries earlier: in fact, we find therein expressed the same, and persistent, idea of Rome as the city of “drawing” and academic study. First-hand sources, mentioned in recent studies by Jorge Coli and Sonia Gomes Pereira, allow us to take a closer look, however, at what the Academy intended the Roman stay of an Academy pensioner like Meirelles. This document is also worth rereading because the instructions not only provide for the practice of drawing and then colouring in very precise stages, but also for the opportunity to travel to Rome to “network”, as we would say today, i.e. to take advantage of the possibilities offered in the city from the point of view of cultural sociability: the student is advised to attend some particular academies, sessions of literary societies, schools and libraries.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, Rome is also seen as the starting point for excursions outside Rome in the summer months (June to September): in the first year it is recommended to go to “Naples, Pompeii, Herculaneum”, while in the second year, in the same months visits to artistic cities to the north of Rome are urged, probably Florence and Venice, and finally a stop in Paris before returning to Brazil. This training itinerary closely mirrors that proposed to the boarders of the French Academy in Rome in the same years. But it is also reflected, above all, in the debates on the need to increase training in colouring outside Rome, at the Accademia di San Luca, as pointed out in the essay by Melchiorre Missirini, former secretary of the Academy, published in 1838: *Del colore della pittura e specialmente del colorire della scuola veneziana*. As early as the 1820s, the problem of the shortage of models available in the museums and collections in Rome, including the Academy's own collection, which were necessary for training in colouring, arose.<sup>17</sup> There were essentially two reasons for this: the first was clearly expressed by Gaspare Landi, as professor of painting, and by Missirini himself in 1819 to the Camerlengo, Cardinal Pacca, sent to urge a renewal of the academic

collection. Landi wrote: "The lack of originals to be given to young people is such that (without exaggeration) the school of painting, which is undoubtedly one of the best in Rome, would be closed if I did not lend them some of my own" and the problem was taken up by Missirini who stressed how Landi was in some way forced to give the students of the Academy "works of arts of his own hand" and how the master "cannot conceal the damage that has come to him as a result of not being able to sell his said works, despite having had the most favourable feedback".<sup>18</sup> The two missives can therefore perhaps offer us a further interpretation, not only canonical and ideal of the city of "drawing and rigorous study", and therefore also of the presence of that copy of Minardi's portrait in Rio de Janeiro's collections: evidently to be understood more as one of those works "of his own hand" that the painter Landi was forced to copy by his students, than a "truly" selected "ideal" model.

Secondly, the reactions of the artists to the new regulations imposed by the Pontifical Museums, especially from the 1820s onwards, as recorded in the correspondence and licences already mentioned, tell us of practices that are far more complex than copying, compared to the idea of Rome conveyed by historiography. In fact, starting with the regulation of the Pontifical Museums in 1822, the days of access reserved for artists were considerably reduced in favour of opening to the public of travellers and tourists. This led to a congestion of requests, which was not without difficulty on the part of the artists of all nationalities present in Rome, as was recalled by the painter Luigi Durantini in a letter-petition to Antonio d'Este, director of the Pontifical Museums, in 1823, in which he begged, on behalf of a group of copyists, to allow artists access to the Gallery on Saturdays: an extra day was in fact considered indispensable, following the opening of two days a week for visitors, which substantially reduced to only three days the possibility for artists to access the museum and work of arts there to paint their copies.<sup>19</sup>

What were the consequences for artists of such new models of museum visiting practices? First and foremost, the fact that artists had to look elsewhere for their models for "colouring": in private pictures galleries, but even here access could prove complicated due to the much greater congestion of these spaces compared to previous centuries, as Andrea

Appiani Jr. reminded Tommaso Minardi in a letter of 1836 regarding "the Tiziani" in the Galleria Borghese that he wanted to copy but "unfortunately" found them all occupied ("disgraziamente tutti occupati", he wrote). An alternative, apart from moving outside Rome, could be the academic picture gallery, which had been made more suitable to the needs of colour training after the renovation of the 1820s and 1830s and which was open all week on weekdays and with less respectful regulations for copyists<sup>20</sup>.

This is the reality of Rome that Meirelles experiences. And let us check, at this point, the copies he painted as a *pensionnaire* of the Academy in Rio de Janeiro in the light of what has been said above. The list of copies that can be traced from the documentation shows a selection of models by Meirelles that are entirely in line with the training proposed in those years at the Accademia di San Luca and at the studios of Consoni and Minardi.

On the one hand, the archival documents refer to a copy made by Meirelles from Guido Reni, the *Hope*. It brings us back precisely to what, in the same years, was returned to us by the requests for copies signed for their students by Nicola Consoni and Tommaso Minardi who both urged the study of Guido Reni alongside Raphael and Domenichino as essential stages in the comparison with the classical ideal. This is also evident from the copies, also probably commissioned in Rome in these years, which are now in the collections of the San Carlos Academy in Mexico City.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, the strong increase of Venetian models to which the copies mentioned from famous paintings by Titian, Veronese, Paris Bordone, among others, are in line with the neo-venetism pursued at the Accademia di San Luca in the same period. This was also reflected in the increase in requests to study Venetian paintings in Roman museums, such as those in the Capitoline Museum, and which also affected Minardi's and Silvagni pupils in those years. The copy by the painter Gerolamo Viscardini, now in Mexico (Santiago de Querétaro, Museo de arte de Querétaro), must be connected with the same environment, as it was executed in Rome, as the request in the same years testifies.<sup>22</sup>



**Fig. 2.** *Salomè* (from Guido Reni), first half of XIX c., 134.5 x99 cm, Mexico City, Museo Nacional de San Carlos, SIGROA 10049

A further reflection is possible, however, and this is what I am concluding with, if we look at the places to which the models chosen by Meirelles refer and which lead us almost exclusively to polarise the Brazilian artist's practice of copying, as it occurred within academic collections. Is this a well-considered choice or an obligatory necessity, we should ask ourselves in the light of what has been said?



**Fig. 3.** V. Meirelles, *Tarquinio e Lucrecia* (copy from Cagnacci, formerly attributed) 70,3x92,8 cm , Acervo Museum D. João , Rio de Janeiro

The beautiful copy of the *Tarquinio e Lucrezia*, already attributed to Guido Cagnacci, a painter from Emilia who trained at the school of Guido Reni and Guercino, but actually by the Florentine Felice Ficherelli, is unusual for these years, but it is a painting that had entered the academic collections in San Luca in the 1830s and from that moment on had aroused interest, especially among the students of the Academy of France. In the guide to the

Academic Gallery of St. Luke published at the end of the century, which referred to the last rearrangement curated by Tommaso Minardi, the painting was exhibited in the so-called "Sala della Fortuna" (Room of Fortune), named after Guido Reni's painting with the same subject and which followed the room of "Raphael".<sup>23</sup>

In this way, it was therefore a very appropriate model for the training of a historical painter but also as a source of study on colouring. This is demonstrated by the exact reproduction by Meirelles, who made an oil painting slightly smaller than the original.

The copy from Titian's *Amor Sacro e Amor profano* suggests one think of those "Titians all busy" in the Borghese Gallery that Appiani mentioned to Minardi in the above-mentioned letter and, on the other hand, the detail chosen by Meirelles may also suggest the hypothesis that the copy did not take place in front of the original in the Borghese Gallery. In fact, in the 1840s, a painting by Domenico Pellegrini, trained between Venice and London, a partial copy of Titian's *Amor sacro e amor profano*, which is still in the collection, had arrived in the academic picture gallery. The detail chosen by Meirelles is the same and, on the other hand, Pellegrini's canvas was intended to meet an urgent and eminently practical need: to provide students with a famous Venetian reference model (albeit a copy).<sup>24</sup> A model that could easily replace the (original) but more inaccessible one by the Borghese. The detail became canonical in the Brazilian school, if, some time later, Zeferino de Costa chose the same detail for his copy dating from the 1860s.<sup>25</sup>

The other paintings executed by Meirelles and sent to Rio de Janeiro, from the *Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple* by Titian to the *Miracle of St. Mark* by Tintoretto, the *Supper at Levi's House* and the *Holy Family with St. John the Baptist and Saints*, also by Veronese, and the *Presentation of the Ring to the Doge* by Parsi Bordone, also belong to an important academic collection, that of the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice, renewed after the return of the works of arts from France in the aftermath of the Napoleonic requisitions. Some of these paintings entered the Academy's collection after 1815 following the Napoleonic suppressions and were placed in the room dedicated to the 'glories' of 16th-century Venice together with Titian's

*Assumption*, also returned from France, and where John Ruskin also saw them<sup>26</sup>.



**Fig. 4.** D. Pellegrini, *Amor Sacro* (from Tiziano), XVIII c., Rome, Accademia di San Luca. V. Meirelles, *Amor Sacro* ( fromTiziano), 1853-59, 107x 88.5 cm, Acervo Museum D. João

The choice of Meirelles, who, as stated in the *Istructiones*, must have gone to Venice in the penultimate year of his Italian sojourn, is therefore oriented first and foremost towards easily accessible works, while interpreting in the selection of the works the requirements of the academy of origin; moreover, even in this case, the choice of formats, all considerably reduced compared to the originals, recalls the practice of colour "sketches" that, for example, Giuseppe Silvagni suggested to his students in the same years. (including, I recall, the Mexican Primitivo Miranda).<sup>27</sup>

It is to that "idea" of Rome as an exemplary city of study that Meirelles' copies are traced once they arrive in Rio de Janeiro and are exhibited in the annual academic exhibitions documented in the Catalogues published in subsequent years.

Here they are in fact remembered as all "feita em Roma" even when, clearly, the models speak of a comparison with Venice.<sup>28</sup>

Their being useful subjects for the construction of a notion of historical painting that the Academy of Rio de Janeiro intended to found, makes them, in a certain sense, "Roman". Beyond the difficulties and perhaps even the discontent encountered by artists in gaining access to the originals in the Museums, the idea of Rome continued to convey.

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## Endnotes

1. On the role of Copies in academic culture between the 18th and 19th centuries, see: Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*.
  2. On cosmopolitan Rome in the age of Restoration analysed from a transnational perspective see most recently at least: Capitelli, Cracolici, *Roma en México*. Capitelli, Donato, Mazzarelli et al, *Lettere d'artista*.
  3. See: Mazzarelli, *Gli artisti a Roma*.
  4. Quoted in Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*. 158
  5. Ivi. 157-158.
  6. Ibidem.
  7. See: Gonzaga-Duque, *Arte brasileira*.
  8. See: Migliaccio, *Arte brasiliana*. Coli, *Come se deve escrever*.
  9. Félix-Emile Taulnay, *Discurso* (1834) in Migliaccio, *Arte brasiliana*. 34
  10. Dazzi, *Meirelles, Zeferino*
  11. Migliaccio, *Arte brasiliana*. 43.
  12. See: Turazzi, *Victor Meirelles*. Coli, *Victor Meirelles*. Pereira, *Victor Meirelles*.
  13. Coli, *A linha e a mancha*. 34-35
  14. Tavares, *Displayng*.
  15. Gonzaga Duque, *Arte brasileira*. 144-145. See Coli, *A linha e a mancha*.34
  16. Pereira, *Victor Meirelles*. 50-52.
  17. Missirini, *Del colore*. See Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*. 254-264.
  18. See: Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*. 154-155.
  19. See: Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*. 186-187.
  20. See: Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*.260-261.
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21. Mexico City, Museo Nacional de San Carlos. See the entry in *Roma en México, México en Roma*, I.2. 154-155 (C. Mazzarelli).
22. Mazzarelli, *L'esemplarità di Roma*. 68-69.
23. Pereira, *Victor Meirelles*. 46-53. See also *Guida per visitare la Galleria*.
24. Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*. 260.
25. Migliaccio, *Arte brasiliana*. Dazzi, *Meirelles, Zeferino*.
26. Pereira, *Victor Meirelles*. 53-60. See also: Ruskin, *Guida*.
27. Mazzarelli, *Dipingere*. 261-264; Mazzarelli, *L'esemplarità di Roma*. 64-70.
28. Quoted in Pinto da Silva. *Victor Meirelles*. 180-181.

# The *Extraordinary International Congress of Art Critics (1959): Argan, Dorfles, Dorazio and “The New City: Synthesis of the Arts”*

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## **ABSTRACT**

During the 5th Bienal de São Paulo in 1959, The Extraordinary International Congress of Art Critics was consecrated to the theme of “Brasília: The New City-Synthesis of the Arts”. It focused on architecture, urbanism and their connections with plastic arts. While it extended the scope of the exhibition’s debate on Abstract expressionism, Tachism and Informal Art, it left an unprecedented record of the discussions.

Gomes Machado — director the São Paulo Biennial at that time — in contrast with Mario Pedrosa, criticized the 5th São Paulo Biennial as “a tachist and informal offensive” (“*uma ofensiva tachista e informal*”). Mário Pedrosa, a Marxist and Trotskyist activist, was mainly interested in “surprise by valuing abstract art and the problems of perception of form” (“*surpreendeu ao valorizar a arte abstrata e os problemas de percepção da forma*”).

While Anglo-Saxon countries emerged as promoters of Abstract expressionism, Italy and Brazil shared a similar approach to art, toward a peculiar interpretation of abstraction. By examining archival material, as well as conference talks made by Mário Pedrosa, Carlo Giulio Argan, Gillo Dorfles and Pietro Dorazio, this article aims to shed new light on cultural exchanges between Italy and Brazil, art criticism congruity and diversity, and the way critics and artists meant abstraction at the end of the fifties.

## **KEYWORDS**

Abstract Art; Synthesis of the Arts; Carlo Giulio Argan; Piero Dorazio; Gillo Dorfles.

In September 1959 took place the "Extraordinary International Congress of Art Critics" in Brazil, touring three different cities: Brasília, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. The Congress was organized in parallel with the 5th Biennial of São Paulo, extending the scope of the exhibition's debate on art, and leaving behind an unprecedented record of discussions on the themes to some degree raised by the Biennial itself, which was mainly focused on post-Surrealism, Abstract expressionism, Tachism and Informal Art. Mario Pedrosa, the general secretary of the Brazilian Congress organizing committee and one of the founders, in 1947, of the International Association of Art Critics (IAAC), in contrast with Gomes Machado, who directed the São Paulo Biennial at that time, criticized the 5th Biennial as a tachist and informal offensive.<sup>1</sup> Pedrosa, a Marxist and Trotskyist activist, was mainly interested "in assessing abstract art and the problems of form of perceptions."<sup>2</sup> This ambivalent approach on abstractions basically characterized the critical debates of that time, not only in Brazil but also in Italy; a dichotomy which clearly appeared in the 1959 Brazilian Biennial and Congress. By putting the congress in dialogue with the Biennial, in particular analyzing conference talks made by Mário Pedrosa, as well as Carlo Giulio Argan, Gillo Dorfles and Pietro Dorazio, my essay aims to shed new light on cultural exchanges between Italy and Brazil, art criticism congruity and diversity, and the way critics and artists intended abstraction at the end of the fifties.

#### **"Brasília: The New City-Synthesis of the Arts"**

In a still unfinished Brasília, the Congress was consecrated to the theme of "Brasilia: The New City-Synthesis of the Arts," focusing on architecture, urban planning and their connections with plastic art. It brought together talks by architects, art historians and critics who explored the experience of Brasília as a new city with its significance in Brazilian architectural culture and its expression in the national territory. The political involvement emerged clearly in the papers of speakers invited to participate to the event. From the Brazilian delegation, besides Mario Pedrosa as organizer, we also find leading figures in architecture, such as Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer, and art critic

Mario Barata. Among the international names, the program mentioned Meyer Schapiro, Herbert Read, Sérgio Milliet, André Bloc, as well as Italians, Carlo Giulio Argan, Piero Dorazio, Gillo Dorfles, and Bruno Zevi. While the Biennial of 1959 emerged as a promoter of Abstract expressionism and Art informel, the discussions at the congress seemed to veer toward a peculiar interpretation of abstraction in art, which actually has its main theoretical idea in the concept of "Synthesis of the Arts".

The seven thematic sessions developed this central theme through interdisciplinary angles (the city; urban planning; technique and expression; architecture; visual arts; industrial arts; education; and finally, the situation of the arts in the modern age). The Brazilian magazine *Habitat* pointed out that the Congress main topic of the new city and the synthesis of the arts had coherence with the problems that the city of Brasília posed, stating that "There is no doubt that such contributions go to the heart of a modern question, namely, the integration of the arts in all their scales, at the service of man, in a planned, detailed construction."<sup>3</sup> Pedrosa anticipated the Congress theme in an article emblematically titled "Crisis," published in the *Jornal do Brasil*, just one month before the opening of the event.<sup>4</sup> In Pedrosa's view, the two fields deeply affected by that crisis are painting and sculpture; while architecture and urbanism, thanks to their public and social nature, managed to revitalize the aesthetic and artistic values of modern civilization. From Pedrosa's introductory talk at the Congress, the city of Brasília emerged as a work of collective art, a new experimental approach to urban planning, architecture, and collectivity. Pedrosa defended its connection between utopia and planning, actually an important problem in aesthetic thought at that time. In the light of that crisis, he stated that the city offered the opportunity for collective action. Moreover, by reflecting on Brasília, he dealt with a new conception of art, which had to be objective and collectively centered on the community.

The social role of art and architecture was an approach shared by many art critics and historians invited to the Congress, including Italian Giulio Carlo Argan, who was vice-president of the International Association of Art Critics, and appointed chairman of the Brazilian congress of 1959. In

his paper, entitled “Tradition and materials of the past in architecture”<sup>5</sup>, Argan focused on the attitude of the architect and the modern artist in the face of tradition, stating that the most original artists and most vital movements built up their position of forms by way of a critique of the past, and he concluded pointing out that modern art can be made in a true phase in continual historical development that should not be paved with a technical end, or even worse, stylistic revivals, but rather, involve a profound critical study of the old techniques, considered like so many other methodologies of the invention of forms. This topic was at the center of Argan’s reflection at that time, so much so that he dealt with the theme also at the previous International Congress of Art Critics, held in 1957 in Palermo (Italy), where he stated that the technique of art is not separate from the technique of production, and as a consequence, “the relationship between technique and production must be one of integration and not of contradiction.”<sup>6</sup>

Argan had long been interested in architecture – in Italy he brought new attention to the Bauhaus, publishing in 1951 the book *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus* (*Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus*)<sup>7</sup> – and on the Brazilian architecture as well. Commenting on the exhibition *Architettura Brasiliana* (Brazilian Architecture) held at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome in 1954, Argan showed his deep knowledge of the topic, observing that Brazilian architecture “was born by addressing the problem of large organizational centers, and ‘descended’ to the problems of the house, social housing, and urban planning only at a later time.”<sup>8</sup> One point that characterizes Brazilian interest in Argan’s works, as scholar Luiz Renato Martins explained in his recent book *The Long Roots of Formalism in Brazil*, “is the fundamental role attributed to the connection between work as experience and reflexive formation.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, contrary to the idea that a work of art presents a precious asset with intrinsic value that is foreign to a common work, which still permeates most art studies in various forms, Argan’s research is based on an opposite premise, namely, that art is a way of producing value (especially social value), among other things. In this condition art is, above all, a paradigmatic form of work in the collectivity.

Pedrosa and Argan had several theoretical ideas in common,

specifically with regard to the role of art in society and the idea of artistic abstraction, so much so that in the following decades they collaborated in several occasions;<sup>10</sup> a common approach that certainly stems from their militant role in the arts.

Pedrosa's article "Abstraction or figuration or realism?" published in the *Jornal do Brasil* in 1957, is emblematic of the meaning that abstract art had for him. He challenged the definition of "Abstract art" provided by the French avant-garde theoretician and artist Michel Seuphor in his *Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite*, published in Paris in 1957. According to Pedrosa, Seuphor considers just one of the effects but not the essential cause of abstraction when he labels as abstract every painting that does not identify with an objective, constituent reality of life. If seen from that point of view, the specificity of this approach involves a refined aesthetic awareness that captures, as Pedrosa wrote: "expressive elements of line, color, and composition, regardless of the subject in question or any representation of nature or external reality."<sup>11</sup> By insisting that the subject of a work of art is of secondary importance, Pedrosa claimed that naturalist or socialist realism is in a marked state of decline since it is supported solely by an extra-artistic discipline. Thus, discussing the conventional view of figurative or abstract art (in terms of a work that may or may not illustrate an external reality), Pedrosa relied on an approach based on the perception of the intrinsic values of the work of art itself, something that we also find in Argan's art theories at that time. The conception of the "Synthesis of the arts" was for Pedrosa (and Argan as well), a way to correct individualist art, and to quote Pedrosa, "a way to go against the very fashionable romantic and expressionist temperamental impulses."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, from this point of view, it was an instrument for reintegrating the artist into an objective social mission. In line with this approach, we find the position taken by the second invited Italian speaker at the Brazilian congress: art critic and painter Gillo Dorfles.

In Italy, Dorfles played an important role in the affirmation of an industrial aesthetics and in developing the Concrete Art Movement in Milan (known with the acronym MAC). In his talk at the Congress, entitled "The industrial arts in the new city," he defended an axiology based on the value of

industrial objects and their ability to generate transformations in cities as well as in the very conception of art.<sup>13</sup> The lecture explained Dorfles's belief that cities could emerge from industrial production: from domestic objects to buildings. In his opinion, the industrial aesthetics played an important role in the formation of popular tastes. He pointed out that a civilization founded on – what he called – “aesthetic pleasure” needed serial art, the only one that allowed for obtaining freedom of form. Dorfles also believed that obsolescence of objects is a positive thing because it leads to a greater variety of forms and innovations, producing a constant urban transformation. Back in Italy, he reviewed the congress in *Domus*, an Italian journal specialized in architecture and design.<sup>14</sup> This number of the magazine opened with a cover by Bruno Munari, one of the founders with Dorfles of the Concrete Art Movement in Italy, and forerunner of Programmatic Art. In his article Dorfles presented Italian readers with the main focuses that emerged from the Brazilian Congress. With regard to the “Synthesis of arts” he maintained that in contemporary society the synthesis would be possible by integrating art creativity with technique and industrial elements, while to aim at the synthesis of the other major arts was, in his view, an anachronism. Dorfles had addressed the theme of the synthesis of the arts in a previous article he published in *Domus*, in which he reviewed the book *Art in European Architecture. Synthèse des Arts*, published in 1956 by architect Paul Damaz, with a preface by Le Corbusier. Dorfles criticized the book's illustrations and claimed that Damaz failed in his aim to synthesize the arts, stating that “While we look with pleasure at Fontana's Spatial Concepts, Le Corbusier's Unité d'habitation, Max Bill's works, and Basaldella's Fosse Ardeatine, many of the other examples included in this book are simply bad, and painting does not seem to really enter into the spatiality of modern architecture”.<sup>15</sup> The concept of space was a central point for understanding the ideal of the synthesis of arts for Dorfles. In 1954, in a conference consecrated to the figurative and abstract art held at the Giorgio Cini Foundation in Venice, Dorfles explained, from an historical point of view, that the space in images was strictly link to perception, and therefore, to the social and ethical values of society.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Synthesis of “Plastic Arts”**

The topic of synthesis of the arts with regard to plastic art was presented at the Congress by several figures: André Bloc, Reymond Lopez, Meyer Schapiro, Georg Schmidt; additionally, the program mentioned Italian painter Piero Dorazio, who took part in the same session of Dorflès, with a paper entitled “Color as an element of visual integration in the urbanistic space.” Unfortunately, Dorazio's abstract – like many others as well – was not included among the texts published in the journal *Habitat*, nor does his archive preserve a draft of the talk. However, for Dorazio it was not the first he took part in an International Congress of Art Critics, as he also participated to the 1948 edition in Paris.<sup>17</sup> In 1959, the artist was reflecting on color as a tool of visual integration also in his paintings, hence the decision to prepare a speech on color is not surprising at a time when he was experimenting with the space on the canvas in relation to colors and its optical and sensory impact on the viewer. From the very beginning of his artistic career, color played an important role, as clearly emerged, for example, in his canvas *Tutta Praga (All Prague)*<sup>18</sup>, painted in 1947, when he was part of the Italian art abstract group called Forma 1 (Form 1): colored lines are painted in dialogue with the wider colored surfaces in order to create a new compositional space. Dorazio's interest in space and its relationship with environment and people dated back to the very beginning of his formation. He studied architecture in Rome at La Sapienza University, and right from the start he took part in the debates concerning the synthesis of the arts in Italy. In 1952, he published the article “Towards a Synthesis of Plastic Arts” in the Italian art magazine *Arti Visive*, the journal of Gruppo Origine. In this text – in which, for example, he published the reproduction of the library of Viipuri designed by architect Alvar Aalto – Dorazio explained that it was not a question of introducing painting and sculpture into the pre-established space of architecture, but rather, of conceiving the plastic expression of our culture in a synthesis of form and style. “We are building a new civilization for a new society,”<sup>19</sup> he wrote, “Painters and sculptors must intervene on the reality that is the all-encompassing problem of architecture, urban planning of new

cities, new suburbs, and new factories. It is a collective activity, a program for a total reconstruction.”<sup>20</sup> According to these words, the participation of Dorazio in the Congress ideal in Brasília should not surprise. The years from the date of the congress, 1959, to 1963 were significant for Dorazio's new pictorial experiments.

In 1959 he tried to exhibit his paintings at the 5th Biennial of São Paulo, but the selection committee failed to include him, the reason, as Umbro Apollonio wrote in a letter to the painter, being that his last paintings simulated Mark Tobey's and Jackson Pollock's works too much.<sup>21</sup> These two artistic poles experimented by Dorazio at that time are well clarified by the two paintings *Carta Militare* (Military Map) (1958) and *Crack bleu* (1959), both exhibited in Berlin at the Springer Gallery in the Summer of 1959, almost in parallel with the 5th Biennial of São Paulo<sup>22</sup>. The introduction in the German catalogue was by Argan, who wrote with regard to Dorazio's paintings on display: “We may ask what the ultimate end of this kind of painting will be in our time, a time characterized objectively by the informal? Perhaps only this: if the informal tends to increase the occasions on which we encounter reality and furnishes us with the aesthetic 'revelation' of every ordinary and less qualified phenomenon, Dorazio's painting will, on the contrary, tend to develop our capacity for aesthetic evaluation of phenomena, increasing our attitude for more rigorous aesthetic values and finally, steering the activity of our conscience in a direction which should also be aesthetic.”<sup>23</sup> The dichotomy between Art informel and Dorazio's abstractions pointed out by Argan, entails basically the same problems discussed at the Brazilian Congress and 5th Biennial of 1959, which merely focused on clarifying the difference between these two kinds of abstractions.

### **Informel Abstractions vs Concrete Abstractions**

This problem had been at the center of many debates since the mid-forties, not only on the Italian art scene, but also in Brazil. Several Brazilian exhibitions and art journals (such as *Modulo*) had found consensus on the fact that art, in order to be modern, should be abstract. A rich series of interventions in *Modulo* reaffirmed in Brazil, over the years 1957-1959, the

syllogism that modernity is abstractionism, until the second half of 1959, when abstractionism, in the Brazilian artistic context, became neo-concrete art.

In his review to the 5th Biennial, Pedrosa, one of the major proponents of abstract concrete tendencies who spent the previous years campaigning for Brazilian Concretism and Neo-Concretism by organizing exhibitions on its leading figures, such as Lygia Clark, clarified his position with regard to abstraction. In this article, entitled “On the ‘informel’ and related misunderstandings,” Pedrosa disagreed with the use of the term informal art, as he found it “vacuous”, with “no meaning.”<sup>24</sup> He believed it would be more appropriate to use the prefix “anti,” but never “in.” “Antiform,” he said, would be “an appropriate aesthetic concept within the art fields.”<sup>25</sup> Terms such as informal art, Tachisms, and lyrical abstraction were circulating widely in the fifties in Brazil, referring to painting characterized by dabs of paint and graphic symbols, employed not only by international artists but also by Brazilian painters, such as Antonio Bandeira, Tomie Ohtake, Flávio Shiró, and Manabu Mabe, among others. Pedrosa, who thought that the term informal distorted the concept of form, wrote: “Form is the initial element of perception and without it, it would be impossible to perceive anything [...]. A stain is the first form that is seen within the perceptual experiences observed by Gestalt.”<sup>26</sup> The discussion about abstraction at that time mostly concerned the conflict between subjectivity and objectivity. Pedrosa addressed this issue in the text “From abstraction to self-expression,” published immediately after the congress in Brasilia in the *Jornal do Brasil*.<sup>27</sup> Pedrosa (as Argan) relies on Gestalt’s psychology of form and on the idea of an aesthetic perception. In this text, he once again rejected Informal abstraction, accusing it of sacrificing “the psychic distance between viewer and artist in favor of an explicit hedonism that seeks to transform the work into an individualized person that can only project its sentimental anxieties and the neurosis of its private life.”<sup>28</sup> In opposition to Pedrosa's direction was the path followed by the 5th Biennial of São Paulo under the direction of Machado, who chose to exhibit mostly Abstract Expressionism and Art Informel paintings. The vogue for the so-called Informel was an international trend in the fifties, so much so

that starting from 1948 it characterized several editions of the Venice Biennials as well.

In view of the above, we can understand the decision made in 1959 by the Biennial of São Paulo selection committee of not including Dorazio in that edition: Dorazio's paintings, in fact – as clearly explained by Argan in the exhibition catalogue of Dorazio's German show – were not informal art. The Italian session was in fact dedicated to abstract artists whose paintings were mostly characterized by automatic and gestural signs. Umbro Apollonio, who curated the session, wrote that the artists exhibited: “showed a true *spiritual* rigor”.<sup>29</sup> The ones included at the 5th Biennial of São Paulo were former members of abstract groups such as Fronte Nuovo delle Arti, then Gruppo degli Otto, with paintings by Renato Birolli, Corrado Cagli, Mattia Moreni, Ennio Morlotti, Emilio Vedova, and those of Gruppo Origine, like Alberto Burri and Giuseppe Capogrossi, who, with different languages, were elaborating a peculiar response to Art informal. Dorazio was not interested in automatism and gestural paintings at all. Indeed, he centered his research almost only on color, light, structures and perception, as emerged from his new paintings exhibited at the Venice Biennial in 1960, in a solo room. He had to wait until 1963 before seeing these last works accepted by the Biennial of São Paulo, basically when the organization committee had completely changed, becoming an autonomous foundation endorsed by Brazilian president (Jânio Quadros) and his secretary of culture, Mario Pedrosa. Argan was the curator of the 1963 Brazilian Biennial Italian session; he exalted Dorazio's effort “to represent the compositional space as unitary and continuous.”<sup>30</sup> He stressed the rigorous and coherent path of the “structure of perception” of Dorazio's works of art, structures that the critic read as “an act and a state of consciousness.”<sup>31</sup> In so doing, he finally placed Dorazio on the opposite side of the Informal trends. The phenomenological turning point that characterized Dorazio's work at the beginning of the sixties, was explained in an article published in the Italian art journal *Metro* by German art historian Will Grohmann – who, like Dorazio and Argan, also took part in the Congress of Brasilia in 1959. In an article entitled *Piero Dorazio, Or the Return to Quality in painting*, Grohmann effectively described Dorazio's

paintings:

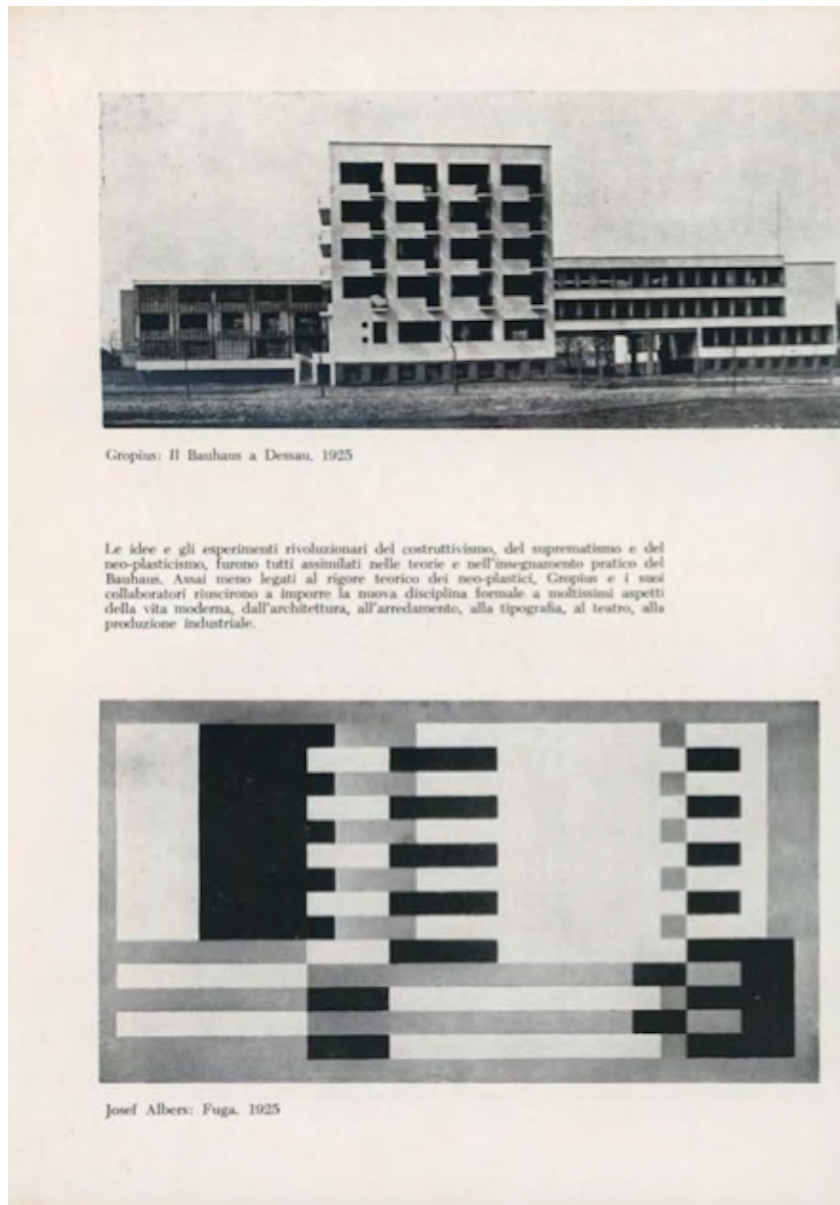
The nets are either narrow or ample, rigid in their geometricity or vibrant, according to whether the quality of the color is restricted or fluid, and sometimes he presents them even in contrast with the linear system, and then the scheme takes on dissonant tones. Or else it becomes 'disturbed' when, for example, a stripe runs down the canvas. [...] The space of the poet, if in research into the unknown we were only concerned with contacts with the elements. What would the poetic spirit be if it did not result from the simple fact of working with such refined qualities as light and color, with such absolute postulates as the many linear systems, and with such fantastic definitions of a pictorial space in itself?<sup>22</sup>

Structures, though – as Gillo Dorfles pointed out in 1962 – became a "necessary" element of Dorazio's pictorial composition.<sup>23</sup>

To conclude, discussions on abstraction reached a climax at the 5th Biennial of São Paulo and the International Congress of Art Critics of 1959. Opposing Abstract expressionism and Informel to geometrical oriented Concrete Art groups, the two Brazilian events gave voice to the dual poles of abstractions running in the fifties. Brasília as a "Synthesis of the Arts" project, with its temporary scaffolding built up of reticular structures, as well as Oscar Niemeyer organicist buildings, most likely impressed the imagination of international critics, architects and artists who had the opportunity to visit the city during the Congress. Dorazio, who used to compare the forms of architecture to pictorial shapes, as he did in his book *La fantasia dell'arte nella vita moderna* (The fantasy of art in modern life)<sup>24</sup> (fig. 1), possibly found a source of inspiration in Brasilia's social utopian urban projects, buildings (fig. 2) and unfinished structures (fig. 3), in particular with regards to the grids he started painting in the early-sixties: in both cases we are facing structures from and for life.

Considering the above, the Congress closed with the affirmation of a certain specific type of abstractionism which was seen as representative of the modern artistic languages and, above all, of collectivity. In this perspective, the construction of Brasilia as a "Synthesis of the arts" seems to

conclude a path of acceptance of a non-figurative language, that in Brazil became neo-Concrete abstract art, while in Italy the new research on communication and perception was to open to different artistic experimentations, including the trends of Programmatic and Gestalt art.



**Fig. 1.** Bauhaus building and a painting by Josef Albers in Piero Dorazio, *La fantasia dell'arte nella vita moderna* (Rome: Polveroni e Quinti editori, 1955), n.p.



Fig. 2 Palácio de Agricultura in Brasília, in *Modulo*, no. 15 (1959): n.p.

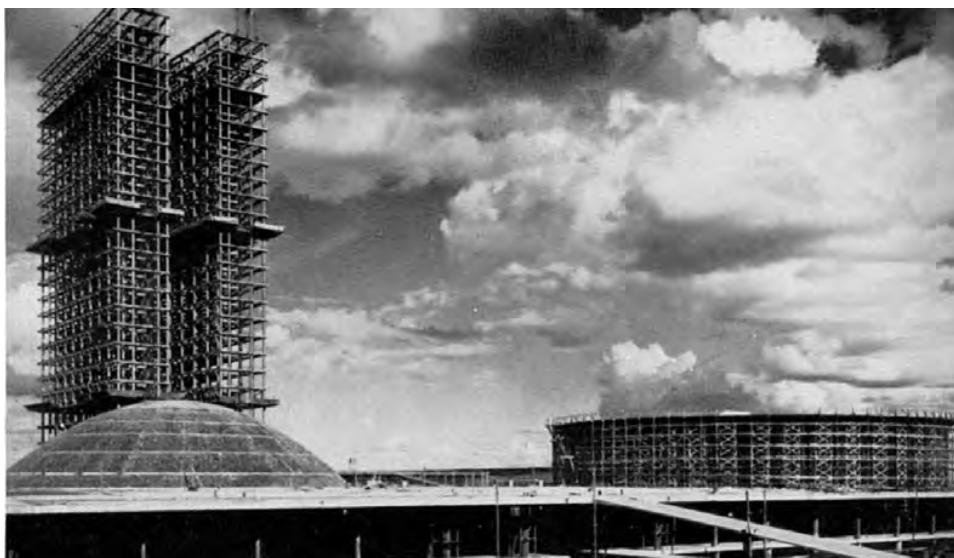


Fig. 3 Brasília under construction, in *L'Architettura: cronache e storia*, no. 51 (January 1960): n.p.

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### Endnotes

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# **Brazilian Modernism and Italian Paradigm. The Commemorative Exhibition of the 50th Anniversary of Official Immigration**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The present paper gives a vast panorama about the Exhibition Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of Official Immigration, which took place at the Palace of Industries of São Paulo in 1937. I propose an analysis of the Italian pavilion that was divided in three sections: Il Salone d'Onore, dedicated to the imperial propaganda resulting from the invasions in Ethiopia and the fascist political and social achievements; La Mostra Merceologica that exhibited Italian art crafts and books; and La Mostra d'Arte with 47 paintings, 18 sculptures and 39 engravings of diversified artists that collaborated also with other fascists exhibitions in Italy and abroad. The focus of the analysis is directed to the fascist propaganda within San Paolo's modernism and Italian immigration contexts, proposing to instigate reflections on the concept of modernism itself and on the role attributed to immigrants by imperialist politics.

## **KEYWORDS**

Immigration; Diaspora; Modernism; Tradition; Fascist propaganda.

From May to September 1937 the Commemorative Exhibition of the Fiftieth Anniversary of Official Immigration, took place at Parque Dom Pedro II in São Paulo. The Minister Guido Romanelli, designated to supervise the Italian participation, published a detailed account of it. In the introduction, Romanelli clarifies that one of the main motivations for the Italian participation was: "l'atteggiamento assunto dal Brasile nei confronti dell'Italia durante la guerra Etiopica, per non essere associato alla sleale politica delle sanzioni".<sup>1</sup> Brazil, thus, was a oasis for the Italian political horizons, since it did not joined the economic boycott established by the League of Nations as a reaction to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, in 1935.

We propose here to present the Italian participation in the 1937 Exhibition, analyzing its fascist propaganda within São Paulo's modernism context and within the Italian immigration context. Let us start with the following open question: in the context of the nationalist policies of both Italian fascist imperialism and the Brazilian era of Getúlio Vargas, what is the meaning of an exhibition in honor of the immigrant? As appropriately noted by Jorge Coli, the ideological myth that defines Brazilians is based on the harmonious miscegenation of the three races - Indian, African and Portuguese . This would be reinforced in 1936 in *Raízes do Brasil*, by Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, and in 1995 in *O povo brasileiro*, by Darci Ribeiro. Of this myth that gained much strength during the nationalist context of the 1930s, Coli observes: "Essa síntese matricial exclui, por suposto, todos os 'estrangeiros': os imigrantes italianos, japoneses, alemães, coreanos, etc., que chegaram ao Brasil no final do século XIX e remodelaram completamente a geografia humana do país ao longo do século XX".<sup>2</sup>

On the Italian side, it is also worth remembering the political opinions on the topic of the immigrations of the 19th and 20th centuries. This was divided between those who believed that the departure of the emigrants was a loss for the nation and those who believed that they were instruments for Italian international policy. Mussolini, in 1924, would speak about it in the following terms: "L'emigrazione è un male, perché impoverisce la nazione di elementi attivi che vanno all'estero per diventare i globuli rossi di anemici

paesi stranieri. Questo male può essere minimizzato con l'organizzazione e tramutato in un peso a nostro favore a livello Internazionale".<sup>3</sup> For this reason the following is really an open question: how was an exhibition in honor of the immigrant possible in this context?

Romanelli refers to the 1937 Exhibition in this historical context as a contrast between the international scene and the unnoticed Brazilian event. The first is described by Romanelli as "un fermento di eventi in rapida successione di importanza trascendente per l'evoluzione politica, economica e sociale del mondo". And the second is pronounced as "manifestazione indetta dallo Stato di San Paolo per commemorare un cinquantennio della sua vita nazionale".<sup>4</sup> The Minister, as we can see, made a very clear distinction between the international scene and the commemoration of immigration, which he interpreted as a Brazilian issue. While acknowledging that the 1937 Exhibition was not intended to be an international event, Romanelli criticizes the hedonism and selfishness of nations with little interest in that Brazilian commemoration. Italy, instead, would have placed itself differently because it represented the largest number of emigrants in Brazil and had contributed to the development of São Paulo with about thirty percent of its population.

Although Romanelli's report was intended to emphasize Italy's greater attention, compared to other countries, the Italian participation in the 1937 Exhibition does not seem to have been driven by Italy's attention to its compatriots. In the Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma, we find several letters written both by the Brazilian representatives of the 1937 Exhibition and by the Italian consular authorities in Brazil, offering free conditions for Italian participation. These documents contain not only invitations, but also insistent requests for responses from the Italian authorities. Francesco Pettinati, general commissioner of the 1937 Exhibition, wrote to the art critic and gallery owner Giuseppe Sprovieri, soliciting a response from the Italian government to the Brazilian invitation, in the following terms:

“Il motivo per cui ti scrivo non è semplicemente quello di annoiarti [sic] ma per dirti che a suo tempo ho inviato comunicazione ufficiale al Ministero della Stampa e Propaganda e alla Direzione degl'Italiani all'Esterio

dopo aver fatto tutte le pratiche possibili e immaginabili presso il Regio Consolato di qui il quale ha informato minuziosamente di tutto e su tutto il Patrio Governo. Non chiedevo sussidi né favori di sorta: limitavo ad offrire gratis al Governo Italiano l'area per un padiglioncino nel quale possibilmente, suggerivo una mostra simbolica, fotografica e sinottica delle opere del Regime. Facevo la richiesta avvertendo che i Governi del Giappone e della Germania, seguiti da altri Governi, erano in trattative con noi per la partecipazione dei rispettivi paesi in forma tutt'altro che gratuita. Ho rotto le scatole al povero Console, ho scritto e telegrafato ma senza costrutto. Ne sono umiliato! Neanche un rigo di risposta anche per dirmi vada a farsi friggere..... Niente. E dire che il Governo dello Stato, mi ha nominato Commissario! Fai tu le deduzioni che vuoi".<sup>5</sup>

The Italian participation in the 1937 Exhibition, therefore, does not seem to have been immediately motivated by the authorities, as we should imagine by Romanelli's speech. Nor does it appear in "Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla Direzione Generale per i servizi della propaganda durante l'anno 1937-XV" of the Ministero della Cultura Popolare, where we read the list of Italian cultural participations abroad, counting documentary exhibitions in more than eleven cities and seven art exhibitions in more than twenty cities around the world. No mention of the 1937 Exhibition of São Paulo.

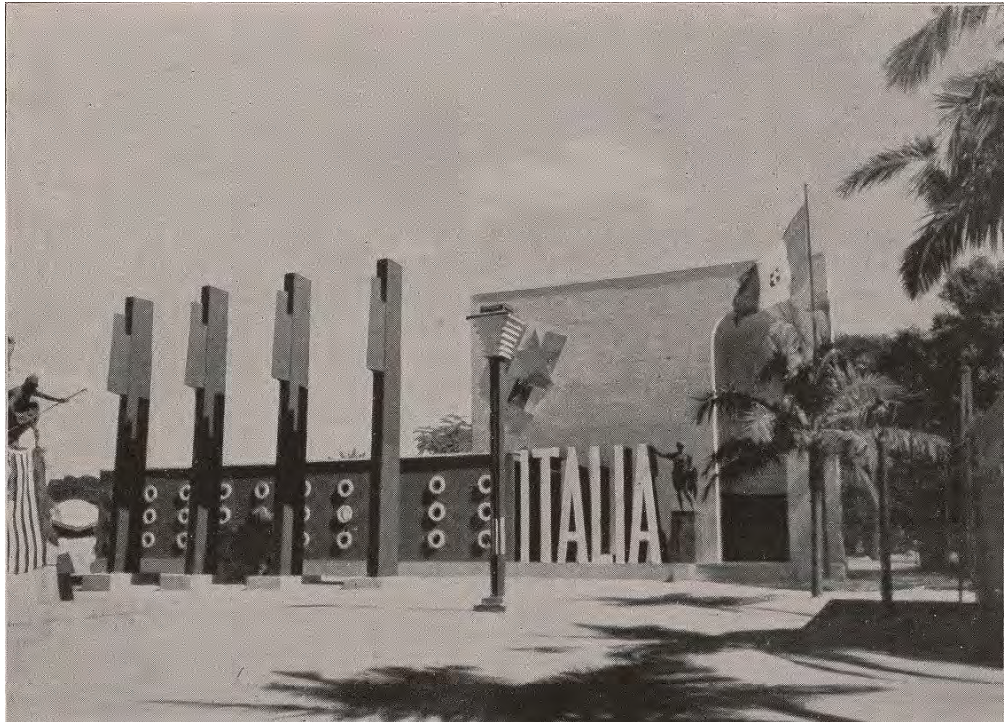
When Romanelli wrote that it was foreseeable that the appeal of the promoters of the São Paulo Exhibition would not find resonance, he was referring to the other countries (without naming a single one), thus concealing Italy's delayed interest in the Brazilian event. It was the Italians of Brazil who insisted for the official participation of Italy in that Brazilian event, in search, perhaps, of official support that would give meaning, form, and representation to their still young national identity. Pettinati, for example, son of an Italian and born in São Paulo, in his letter to Sprovieri confessed to him that he had never been to Italy and sighs: "ardo di conoscere". For the Italians in Brazil, the Italian participation in the 1937 Exhibition seemed to be more than a simple Brazilian event, but instead mainly as an attempt to

concretize an idea of their homeland that was still too abstract. They committed themselves not only to insisting on the official participation of Italy, but also to asking for a symbolic donation to the city of São Paulo, proposing "una mostra di carattere 'spirituale'", as defined by Consul G. Castruccio: "con opere del Regime, navigazione, turismo, bonifiche, città universitarie e 'qualche gagliardo campione della nostra grande industria con un potente motore d'aviazione, o una 'Littorina'".<sup>6</sup>

The Consul's proposal seems to have been accepted on February 2nd during the presidency of Ambassador Amedeo Giannini at Palazzo Chigi, when, according to Romanelli, it was decided to pervade the spiritual concept of the exhibition and to reserve the great part of the pavilion to figurative and documentary representations, limiting the *Mostra Merceologica* to few sections, such as art, culture and handcraft.

After crossing the external area of the Italian pavilion, where the visitors were greeted by the statue of *Augusto di Prima Porta*, and entering through the main door, shaped like a triumphal arch, the spectator would reach the *Salone d'Onore* dedicated to the imperial projects of the regime. The large panel decorating the entrance, entitled *Fede Volontà Vittoria*, suggested a sense of historical continuity between the ancient monumentality represented by the elements of the pavilion's facade and the fascism monumentality represented by Mussolini's gesture associated with Augustus' gesture. In this same section, several other panels dedicated to the imperialist propaganda in Africa and its military, social and urban organizations in Italy decorated the walls of the room. Ending the tour of the pavilion, the spectator would reach the *Mostra Merceologica* that exhibited Italian books and handicrafts of Enti Nazionale delle Piccole Industrie (ENAPI). Between the first and the last sections there was the *Mostra d'Arte*, surrounded by panels dedicated to tourism and agriculture, and to the Italian-Brazilian collaboration from 1499 to 1937, together with a panel on the work of the Italians in the State of São Paulo and a few photographs of fascist architecture in Italy. Composed by 47 paintings, 18 sculptures and 39 engravings the *Mostra d'Arte* was curated by the painter Orazio Amato that was Segretario Interprovinciale del Lazio del Sindacato Belle Arti, and set up

by Roberto Vighi, Ispettore di Belle Arti del Ministero dell'Educazione di Roma. According to Romanelli the works of art were chosen with the criterion of “soddisfare il ricordo nostalgico dell'esule”.



**Fig. 1.** La Partecipazione Italiana all'Esposizione di San Paolo del Brasile. Bibliotheca Hertziana.

Among the paintings and engravings there was a predominance of landscapes representing countryside and urban panoramas with its emblematic architectures. Those landscapes, that operated both as postcards for Brazilians and as souvenirs for Italian immigrants, were intended to represent ichnographically the attribute of *italianità*. The same applies to the illustrations of Italian's festivities such as in *La Corsa di Sant'Andrea*, celebrating the patron of Amalfi, and to the representations of the Italian costumes and physiognomies as in *Pastore Sardo* and *Rurale di Littoria*, that exemplified the builders of foundational cities, instigating a sense of *italianità* through regionalist traditions.

Alongside the ordinary man, praised for his work in the field and for his connection with native culture and for the continuity of tradition, there were also historical characters celebrating both the regime and the common *latinità* shared with Brazil, as we can see in the sculpture *Cristoforo Colombo, Il Re Imperatore, La Regina Margherita* and *Il Duce*, which suggested a natural imperialistic and fascist continuity with Latin roots.

It is not possible to distinguish fascist art strictly through its aesthetic qualities. It is, though, possible to recognize some fascist artists through their engagement to the regime. The definition of a fascist aesthetic goes back to 1922, during the formation of the group *Novecento Italiano*, whose first exhibition, in 1926, at the Palazzo della Permanente di Milano, was organized by Margherita Sarfatti who defined the artists as "italiani, tradizionalisti, moderni" (M.Sarfatti, *Storia della pittura moderna*, Rome, 1930, p. 126). Among them was Orazio Amato, that curated the *Mostra d'Arte* at the 1937 Exhibition and also contributed to it with two paintings, Anselmo Bucci, Francesco Messina, Arturo Tosi e Leonetta Cecchi Pieraccini.

In addition to the presence of artists of the group *Novecento Italiano*, the 1937 Exhibition was also showing works of artists who exhibited at the *II Quadriennale di Roma* in 1934, and at the Venice Biennials of 1934 and 1936. The mapping of the trajectories of these artists will not fit the time of this presentation. What is valuable, though, is to point out the consequences of the *Mostra d'Arte* in São Paulo's modernist context. The documentation of the Italian participation was more restricted to Italian newspapers published in Brazil, such as *Fanfulla*. Among the Brazilian newspapers, we found mentions of the events connected to the exposition and to its great popularity, guaranteed also by an amusement park among the pavilions and gastronomic events, such as the wine tasting in the Italian cantina. What remained preserved in public archives of São Paulo were a few documents that will lead our next considerations.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1937 the Mayor of São Paulo, Fabio Prado, received a letter commenting the "very interesting Italian exhibition on contemporary fine arts" and suggesting the government the "acquisition of some works of art that enrich their artistic heritage, remember the festive

celebration, while at the same time practicing a gesture of good political kindness”.<sup>2</sup> It would be an ordinary comment if it wouldn't have been written by Mário de Andrade, one of the most important names of Brazilian modernism that during the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas endorsed his critical thinking as a social and political responsibility.

In 1935, during the Mayor management of Fabio Prado, the Department of Culture was created with the scope of gathering several cultural institutions under its sole responsibility and with the aim to democratize the access to artistic and cultural manifestations. In the same year of its creation, Mario de Andrade was invited to collaborate with the Department of Culture as director; a position that he embraced as an opportunity of social investment in Brazilian culture education. With the implementation of Estado Novo, achieved with the coup d'état of Getúlio Vargas and the consequent replacement of Mayor Fabio Prado by Prestes Maia, Mário de Andrade was removed from his position in May 1938. As director, the request to Fábio Prado in the letter written in December 1937 may have been one of the last actions, preceding his Folklore Research Mission financed by the Cultural Department in the North and Northeast of Brazil, in February 1938. In that letter, Mario de Andrade requested two sculptures from the 1937 Exhibition, as we can read:

“[...] considerando que ao governo da Cidade de São Paulo não pode passar ignorada a exposição italiana, o Departamento de Cultura propõe a V. Excia. a compra de algumas esculturas italianas da referida exposição. Toma ainda a liberdade de sugerir a V. Excia. fiquem de propriedade municipal o delicioso bronze ‘Polledro’ de Sirio Tofanari e a admirável cabeça de mármore ‘Giovine Donna’ de Francesco Wildt”.<sup>8</sup>

Both sculptures were acquired. Tofanari's bronze is today kept at the City Hall and Wildt's marble at the Cultural Center of São Paulo (CCSP). It is possible that such acquisitions were associated with the Cultural Department's ambition to create a municipal museum dedicated to "active teaching", as defined by Mario de Andrade in a letter written to Paulo Duarte,

in September 1937. It was a new conception of a museum, with a different constitution, regulated by central governments. Andrade described it as follows: "They must contain everything. They should be archaeological, folkloric, historical, artistic museums as well as museums of the outdoors and of industry". We, in turn, could associate the "museum of everything" with the old cabinets of curiosities, but it was associated, instead, with the democratic thinking of Mario de Andrade and the social engagement of his projects especially during the 1930's. In 1937, for example, National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service (known as SHPAN) was created with parameters based on Mario de Andrade's preliminary project, which foresaw the expansion of the concept of monuments and material goods and the incorporation of the concept of movable traditions. These changes would bring about an expansion of the very concept of culture, since the political criteria for safeguarding it would also consider more popular manifestations that did not endure in time and space, such the popular festivals and songs of the Northeast of Brazil.



**Fig. 2.** La Partecipazione Italiana all'Esposizione di San Paolo del Brasile. Bibliotheca Hertziana.



**Fig. 3.** La Partecipazione Italiana all'Esposizione di San Paolo del Brasile. Bibliotheca Hertziana.

Also in 1937, the Minister Gustavo Capanema commissioned Candido Portinari to create a mural for the Ministry of Education and Health in Rio de Janeiro. A work whose studies resonated within Mário de Andrade's critics as one of the main *topoi* of modern Brazilian painting celebrated as "a collective triumph of labor", in the words of the critic.

It is curious to note in this period the participation of artists and critics of the left, such as Portinari and Mario de Andrade, in Vargas' government. Tadeu Chiarelli analyzed this curiosity, justifying it as a "oportunismo de esquerda dentro de um regime de direita"<sup>4</sup> and suggests to conjecture "a possibilidade de participar na área artístico-cultural de um governo conservador, sem uma política definida para o campo das artes

plásticas, poderia ser a oportunidade ideal para forçar a criação de um imaginário que glorificasse o povo brasileiro".<sup>10</sup>

Returning to the letter addressed to Fabio Prado we come across two brief descriptions by Mario de Andrade of the sculptors whose works he suggested to be acquired by the Mayor: Siro Tofanari and Francesco Wildt. The former, Andrade describes as an animalist celebrated in several Italian and foreign museums. And the second is presented as follows:

"De Francesco Wildt seria quase ocioso falar, tanto o seu nome é hoje universalmente conhecido. Milanês, nascido a primeiro de março de 1868 e morto a 12 de março de 1931, Wildt consagrou-se por toda a parte tanto pela grandeza e consciência de sua técnica como pela originalidade de sua arte, profundamente impregnada de valor humano. As suas pesquisas escultóricas tornaram-no também um dos estalões da arte moderna. A sua *Giovine Donna* é o último trabalho que criou, antes de morrer – obra de uma pureza admirável de linha e duma intensidade esplendida de expressão".<sup>11</sup>

What we must notice from this description provided by Mario de Andrade is that the critic describes the sculptor erroneously. Francesco Wildt was actually born in 1896 and in 1931 he did not die, but started teaching at the marble school in Brera, after leaving the studio of his father, Aldofo Wildt, with whom Francesco collaborated until his death. Andrade, presents Francesco describing Adolfo, a legitimate misattribution which can be justified by the son's own way of living on his father's shadow, as Paola Mola mentions in the article *Miscellanea wildtiana*:

“Che Francesco non si occupasse di smentire e che potesse anzi favorire l'equivoco, è molto probabile: vissuto nel culto della personalità paterna doveva essere intimamente contento dell'errore [...]. É

significativo che Francesco usasse firmare in modo identico al padre, con il cognome in stampatello preceduto (ma non sempre) dall'iniziale del nome".<sup>12</sup>

Adolfo Wildt, in turn, was one of the main Italian sculptors internationally associated with fascism. In 1923 he sculpted the bust of Mussolini, which was extensively used within the propaganda of the regime, such as in the Italian pavilion in 1925 Paris Exhibition, in the Mostra del Novecento Italiano in 1926, and on the cover of the Italian version biography *Dux*, written by Margherita Sarfatti.

We can understand Chiarelli's interpretation of a "left-wing opportunism". However, it is difficult to extend this interpretation to Mario de Andrade's interest in the fascist exhibition. We can draft a clarification taking into consideration the following arguments: first, although the Italian pavilion in the 1937 exhibition leaves no doubt as to its fascist identity, Mario de Andrade makes no mention of the political character of the exhibition in his request to the mayor Fabio Prado. Second, it must be acknowledged that taking into consideration the set of works exhibited, Mario de Andrade points out perhaps the most "neutral" ones, shunning the works which themes could be associated with representations of *italianità*.

Returning to the "museum of everything", we can indicate two main axes in Mario de Andrade's description. The first one concerns the definition of culture itself proposed to be understood in a broader sense, materially and immaterially, mirroring his preliminary project for SPHAN: "Se num edifício canal do município se guardam um tronco de escravos, umas cestas trançadas, uns desenhos-cópias de petroglifos existentes na região, uma cadeia de jacarandá entalhado, uma bandeira da Guerra do Paraguai um quadro de boa pintura e uma cópia de Fídias, haverá também um jardim com pariris ameríndios, taipas caipiras, pinguelas, porteiras seriação progressiva de cultivo dos vegetais da região, etc. E também não esquecer as indústrias do município".<sup>13</sup>

The second one concerns the didactic engagement of the museum as Andrade suggests that it should contain: "visitas obrigatórias, em dia de trabalho, de operários, estudantes, crianças, etc. Visitas vivas, sem

conferência de hora, mas acompanhadas de explicador inteligente. Sem isso não haverá museu, mas cemitério. Sem isso, sem o auxílio do povo, esclarecido, jamais conseguiremos nada de permanentemente eficaz contra vandalismos e extermínios”.<sup>14</sup>

This didactic engagement of the “museum of everything” was also expressed in the diversified nature of its objects - archeological, folkloric, historical and artistic - and referred to Mario de Andrade's praise of the social character of Portinari's paintings. Chiarelli defined this praise as "uma arte mais compreensível ao povo [...] alheia a qualquer malabarismo estético que anuviasse a mensagem do assunto tratado, para que se tornasse mais compreensível e mais direta”.<sup>15</sup> In the text on Portinari, written between 1942 and 1944, for the Argentine publishing house Losada, Mario de Andrade differentiates the artist's social didacticism from the revolutionary experimentalisms of the early twentieth century that taught "um espírito de insatisfação coletiva, e de repúdio às ordens sociais dominantes"<sup>16</sup> Portinari's experimentalism, in turn, would teach a social conscience without being revolutionary, without being political.

The acquisitions of Tofanari's and Wildt's sculptures could therefore be contextualized in Mario de Andrade's project for the Department of Culture to create a popular museum, whose didactic and social qualities should not be overshadowed by the political aspect of the works, as declared by Andrade to Paulo Prado: “Quanto aos objetos do museu, não haverá município que não ofereça o que possui de arqueológico, de folclórico, e mesmo de histórico ou de artístico, em benefício e glória do seu município. Talvez seja apenas necessário mudar de vez em quando de partido na Prefeitura, pois desconfio que muitos prefeitos só receberão ofertas de seus correligionários, ah, política!”.<sup>17</sup>

Besides the prevalence of social quality over the political aspect of the work, the acquisition suggested by Mário de Andrade can also be associated with his predilection for movable traditions, “ou seja, pelos bens culturais que se transformam ao longo do tempo”,<sup>18</sup> as analyzed by Pedro Fragelli in the article *Tradition and Revolution: Mario de Andrade and the Brazilian cultural heritage*. The debate surrounding the demolition of Sé, the historic city center

in Bahia, led Mario de Andrade to defend himself in his writings from accusations of being a "futurist barbarian". Clarifying his considerations between the pros and cons of the demolition that ultimately did not happen, Andrade differentiates two types of traditions: the movable and the immovable. Regarding the former, exemplified in songs, poetry and popular dances, he states that it is necessary to safeguard them "talqualmente estão, porque elas se transformam pelo simples fato da mobilidade que tem".<sup>19</sup> As for the second ones, Andrade affirms that they don't evolve by themselves, and can even be harmful, and concludes: "Algumas são perfeitamente ridículas que nem a 'carroça' do rei da Inglaterra. Destas a gente só pode aproveitar o espírito, a psicologia e não a forma objetiva".<sup>20</sup>

This was an anti-traditional conception of tradition that "inclui tanto o passado cultural quanto a liberdade em relação a ele", as written by Fragelli quoting Robert Schwarz perception.<sup>21</sup> In light of such reflections we can ponder whether such freedom would not also be part of a de-contextualization of Tofanari's and Wildt's sculptures. Just as an African tribal object in the European context of the 1920s had its mystical content corrupted when put to question the academic and cultural aesthetic vices of the West, Tofanari and Wildt's sculptures, in the Brazilian context of leftist intellectuals, were dissociated from their propagandistic objectives in the 1937 Exhibition, which were described as follows by Valerio Mariani in the bilingual catalog of the *Mostra d'Arte*: "Comunque se attraverso questo semplice saggio d'arte nostra, il visitatore saprà riconoscere alcuni fondamentali aspetti dell'anima italiana, e se italiano sentirà la nostalgia del suo paese, se straniero sarà afferrati dal fascino della forza, della schiettezza, dell'accogliente dolcezza d'una terra che forse non conosce ancora, la rassegna di queste opera avrà raggiunto il suo più alto scopo".<sup>22</sup>

It was, therefore, an exhibition whose propaganda could not make without the immigrant. Without representing it or even its contemporary reality, the *Mostra d'Arte* invested in representations of a land where the immigrant did not live, of an ideal nation different from the one he had abandoned not more than fifty years before for Brazil. Such nostalgia, thus, was a rhetorical discourse, without social scope, an adaptation of fascist

propaganda to the Brazilian social context, a strategic resource that would lead the regime to better understand its international policy and that would help consolidate the Estado Novo in Brazil. On December 20, 1937, shortly after the coup d'état of Getúlio Vargas and the end of São Paulo Exhibition, the department of *Propaganda Presso Gli Stati Esteri* received a letter sent from Brazil requesting Italian journalists who could favor the propaganda of the newly installed regime, assuring the nature of this govern: "è quanto di più concretamente fascista si poteva realizzare nelle condizioni ottocentesche del Brasile e secondo le realtà interne ed internazionali."<sup>23</sup> Two years after the São Paulo Exhibition, one can notice a change in the Italian interest in Brazil, if one compares it with the initial slow and disinterested adhesion of the Italian pavilion at the 1937 Exhibition. A report addressed to the Minister of Cultura Popolare, Alessandro Pavolini, and signed by Cesco Tomaselli about his trip to Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, focusing on Italian immigrants and travelers, dates from December 4, 1939. In this report, Tomaselli indicates in South America a large number of "Italiani morti", referring to the immigrants without Italian identity: "Come Dante nell'Inferno incontra i trapassati, coi loro corpi che paiono sostanza viva e sono invece ombre, che la luce attraversa, così io, pellegrinando nel Nuovo Mondo, mi sono imbattuto in esseri che avevano origine, caratteri, cognome italiani, spesso bellissimo cognome, ma udendo echeggiare sulle mie labbra la favella natia rimanevano sordi, interdetti, indifferenti, confusi, qualche volta ostili".<sup>24</sup> In Brazil, though, Tomaselli indicates a hope of reversing this situation because of the greater number of "italiani recuperabili" and suggests the foundation in São Paulo of a newspaper published in Portuguese that could amplify the propaganda made by Italian journals such as *Fanfulla* on which he ponders: "chi sono i lettori di Fanfulla? Sono i connazionali che non hanno bisogno di essere fertilizzati".<sup>25</sup>

To conclude, let us return to the consideration left open at the beginning of this presentation: how was an exhibition in honor of the immigrant possible in the aforementioned Italian and Brazilian historical and cultural contexts? Although it is not possible to answer this question with a single answer, I ponder on the element of nostalgia being a valid key for

reading it. On the Italian side, it was a rhetorical nostalgia, used by fascist propaganda in the process of national-building within the imperialist ambitions of the regime. On the Brazilian side, in turn, it was a “reflexive nostalgia”, which Svetlana Boym defined as a questioning attitude of truth, which praises the fragments of memory and temporalizes space. Two nostalgias that, despite being different, proved to be compatible in the 1937 Exhibition, integrating Italian imperialist program with the Brazilian colonialist culture.

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# Far Beyond the Work of Art: Migrations of Knowledge Between Brazil and Italy in the 1950s: Danilo Di Prete and Bramante Buffoni

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## **ABSTRACT**

The article will discuss the artistic careers of the Italian artists Danilo Di Prete (Viareggio) and Bramante Buffoni (Milan) after their immigration to São Paulo, Brazil, in the post-World War II. This discussion will not address the plastic and artistic solutions applied by them in their artworks, but instead how their immigrant condition contributed to their fluency in the art system in Brazil.

By means of the analysis of the complex relationship established by these artists and the cultural agents operating in São Paulo at that time - many of whom also Italians - we will approach the difficulties and solutions proposed by them in their performances in Brazil and how their immigrant condition contributed to the configuration of an expanded artistic performance, which included not only painting or sculpture, but also a list of various activities such as: organizing and setting up exhibitions, acting in the field of decoration, poster design and illustrations, among other productions. In this sense, we will approach a field that still remains neglected by Brazilian historiography about the relevance of these artists in the construction of a broader sense of modernity, something that, in a way, had a great impact on the Brazilian art scene in the 1950s.

## **KEYWORDS**

Italian Modern Art; Bramante Buffoni; Danilo Di Prete; knowledge migration; art system in São Paulo

### **Introduction**

It is well known and discussed in art historiography in Brazil the strong contribution given by descendants of Italians and by some Italians who migrated to São Paulo during the interwar period and after World War II, such as Fulvio Pennacchi (1905-1992)<sup>1</sup>, Galileo Emendabile (1898-1974)<sup>2</sup>, and many others<sup>3</sup>. The subjects of studies, articles and exhibitions are mostly artists who worked in the field of painting and sculpture, and also those who marked the system of arts - such as Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho (1898-1977)<sup>4</sup>, known as Ciccillo, and the couple Pietro Maria Bardi (1900-1999) and Lina Bo (1914-1992)<sup>5</sup>. Also in this system, there is the presence of several dealers such as the couple Anna Maria (1913-1994) and Pasquale Fiocca (1914-1994)<sup>6</sup>.

There are, however, some other Italians who impacted our artistic milieu and require further study. The silence around their names can occur for many reasons, among which we could list: 1. the absence of their works in public collections and consequently their absence in retrospectives or solo exhibitions; 2. the small reproduction of their works in publications addressed to the general public or academic field; 3. the lack of an institute that gives support and visibility to the artist; 4. the existence of an archive safeguarded by a museum or an institution; 5. the small circulation of their works in the secondary market and the low prices achieved at auctions; 6. a more heterogeneous plastic solution applied in the artworks in terms of quality; or even, heterogeneous in terms of supports used, that is, not exclusively within the known axes of the so called "Fine Arts", but those understood as belonging to the "Applied Arts"<sup>7</sup>.

Bearing these aspects in mind, the goal of this article is to discuss two Italian artists, who migrated and settled in São Paulo, about whom there has been a certain silence for decades, due to the reasons just mentioned, but others that we will try to point out. They are Danilo Di Prete (1911-1985) and Bramante Buffoni (1912-1989), who arrived in the city in 1946 and 1953, respectively. In those years, as it is known, an art system in São Paulo was still being developed<sup>8</sup>, which meant for both artists to start building their careers

from scratch, in an artistic milieu very different from the one they were used to.

However, our idea is not to approach their artistic processes exclusively from the point of view of their production in the support of painting, but rather, from their multiple activities, which include the field of the “Applied Arts”. Working in other fields was possible due to the full knowledge and experience they had of the Italian artistic system, in which modernity was understood in a broader sense<sup>9</sup>. Being modern was not just about working with “Fine Arts”, but also acting on various fronts such as graphic arts, advertising, decoration for public and private spaces and the elaboration of sets and costumes for shows. It was also working with furniture, photography, creating jewelry and prints for clothing and contributing to fashion. Furthermore, it was to promote their work and themselves.

We will start the discussion by presenting some notes on their career, production and reception in São Paulo. Lastly, we will conclude by addressing some insights on how our approach to the career and production of these artists can contribute to the debates in our field of study.

### **Di Prete**

Danilo Di Prete spent his youth working as an artist in the coastal city of Viareggio. His artistic education would not occur in a formal academy, but through the active contact with other painters, the habit of visiting exhibitions, and also assembling shows and constructing floats for the city’s carnival<sup>10</sup>.

He displays his own paintings in shows, which took place during the fascist regime. As it is known the regime fiercely commanded the exhibition system, which comprised a great number of exhibitions organized by the Union of Fine Arts, aside from the Quadrennials of Rome and the Venice Biennial<sup>11</sup>. Di Prete was familiar with this exhibition system, and took part in all exhibition types, with the exception to the Venice Biennial.

During World War II, he took part in as an artist and a soldier. With its end, he found himself in a terrible financial condition which made him move

with his family to São Paulo, where he already had a relative, who had a stable economic situation.

When he arrives in the city in 1946, soon realizes that although it was experiencing broad economic growth and development, the exhibition artistic system was incipient compared to the Italian one. Then, he starts to establish relationships with the members of the Santa Helena Group and the São Paulo Artistic Family<sup>12</sup>. At the same time, with these limited exhibition opportunities, Di Prete painted walls for a living, and from 1947 onwards, worked with the creation of illustration for magazines<sup>13</sup>, newspapers, books and also of ads and posters for important advertising agencies<sup>14</sup>.



**Fig. 1.** Danilo Di Prete. Ad for the newspaper *Diário de S. Paulo*, 1947.

The development of commercial and institutional posters would benefit the artist, who was granted with many awards and recognitions<sup>15</sup>. Then, he started to advocate in favor of posters as something not "minor" in relation to painting. He makes this move here, at the same time he publicizes it in his Viareggio through correspondents<sup>16</sup>, stating that he was pioneering the debate about the boundaries between the so-called major and minor arts in Brazilian lands.

As it is known, the cultural scene in São Paulo changed by the end of the 1940s with the creation of the Museum of Art of São Paulo by Assis Chateaubriand and the former Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo by Ciccillo<sup>17</sup>. And it is with the latter that Di Prete tries to bond. According to testimonies provided by him from the 1970s onwards, they met in 1949 and he suggested to Ciccillo the creation of a show in São Paulo that would follow the model of the Venice Biennial<sup>18</sup>. However, Ciccillo had already been thinking about an event of this type since 1948, but foresaw it for the year of 1954, along with the celebrations for the 4th centenary of the city of São Paulo<sup>19</sup>. Thus, Di Prete's role was to push Ciccillo to accomplish something he had considered previously.

The first São Paulo Biennial was carried out by Ciccillo and Yolanda Penteadó (1903-1983) in 1951, under the organization of the former Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo. Di Prete does not participate in any negotiation in the holding of the show, but before its opening, he works in the production from wall painting to assembly, and after it, welcoming the Italian delegation when it arrives.

But the artist's connection with the São Paulo Biennial would go beyond this organizational issue. He was present in thirteen of its editions in which he won two prizes for first place of national painting (1st and 8th editions, in 1951 and 1965, respectively<sup>20</sup>), designed catalog covers (2nd edition in 1953) and a poster (7th edition, 1963), had two solo special rooms (6th and 9th editions, in 1961 and 1967, respectively) and won several acquisition awards.



**Fig. 2.** Danilo Di Prete. Poster and cover for the catalog of the 7th São Paulo Biennial, 1963. Fundação Bienal de São Paulo/ Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo.

Thus, his circulation in the artistic milieu and creations are deeply linked to the history of the São Paulo Biennial and Ciccillo, with whom the artist has always maintained a close relationship according to Giuliana Di Prete's testimonies to the author.

Bearing this background in mind, it is not by chance that Di Prete has been left at a margin, mainly situated in footnotes in academic papers or

treated in a pejorative way by the critics and by the historiography of art in Brazil<sup>21</sup>. A possible sponsorship of Ciccillo in gratitude for his undisputed collaboration has always been considered in articles by the time and, even later, in compendiums that discussed the history of the show.

Nevertheless, if we get rid of this negative judgment, it becomes evident that Di Prete's contributions to the artistic milieu in São Paulo were significant and in different fields. And these contributions incorporated knowledge and practices from his country of origin, expressed in a more or less perceptible way. At first, regarding the field of advertising<sup>22</sup>, for which he made an effort to speak in favor of an elimination of the hierarchy of the arts. With this operation, he seems to import the assumptions of the futurist Italian artists who had already preached the importance of advertising, such as Fortunato Depero and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, which he knew.

Secondly, his contribution related to the São Paulo Biennial, as explained.

Finally, there is a contribution to the concept of the construction of an artist's career that he applied to himself. Di Prete had already been consciously acting in this regard even before his arrival in Brazil, when he started archiving materials that documented his activity as an artist<sup>23</sup>. Living in São Paulo, he continues this practice. In addition to that, he delivers public pronouncements about his role as the creator of the São Paulo Biennial<sup>24</sup>, which demonstrates his worries on the place he would occupy in the pantheon of the arts in Brazil.

It is in the act of publicizing himself as a product, in São Paulo and in his Viareggio, that seems to be a greater combination between what he brings from his country and what he learns in São Paulo. Because if, on the one hand, from Italy he carries the memory of how an artist could build his career by climbing steps within a system of arts, from São Paulo, he perceptively understands, based on his work in advertising, that aside from selling products, it was possible to advertise himself in a constant and fresh way, making use of a powerful exhibiting vehicle, such as the Biennial.

### Buffoni

Like Di Prete, Bramante Buffoni did not have a traditional background in Fine Arts. The artist attended the Superior Institute for Industrial Arts in Monza, beginning his studies in 1929. The Institute was modeled on the Arts and Crafts schools that emerged in the early 20th century, with classes in decoration, ceramics and graphic arts<sup>25</sup>.

During his years at this school, Buffoni devoted himself primarily to the study of decoration. In this environment, the artist was able to produce and exhibit his first works, in addition to forming a social network that helped him in his professional insertion in Milan.

From the 30s to the 50s Buffoni had a fruitful participation in industrial art fairs, that took place majorly in Milan. Involving several modern artists, these events were intended to showcase the latest in arts, science and technology in Italy. They also served to demonstrate its economic power and its place in the civilizational and imperialist narrative. They worked as a way to associate modern Italian design with the idea of a nation in progress.



**Fig. 3.** Bramante Buffoni, Pirelli logotype for raincoat, 1949. Courtesy of the Pirelli Foundation.

Buffoni's participation in these fairs showcased mainly his production as a muralist and a graphic designer. He presented murals for the decoration of dining rooms, as well as scenographies for stands of textile producers. Also important was his presentation of posters, which classified him as one of the most significant modern graphic artists working in Milan at that time. This recognition was relevant to Buffoni, as he was beginning his collaboration with Olivetti and Pirelli, in the field of production of posters <sup>26</sup>.

In 1953, in the peak of his career in Milan, Buffoni decided to come to São Paulo with his son, Giovanni. It is possible that the success of his compatriots in South America served as a parameter for his decision to migrate to Brazil. The artist may have received information about possible job opportunities, or he may have been planning to collaborate with companies such as Pirelli and Olivetti in São Paulo. The fact is that the network of contacts formed by Italian artists, architects and intellectuals who arrived in Brazil after World War II was fundamental for his establishment in the city.

In a letter written in June 1953, Buffoni gives us important clues about the circumstances of his arrival in Brazil, including an extensive commentary on the importance of other Italians in his adaptation:

[...] as soon as I disembarked I saw Bardi who runs the Museum of Modern Art (sic) with adjoining school. He welcomed me along the way and the reason I understood later. Anyway, he is thinking of a great article with photos of works in his magazine ABITAT (sic) like Domus, he created a graphic arts course for me, which I will start in August (...). Then, through Palanti and a friend of his, a scenographer painter [...] with whom I associated myself for some works, I [put] myself to work. Finally, at his request I went to Matarazzo, who is the president of the international exhibition that will open in São Paulo in June 1954. He welcomed me well, declaring his pleasure to have me here and making me work proposals<sup>27</sup>.

One can point out three Italian names that were very important to Buffoni in those years: Pietro Maria Bardi, Giancarlo Palanti (1906-1977) and Ciccillo. The first one, Bardi, migrated to São Paulo with Lina Bo Bardi in 1946 and was working as director of the newly founded Museum of Art of São Paulo. Also, alongside Lina, they managed the Contemporary Art Institute and the magazine Habitat. Buffoni quickly began working with the Bardis, first as a graphic art professor, and then as graphic artist for the Museum. He also worked on joint projects with Bardi, such as the book “The artist and the machine”, published by Olivetti, with texts by Bardi and graphic design by Buffoni. Bardi's support demonstrates Buffoni's recognition as a strong contributor to their agenda in favor of the “Industrial Arts”, represented by some of the Museum exhibitions, and their actions in the Institute and Habitat magazine<sup>28</sup>.



**Fig. 4.** Bramante Buffoni, decorative panels for the headquarters of the Olivetti office in São Paulo (OISA Olivetti Office in San Paolo, Brasil), 1957. Olivetti Historical Archive Association, Ivrea – Italy.

The second name mentioned by Buffoni was of the Milanese architect Giancarlo Palanti. Palanti had been in São Paulo since 1946 and enjoyed a comfortable position as responsible, among other things, for Olivetti's architectural projects in Brazil. Together with the architect, Buffoni designed several murals, including the panels for the Olivetti headquarters in São Paulo<sup>29</sup>.

Buffoni's proximity to Ciccillo Matarazzo – the third name mentioned by the artist – expresses his particular interest in working on the exhibition for the city's anniversary, organized by the industrialist. Although there are no records of the artist's participation in the 1954 fair, Buffoni remained close to Ciccillo, having participated in the Third Biennial of São Paulo, in 1955, and, in the same years, sold a painting to Matarazzo, that is currently part of the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo.



**Fig. 5.** Bramante Buffoni, *Untitled*, n.d. Oil on varnished wood, 50 x 70 cm. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo.

In 1955, Buffoni's name was mentioned many times in newspapers, including a note of reproof, mentioning that Buffoni had not been "taken advantage of", since he was an artist with such a background in industrial fairs<sup>30</sup>. The news that Buffoni was an underused talent was in line with several critics in the press valuing the artist as an excellent decorator. In 1954, the critic Quirino da Silva wrote that "Buffoni is, above all, a decorator aware of his craft", and also was "first of all a craftsman"<sup>31</sup>.

Buffoni asserted himself in the artistic milieu of São Paulo less through painting than through what he identified as "industrial arts". Both in his letters and in the critical reception of his works, there was a very clear concern with the dimensions of his craft. This can be understood a way of dialoguing and inserting himself in an established Italian community in São Paulo. One can highlight that this attitude reflects a certain clarity on the part of the artist, who made an informed choice to work with the decorative arts, in temporary exhibitions and architectural projects. This argument tends to oppose the usual idea that he has followed this path for "lack of choice", or for a negative evaluation of the Brazilian art scene.

### **Final considerations**

While working in Italy, many modern artists developed tools and strategies to deal with the various agents of the system, creating works from which they could make a living, and still working on their images to consciously build their careers for the future.

When immigrating to Brazil, some of these artists realized how incipient the artistic system was compared to the Italian one organized by the regime, both in relation to the amount of exhibitions, and also how the artists managed their activities and connected to the various cultural agents. However, the immediate postwar era was a turning point in São Paulo, which was at full development and expansion, hosting the opening of art museums and important spaces for dissemination and circulation, especially of modern art. This scenario attracted foreigners, mainly Italians, as those two discussed in this article.

We can thus observe that for both Di Prete and Buffoni, it was fundamental that an operation of immigrating knowledge and models from the Italian environment be introduced and reframed by them as they began to act in the Brazilian art system.

One can notice that although they did not know each other in Italy, they were completely aware of its art system in a broader sense. Also, while living in São Paulo they had the same interlocutor, Ciccillo, and made use of the São Paulo Biennial as a platform to give more visibility to their productions.

They also had three major points of convergence, in which they operated. The first one was training. Both had a hybrid training, in non-traditional contexts and schools. The second one, within the exhibitions. After their training period, they actively participated in different kinds of exhibitions in Italy (Applied and Industrial arts), not only to exhibit their works, but to specialize in what they understood as an "exhibition system". The third one is regarding what we call as a circulation of knowledge. Both migrated to Brazil because they envisioned the possibility of growing professionally and upon arriving here, they identified opportunities not only as painters, but as artists within this "exhibition system" encouraged by the 50s in São Paulo. An important aspect is that in general, this choice is identified as a "lack of choice", as a way out of an environment in São Paulo that had no market to absorb the painting production of these artists. Although this argument may have validity, based on the observation of Di Prete's and Buffoni's experiences, one can add to it the idea that this choice made by the artists, and especially in the case of Buffoni, was deliberate, and came from a clear analysis of the best ways to act in São Paulo at the time. It also came from an artistic moment of expansion of what was understood to be artistic activity in the city.

In the case of Di Prete, he inserted himself into this system with the support of a net of social relationships, extrapolated the limits of painting and also made a systematic effort in favor of his career. All these strategies and knowledge migrated with his coming to Brazil.

We started this article highlighting some of the hypotheses regarding the silence in our historiography on Buffoni and Di Prete. In general, we can state that it is difficult to discuss their varied productions and activities within the frameworks and the canonized discourses of Art History in Brazil.

We believe the approach we make represents a historiographical contribution because the idea is not to make an effort to include them in the greater narrative. But rather, to use them as examples to question these greater narratives in favor of more open and transversal discourses. The best ways to bring these (and many other) artists and narratives to light from a historiographical point of view, remain as open questions. A solo show for each of them only displaying paintings or even articles addressing especially their "Fine Arts" creations, for example, would not be enough.

From our point of view, along with these artworks, at least three things are mandatory: 1. that their other productions in the "Applied Arts" and "Advertising" fields to be displayed and discussed as not being a minor or collateral activities, but rather, creations in the same level of importance of their paintings; 2. a deeper discussion on their broader activities and migration of knowledge should be done<sup>32</sup> ; 3. their activities should be discussed in other fields of knowledge: communication, marketing and advertising; design; psychology; archival science; amongst others. These are just some initial ideas on how we could approach their trajectories thoroughly and comprehensively, and thus, contribute to a shift in sight to historiography.

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## Endnotes

1. More information on the artist, please see: Bardi, Pietro Maria. *Fulvio Pennacchi*. São Paulo: Raízes, 1980; Chiarelli, Tadeu and Araújo, Marcelo Mattos. *Pennacchi: 100 anos*. São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado, 2006.
2. More information on the artist, please see: Silvana Brunelli Zimmermann, "A obra escultórica de Galileo Emendabili: uma contribuição para o meio artístico paulistano". Master's thesis, University of São Paulo, 2000; Bardi, Pietro Maria, *Galileo Emendabili*. São Paulo: Instituto Italiano de Cultura, Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, 1987.
3. We can also mention studies that have as a starting point for their analysis the immigration prior to the period discussed here, such as: Walter Zanini, "Le relazioni artistiche tra il Brasile e l'Italia", *rivista trimestrale d'arte contemporanea Terzo occhio*, no. 2, (1999), ed. Bora, Bologna; Migliaccio, Luciano. "Le relazioni tra la cultura artistica moderna italiana e il Brasile: due momenti esemplari". In *América Latina y la cultura artística italiana un balance en el bicentenario de la Independencia latinoamericana*, edited by Mario Sartor, 301-317. Buenos Aires: Istituto Italiano di Cultura, 2011.
4. More information on the Matarazzo Sobrinho, please see: Almeida, Fernando Azevedo. *O Franciscano Ciccillo*. São Paulo: Pioneira, 1976.
5. There are many books and essays on the couple and also focused on each of them. Please see: Anelli, Renato Luiz Sobral. "O projeto do casal Bardi no Brasil: da ação cultural à construção da própria história". In *Casa de Vidro: arquiteta Lina Bo Bardi: plano de gestão e conservação* edited by Renato Luiz Sobral Anelli, 36-47. São Paulo: Instituto Bardi Casa de Vidro, 2019; Ferraz, Marcelo Carvalho, and Vainer, André, and Suzuki, Marcelo. *Lina Bo Bardi*. São Paulo: Instituto Bardi, Casa de Vidro, Romano Guerra Editora, 2018; Tentori, Francesco. *P.M. Bardi*. Milan: Mazzotta, 1990.
6. On the couple and the activities of the gallery, please see: Silva, José Armando Pereira da. *Artistas na Metrópole: Galeria Domus, 1947-1951*. São Paulo: Via Imprensa, 2016.
7. The use we make here of the distinction between "major" and "minor" arts is exclusively due to the current use that has been made by the historiography of art for decades, but it does not imply that the authors themselves agree with this distinction. On the contrary, as we will try to demonstrate in this essay, we believe this separation is arbitrary and sterile. This topic was discussed in the exhibition curated by the authors and a team of researchers on modern art called: Design for modern daily life in Brazil: 1920-1960 at MAC USP from aug. 2021-aug. 2022. See the exhibition catalog: *Design for modern daily life in Brazil: 1920-1960*, edited by Ana Gonçalves Magalhães. São Paulo: Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, 2021.
8. On the topic, see: Durand, José Carlos. *Sociologia da Arte: Arte, Privilégio e Distinção*. São Paulo: EDUSP; Perspectiva, 1989.
9. In this regard, we can mention the beliefs and activities of the Italian futurist artists, especially those carried out by Fortunato Depero. His activities are broadly discussed by the historiography of art. A significant discussion on him can be found at: Center for Italian Modern Art, New York. "Fortunato Depero", 2015. <https://www.italianmodernart.org/journal/issues/depero/>
10. For more information on these activities, please see: Rocco, Renata Dias Ferraretto Moura. "Danilo Di Prete em ação: a construção de um artista no sistema expositivo"

11. On the subject see: Crispolti, Enrico. "Le Esposizioni 'Sindacali' in Italia fra le Due Guerre." In *Immagini e Forme del Potere: Arte, Critica e Istituzione in Italia fra le Due Guerre*, edited by Davide Lacagnina, 19-32. Palermo: Passaggio, 2011.
12. On these agremiations see: Walter Zanini, *História Geral da Arte no Brasil*, vol. 02 (São Paulo: Instituto Moreira Salles, 1983), 585-587.
13. Such as the cover for "Fundamentos Magazine" (Ed. Brasiliense, 1st edition). Jun. 1948 and the cover for the book *Idiot* by Dostoiévsky (ed. José Olympio). 1949.
14. He created for companies such as: Diários Associados; Clipper clothes; Silverware Wolff; Jockey Club races, amongst others.
15. Such as the poster he created for the newspaper Diários Associados in 1947. Its image can be seen in our dissertation, previously mentioned.
16. For example: Kata. "I Successi in Brasile di un Pittore Viareggino." *Il Tirreno*, Viareggio, April, 23, 1949.
17. There are many publications, articles and academic studies on this topic. We can mention: Lourenço, Maria Cecília França. *Museus Acolhem Moderno*. São Paulo: Edusp, 1999; Barbosa, Marina Martin. "MAM e MASP: Percursos e Movimentos Culturais de uma Época." PhD diss., The University of Campinas, Brazil, and Università Ca' Foscari, Venice, 2015.
18. He states that on many occasions from 1969 onwards. One of them was given to the Matarazzo Foundation. Its transcription can be found both at: Arquivo Wanda Svevo / Fundação Bienal de São Paulo; the artist's daughter Giuliana Di Prete Campari archive (in São Paulo).
19. As it can be seen in the article: Martins, Ibiapaba. "Duas Entrevistas Oportunas." *Correio Paulistano*, São Paulo, November 14, 1948.
20. It is important to highlight that Di Prete was in charge of assembling the space for Brazilian representation. See the exhibition catalog: *VIII Bienal de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1965): p. 17.
21. There are many examples of both approaches. One of them is: Francisco Alambert and Polyanna Canhête, *As Bienais de São Paulo: Da Era do Museu à Era dos Curadores (1951-2001)*, (São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2004), 37-38.
22. His creations for ads and posters were diversified and complex (images can be found in our dissertation). His partnership with advertising agencies of the time - Standard and J. W. Thompson- was very fruitful.
23. As mentioned above, this archive belongs to Giuliana Di Prete Campari.
24. Such as the one mentioned, and also another one in 1979 to a broad audience on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the former Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo on October 9, 1979 (consulted at Arquivo Multimeios – Centro Cultural São Paulo).
25. Bossaglia, Rossana. *L'ISIA a Monza: una scuola d'arte europea*. Monza: Associazione Pro Monza, 1986.
26. Priarone, Giuseppe. *Grafica pubblicitaria in Italia negli anni Trenta*. Florence: Cantini, 1989.
27. Letter from Buffoni to Alfonso Gatto of 06/21/1953, pgs. 176-177, consulted at the Manoscritti Center of the University of Pavia, Italy, October 2013. Translation by Andrea Ronqui.
28. Cf. Leon, Ethel. *IAC - Primeira escola de design do Brasil*. São Paulo: Blucher, 2014.
29. Sanches, Aline Coelho. "A obra e a trajetória do arquiteto Giancarlo Palanti: Itália e Brasil." Thesis, University of São Paulo, 2004.
30. "Bramante Buffoni e a arte na rua", *Correio Paulistano*, June 11, 1955, 7.
31. Quirino da Silva, "Notas de arte", *Diário da Noite*, December 22, 1954, 4.
32. We have been working in this direction. In the case of Buffoni: the exhibition of the modernist house curated by one of the authors, Patrícia Freitas, was conceived in a documentary format - it exposes the trajectory and not objects. As for Di Prete, a publication about him that will come out this year by the author, Renata Rocco, in which an attempt is made to not work with the format of a traditional artist biography, but to present Di Prete as someone who produces his paintings and work for many other media. Aside from that, he

publicizes all these creations and publicizes himself as an artist/ product. Nonetheless, we strongly believe that more research and debate should be carried out on the two artists discussed. Not only them, but also other immigrants that remain on the margins of the canonical discourse in Brazil.

# **Waldemar Cordeiro and Grupo Forma: The Roman Road to São Paulo Concrete Art**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper<sup>1</sup> presents the relations of the Italian Brazilian artist Waldemar Cordeiro, leader of the concrete art group from São Paulo, with groups of abstractionists that emerged in Rome, immediately after the end of the Second World War.

## **KEYWORDS**

Waldemar Cordeiro; Abstraction; Concrete art; Forma group; Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente Art Club.

In a text written by Waldemar Cordeiro and published by the São Paulo newspaper *Folha da Manhã* on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1948, the Italian-Brazilian artist describes his reencounter with old friends, such as the Italian painter Giulio Turcato, a member of Grupo Forma at the *Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente Art Club*, with which Cordeiro had been involved in since it was founded in 1945, in Rome.

Rome, January – . . . I paused in front of the door to the Art Club's new office; it opened, revealing a room with framed paintings hanging on the walls. There were many new faces, but those who were old friends recognized me at once. After the sorts of gestures that are spontaneously produced by mutual fondness, I sat down among them. The electricity of a lively controversy still hung in the air. Rekindling the discussion would have been the best way to find my way back to my dear friends, and forget the period of absence...

First, I heard Turcato's voice, and then those of several young people, unknown to me. Although I was soon able to identify the opposing camps, I still didn't understand. I was lacking some kind of crucial knowledge. The lively discussion continued; the arguments were solid, divergent, and new to the people I had known.<sup>2</sup>

Cordeiro was born in Rome and lived in that city until 1946, when he moved to São Paulo to meet his father, who lived in Brazil. There he began working as an art critic, publishing texts that echoed the lively nature of the Roman artistic debate following World War II. From September 1947 to mid 1948, Cordeiro returned to Rome to settle his personal affairs. In 1948 he returned to São Paulo as a representative of the Art Club, tasked with expanding the association's activity in Brazil.

Like other Italian artists of his or earlier generations, from a very young age, Cordeiro viewed theoretical reflection as an activity that was both complementary to and inseparable from the pictorial practice. He began his professional life in newspapers. After studying at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome and, as an adolescent, visiting the studios of the city's artists, Cordeiro began publishing caricatures in the newspaper *Petiroso*. During the

same period, he exhibited them at Funny Face Shop, a store selling satirical drawings that had been opened by Federico Fellini in 1944. When he moved to São Paulo in 1946, he found work as a journalist at the Italian newspaper *Diário Latino*, where he continued publishing caricatures and art reviews. He began contributing to the newspaper *Folha da Manhã* and, eventually, to the newspaper *A Noite*. Cordeiro wrote about artists, reviewed exhibitions, and also critiqued other reviews. His writing was candid, without any equivocation, and thus often controversial. This was swiftly recognized by those in São Paulo, establishing his public persona in Brazil. He often engaged in polemics with other critics working in the city, particularly with the sociologist and art critic Sérgio Milliet. His texts defended abstract art within an environment that was still reactive to the movement, at a time when the debate was focused on the opposition between abstractionism and figurative art. Guided by the thinking of the German aesthete Konrad Fiedler, he argued for the autonomy of the visual elements, vehemently rejecting the idea of art as an expression of content unrelated to its own visuality. Together with Mário Pedrosa he became known as one of the primary advocates of abstractionism in Brazil and, beginning in 1952, as a leader of Grupo Ruptura, whose inaugural exhibition was held at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo in 1952.

This paper examines Waldemar Cordeiro's contact with associations that played a central role in the circulation of abstractionism in postwar Italy, in particular the Rome Art Club and Grupo Forma. The texts by Cordeiro that were published in São Paulo newspapers between 1946 and 1952, several of which were specifically about modern art in Italy,<sup>3</sup> reveal that he closely followed new developments in the Italian art scene. This set of texts, as well as Cordeiro's work promoting exhibitions for the São Paulo Art Club in 1949 and 1950, are presented here as the strongest evidence of his connection with the Italian art scene in the 1940s and 1950s.

The Rome Art Club was created in 1945 with the aim of cultivating avant-garde art and activating connections between the Italian artistic milieu and the international landscape. Through exhibitions, debates, and the publication of a newsletter, the association proposed to promote the idea of

art as a universal value. Following years of fascist interference in Italian cultural life, the club sought to distance and protect itself from new government interventions: “The Art Club shall be a brotherhood of free artists, independent of all official influence, in an international climate. The Art Club is an apolitical association.”<sup>4</sup>

Following the war, the Rome Art Club brought together artists from the Scuola Romana and Corrente, as well as members of groups created after 1945, such as the Fronte Nuovo delle Arti<sup>5</sup> (New art front), Forma,<sup>6</sup> and Origine;<sup>7</sup> despite their differences, they all rejected the status quo of modern Italian art mainly identified with the Novecento. Although the Art Club did not identify with a single political party and its members had a range of political views, several of them were members of the Italian Communist Party. From an aesthetic point of view, despite its diversity, the Art Club primarily attracted artists linked to exploring abstractionism, which also reinforced its international nature.

The club emerged from the confluence of Italian and foreign artists who had been in Rome since the city’s liberation in 1944, many of them as Allied soldiers. It was founded by the Italian painter Enrico Prampolini, a former Futurist with ties to the international artistic landscape, specifically the French group *Circle et Carré*, and the Polish painter Józef Jarema, who arrived in Italy as a sergeant in the Polish II Corps, a Polish resistance force that fought along with the Allies in Italy. From Futurism, the Art Club inherited the synthesis of theory and practice, as well as an internationalist and experimental inclination. The Art Club had a presence in a number of Italian cities, as well as in other countries, including Austria, Belgium, France, Holland, England, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, South Africa, Australia, Japan, Uruguay, and Brazil. Until 1955, the association had as many as 600 members and organized 93 exhibitions on different continents.

Waldemar Cordeiro was involved in the formation of the Art Club in 1945, when he was still living in Rome. After his visit to Italy, from September 1947 to mid-1948, the artist returned to Brazil as a representative of the Art Club, tasked with creating the São Paulo Art Club, in April 1949, of which he became vice president.<sup>8</sup>

The Polish painter Leopold Haar and the Hungarian sculptor Kazmer Fejer, also members of Grupo Ruptura from 1952, passed through the Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente before settling in São Paulo. Haar arrived in Italy in 1944 as a “war official artist” in Anders’s Army (he developed design projects to the army), alongside Joseph Jarema. He was part of the Art Club’s inaugural exhibition in 1945, as well as other exhibitions of Polish artists that Jarema organized in Rome during the same period.<sup>9</sup> He immigrated to Porto Alegre, a city in South of Brazil, in 1946 and had a solo exhibition of drawings and paintings the following year, in which he presented himself as a founding member of the Rome Art Club, according to the brochure of his solo show. Kazmer Fejer was involved in founding the Budapest Art Club and participated in the association’s exhibitions in Vienna in 1947 and Turin in 1948. That same year, before moving to São Paulo, Fejer lived in Uruguay, where he was also a member of the Montevideo Art Club, alongside Joaquín Torres-García.<sup>10</sup>

In the article “Os pintores italianos buscam a verdade,” (Italian painters seek the truth) cited at the beginning of this text, the truth for Waldemar Cordeiro would be the series of initiatives to revitalize artistic language that emerged in Italy immediately following the war. The artist mentions the Forma group for the first time, remarking on recent developments in the Italian art scene. Waldemar Cordeiro mentions the artists whom he believed were encouraging a “revitalization” in contemporary Italian art: Renato Guttuso, Giulio Turcato, and Antonio Corpora, in Fronte; the Forma group of “abstractist” painters, promoted in Rome by Turcato, and the “valiant figures” Enrico Prampolini and Gino Severini.

Immediately following the war, despite the emergence of initiatives opposed to Novecento, the Italian art scene continued to have strong ties to figurative art. For Luciano Caramel, during that period, the attempts to make Italian art more contemporary, many of which were identified with neo-Cubism, were mostly restricted to an “abstractionism with a historical memory”; in other words, one still dialoging with figurative art.<sup>11</sup> Between 1930 and 1940, the first Italian abstractionist group appeared in Milan and included Lucio Fontana, Atanasio Soldati, Osvaldo Licini, Mario Radice,

Fausto Melotti, Manlio Rho, and Mauro Reggiani, among others. Closely related to the Movimento Italiano para a Arquitetura Racional (MIAR) (Italian movement for rational architecture), these artists were nourished by international movements with a constructivist tendency, even as they assimilated aspects of Italian metaphysical painting. Nonetheless, for Caramel, the Italian experiment with geometric abstraction in the first half of the twentieth century can be regarded as isolated, entering the country slowly and laboriously.<sup>12</sup> Following the war, the exhibition *Arte astratta e concreta* (Abstract and concrete art) at the Palazzo Reale in Milan, in February 1947, had a strong impact; it was organized by the Swiss painter and designer Max Huber and the architect Lanfranco Bombelli, with the help of Max Bill, and included artists from Italy, France, Germany, and Switzerland. Among them were Bruno Munari, Ettore Sottsass Jr., Luigi Veronesi, August Herbin, Vordemberge-Gildewart, Richard Paul Lohse, Walter Bodmer, Camille Graeser, Max Huber, Max Bill, Paul Klee, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Jean Arp, Wassily Kandinsky, and Georges Vantongerloo. The exhibition brought together a large number of abstractionists in Italy for the first time, particularly Swiss artists chosen by Max Bill. With texts by Kandinsky, Vantongerloo, and Bill, the catalog didactically introduced the debate over the difference between abstract and concrete art. The former was presented as a new romanticism and the latter as the pure manifestation of the intellect, lacking any ties to the world of appearances.

The Forma group was created in Rome in 1947 mostly by young artists in their twenties, several of whom were associated with the Rome Art Club and interested in abstractionism as a way to make Italian art more contemporary within the postwar context. Its members — Carla Accardi, Ugo Attardi, Pietro Consagra, Piero Dorazio, Mino Guerrini, Achille Perilli, Antonio Sanfilippo, and Giulio Turcato — were part of the group until approximately 1950, all becoming prominent names in Italian abstract art beginning in the 1950s. According to Caramel, the Forma artists did not see the exhibition *Arte astratta e concreta* in Milan, but they did come into contact with its catalog. It would have undoubtedly influenced the editorial process for the magazine *Forma 1*, published in April 1947,<sup>13</sup> alongside the group's first exhibition at the

office of the Rome Art Club. Enrico Prampolini, who at the time was interested in abstractionist practice and theory, as well as in encouraging formal study that distanced itself from neo-Cubism, offered support and was a key reference for the group.

The cover of the magazine *Forma 1* displayed a manifesto that synthesized the ideas presented in other texts within the publication. First, the manifesto stands firmly against the Communist Party's critiques of avant-garde art, labeled as bourgeois and decadent, and against socialist realism:

We declare ourselves FORMALISTS and MARXISTS, convinced that the terms Marxism and formalism are not irreconcilable, particularly today, when progressive elements of our society must maintain a REVOLUTIONARY, AVANT-GARDE position, rather than becoming comfortable in the misunderstanding of a dead, conformist realism, which the most recent attempts in painting and sculpture have shown to be a narrow, limited road.<sup>14</sup>

According to Achilli Perilli, in his book *L'Age D'or di Forma 1*, the manifest reflected a utopian reading of the relationship between early twentieth-century avant-gardes and the Russian revolution.<sup>15</sup> Several *Forma* members were left-wing activists and were involved in other groups that defended art with political and social content. Turcato and Consagra were affiliated with the Partito Comunista Italiano, Dorazio was tied to socialism, and Perilli was linked to Trotskyism. Dorazio and Perilli had participated in exhibitions organized by the Social Art Group, known as GAS, which received support from the Italian Socialist Party, and contributed to the first and only issue of the magazine *La Fabbrica*, published by the GAS, with poetry, stories, and illustrations that exalted Rome's peripheral and working-class neighborhoods. In addition to their activities in *Forma*, Corpora and Turcato were involved with the Fronte Nuovo delle Arti, which strongly espoused the idea of art as a social protest. In the *Forma* manifesto these same artists

proposed a new type of political activism, which would not be irreconcilable with their abstractionist explorations.

The group's solution was the assertion of new aesthetic attitudes, capable of fashioning a wholly different society than the one that had created the war. Only a new art and a creative process, absolved of any obligation to express social or psychological content, would be able to map out the future. As well as positioning itself against the Novecento and neo-realism, the group also turned its back on the expressionism present in the Scuola Romana and, with a Picassoan tendency, in the Corrente and Fronte groups.

Different pieces made by the group were also reproduced throughout the pages of the magazine *Forma 1*: paintings and sculptures that to some extent still had figurative characteristics, which might be described as abstractions retaining the "memory" of human bodies and still lifes. Most of the works reproduced in the magazine were out of step with the radical discourse in the manifesto, as well as the other texts, which proposed the work's complete formal independence from any type of subject matter unrelated to its own visual reality: "In art, all that exists is the traditional and inventive reality of pure form", states the manifesto.<sup>16</sup>

Caramel understands the remnants of figurative art present in Turcato, Dorazio, Guerrini, Sanfilippo, and Accardi's works during their *Forma* years, from 1947 to 1950, as a formative stage for young artists who were steadily moving toward an abstractionist simplification.<sup>17</sup> For Caramel, *Forma*'s main contribution was taking up futurism's confrontational stance, leading to a rupture with the status quo of modern Italian art that had prevailed in the thirty years preceding the movement.<sup>18</sup>

When Waldemar Cordeiro lived in Rome, in early 1940s, he moved in the same circles as Enrico Prampolini, Giulio Turcato, and Piero Consagra. As with the young *Forma* artists, Cordeiro's espousal of abstractionism was marked by a contradiction between theory and practice. Particularly in 1947, Cordeiro experimented with a style of painting that involved quick gestures, bright colors, and angular aspects. These works can be seen as belated gestures toward Expressionism and Cubism, which he would go on to harshly criticize. Beginning in 1948, after he met the *Forma* artists in Rome, his

painting underwent a formal simplification: his brushstrokes became more measured, while the planes are clearly defined. In 1948 he produced a series of abstract paintings that continue to refer back to still lifes, such as *Sem título* (Untitled). In 1949 he was primarily interested in studying the pictorial plane through neo-plasticist experiments, which proved to be crucial in his development toward work wholly disconnected from any type of figuration. His total departure from the figurative universe began to take shape around 1951, and seems to have been complete in 1952, when Cordeiro produced a series of spatial studies made using a compass, which he showed at Grupo Ruptura's inaugural exhibition.

Paradoxically, at the theoretical level, Cordeiro had been assertively arguing for the autonomy of form since early 1949, when he published the texts "Abstracionismo" and "Ainda o abstracionismo" ("Still more abstractionism"), in the magazines *Artes Plásticas* and *Revista dos Novíssimos*, which contain several of the key ideas that would underpin Grupo Ruptura's manifesto: "Abstractionism is a nodal point. It is a qualitative leap determined by a 'rupture,' which seeks to reclaim the real language of the visual arts."<sup>19</sup> From that moment on, there is a perpetual opposition between "the old" (any and all remnants of figuration) and "the new" (autonomous abstraction), which will structure the manifesto of 1952, as well as its vehement criticism of the idea of art as expression, with arguments similar to those used by the Forma artists: "Only by objectivizing, by depersonalizing a form, can you make it a matter of reflection... But it is impossible to objectivize when you are engaged in expression."<sup>20</sup> Cordeiro evaluated the arguments of other critics, as well as works by Brazilian and international artists, positioning himself against impressionist, expressionist, and cubist styles in painting, which he considered to be outdated languages, disconnected from the present. The artist thus understands the influence of the Paris School on his contemporaries as a regression in the evolution of modern art.

With Cordeiro's support, the São Paulo Art Club held its first exhibition in 1949, which included artists based in Brazil, from different generations and movements, such as Clóvis Graciano, Mário Zanini,

Francisco Rebolo, Flávio de Carvalho, Maria Leontina, Milton Dacosta, Mário Gruber, Aldemir Martins, Samson Flexor, Lothar Charoux, and Alfredo Volpi.<sup>21</sup> In the text “O significado da exposição de pintura do *Art Club*” (“The meaning of the Art Club’s painting exhibition”), published in *Folha da Manhã*, Cordeiro harshly criticized several artists in the show that he himself had helped to organize. According to the artist, the exhibition facilitated a panoramic view of the development of modern art in Brazil, which, on an evolutionary scale, would move from old to new. At the extremes of this scale were Clóvis Graciano, whose work expressed “a feeling aligned with the old,” “the obsolete quality of art” and, on the opposite side, representing the most “advanced” stage of Brazilian art, the abstractionist Lothar Charoux, who would be part of Ruptura group.

In 1950 the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo presented an exhibition on the Rome Art Club, which included Enrico Prampolini, Józef Jarema, Giuseppe Capogrossi, Antonio Corpora, Alberto Burri, the members of the Forma group, and Mimmo Rotella, among others. On that occasion, Cordeiro published a text in the exhibition brochure, also reproduced in *Folha da Manhã*,<sup>22</sup> in which he broadens his analysis of Italian modern art, from the 1920s to the contemporary landscape, emphasizing the importance of the innovations in language proposed by the generation that emerged following the war, and particularly by the Forma group. In this text, he set out and clarified the arguments he had presented two years earlier in “Os pintores italianos buscam a verdade.” Cordeiro began his analysis with a critique of the Novecento—an “autarchic” art, representing fascism, which had opposed futurism—while the Scuola Romana, as well as Giorgio Morandi, Gino Severini, and Enrico Prampolini, had an attitude of resistance, which assured the positive developments in Italian art that flourished following the end of the war. Once again, Cordeiro believed that “the hasty and inadequate work following in the footsteps of *Guernica*,” namely, the neo-cubism of the Corrente and Fronte groups helped to pave the way for abstraction, even though they had not promoted innovations in the Italian artistic language. Cordeiro argued that Forma had “a ‘moral’ attitude.” For him, the formal explorations in the works of Prampolini, Turcato, Dorazio,

Guerrini, Ugo Sterpini, Consagra, and Perilli “develop the different aspects of that truly artistic, truly human drama.”

One year later Cordeiro returned to the subject of Italian modern art in the text “Um consórcio das formas da visualidade estética moderna,” in which he analyzed different national delegations at the first São Paulo biennial.<sup>23</sup> After mentioning the Italian artists in the exhibition, he suggested that the next edition of the biennial would bring a number of works to Brazil, including those by Anastasio Soldati and Lucio Fontana, precursors of abstraction in Italy, as well as Gino Severini and the Forma artists: Turcato, Guerrini, Dorazio, and Consagra.<sup>24</sup> In that same text, Cordeiro recognizes abstract expressionism (which he also called “romantic abstractionism”) and concrete art as central movements in the contemporary landscape. He sees the works presented by the Swiss delegation as the most cohesive group at the biennial, emphasizing the importance of Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Richard Paul Lohse, and Bill.<sup>25</sup> Unless I am mistaken, Cordeiro had not written about Max Bill before that point. He had not commented on Bill’s retrospective at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo in March of that year, nor on the activities of the Instituto de Arte Contemporânea, which was the first design school in the country, inaugurated by the Museu de Arte de São Paulo at the same time as the Swiss artist’s exhibition.<sup>26</sup> The text also marks the moment when Cordeiro begins to refer to Gestalt theory. It is interesting to highlight that the terms *concrete art* and *concretism* had occasionally appeared in articles from 1951, although not in reference to his own work, which he described as a “neo-plasticist abstractionism.”<sup>27</sup>

The discussions about abstractionism in Rome were certainly not the sole reference for Waldemar Cordeiro’s reflections on abstractionism and concrete art in Brazil. The artist’s theory and practice had other sources—such as suprematism, neo-plasticism, and the theory of pure visibility—that are abundantly cited by the literature. Beginning in 1951, Cordeiro was also in contact with Tomás Maldonado and the group of Argentine concrete artists. However, the abstractionism practiced by the young artists in Forma, as well as the abstractionism practiced by Cordeiro until approximately 1951, did not approach the geometric precision of

concrete art. Rather than a definitive concept of concrete art, his contact with the Italian group provided Cordeiro with terms and ideas that nurtured the first phase of his defense of abstractionism in Brazil.<sup>28</sup> It is also possible that the Forma manifesto inspired parts of the Grupo Ruptura manifesto, which Cordeiro wrote in 1952. In particular, the Brazilian text rejects the “mere negation of naturalism, that is, the ‘wrong’ naturalism of children, of the insane, the ‘primitive,’ the expressionists, the surrealists, etc.”<sup>29</sup> while the Forma manifesto denies “any tendency toward inserting human details into the free creation of art through deformations, psychologisms, and other contrivances.”<sup>30</sup> Cordeiro’s encounter with his Italian friends of the same generation during his time in Rome, in 1947 and early 1948, was a germinal moment for the artist from a theoretical and formal standpoint. Although the Italian-Brazilian painter broadened his theoretical references related to concrete art in the following years, his connection with Rome marked his choice of abstractionism, as well as the content and assertive nature of his discourse in Brazil.

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## Endnotes

1. A version of this text, translated from Portuguese to English by Audrey Young, was published in Heloisa Espada, "Waldemar Cordeiro and Grupo Forma: The Roman Road to São Paulo Concrete Art," in Gilbert *et al.*, *Purity is a Myth: The Materiality of Concrete Art from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay*, 46-65.
2. Waldemar Cordeiro, "Os pintores italianos buscam a verdade," São Paulo, *Folha da Manhã*, January 21, 1948, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia Exata*, 44-45.
3. Waldemar Cordeiro, "Escola Romana," *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, no month or day, 1948, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia Exata*, 33-34; Waldemar Cordeiro, "A luva de De Chirico," *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, no month or day, 1950, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia Exata*, 37-40; Waldemar Cordeiro, "Os pintores italianos buscam a verdade," São Paulo, *Folha da Manhã*, January 21, 1948, in: Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia Exata*, 44-45; Waldemar Cordeiro. "A atividade da nova e novíssima geração levará a arte italiana ao plano da linguagem mundial," *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, June 25, 1950, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia Exata*, 90-92.
4. Conte and Simongini (Eds.), *Art Club 1945-1964. La linea astratta*. Parma: Galleria d'Arte Niccoli, 102.
5. The Fronte Nuovo delle Arti was a group that formed in Milan in 1947 and 1948 that included former members of Corrente, such as Birolli, Cassinari, and Guttuso, as well as Giuseppe Santomaso, Emilio Vedova, Antonio Corpora, and Giulio Turcato, among others. Fronte primarily became known for practicing a kind of cubism with an expressionist tendency, linked to the expression of social content, taking Picasso and *Guernica* as key references.
6. I will introduce the Forma group below.
7. Origine was an association of abstractionist artists founded in Rome in 1951 that published the magazine *Arti Visive* (1952-56). Origine included artists linked to the Rome Art Club, such as Prampolini, Carla Accardi, Achilli Perilli, Piero Dorazio, Giuseppe Capogrossi, and Alberto Burri. It was common for Art Club members to be involved with several groups at the same time.
8. The president of the São Paulo Art Club was the translator and journalist Edoardo Bizzarri, who was then the Director of the Instituto Cultural Brasil-Itália.
9. "Exposição Leopold Haar," exhibition brochure (Porto Alegre, 1947), n.p. Mira Haar's archives, São Paulo, Brazil; "Mostra di Pittore Polacchi," *Art Club: Periodico d'informazione dell'Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente* 11: 5.
10. "Comitati direttivi degli Art Club all'estero," *Art Club: Periodico d'informazione dell'Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente* 19-20: 4.
11. Caramel, *Arte in Italia 1945-1960*, 57.
12. Caramel, *Arte in Italia 1945-1960*, 58.
13. The second issue of the magazine, *Forma 2*, was published in Rome in May 1950, in honor of Wassily Kandinsky.
14. Accardi et al., in Perilli, *L'Age D'Or di Forma 1*, 43.
15. Perilli, *L'Age d'or di Forma 1*, 36.
16. Accardi et al., in Perilli, *L'Age d'or di Forma 1*, 43.
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19. Waldemar Cordeiro, "Abstracionismo," *Artes Plásticas*, 1, no. 3 (January-February 1949), in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: fantasia exata*, 49.

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22. Waldemar Cordeiro, "Atividade da nova e novíssima geração levará a arte italiana ao plano da linguagem mundial," *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, July 25, 1950, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: fantasia exata*, 90-92.
23. . Waldemar Cordeiro, "Um consórcio das formas da visualidade estética moderna...," *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, December 22, 1951, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: fantasia exata*, 166-175.
24. Grupo Forma was dissolved in 1950.
25. The latter was not actually part of the Swiss delegation, but applied to the event as an independent artist, receiving the grand prize for sculpture with the piece *Unidade Tripartida* (Tripartite unit).
26. Waldemar Cordeiro, "I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna," *Folha da Manhã*, São Paulo, December 22, 1951, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: fantasia exata*, 170.
27. . Waldemar Cordeiro, "As formas da nova estética," São Paulo, *Folha da Manhã*, December 24, 1950, in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: fantasia exata*, 64.
28. Adrian Anagnost also indicates the importance of Italian references in Cordeiro's intellectual and artistic development. According to Anagnost, the mathematical procedures for the artist's first concrete works, made in the early 1950s, are related to the work of the Milan-based poet-engineer Leonardo Sinisgalli. I encountered Anagnost's unpublished research during the Scholar's Day meeting on Waldemar Cordeiro, 28 March 2019, at Princeton University, organized by Rachel Price and Natalia Brizuela.
29. Lothar Charoux et al., "Manifesto Ruptura," in Cordeiro (Ed.), *Waldemar Cordeiro: Fantasia Exata*, 208.
30. ACCARDI et al., in Perilli, 43.

# Modernity Abroad: Italy at the Bienal de São Paulo, the Early Years

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## **ABSTRACT**

The first Bienal Internacional de Arte de São Paulo was inaugurated on October 20, 1951. At that time, it was the first modern(ist) exhibition outside the well-established geographical axis between Western Europe and United States of America. It was also the second exhibition in the world after the Venice Biennale (founded in 1895) to present itself as a long-term project, as the very term “biennial” implied.

That Venice could be considered either a model or a sort of archetype was not the only tie with Italy. A strong migratory current had brought to Brazil, between the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th, a significant number of Italians. Over the years a part of these had also taken on significant social roles, such as the president of the Bienal de São Paulo, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho (who had personally organized the first Brazilian participation at the Venice Biennale in 1950), and other members of both the executive council and the board. Moreover, recent immigrants like Lina Bo and her husband Pietro Maria Bardi were gaining visibility.

It was therefore almost obvious that Italy – the new antifascist and republican Italy – was treated as a special guest along with France and United States, and that Italian section was among the largest. My aim is to show the artistic and political implications of the Italian presence at the early editions of the Bienal de São Paulo, and to investigate the specificities of the relationship between the two countries linked by a migratory current in the changing framework of international politics.

## **KEYWORDS**

São Paulo Biennial; Venice Biennial; Post-war Italian art; Italian emigration; Modernity

### **The Beginnings**

The Bienal Internacional de Arte de São Paulo was founded by Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, also known by his nickname Ciccillo, the Italian-Brazilian industrialist who, only a few years before, in 1948, had set up the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo. That very year he began negotiations with the Venice biennial to establish a Brazilian participation to the international exhibition; this project was eventually realized for the following edition of the Biennale, in 1950, with two galleries in the Italian central pavilion reserved to Brazilian artists.

Meanwhile, Matarazzo was working on another, more ambitious project: the Bienal de São Paulo, or more exactly the Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, the second great international exhibition in the world and the first in the southern hemisphere. The model of the new initiative would have been of course the Venice Biennale, so the exhibition was meant to result chiefly from a series of national participations; a film festival was also planned, while the exhibition of architecture preceded that of Venice by almost thirty years.<sup>1</sup> The history of this close relationship between both the two biennials and the two countries can be quite extensively written thanks to the documents conserved in the Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (ASAC). The historical archive of contemporary arts of the Venice biennial preserves correspondence between the two institutions and with governments, minutes of meetings, projects, lists, budgets. Of course, it would have been interesting to complete the study with the documentation in São Paulo, but the recent events have made it difficult to schedule a research trip to Brazil. However, we can rely on the correspondence in Venice, as the secretariat of the biennial has always kept the minutes.

This is an almost exclusively male story: the female figures that appear are very few, and even when they occupy roles of great prestige, such as Palma Bucarelli, the Soprintendente of the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome, letters sent to her begin with the formula “Gentile Signorina Bucarelli” (Dear Miss Bucarelli), instead of “Gentile Dottoressa” (Dear Dr. Bucarelli), with a clear underestimation of her professional role.

The first official communications between the biennials show that it was largely expected that the Italian Government would have entrusted the Venice Biennale with the organization of the national participation, because the Biennale was acting as a sort of office for artistic diplomacy from the times of the fascist regime,<sup>2</sup> and there was no reason to stop this practice in postwar republican Italy. Moreover, the importance of every initiative aimed at strengthening relations between Italy and Brazil was very clear to the Italian Government, as we read in an official letter sent from the Foreign Ministry to the Biennale:

Having regard to the relationships, due especially to our emigration, which bind Italy to Brazil and particularly to the state of São Paulo, center, as is well known, of one of the most numerous and flourishing Italian communities, it seems in any case indispensable that participation in the 1st Biennale d'Arte, if decided – and it would be very painful if economic reasons were to prevent it – be fully worthy and such as to give Italy, in comparison with other nations, the place that it deserves in the world of the arts.<sup>3</sup>

São Paulo, along with New York and Buenos Aires, was in fact home of one of the largest communities of Italians outside Italy. Among these immigrants there were intellectuals like Pietro Maria Bardi, the director of the MASP, Lina Bo, later the celebrated architect of the same museum building, or Adolfo Celi, the co-founder in 1949 of the Teatro Brasileiro de Comédia,<sup>4</sup> of which he was also the first artistic director; and very wealthy entrepreneurs, like Cicillo Matarazzo and many others, that formed an influential *élite*: a large audience interested in all that could arise from Italy, and ready to decree the success of the cultural initiatives. Nonetheless, as Matarazzo pointed out in a letter to the secretary general of the Venice Biennale Rodolfo Pallucchini, it was rather France that carried out “an intelligent propaganda”, increasing cultural exchanges, sending artists, professors, journalists. “I would see with great pleasure that Italy did the same and maybe more”, writes Matarazzo, “for example an exhibition of half a century of Italian art from

1900 to 1950, would meet with enormous success”.<sup>5</sup> Both Italian governments and cultural organizations, although motivated by political interests, do not seem to have been as prompt in the realization of projects, and the definition of the participation in the Brazilian biennial proceeded with exasperating slowness.

Despite the delays in the communication of information requested over and over again by the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (list of artists, number of selected works, details about measures, texts for the catalogue), the Italian selection had an excellent location, at the center of the temporary pavilion set up at the Trianon, on the ground where the MASP was later built. As evidence of his preferential relationship with Italy, Matarazzo used to write personally in Italian on the letterhead of the Museu de São Paulo, both to Pallucchini and to the President of Venice biennial Giovanni Ponti. In fact, all the correspondence between the two biennials, even the letters of the secretary of the Bienal de São Paulo Arturo Profili, was written in Italian, an uncommon language in international relations that underlines, in these circumstances, the special relationship between the two countries, or at least between the two organizations.

### **Modernity in question**

What was at stake, in the launching of the São Paulo biennial, was the idea to promote modern art, and – as the artistic director Lourival Gomes Machado put it in his introduction to the catalogue of the first edition – “to put modern art of Brazil not simply in proximity but in living contact with the art of the rest of the world” and “for São Paulo to conquer the position of international artistic center”.<sup>6</sup> This necessity to affirm modern art is clearly stated in one of the first letters sent by Raniero Pacileo, a lawyer acting as a broker between Matarazzo and Italian institutions, in which he recommends “the ‘modern’ character of the works that will be sent”.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the selection of Italian artists was made by a committee that did not seem the most suitable for a resolutely modern choice: it was composed of two art historians, Roberto Longhi and Costantino Baroni, two artists, the sculptor Marcello Mascherini and the painter Gino Severini, and a representative of the Foreign Ministry, Fernando

Corsi. The initial recommendation of the president of Venice biennial, to limit the selection to four painters, one sculptor and two engravers, was largely disregarded and the final numbers were of forty artists and two hundred and eleven works, and so it was for the request about the 'modernity' of the works, equally ignored.



**Fig. 1.** Alberto Magnelli, *Avec mesure (Com Medida)*, 1950, oil on canvas, cm 100x80,6, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo.

The oldest among the painters was Carlo Carrà, a former futurist, here represented by paintings from the interwar years as well as by more recent works. The youngest was Sergio Vacchi, not yet thirty. Most of the painters had made their debut under the fascist regime, most of them remained within a kind of figurative painting, with the remarkable exception of Afro, Corrado Cagli, Osvaldo Licini, Mario Reggiani, Emilio Vedova and Alberto Magnelli, the latter awarded with a second prize for painting and purchased by the Museu de Arte Moderna (Fig. 1).

Among the others, Filippo De Pisis and Giorgio Morandi were probably the best known, but it should not be forgotten that a few years earlier Matarazzo had purchased seventy-one works by Italian painters for the collections of the then newly founded Museu de Arte Moderna. As Ana Magalhães has shown in a recent article, with Margherita Sarfatti acting as a broker, the painters were – not surprisingly – largely the same that had been promoted during the fascist regime,<sup>8</sup> but for the new and modern Bial something new was absolutely needed. Hence the young painters, and the decision to present old and new abstraction in the same years in which the debate between realists and abstract painters was very harsh in Italy.

It is worth noting that in the early lists of artists we find even the name of Mario Sironi, that is the creator of the image of the fascist regime, the author of some of the most important mural paintings in public buildings, the artist who had remained loyal to fascism until the end.<sup>9</sup> This comes with no surprise: Pallucchini would have wanted to exhibit works by Sironi since the first post-war Venice Biennale, in 1948, and failed just because of the artist's refusal. In 1951 he sent Marco Valsecchi, a Milanese art critic that eventually would act as deputy curator of the Italian section, but not even he was able to convince the artist to send his works to the biennale, and after an exchange of letters with the artist his report was the same as the previous attempts: "Sironi is adamant".<sup>10</sup>

It may appear quite odd that the artistic institutions of republican Italy continued to seek out the artist who most of all had represented the regime. Nonetheless, at the second biennial, we find seven paintings by Sironi, all of them painted in the last three years: Gino Ghiringhelli, owner of *Il Milione*

gallery, had been essential to persuade the artist, who was always reluctant to send works to official collective exhibitions. From a confidential letter sent by Matarazzo to Pallucchini we know that the Brazilian patron had expressed the desire to see Sironi's works at the Biennale,<sup>14</sup> and eventually two paintings were sold by an artist that was now, at the beginning of the Fifties, one of the few Italian artists included by Michel Tapié in his highly influential book *Un art autre*.

### Converging interests



**Fig. 2.** Umberto Boccioni, *Forme uniche della continuità dello spazio*, 1913, plaster, cm 119,7 x 89,9 x 39,9, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo

The second Bienal de São Paulo was, in the words of art historian Adele Nelson, “an enviable temporary museum of modern art”,<sup>12</sup> that is an extraordinary successful exhibition of the international actuality with an important series of historical sections: there was a Picasso exhibition, with 51 works including *Guernica*; Germany dedicated a retrospective to Paul Klee, Belgium to James Ensor, the Netherlands to Piet Mondrian; France brought 60 cubist works from 1907 to 1917, and Italy organized a retrospective on Futurism, with 40 works from 1910 to 1915. About this exhibition, the dates show the will to separate futurism from any subsequent compromise with fascism, as had already been done in Italy that same year, when one of the members of the new Italian committee, Giulio Carlo Argan, had curated the first important exhibition dedicated to Umberto Boccioni after the end of the war.<sup>13</sup>

Oddly enough, the idea of the futurist exhibition in São Paulo didn't come from Argan. It was Matarazzo to suggest it to Pallucchini, confidentially revealing that the French committee had proposed a Cubist exhibition.<sup>14</sup> Matarazzo was not just fond of his Italian origins. The kind of courtesy and confidentiality he dedicated both to Pallucchini and to the staff of the Venice biennial was also closely related to a national interest: as mentioned above, Brazil's first participation in the Venice exhibition dates back to 1950, but its pavilion was not built until 1964. Therefore, for each edition a negotiation to obtain a good location was needed. On another level, in a letter of December 1953, Matarazzo suggests to finding an agreement between the two institutions so that the most prestigious international prizes are not assigned to the same artists.<sup>15</sup> In short, the history of Italian participation in the São Paulo biennial is also a history of diplomatic relations crossing all topics, from the selection of artists to the purchase of works either for private or public collections; from the awarding of prizes to the serene coexistence between the only two great international exhibitions of the time; from commercial and political relations to the weight and value of the Italian community and its expectations. Pallucchini, on his part, was able to reassure Matarazzo about the consideration that the Italian committee had for the Brazilian wishes, as shown in a letter sent in the spring 1953:

After a wide discussion about the opportunity to choose either all new names or to bring back also some artists who had been very appreciated in São Paulo, the principle of keeping to a mixed list prevailed: so we will bring 8 artists who have not yet exhibited there [...], 8 exhibitors at first Bienal de São Paulo [...], 6 sculptors between old and new [...]; moreover an exhibition of engravings by Giorgio Morandi (25 pieces).<sup>16</sup>

This time too, Italy was among the countries with the best and greatest exhibition space (along with France, United States and Brazil). The 1953 exhibition coincided with the celebrations for the 400 years of the city of São Paulo, and was hosted in the new buildings designed by Oscar Niemeyer at Ibirapuera Park, with a division between the American countries in the Palace of States and the other countries in the Palace of Nations.<sup>17</sup> It may seem odd, but after so much effort to bring Sironi's works there, no one notices them even in the extensive press review.<sup>18</sup> It was Morandi in fact to attract the attention and interest of everyone, and eventually was awarded with the first prize for engraving, the only major prize given to an Italian artist in this edition. Nevertheless, a number of press clippings shows how Marino Marini, at least for the press and the public, was also one of the successful artists of the exhibition.

At the third edition Italy shows at last a stronger modernist trait, with Alberto Burri and Giuseppe Capogrossi, along with other ten painters and Pietro Consagra and Mirko among the sculptors. The selection was the consequence of the usual balance between "masters" and young artists, and between artists already exhibited and others never seen in São Paulo: Enrico Prampolini (never exhibited before), Massimo Campigli and Alberto Magnelli had ten paintings each, the younger Burri, Capogrossi, Renato Guttuso and Antonio Corpora had four or five paintings each. The Brazilian counterpart appreciated this effort, as secretary Arturo Profili wrote: "the Italian 'picture' is really a success, and it warmly meets the desires of local critics, artists and collectors". The impression, Profili continued, was that Italy was focusing especially on sculpture, but "there is certainly no lack of chances for the

rest”.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, two Italian artists won the major prizes on this occasion: Mirko was awarded with the first prize for sculpture and Magnelli, winner of a second prize in 1951, was awarded with the first prize for painting, while engraver Mino Maccari and sculptor Pietro Consagra had purchase awards.



**Fig. 3.** Pietro Consagra, *Colloquio*, 1955, bronze, cm 93,1 x 77,3 x 30, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo.

While it is clear that the new, more decidedly modern, direction of the Italian choices met with the favor of the Brazilian organizers, it is worth revealing an awkward aspect of the 1955 edition: during the selection of the artists in Italy, an objection was raised about the name of Renato Guttuso;

this objection, as Argan wrote to Pallucchini, came from political circles, and was clearly related to the artist's well-known communist militancy.<sup>20</sup> The paradox was that artists who had been part of the fascist regime, such as Sironi or even Maccari, did not arouse complaints of any kind, while an artist who was a militant in an antifascist party represented in the parliament of republican Italy could be subjected to an attempt at censorship.

### **Towards a new governance**

Guttuso was invited again in 1957, this time with ten drawings. For that edition the São Paulo secretariat would have wanted a retrospective of Scipione and one of Lorenzo Viani, along with an exhibition on *pittura metafisica*,<sup>21</sup> but the unofficial requests were not granted, and indeed the real event of the fourth biennial was the exhibition of 30 paintings by Giorgio Morandi, awarded with the newly established Grand Prix in an edition hosting wide retrospectives of Jackson Pollock, Marc Chagall and Ben Nicholson, making clearer and clearer the biennial's interest in welcoming modern art not only in its actuality but also in its decades-long history.

1957 edition was also marked by the launch of the brand new biennial of the arts of theater, on which we cannot dwell here; and by the move in biennial's present home, the Industry Pavilion at Ibirapuera Park. In this edition for the first time Matarazzo's direction is questioned. In the Venetian papers, of course, there is no trace of these controversies, but it is true that his letters become rare, and that the correspondence seems to be entrusted to Profili more than in the other editions. Last but not least, at the 1957 edition for the first time, two women were invited in the Italian selection, Gina Roma and Anna Salvatore (and for the latter, a Brazilian newspaper entitled *Um pintor que se chama Anna*).<sup>22</sup>

The following editions progressively show the beginning of a certain loss of interest on both sides, also due to the end of the partnership between the biennial and the Museu de Arte Moderna and to the consequent decrease of Matarazzo's role. Eventually, in 1961, he ceased to be the main patron of the biennial, with some inevitable consequences on the exhibition's budget. References to the relations between the two countries, to emigration and to

the community of fellow citizens in Brazil are also dropped on the Italian side, as if politics towards the communities of Italians abroad passed through other ways or as if the interest of Italian politics had shifted from the wealthy and cultured urban classes that attended and supported events such as the São Paulo biennial to the lower classes, to the emigrants who had not become part of the local elite. Contradictory tendencies emerge from the archives: the delay in providing information is such that Italian works did not appear in the first edition of the biennial's catalogue, but on the other hand we find an intervention by the Minister of Education, Giuseppe Medici, "to avoid an excessive univocity of tendencies", that is to avoid a too modern selection.<sup>23</sup> Of course, President Ponti had no choice but to reply that "the designations of the Italian committee experts were determined by the general direction of the Paulista exhibition, which, as the regulation specifies, expects foreign participants to give a notable contribution to the knowledge and development of new trends in contemporary creation".<sup>24</sup> So the Italian selection presented that year eleven works by Burri, eleven by Fontana<sup>25</sup> and twelve by Emilio Vedova, along with some retrospective of Renato Birolli, Corrado Cagli, Ennio Morlotti.

That year an exhibition of works by Burri, Cagli and Guttuso went to the Museu de Bahia, at the request of its director Lina Bo Bardi, and Francesco Somaini was awarded with the first prize for the sculpture, while the Rassegna Storica della Medaglia was widely appreciated. But the direct intervention of a Minister in the procedures of artists' selection was something new and disquieting.

Various changes both in Italy and in Brazil made it clear that a season had ended, that the biennial would continue, even with the difficulties of the years of the military regime, and that it would return to the importance of the beginnings, but with a sense and an idea of the relations between the two countries different from the very early editions.

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1. See Agnaldo Farias ed., *50 anos de Bienal de São Paulo, 1951-2001* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2001); Isobel Whitelegg, "The Bienal Internacional de São Paulo: A Concise History, 1951-2014", in *Perspective*, 2/2013: *Le Brésil*, p. 380-386. The First Biennale di Architettura, directed by Paolo Portoghesi and dedicated to "The Presence of the Past", took place in 1980.
2. See Massimo De Sabbata, *Tra diplomazia e arte: le Biennali di Antonio Maraini, 1928-1942* (Udine: Forum, 2006).
3. All the documents cited in this article are kept in Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee, Biennale di Venezia, serie Mostre all'estero, sottoserie Biennali di San Paolo del Brasile 1950-1974 (henceforth referred as ASAC). See *Telespresso* n. 32/1099 sent by the Ministero degli Affari Esteri, DGRC, to Presidenza della Biennale di Venezia, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, DGBA, February 26th, 1951, ASAC, segnatura b. 01 Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile del 1951, 1. Corrispondenza con i Ministeri. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are mine.
4. With the Brazilian actors Paulo Autran and Tônia Carrero. See *Adolfo Celi, Un uomo per due culture (A Man for Two Worlds)*, dir. by Leonardo Celi, 93', Celifilms 2006.

5. Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, letter to Rodolfo Pallucchini, São Paulo, June 1st, 1950, ASAC, segnatura b. 01 Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile del 1951: 4. Corrispondenza con il Museo di San Paolo e avv. Pacileo.
6. Lourival Gomes Machado, *Introdução*, in *I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo: Catálogo*, (exh. cat., São Paulo, Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1951), São Paulo, 1951, p. 14.
7. Raniero Pacileo, letter to the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, DGBA, Roma, 2 marzo 1951, ASAC, segnatura b. 01 Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile del 1951: 1. Corrispondenza con i Ministeri. In the same letter Pacileo announces the space given to Italy: 230 mt. for painting, an area suitable for 20 sculptures and 50 engravings.
8. Ana Gonçalves Magalhães, "The Italian Art World and São Paulo Museum Collections in the Aftermath of World War II", *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana*, 44 (2019/2020), pp. 449-481.
9. The name of Sironi appears in various lists to be found in different folders: ASAC, segnatura b. 01 Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile del 1951: 3. Varie; b. 02 Biennale di San Paolo del 1951, 1951-1952: 3. Commissione per la mostra di san Paolo (sulla base del comitato internazionale di esperti). About Sironi in the postwar years see Claudia Gian Ferrari, Elena Pontiggia, *Sironi. Gli anni Quaranta e Cinquanta. Dal crollo dell'ideologia agli anni dell'Apocalisse*, exh. cat. Milano, Fondazione Stelline, 2008 (Milano: Electa, 2008).
10. Memo in a document titled "Opere da Milano", in ASAC, segnatura b. 01 Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile del 1951: 3. Varie.
11. Matarazzo Sobrinho, letter to Pallucchini, São Paulo, February 21st, 1953, in ASAC, segnatura b. 03 2. Biennale San Paolo del Brasile 1952-1954, 2. Preventivi di spesa e corrispondenza relativa.
12. Adele Nelson, "Monumental and Ephemeral: the early São Paulo Bienais," in *Constructive Spirit: Abstract Art in South and North America, 1920s-50s*, Mary Kate O'Hare ed., exh. cat. Newark, Newark Museum/Fort Worth, Amon Carter Museum, 2010 (Newark/San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2010), pp. 129-135 (133).
13. Boccioni was the first Futurist to be "rediscovered" not only, as it was, for the quality of his work but also because of his early death, occurred in 1916, six years before the fascist rise to power. Giulio Carlo Argan, *Umberto Boccioni*, scelta degli scritti, regesti, bibliografia e catalogo delle opere a cura di Maurizio Calvesi (Roma: Quaderni della Quadriennale nazionale d'arte, 1953).
14. Matarazzo Sobrinho to Pallucchini, San Paolo 28 dicembre 1953, in ASAC, segnatura b. 03 2. Biennale San Paolo del Brasile 1952-1954, 10. Rapporti con gli organizzatori della mostra.
15. Matarazzo Sobrinho to Pallucchini, San Paolo 8 June 1953. In a telegram sent shortly before (26 May 1953), Matarazzo had revealed to Pallucchini that France had asked for 300 linear meters for paintings. All the documents in ASAC, segnatura b. 03 2. Biennale San Paolo del Brasile 1952-1954, 10. Rapporti con gli organizzatori della mostra.
16. Pallucchini to Matarazzo Sobrinho, San Paolo 29 maggio 1953, in ASAC, segnatura b. 03 2. Biennale San Paolo del Brasile 1952-1954, 10. Rapporti con gli organizzatori della mostra.
17. Whitelegg, "The Bienal Internacional de São Paulo", p. 381.
18. See the press review folders in ASAC, Raccolta Documentaria Extra Biennale, Mostre all'estero, Biennali di San Paolo, 1-3.
19. Arturo Profili to Pallucchini, São Paulo, 18 novembre 1955, in ASAC, segnatura b. 05: 3. Biennale di San Paolo del 1955, 1954-1956, 17. Varie.
20. Giulio Carlo Argan to Pallucchini, Perugia, 17 marzo 1955, in ASAC, segnatura b. 05: 3. Biennale di San Paolo del 1955, 1954-1956, 17. Varie.
21. Umbro Apollonio to Pallucchini, Venezia, 26 marzo 1957, in ASAC, segnatura b. 06: 4. Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile 1956-1958, 9. Lettere interne.
22. *A Gazeta*, São Paulo, September 2nd, 1957.

23. Giuseppe Medici, Telegramma a Giovanni Ponti, 27 maggio 1959, ASAC, segnatura b.07: 5. Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile 1958-1960, 5. V Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile Elenchi artisti espositori e elenchi vari.
24. Draft of the telegram sent by Giovanni Ponti to Giuseppe Medici, undated but certainly referred to this affair, as shown by the punctuality of the reply and by the subsequent letter of June 13, 1959, in which Ponti develops his arguments extensively. All the documents in ASAC, segnatura b.07: 5. Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile 1958-1960, 5. V Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile Elenchi artisti espositori e elenchi vari.
25. Fontana was a case in point, because he was invited as a sculptor and sent "cut canvases". Fontana was explicitly defended by Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and Lionello Venturi: all the documents in ASAC, segnatura b.07: 5. Biennale di San Paolo del Brasile 1958-1960, 6. Corrispondenza con i commissari.

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# **Teresa Cristina of Bourbon's Voyage. Art and Politics between Italy and Brazil**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the cultural and artistic significance of the voyage of Teresa Cristina of Bourbon (1822-1889), who travelled from Naples to Brazil to become Empress and Consort of Pedro II in 1843.

## **KEYWORDS**

Teresa Cristina of Bourbon; Alessandro Ciccarelli; Eduardo de Martino; Naples; Brazil.

In 1843 Teresa Cristina of Bourbon (1822-1889) travelled from Naples to Brazil to become Empress and Consort of Pedro II. In 1857 Giovanni Cristini describes this event in his *Elogio funebre nella Sua Altezza Reale Maria Amalia di Borbone*. His emphatic comment was “travelling the Mediterranean, crossing the immensity of the ocean”.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this episode is set at height of trade and political ties between the Kingdom of Two Sicilies and Brazil, after the proclamation of Brazilian independence.

In line with this context, a growing interest toward this part of Latin America is documented by various sources. In taking up here these texts, and the orientation of artistic patronage of the Royal Bourbon Court, my paper aims to investigate the connections with the context of Neapolitan art.

Teresa Cristina had grown up in a transitional phase of the Bourbon court.<sup>2</sup> His father Francis I (and then his brother Ferdinand II) were involved in a strong policy of reaffirmation of the government and the promotion of the arts. Take, for example, of official portraiture, such as the commissions addressed to neoclassical painters such as Giuseppe Cammarano, or the affirmation of the documentary landscape painting produced by Salvatore Fergola<sup>3</sup>, appointed court painter in 1829.

In the famous portrait of the royal family by Giuseppe Cammarano, *The King Francis I of Bourbon and his Family* (1820, oil on canvas, Naples, Museo e Galleria Nazionale di Capodimonte), dated 1820, among the children of Francis I, Teresa Cristina (born in 1822) and Luigi Maria Count of Aquila (born in 1824) are missing.

It will be Luigi (1824-1897) who will accompany Teresa Cristina on her journey to Brasil in 1843. The following year, he too got married with the Brazilian princess Maria Januaria, sister of Pedro II.<sup>4</sup>

To understand Teresa Cristina’s artistic entourage and taste, few brief details could be useful, starting from her family milieu. It is interesting to notice that the Count of Aquila was active as a dilettante marine painter, who received his first training in Italy from the landscape painters Filippo Palizzi and Gabriele Smargiassi.<sup>5</sup> As we will see shortly, he was also an art collector, and the first patron of painter and patriot Francesco Saverio Altamura, who called him “patron and a something of an artist”.<sup>6</sup>

In the official portrait by Giuseppe Cammarano is instead present Leopoldo, Count of Syracuse (born in 1819), who also, as his brother Luigi, received an education as an artist and practiced sculpture.<sup>7</sup> Leopoldo was designated the groom's proxy during the marriage ceremony in Naples.<sup>8</sup> The young princess herself had received, like her brothers and as a common custom at court, an artistic education. So, when she became Empress, she was able to play an active role in promoting the arts, as shown recently in an well-documented study by Aniello Angelo Avella, who rescued her, in this respect, from historiographical oblivion.

As it is well-known, Theresa Cristina married in 1843 Emperor Pedro II by proxy in Naples, an event documented by her first court painter Alessandro Ciccarelli (1811-1879) in *The marriage by proxy of the Empress d. Teresa Cristina* (1846, oil on canvas, cm 195 x 254, Museu Imperial/Ibram).<sup>9</sup>



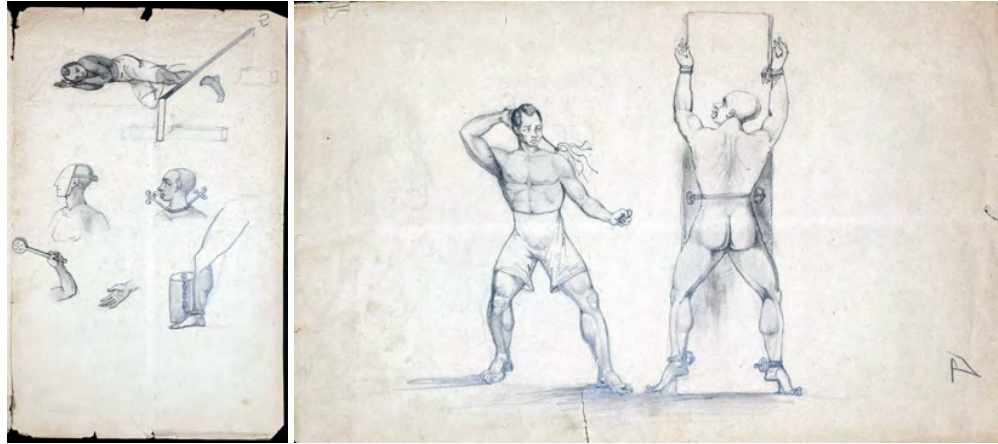
**Fig. 1.** Alessandro Ciccarelli. *The marriage by proxy of the Empress d. Teresa Cristina* (1846, oil on canvas, cm 195 x 254, Museu Imperial/Ibram)

Although documentary research is still in progress, I would like to anticipate here some neglected Italian sources about the painter and in particular one of his unpublished works that I was able to trace. Ciccarelli's presence in Rio de Janeiro is recorded in Naples by the historian Carlo Tito Dalbono, who defines him as a “valiant painter who did not imitate anyone”, described, together with another less-known Neapolitan painter, Luigi Stallone, defined as “living in the new world”.<sup>10</sup>

Before talking about these and other more or less famous Italian artists in Brazil, some documents help us understand the political ties and cultural interests between the two worlds.

In 1827, Count Ferdinando Lucchesi Palli,<sup>11</sup> consul general in the United States, moved to Brazil, in the role of first *chargé d'affaires* at the court in Rio de Janeiro. In 1828 he wrote a *Historical-geographical-political report on the empire of Brazil*.<sup>12</sup> Conceived in the wake of Brazil's independence (1822) and the formal recognition of the Brazilian empire (1826), this document is preserved in hand-written form in state archives of Naples and reflects the strong desire for knowledge towards a great country and its independence.

The second diplomat deserving special attention is Gaetano Merolla, who became in 1832 Consul General of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in Rio de Janeiro. Merolla wrote in 1840 an interesting pamphlet entitled *Report of the Consul General in Brazil on the trade of blacks*.<sup>13</sup> This text condemns slavery as a crime, emphasizing the cruelty to which slaves are subjected, against Christian precepts, and states: “This is the horrendous picture presented by the slave population in Brazil” and “We will never be able to advance the liberal and mechanical arts in Brazil while slavery exists”.<sup>14</sup> Probably intended for publication, the document is also accompanied by two pencil drawings.<sup>15</sup>



**Figs. 2 and 3.** ASN, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, G. Merolla, Memoria del Commercio dei Neri, e dei mali che dallo stesso ne derivano, Rio de Janeiro, 7 febbraio 1840, b. 3886 tav. I-II

Two further volumes were available in Naples about customs and traditions of the new Empire. I'm referring here to the *Historical - Physical - Political History Of The Empire Of Brazil*, by Gaetano Valeriani in 1844,<sup>16</sup> and the issue devoted to Brazil in the *Panorama dell'Universo* by Cesare Malpica (1804-1848)<sup>17</sup>.

The latter, published after the author's death in 1855, is more interesting, for it is furnished with lithographs and written by an author familiar with the Neapolitan artistic environment. Malpica was a journalist and lawyer, who had opened in Naples since 1830<sup>18</sup> a private school that quickly became a place of reference for many young people, including many artists.

Unlike other documents mentioned earlier, Malpica pays some attention to the Brazilian artistic context, emphasizing the importance of the contribution of the French school, particularly Lebreton and Debret, and the birth of the local Art Academy. The presence of foreigners contributed to the decoration of the palaces that offered a new face to the empire.<sup>19</sup> However, except for a generic mention of a new Brazilian dawn, there is no explicit reference to the current government or of Italian, and especially Neapolitan, artistic presences. The narrative stops at Pedro II's ascent to the throne.

We are now better equipped to follow the journey of the fleet that sailed from Naples on 1 July 1843, with Teresa Cristina on board.

Two travel diaries are a tour disposal, but only one of them mentions the presence on board of a court painter. Both accounts are dedicated to Prince Luigi Maria of Bourbon, Count of Aquila, who was on board.

The first one is included in the life of Baron Raffaele De Cosa, admiral of the king's fleet, written by Gaetano Parrilli and published in 1856.<sup>20</sup> But the most interesting for our research is the second one: Eugenio Rodríguez's diary, published shortly after the events in 1844.<sup>21</sup>

The story begins with the arrival of the Brazilian fleet in the Gulf of Naples on May 23 and ends with its return home. There are many nautical annotations, observations of the fauna, and expressions of amazement at the unusual landscape. Among these, the power of nature dominates the view of:

bizarre and volcanic forms of the island of Porto Santo, which from the west is surrounded almost to the border by high rocks [...]. One of the other rocks described, is of very strange shape all composed of lava, called the Hawk, nor arbitrarily given that name, because in it that species of bird and the flock of seagulls nest. The waves breaking furiously against the base, thrust themselves to a great height, and precipitating cover the rock with thunderous foam, paying the roar of that bellow at some distance, almost forcing the inexperienced marine to keep away. I believe this crucially dangerous spot was painted by the court painter<sup>22</sup>, who was transporting H. M. the Empress; no doubt, for by the Admiral's will we remained a long time to the west of the island.<sup>23</sup>

First of all, the terms devoted to "wild nature" and "the power of a God" and "the power of the waves" in this and other pages connect to a romantic poetics of seascapes and storms, evoking the paintings of Horace Vernet and Théodore Gudin, seen and transferred in the context of the Bourbon court by the painter Salvatore Fergola.

It is evident that Luigi, count of Aquila, who had joined the navy when he was very young, had, as artist, a predilection for these subjects, as in *The Tempest* (s/d, oil on canvas, cm 95 x 128, Museu Imperial/Ibram).



**Fig. 4.** Louis of Bourbon, Count of Aquila, *The Tempest*, s/d, oil on canvas, cm 95 x 128, Museu Imperial/Ibram

He had been introduced to painting through this taste, with a reflection of the Posillipo school, as well as by the two landscape masters already mentioned, and so different from each other, such as Smargiassi (exponent of the most rigorous academic tradition,) and Filippo Palizzi (a champion of the anti-academic reform).

The figure of the collector and artist Count d'Aquila, the most liberal prince of the royal court, is as interesting as little investigated. His liberal position is reflected in the choices of taste towards a new generation of artists, in particular that already mentioned Altamura, which he helped to escape to Florence after a sentence in Naples for involvement in the

anti-Bourbon movements of 1848.<sup>24</sup> His first commission to the painter of the work *Nathan the Prophet rebukes David* (1847, Caserta, Prefettura),<sup>25</sup> reveals the orientation of the prince towards Roman purism.

In 1844 Luigi had married the imperial princess of Brazil, Maria Januaria, sister of Pedro II. After a difficult relationship with the emperor and the return to the Kingdom of Naples, Louis was condemned to exile because of his political conduct. So he moved permanently to Paris and never abandoned painting. Here he participated in the International Exhibition of 1878.

Returning now to Rodríguez's text, it is to point out his first exploration of the Brazilian landscape around Rio de Janeiro, which he calls "a living history".<sup>26</sup> He also describes the Museum, stressing however the poverty of the collections. This will be a central aspect in the active cultural policy of Teresa Cristina, in enhancing the archaeological heritage. As it is well-known, she was responsible for the large collection of finds from the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii, thanks to the policy of exchange initiated with her brother Ferdinand II.<sup>27</sup>

The court painter mentioned by Rodríguez is certainly Alessandro Ciccarelli. The activity of the painter in Brazil and Chile, where he arrived in 1848 as the first director of the Academia de Pintura, is known and has been investigated in recent contributions of great interest.<sup>28</sup> In the Italian art-historical studies he is instead a figure almost forgotten,<sup>29</sup> despite a promising debut reported by the sources to which I turn now: sources that will lead us to the identification of a work never recorded before.

But who was this painter in his early thirties and why did the choice of the official assignment fall on him?

Francis Napier, ambassador in Naples since 1848, already remembered Ciccarelli's presence in Brazil, even if he got the name wrong: "Report is more favourable to Giuseppe [*sic*] Ciccarelli, who followed a Neapolitan Empress to Brazil, and may be destined to the glorious office of disseminating the principles of Christian art beyond the Atlantic".<sup>30</sup>

Ciccarelli was a student of the Royal Institute of Fine Arts in Naples and he participated with continuity to the Bourbon exhibitions from 1830 to 1843, the year of his departure with Teresa Cristina.

In 1833 he received the silver medal for the first class of painting<sup>31</sup> and in 1834 he won the prestigious “Pensionato” in Rom, together with the painter Vincenzo Morani, with the Magisterium of Vincenzo Camuccini.<sup>32</sup>

From this moment on, the reviews dedicated to him are quite frequent in the “Annali civili”, with reference to his participation in the Bourbon exhibition, or in the Roman periodical “Il Tiberino”, in particular with reference to his participation in the yearly exhibitions in Palazzo Farnese organized by Camuccini.



**Fig. 5.** Alessandro Ciccarelli, Madonna of the Rosary with St. Dominic and St. Catherine of Siena, Monte Urano (FM), 1836, oil on canvas, church of Saint Rocco (from the church of St Michael the Archangel)

If in 1837 an article was dedicated to *Philoctetes*,<sup>33</sup> then in 1839 to *Telemaco e Termosiri* and to *Francis I King of France (or Francis I at the Battle of Pavia)*<sup>34</sup>. All these works were purchased by the royal court.

But already in 1836, in the same pages of the "Tiberino", a long article described a *Madonna del Rosario* by Ciccarelli,<sup>35</sup> with emphatic tones. The same work was also mentioned in his biography published in "El Taller Ilustrado" in 1885.<sup>36</sup>

This work, one of Ciccarelli's little-known paintings, has been traced in the Marche, signed and dated. It is dated 1856, but I am convinced that there has been an error in reading the date: the correct one should be 1836. This hypothesis is confirmed in the mentioned article of the "Il Tiberino", whose description coincides perfectly with the work. The review describes the landscape in the background, identified in Monte Urano, a town in the province of Fermo, for which the work was originally intended and where it is presently still located.

Browsing through the catalogues of the Bourbon exhibitions, the subjects treated by Ciccarelli fall within the genres of history painting and portraiture, greatly appreciated by the Bourbon court, showing an artist with a solid Roman training, also in the practice of copying old masters. His participation to the exhibition of 1833, for instance, is witnessed through a copy of Guido Reni's Saint Cecily and in 1837 with another copy after Raffaello.<sup>37</sup>

This Method is what he would propose again during the Chilean period, as we know not without controversy.<sup>38</sup> In Santiago, another Italian, the Tuscan Giovanni Mochi (1827-1892), found a welcoming environment in 1879, and devoted himself to portraits and landscape painting.<sup>39</sup> These two presences further prove how the figurative tendencies of Rome and Florence widely spread in South America during the 19th century, consolidating a transatlantic dialogue further reinforced by the training in Europe of Latin American artists.<sup>40</sup>

Ciccarelli became a perfect example of the practice of the academic training system at that time, which saw in the Roman sojourn its centre.<sup>41</sup> Ciccarelli's oblivion in later Italian historiography is probably due to the fact

that he never returned to Italy. Moreover, the painter left Naples too early, before the involvement of the newer generation of artists in the anti-academic reform.

This becomes evident in his landscape paintings. The famous view by Ciccarelli of *Rio de Janeiro* (1844, oil on canvas, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo) <sup>42</sup> offers an apt example of the kind of the landscape painting established in the years of his training and then greatly appreciated by the Bourbon entourage. In a similar way, the *Marriage of Teresa Cristina*, completed in 1846, acts a manifesto of the documentary and celebrative painting of the Bourbons. It is a practice absorbed by the Kingdom and replicated by the Empire to build its own visual identity.<sup>43</sup>

An equally neglected passage in another contemporary source tells us that in addition to Ciccarelli, another Neapolitan artist left for Brazil, following the path opened by Teresa Cristina. This was Luigi Stallone (or Stalloni for the Brazilians). Stallone was a student at the Royal Institute of Fine Arts in Naples. He has fallen into oblivion in Italian historiography, despite the fact that the catalogues record 15 of his works presented at Bourbon exhibitions from 1826 to 1845<sup>44</sup>: one landscape and several portraits, including those of the King and of the Queen. The research on him is still in progress, but the hypothesis is that Stallone went to Rio de Janeiro after 1845, when he was Honorary Professor of the Royal Institute of Fine Arts in Naples and interrupted the participation in royal exhibitions, if not already in 1843 when he was registered at the 4<sup>a</sup> General Exposition.<sup>45</sup> He remained in Brazil until his death in 1878, specializing in views.

Pedro II favoured another painter from the Kingdom of Naples, who specialized in seascapes and the depiction of war fleets. This is Eduardo de Martino (Meta, 1836-Londra, 1912) who differs from the other examples in that he did not undertake regular artistic studies. While he was studying at the Nautical School, he attended the private studios of Giaginto Gigante and Domenico Morelli, as well as taking evening classes at the Royal Institute of Fine Arts in Naples, where he was appointed honorary professor in 1902.<sup>46</sup> In 1865, De Martino was in service in the Italian naval division in the Rio de la Plata and he soon came into contact with Italian-Brazilian cultural circles.

The meeting with Pedro II dates back to 1867. De Martino was commissioned to portray the recent naval victories of the Empire in order to build a new national iconography, as had already been the case for the Brazilian Victor Meirelles de Lima. The latter, trained at the local Art Academy, perfected his training in history painting in Rome in 1853.<sup>47</sup>

De Martino's works show a careful direct observation of the nature that he knows best: the sea. So, a large view of the harbor dominates the celebrative painting of *The arrival of Teresa Cristina of Bourbon* (1872, Museu Histórico Nacional, Rio de Janeiro).<sup>48</sup>



**Fig. 6.** Eduardo De Martino, *The arrival of Teresa Cristina of Bourbon*, 1872, Museu Histórico Nacional, Rio de Janeiro

When he left Brazil in 1875 and became a painter for the British Court from 1875 to 1912, he would be remembered as Imperial painter.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, in 1873 de Martino represents Brazil at the International Exposition of Vienna and in 1876 in Philadelphia.

Pedro II continued to look to Naples not only for painters, but also for sculptors. I am here referring to Luigi Pasquarelli, who was also a student at the Royal Institute, and who won the Pension in Rome in 1859 and in Florence in 1862.<sup>50</sup>

Pasquarelli participated in the Bourbon Exhibitions of 1855 and 1859, the National Exhibitions of Naples (1877) and Turin (1880). After the unification of Italy, in 1861, he was involved in the commissions celebrating the annexation of Naples to Italy. In 1872, with a fellowship of the Provincial Council of Naples, he went to Brazil at the invitation of Emperor Pedro II. It is remarkable how in Brazil, in a list published by Federica De Rosa,<sup>51</sup> we can find commissions for both the imperial house - among which also the commissions for the decoration of public buildings - and the Italian Ercole Foglia, of the Italian Society of Charity, for which Pasquarelli made a Bust of Garibaldi and one of Mazzini: therefore, he worked in the same time for the Bourbon Empress and the Italian immigrants in Brazil. Still in 1877, when the Emperor was in Naples and visited the National Exhibition, the magazine "Il Pungolo" described a meeting between Pedro II and Pasquarelli.<sup>52</sup>

Within the chronological span of my investigation (limited to the regency of Pedro II) other Italians arrive in Brazil, such as Nicola Antonio Facchinetti<sup>53</sup> from Treviso or other southern artists trained in Naples who sought the benevolence of the court: some of them unsuccessfully, such as Rosalbino Santoro.<sup>54</sup>

When Teresa Cristina arrived in Brazil in 1843, the impetus of the first generation of European artists who had ensured the foundation in Rio de Janeiro of the local Art Academy,<sup>55</sup> persisted. I think here of the French painter Jean Baptiste Debret (1768-1848)<sup>56</sup> and the landscape painter Nicolas Antoine Taunay (1755-1830).<sup>57</sup>

The arrival of Teresa Cristina contributed to consolidate the tradition of the voyage to Europe for Brazilian artists to complete their academic education: above all in Italy.<sup>58</sup> Her influence was exerted not only in the visual arts, but also in music, as can be seen from an episode recorded by the historian Avella, in which the empress imposed on her consort a preference for Italy rather than Germany for the young singer Carlos Gomes.<sup>59</sup>

In conclusion, the influence of Teresa Cristina and her choice of the court painter Ciccarelli chimes perfectly with what had already happened at the Bourbon court in Naples, establishing in Brazil the influence of Italian (and Roman) history painting. The journey of Teresa Cristina represents a transnational exchange that contributed to reaffirm a public image of the new court through celebratory painting, following the footsteps of what the official artist Fergola, the last court painter of the Bourbons in Naples, had done for her father Francis I and her brother Ferdinand II<sup>60</sup>. Moreover, new room is made for the specialization of landscape painting, in a context in which emerges Luigi count of Aquila would emerge as a figure of extreme interest. Teresa Cristina should be mentioned among other princes of the Neapolitan royal family for the advancement of the arts<sup>61</sup> as a patron and collector in the fields of painting, music, archaeology, and photography, including her important legacies bequeathed to Brazil by Pedro II<sup>62</sup>.

On the connection between Italy and Brazil, as centres of political power when the two countries were building their national identities, I would like to share one last reflection.

While in 1843 the Italian Princess Teresa Cristina of Bourbon became the "Mother of the Brazilians" (Naples, 1822-Porto, 1889), just a few years earlier, in 1839, the Brazilian revolutionary Ana Maria de Jesus Ribeiro da Silva (1821-1849) became Anita Garibaldi, giving rise to a myth in the Italian patriotic symbolism, in illustrated popular press and paintings<sup>63</sup>. Many events linked Italy and Brazil in the 19th century. The two countries have long enjoyed a fruitful cultural relationship, where women were much more active than historiography has recorded to date.

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5. See: R. Moscati, *Borbone, Luigi Maria di, conte d'Aquila*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 12 (1971), ad vocem and bibliography. See also: L. Martorelli, "La pittura dell'Ottocento tra accademia, museo e collezionismo", in *I Borbone di Napoli*, edited by N. Spinosa, F. Di Mauro (Sorrento: Franco Di Mauro, 2009), 363-389: 379, 385, 389 footnote 118; and M. Picone Petrusa, *La restaurazione e il ruolo dei Borboni come mecenati*, in F.C. Greco, M. Picone Petrusa, I. Valente, *La pittura napoletana dell'Ottocento* (Naples: Pironti, 1993), 34-35, footnote 31. About Leopoldo, conte di Siracusa, as sculptor see the catalogue entries in *Civiltà dell'Ottocento a Napoli. Le arti figurative* (Naples: Electa Napoli, 2004), 331-333 no. 15.40-15.43.
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13. ASN, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, G. Merolla, *Memoria del Commercio dei Neri, e dei mali che dallo stesso ne derivano*, Rio de Janeiro, 7 febbraio 1840, b. 3886. See also: Avella, *Una napoletana imperatrice ai Tropici*, 33. Also known of Merolla is a substantial correspondence in G. Merolla, *Correspondencia brasileira* (1832-1834), edited by Edorado Bizzarri (São Paulo, Istituto cultural italo-brasileiro, 1963).
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17. C. Malpica, *Panorama dell'Universo. Storia e descrizione di tutti i popoli, delle loro religioni de' loro costumi delle loro arti della loro industria ec., con figure litografiche*, vol. 6, *Brasile* (Naples: Stabilimento Tipografico-Litografico dell'Ateneo, 1855).
18. A. Carrannante, *Malpica, Cesare*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 68 (2007), *ad vocem*.
19. Malpica, *Panorama dell'Universo*, 103.
20. G. Parrilli, *Vita del barone Raffaele De Cosa* (Naples: Libreria strada Toledo, 1856), 84-92.
21. E. Rodríguez, *Descrizione del viaggio a Rio de Janeiro della flotta di Napoli* (Naples: Presso Caro Batelli e comp.<sup>o</sup>, 1844).
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25. F. De Rosa, catalogue entry in *La Patria, l'Arte, la Donna*, 55 no. 1.5; A. Irollo, *Ferdinando II e la promozione delle arti a Napoli*, in Capitelli, *Mecenatismo pontificio*, 232-233, fig. 161.
26. Rodríguez, *Descrizione del viaggio*, 58.
27. Avella, *Una napoletana imperatrice ai Tropici*, 108-139.
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29. Martorelli, *La pittura dell'Ottocento*, 383, 389 footnote 142.
30. F. Napier, *Notes on Modern Painting at Naples* (London: J.W. Parker, 1855), 51.
31. *Annali civili del Regno delle due Sicilie*, III, May, June, July and August, 1833, 47, 58.
32. C. Lorenzetti, *L'Accademia di Belle Arti di Napoli 1752-1952* (Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1953), 463.
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34. G. Checchetelli, "Alessandro Ciccarelli", in *Il Tiberino*, no. 30, V, May 25, 1839, 117-119; V. Torelli, *Cenno sull'Esposizione di Belle Arti aperta nel Real Museo Borbonico nel 30 maggio 1839* (secondo articolo) (Naples: Presso L'ufficio Dell'Omnibus, 1839), 4-6; S. Susinno, "Napoli e Roma: la formazione artistica nella "capitale universale delle arti", in Id., *L'Ottocento a Roma. Artisti, cantieri, atelier tra età napoleonica e Restaurazione* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2009), 263-279: 270. On the painting *Telemaco and Termosiri* see also: G.F., "La mostra di Belle Arti del 1839", in *Annali civili del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, XXXIX, May and June, 1839 (Naples: Dalla Tipografia del Real Ministero degli affari Interni), 131-152: 141. On the

- painting *Francis I at the Battle of Pavia* see: L. Martorelli, catalogue entry in U. Carughi, A. Porzio, and L. Martorelli, *Il Palazzo della Prefettura*, (Naples: S. Civita, 1989), 104 no. 97.
35. I.F., “Di un dipinto di Alessandro Ciccarelli”, in *Il Tiberino* no. 32, August 13, 1836, 125.
36. in *El taller Ilustrado*, December 13, 1885.
37. A. Ciccarelli, *Santa Cecilia, copiata dall'originale di Guido*, in *Catalogo delle opere di Belle Arti del Real Museo Borbonico* (Naples: Stamperia Reale, 1833), 15 no. 86; A. Ciccarelli, *Coronazione di Maria Santissima con Cristo, e diversi Angioli, copiata da Raffaello della grandezza dell'originale*, in *Catalogo delle opere di Belle Arti del Real Museo Borbonico* (Naples: Stamperia Reale, 1837), 66 no. 22.
38. de la Maza, *Duelo de pinces*, 219-228.
39. On Ciccarelli and Mochi, first and third director of the Chilean Academy see the exhibition at Instituto Italiano de Cultura in Santiago, curated by Robinson Avello, *Arte italiano, una hiel a Chile*, March 1 through March 26, 2016.
40. As Stefano Cracolici shows us in his article S. Cracolici, “Uncovering a Common Heritage: Latin American Academies of Fine Arts in the Century of the Independence”, in *Why Latin America Matters: A Collection of Essays*, edited by S. Garcia-Ferrari, H. Egil Offerdal, and M. A. Kania (Edinburgh: Centre for Contemporary Latin American Studies, 2021), 46-62.
41. On this subject see G. Capitelli, and S. Cracolici, “Apostar por Roma: arte en México en el siglo de la Independencia”, in *Roma en México. México en Roma. Las academias de arte entre Europa y el Nuevo Mundo, 1843-1867*, edited by G. Capitelli and S. Cracolici (Roma: Campisano editore, 2018), 19-56, catalogue of an exhibition at the Museo Nacional de San Carlos, Ciudad de México, December 6, 2018 through April 28, 2019.
42. Lima and Quiroga, “Ciccarelli: paisagem em contradição”.
43. However, Ciccarelli received an unflattering review regarding a previous painting depicting a royal scene, exposed in 1841 (G. Quattromani, “Saggio sopra alcune opere di Belle Arti messe in mostra il dì 30 maggio dell'anno 1841”, in *Annali civili*, fasc. L., March and April, 1841, 133-253: 138-139). The painting was: A. Ciccarelli, *Sua Maestà il Re N.S. in compagnia di S.A.I. l'Arciduca Carlo, e seguito da diversi Generali passa in rassegna le truppe al Campo*, in *Catalogo delle opere di Belle Arti del Real Museo Borbonico* (Naples: Stamperia Reale, 1841), 12 no. 117.
44. See the annual catalogue delle opere di Belle Arti del Real Museo Borbonico (Naples: Stamperia Reale): 1826, 44 no. 293, 24 no. 130; 1830, 40 no. 329-330, 36 no. 302, 81; 1833, 23 no. 157; 1839, 5 no. 37-40; 1841, 45 no. 376; 1843, 51 no. 386; 1845, 20 no. 175. On the painter see also: G.F., “La mostra di Belle Arti del 1839”, 150; Lorenzetti, *L'Accademia di Belle Arti*, 231 footnote 1. See here footnote 10.
45. <https://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/pessoa24736/luigi-stalloni>
46. L. de Vito Puglia, *Eduardo de Martino. Da ufficiale di marina a pittore di Corte* (Monghidoro: Con-fine edizioni, 2012), 28. A first exhibition on the painter was organized in Brazil at Museu Nacional de Belas Artes (Mnba): *Demartino in Brasile*, June 17, through September 20, 2015.
47. Sartor, *L'arte latinoamericana contemporanea*, 47.
48. A description of the arrival of Teresa Cristina on the Frigate Constitution is in Parrilli, *Vita del barone Raffaele De Cosa*, 1856, 84-90.
49. See “Queen Victoria’s marine painter: Eduardo de Martino”, in *Rivista. The Journal of the British-Italian Society*, no. 201, September/October 1967, 5-6.
50. A first study on the sculptor is in F. De Rosa, “Prime ricerche su Luigi Pasquarelli, scultore lucano tra Napoli, Firenze e Rio de Janeiro”, in *Napoli Nobilissima*, VII, I, fasc. II-III, May-December 2015, 104-118. See also A. De Gubernatis, *Dizionario degli artisti italiani viventi. Pittori, scultori e architetti* (Firenze: Tipi dei Successori Le Monnier, 1889), 357 (in which his Brazilian activities are not mentioned).
51. De Rosa, *Prime ricerche*, 118.
52. De Rosa, *Prime ricerche*, 115.

53. *Facchinetti*, edited by C. Martins, V. Piccoli, M. Pace Chiavari (Rio de Janeiro: CCBB, 2004), catalogue of an exhibition at Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, March 30 through June 6, 2004. The painter participated at the following Italian exhibitions: Turin, XLIII Esposizione (Generale Italiana), 1884, 30 no. 777; Genua, Società Promotrice di Belle Arti, 1889, 23 no. 345; I Esposizione Internazionale d'arte della città di Venezia, 1895, 89 no. 100; LV Esposizione (Prima triennale), Turin, 1896, 16 no. 83.
54. V. Cappelli, "Rosalbino Santoro in Brasile. Un 'pittore itinerante' a Rio de Janeiro, San Paolo e Taubaté", in *Rivista Calabrese di Storia* del '900, 2, 2014, 47-60. In Franco Cenni [*Italianos no Brasil: andiamo in 'merica* (São Paulo: Martins, 1958?, 52)] is mentioned an unknown sculptor Giovanni Castelpoggi, always in the retinue of Teresa Cristina, who then abandoned the artistic career for business (see also Avella, *Una napoletana imperatrice ai Tropici*, 143).
55. The Escola Real de Ciências, Arte e Ofícios, from 1826 called Real Academia de Desenho, Pintura, Escultura e Arquitectura Civil (Sartor, *L'arte latinoamericana contemporanea*, 13).
56. See J.B. Debret, *Voyage Pittoresque et Historique u Brésil, ou Séjour d'un artiste français au Brésil depuis 1816 jusqu'en 1831 inclusivement* (Paris: Firmin Didot et Frères, 1834-1839, 3 voll.); Sartor, *L'arte latinoamericana contemporanea*, 13, 34 footnote 9.
57. E. Dias, *Paisagem e academia: Félix-Émile Taunay e o Brasil (1824-1851)* (Campinas, SP, Brasil: Editora Unicamp, 2009).
58. Sartor, *L'arte latinoamericana contemporanea*, 14.
59. Avella, *Una napoletana imperatrice ai Tropici*, 81.
60. See J.A. Davis, *Salvatore Fergola e Napoli all'epoca di Ferdinando II*, in *Fergola: lo splendore di un regno*, 15-21.
61. On the other members of the royal family see Irollo, *Il mecenatismo dei Borbone*, 286.
62. About Teresa Cristina see the recent *Da Napoli a Rio de Janeiro. L'Imperatrice Teresa Cristina di Borbone delle Due Sicilie e la fotografia*, exhibition at Galleria Candido Portinari - Palazzo Pamphilj, Rome, March 15 through April 22 April, 2022, curated by Evelyne Azevedo and Fernanda Marinho. This exhibition was followed by the Research & Field Seminar *Tra Pompei e Marajó: cultura materiale, patrimoni del passato e debiti del presente*, Rome, Embassy of Brazil - Rome, Bibliotheca Hertziana, Oct 25, 2022 (see in particular the contribution of Nadia Barrella on the Neapolitan context). I have not been able to take into account the outcomes of this conference, held after these CIHA proceedings were delivered, and made available on the Bibliotheca Hertziana website in final drafts.
63. About Anita Garibaldi see S. Cavicchioli, *Anita. Storia e mito di Anita Garibaldi* (Torino: Einaudi, 2017).

# A Painting in Motion Between Italy and Brazil: *Independência ou Morte*, by Pedro Américo

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## **ABSTRACT**

Investigating the biography of “Independence or Death”, painted by Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello between 1886 and 1888, allows us to peruse Italo-Brazilian cultural and artistic exchanges at the end of the XIX century. Pedro Américo himself (1843-1905) may be deemed as a traveling artist, having as early as 1866, until the end of his life, continuously moved back and forth between Brazil and Italy. While a professor at the Academia Imperial de Belas Artes, in Rio de Janeiro, where he was frequently commissioned to paint large canvas artworks, he kept a studio in Florence, where he established himself for several years and did some of his most notorious historical paintings. One of such paintings was “Independence or Death”, which had its bulky 415 x 760 cm shipped across the Atlantic, and currently occupies an entire wall at the Museu Paulista of Universidade de São Paulo. The painting was originally intended to be displayed in one of the rooms at the building/monument, under construction at the time, erected to celebrate the Brazilian independence, designed by Italian architect Tommaso Gaudenzio Bezzi. Analyzing the trajectory of this painting, especially its conception and circulation, allows for an inspection of the connections established between Brazil and Italy and – as with the study of circulation of sculptors in America – allows contrasting the prevalence of French influence over the South American art scene.

## **KEYWORDS**

Historical Painting; Representation; Artistic Exchanges; Pedro Américo; Nineteenth Century

### **Introduction**

This presentation is the result of my Postdoctoral research at *Museu Paulista* of the University of São Paulo and financed by FAPESP<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of the research is to investigate and clarify fundamental matters pertaining to the creation, circulation, and critical fortune regarding the oil painting entitled "*Independência ou morte!*" [Independence or Death], by Brazilian artist Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello. The painting is one of the most celebrated artworks of this notorious artist and its representation has helped erect the social imaginary surrounding Brazilian independence.

Today I will explore part of the biography of "*Independência ou morte!*", showing how it allows us to understand Italo-Brazilian cultural and artistic exchanges at the end nineteenth century, since the artist and the oil painting traveled between Italy and Brazil. Pedro Américo himself may be deemed as a traveling artist because he continuously moved back and forth between Brazil and Italy. And we are interested in knowing the advantages of making a large-scale oil painting, like "*Independência ou morte!*", in Italy, taking into account that the representation was of a specifically Brazilian theme.

### **Pedro Américo – an artist between Brazil and Italy**

Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello was one of the main Brazilian painters of the nineteenth century and a great exponent of Brazilian historical painting. He studied at the *Academia Imperial de Belas Artes* in Rio de Janeiro and completed his studies in France at the *École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts*, financed by Emperor Dom Pedro II.

In 1866, he became professor at the *Academia Imperial de Belas Artes*, at Rio de Janeiro, but this did not stop him from continuing to travel to Europe, as he requested several medical licenses which allowed him to leave his work as a teacher and go to Italy, where he remained for many months.

These stays were often preceded by commissions for large historical paintings. Therefore, it was in Italy that he carried out major artworks with the battle theme, such as "*Batalha do Avaí*", which he carried out between 1872 and 1877, which dimensions are 11m x 6m, and *Independence or Death*, which

he painted between 1886 and 1888 and which dimensions are 4m15 x 7m. Even the enormous dimensions of these artworks and the difficulties in moving them were not an obstacle for the artist to paint them in Italy and afterwards transport them to Brazil.

### **The biography of "*Independência ou morte!*"**

It was Pedro Américo who first suggested painting "*Independência ou morte!*", volunteering to execute a canvas representing Dom Pedro's cry at the banks of the Ipiranga brook, in São Paulo, symbolizing the rupture between Brazil and the United Kingdom of Portugal and the Algarve.

The independence of Brazil was a different process from that of Latin American countries, as it maintained the monarchical system and was led by the son of the king of Portugal, who became the first Brazilian emperor, Dom Pedro I. The date on which independence is celebrated today refers to an event that took place in São Paulo on September 7th, 1822. The emblematic event of that day would have been the cry saying "Independence or Death" uttered by Dom Pedro. In 1822, the passage of Dom Pedro through São Paulo and his cry for independence did not have much relevance, but later the event was converted at the moment that marks the break between Brazil and Portugal, becoming the date on which Brazilian independence is celebrated.

To reinforce the importance of the event and the site where it was held, the people from São Paulo decided to build a monumental building on the hill of Ipiranga. The building therefore had a celebratory function. It was designed by an Italian architect and engineer, Tommaso Gaudenzio Bezzi, born in Turin, who had settled in Brazil in 1875. He worked for the Imperial Court of Brazil in several Brazilian cities and also was part of Dom Pedro II's circle of friends. It was also an Italian, Luigi Pucci, who was responsible for the construction of the building. He was the constructor who built several residences for the coffee elite of São Paulo. Therefore, we can already note here exchanges between Brazil and Italy, since both the author and the constructor of the building were Italian.

In 1885, when the building was under construction, Pedro Américo proposed the painting. The artist defended his proposal saying that:

"[...] the painting is a monument more directly expressive than the stone building, mainly made by a son of this country, who is more grateful to its independence than the foreigner."<sup>#</sup>

He made this comment referring to Tommaso Bezzi, as he was a foreigner designing the building in honor of Brazil's independence. For Pedro Américo, the painting was more expressive than the stone building and should be done by a Brazilian. However, even the painting would maintain the connection with Italy, as we will see.

Pedro Américo obtained the commission for the painting, which was intended to be displayed in the main room of the Ipiranga's monumental building. Therefore, the painting would have a prominent spot and would be another opportunity for Pedro Américo to obtain recognition and consecration. He decided to make this gigantic artwork in Italy. Soon after signing the contract to make the painting, in 1886, Pedro Américo obtained another medical license for his teaching activities and went to Florence.

What justifies this displacement? Why go to Italy to paint the canvas?

### **Florence: an artistic city**

A first justification may be the meaning of having a studio in Florence. Italy, and particularly the city of Florence, was a place of artistic effervescence. Many artists lived there and kept their studio in the city.

In a book from 1896 entitled *Firenze d'Oggi*, there is a chapter dedicated to the artists of the city of Florence, in which the author, Ugo Matini, walks through some streets of the city mentioning the artists who had their studios there.<sup>#</sup> To get an idea, examining just a few streets in the city, the author indicates the existence of more than 70 artists' studios, including Italian and foreign painters and sculptors. Some of them are described as battle-themed painters.

Living in Florence allowed Pedro Américo to know the artistic production of contemporary artists, mainly because he was in contact with many of them, who had studios and exhibited their paintings in the city. This

provided contact and exchanges between artists. An example of this dynamic was mentioned by Ettore Ximenes; In 1920, the sculptor Ximenes won the international competition to erect the monument to the Independence of Brazil, also located in Ipiranga. In an interview to the *Correio Paulistano* newspaper, the Italian sculptor stated that he would have helped Pedro Américo in the execution of a horse from the painting "*Independência ou Morte*". He declared to the newspaper:

"I was a neighbor of Pedro Américo's studio and, on one occasion, when the Brazilian artist was in a phase of intense work, as he had the next visit from D. Pedro II, he asked me to model a small horse, showing me the way he wanted it. I made the horse and when the Emperor of Brazil arrived in Italy, Pedro Américo introduced the monarch to me".#

This passage demonstrates the existing exchanges between the artists. Florence was, therefore, the ideal city for a painter with great ambitions, who wanted to create a painting that would not be prominent only in Brazil. Having already conquered space and notoriety in his home country, Pedro Américo broadened his horizons, seeking to gain international recognition.

There was yet another fundamental aspect for Pedro Américo to choose to paint "*Independência ou morte!*" in Italy. There he would be in contact with an important artistic production of battle paintings, since at the late nineteenth century there was a large production of paintings and engravings dedicated to the theme of the Italian *Risorgimento* and the wars of independence. These representations served as a reference for the elaboration of other representations, because in academic painting it was common to quote great masters and contemporary artists. The use of this procedure was a way for the artist to demonstrate erudition and knowledge of artistic production.

Pedro Américo was an artist who used this procedure. He had already made many references in the painting "*Batalha do Avaí*", which was also painted in Italy, and "*Independência ou morte!*" was no different. He used as

reference Italian paintings, engravings and sculptures, quoting in several details of the painting.

### Italian references

"*Independência ou morte!*" (Image 1) is a tribute to independence and to the first emperor, father of Dom Pedro II, who was the Brazilian emperor when the artwork was painted.

The prince appears at the center of the representation, in the act of proclaiming independence. He is accompanied by his entourage, who wave hats and scarves. The Honor Guard quickly mounts their horses and raises their swords, following their leader's command. While the population, the civilians, just observe the scene, they do not participate.



**Fig. 1.** Pedro Américo de Figueiredo e Mello. *Independência ou morte!*, 1888. Museu Paulista da USP, São Paulo, Brasil.

As I have already mentioned, to create the painting Pedro Américo used many references, the most known being Ernest Meissonier's French paintings, mainly "*1807, Friedland*", which has a very similar structure to "*Independência ou morte!*". But in the details of the painting, in the position

of the horses, in the poses of the characters, there are many Italian references. I will show you some of them.

In Pedro Américo's painting, there is a guard who rips the ties off his uniform, which symbolize the union between Brazil and Portugal, evidencing the rupture, the independence. The character is in the foreground of the painting, with his back to the viewer and riding a brown horse. We can find parallels of this character's pose with several Italian works.

### **Honor Guard Character**

One of the main painters of the nineteenth century was certainly Giovanni Fattori, known for his paintings with the theme of the Italian *Risorgimento*. He was an important professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence and was active during the period when Pedro Américo lived in that city.

We see a similar horseman in his painting "Un episodio della battaglia di San Martino", which belongs to the Giovanni Fattori Civic Museum in Livorno. The character is in the middle of the canvas, and he is riding on a white horse.



**Fig. 2.** Giovanni Fattori. "Un episodio della battaglia di San Martin", 1868. Museu Civico Giovanni Fattori, Livorno, Itália.

In the same canvas, in the foreground, there is another detail of a Piedmontese soldier preparing to get on his brown horse, which bears a

resemblance to the painting by Pedro Américo. In "*Independência ou morte*" the Guard of honor is on the right side of the painting, in the background, next to the house and he is also preparing to get on a brown horse.

The same horseman mentioned first (the one who rips the ties off his uniform) bears a resemblance to the one that appears in the artwork of Vincenzo Giacomelli, entitled "La battaglia di Pastrengo". Giacomelli was a painter active in the north of Italy, mainly Venice, Turin and Milan, and also in Paris. The character is in the center of the painting, in the middle ground and he is riding a caramel-colored horse.

In addition to the paintings, we find points of contact with engravings on the Risorgimento theme. As an example, there is a lithograph by an unknown author depicting the Italian King Vittorio Emanuele II in a similar way. He is riding on a horse, with his right arm raised and holding a sword.



**Fig. 3.** Unknown artist. "Emmanuel II, le roi Guerrier," Second half of the 19th century, lithograph. Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.

There is another engraving by Victor Jean Vicent Adam and Carlo Perrin entitled "La Guerra d'Italia nel 1860-1861 - attacco e presa di Perugia", made in 1864. In the middle of the scene, a character is also riding on a brown horse in a similar pose.

### Character of Dom Pedro I's Entourage

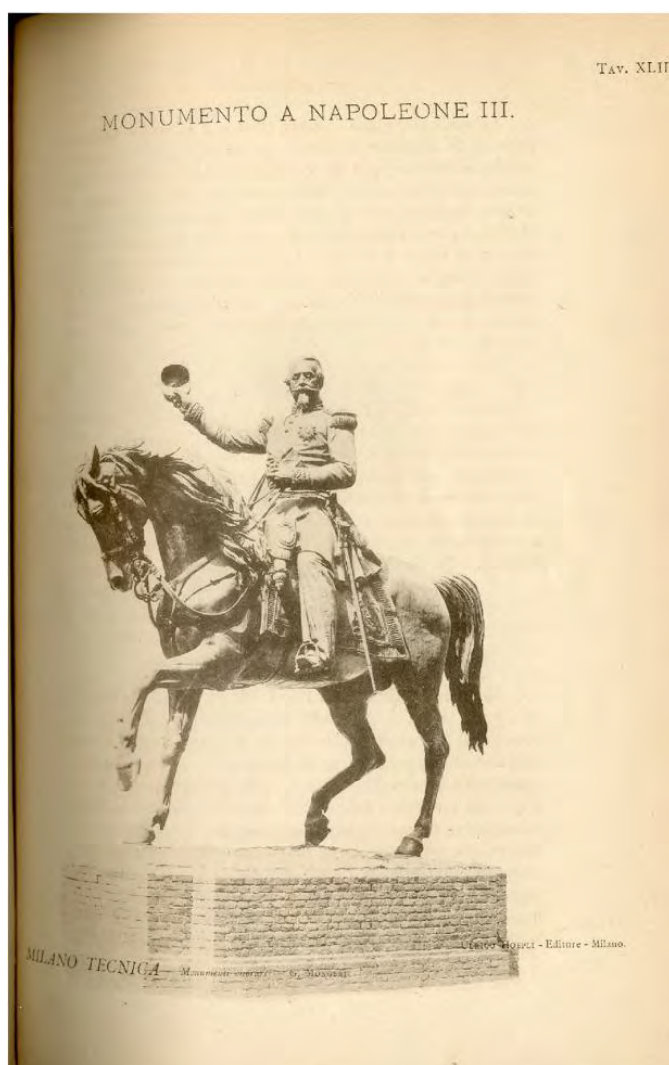
Another example of parallel between "*Independência ou morte!*" and Italian artworks can be traced by analyzing a character from Dom Pedro's entourage. From right to left, he is the second character of Dom Pedro's Entourage. He is riding on a black horse, he is lifting his hat with his right hand and his clothes are different from the other members of the group.



**Fig. 4.** Victor Jean Vincent Adam and Carlo Perrin. "La Guerra d'Italia nel 1860-1861. Entrata di Garibaldi in Messina", 1864, lithograph. Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.

There are similar poses to this character in engravings of the *Risorgimento*, especially the ones depicting Giuseppe Garibaldi. In some of them, even Giuseppe Garibaldi's clothes are similar.

In an 1864 engraving entitled "La Guerra d'Italia nel 1860-1861 – Entrata di Garibaldi in Messina", by Victor Jean Vicent Adam and Carlo Perrin, Giuseppe Garibaldi is depicted as he enters Messina. He is being received by the population and waving his hat in a similar way to the character from Dom Pedro's entourage.



**Fig. 5.** Monumento a Napoleone III. Milano Tecnica, vol. 9, 1885, 308. Milano: Ulrico Hoepli Editore. Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.

Another example is how Garibaldi was represented in the project that the sculptor Ettore Ximenes presented in the contest for the Monument to Garibaldi, which took place in Rome between 1883 and 1884. Ettore Ximenes did not win the competition for the Monument to Garibaldi, but his project was widely publicized in the Italian press of this period. In addition to being a very publicized image, it is worth remembering the possible connection between Pedro Américo and Ettore Ximenes, as mentioned earlier.

Another example of a monument in which this pose is figured is the monument to Napoleon III, by Francesco Barzaghi. He was a Milanese sculptor and his monument was widely publicized in the Italian press. The monument had its image reproduced in an engraving, which shows the monument being displayed in the Milan exhibition of 1881. It was also published in the magazine called “Milano Técnica”, in 1885.

Therefore, both the reproduction of this monument and the project by Ettore Ximenes, circulated in Italian journals on dates close to the execution of the painting "*Independência ou Morte!*". Barzaghi's monument was cast in bronze in 1880. The following year, it was exhibited in the Fine Arts pavilion of the Senate Palace, at the Milan Exhibition of 1881. Therefore, its implantation in the Sempione park, in Milan, was only in 1927.

These were some examples, among many others where I identified the mentioned procedure that Pedro Américo used to compose "*Independência ou Morte!*" from Italian references. Pedro Américo took advantage of his stay in Italy to expand his artistic knowledge. And by making reference to these artworks in "*Independência ou morte!*", he established a dialogue with his peers and proved to be a painter who knew the artistic repertoire and who had great mastery of the artistic technique. Painting was, therefore, a way of inserting Pedro Américo into the Italian artistic environment.

### **The painting exhibition - international recognition**

Another reason for Pedro Américo to settle in Italy was the possibility of obtaining international recognition for his paintings. Being in Italy allowed him to exhibit his paintings in Europe and, thus, having it analyzed by his peers and by European art critics.

The first exhibition of the canvas was held at the *Accademia di Belle Arti* in Florence, when it received the title "Proclamation of the Independence of Brazil". The Academy was one of the main centers of artistic education in Italy, which had professors of great prestige. Therefore, the place where the Brazilian painting was exhibited was the propitious environment for it to obtain the projection desired by Pedro Américo.

The date chosen for the exhibition was strategic, as it coincided with the period when foreign monarchs visited Florence. As the painting was a tribute to the monarchy, the presence of the Brazilian emperor and other European monarchs was significant.

The exhibition opened on April 8th, 1888 in the presence of the Emperor of Brazil, D. Pedro II, and the Empress of Brazil, Teresa Cristina, and the Queen of Serbia, Natália Konstantinović, with her maid of honor. The following day, the painting was seen by the Queen of England, Victoria, and her daughter, Princess Beatrice and the Prince of Battemberg, accompanied by General Ponsonby, the English Ambassador Sir Lumley.<sup>#</sup> The inauguration was also attended by professors, students and members of the *Accademia di Belle Arti*, politicians and members of the Florentine aristocracy. According to *L'arte* magazine, there was a crowd of guests. The columnist for *L'Arte* magazine (signed as G.P.) stated that Pedro Américo "before his great painting, among the sovereigns and princes of various countries and a select crowd of admirers, he must have felt totally satisfied".<sup>#</sup> Therefore, Pedro Américo managed for his artwork to be seen by important people, both from the artistic and political circles, a fact that allowed the event to be publicized in Italian periodicals.

The painting was mentioned, for example, in the newspaper *Il Corriere Italiano*, *L'Opinione Nazionale*, *La vedetta Gazzetta del popolo*, among others. *L'Arte* magazine devoted more than one article in 1888 to the painter and to "*Independência ou morte!*", which was described as "an artwork that alone is enough to assure great fame to an artist".<sup>#</sup> The painting was analyzed in detail by Otello Masini, who also praised it highly.

After the first exhibition in Florence, "*Independência ou morte!*" was shipped to São Paulo, though constant delays in completing the Ipiranga's

monumental building left it encased in a room within the São Francisco Law School building. The painting would only be allotted to its intended location in 1895, when the Ipiranga's monumental building, now turned into *Museu do Estado* [State Museum], was dedicated.

### **Painting circulation**

The good reception that the painting and the artist received in the Italian newspapers also favored the circulation of the image of the painting in Europe. Pedro Américo invested in good reproductions of the painting.

He commissioned Giacomo Brogi's studio to photograph his painting. A painting with gigantic dimensions such as "*Independência ou morte!*" was difficult to have a good photographic reproduction, especially in the nineteenth century. Brogi's studio specialized in photographs of artworks, such as paintings, sculptures, mosaics, frescoes and architecture. In the 1880s, the studio gained prominence with a series of illustrations of artworks by the great masters of Italian art, becoming one of the most renowned photographic companies in Europe in this specific department.

These excellent quality reproductions were used by Pedro Américo in publications, such as the Levasseur's *La Grande encyclopedia* published on the occasion of the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1889. But the photographs were also commercialized. Brogi's studio sold the photographs in several countries, and its catalog was written in French, with information also in English and German.

The photograph of Pedro Américo's painting is included in Giacomo Brogi's studio catalog of photographic reproductions, in the *Galleria Moderna* section, dedicated to artworks by contemporary painters. The commercialization of photography indicates, therefore, that the image of Pedro Américo's painting circulated in Europe. One of these reproductions is currently in the photo library of the *Kunsthistorisches Institut* in Florence.

The intention to make the painting internationally known would also be visible in the artist's attempts to expose it at universal exhibitions. In 1889, in Paris, the sending of the canvas was not authorized, so the preparatory drawings and photography of the painting were exhibited. But in 1893, the

painting was sent to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where it was exhibited in Brazil's Pavilion.

### **Final considerations**

Pedro Américo had many advantages executing his painting in Italy. It is important to note, however, that he did not settle permanently in Italy, most likely because he depended on the commissions he received in Brazil. Therefore, as soon as he finished a painting, he sought a new commission, so he could stay in Italy for a while longer. That's what happened when he finished "*Independência ou morte!*", as soon as those negotiations began to obtain a commission for a painting with the theme of liberation from slavery. In addition to financing his stay abroad, the commissions gave him the opportunity to produce large-scale paintings that gained visibility in Europe and increased the artist's recognition. That's why this transit between Brazil and Italy was so important to him.

This transit was not just Brazilians who went to Italy to complete their studies or to gain projection in their careers. There was also an opposite movement, that is, Italian artists who came to Brazil in search of opportunities to execute artworks of great proportions, such as monuments and public buildings. I have already mentioned the case of Tommaso Bezzi, the engineer of the Ipiranga monument building. But there are many other examples, mainly sculptors, such as Ettore Ximenes, Luigi Brizzolara, Amadeo Zani, Arnaldo Zocchi, among others. The large presence of Italian sculptors in Brazil (and throughout South America) at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, allows us to contrast with the French prevalence in the American art scene. France was certainly a reference, but the Italians also played a central role in public art in American countries.

In Brazil, an emblematic example is the *Monumento à Independência do Brasil* [Monument to Brazil's Independence], an artwork erected during the centenary of Brazil's independence, in 1922. After an international competition, the project by Ettore Ximenes and Manfredo Manfredi was chosen to be executed. There were artists from different parts of the world in

the competition, but Italians were the majority. It is interesting to note that Ximenes chose the painting "*Independência ou morte!*" by Pedro Américo to use as a reference for the high relief present in the monument and this was a prominent element in his project.

Ettore Ximenes was also an artist in transit between Italy and Brazil. In addition to the *Monumento à Independência*, he executed other public monuments in Brazil. He was not an exception; on the contrary, many other Italian sculptors obtained commissions for public sculptures, mainly in the city of São Paulo. Therefore, there were many travels by artists and cultural exchanges between Brazil and Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As we have seen, it was not a one-way street, but a rich and complex network of exchanges, which Pedro Américo, with "*Independência ou morte!*", knew how to take advantage of very well.

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#### **Endnotes**

1. Michelli Cristine Scapol Monteiro is a postdoctoral researcher at Museu Paulista USP with a Research Internship in Italy at the Università degli Studi Roma Tre (2019-2020), financed by FAPESP (2018/17682-0; 2019/15797-8).

# Concrete Poetry: Exchanges between Brazil and Italy 1950-1980

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to analyze the dense network of relationships between artists of Brazilian and Italian Concrete Poetry in the period of greatest expansion of the movement, between the early 1950s and the end of the 1970s. The idea is to critically evaluate the artistic and theoretical repercussions of the early Brazilian experience on subsequent experiments carried out in Italy.

In 1953, Carlo Belloli — leading exponent of the Second Futurism — visited São Paulo for the first time with the delegation of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of which he was general secretary. Two years before Belloli's visit to São Paulo, some of his experiments had been exhibited at the Circulo Cultural Paulista (1951), and his work had become known in Brazilian avant-garde circles. In 1952, the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari, founded the group and journal Noigandres. Four years later, the group organized the National Exposition of Concrete Art of São Paulo, a wide-ranging show that made the Brazilian movement known in the international art scene. Both experiences had a strong and lasting resonance in Italy.

Through the study of archival materials, this paper analyzes the circulation and fortune of Brazilian Concrete Poetry in the Italian verbal-visual landscape, shedding light on a significant episode of the artistic exchange between Brazil and Italy.

## **KEYWORDS**

Brazilian Concrete Poetry; Visual Poetry; Noigandres Group; Post-War Italian Art; Neo-avant-garde.

Brazil and Italy, together with Switzerland and the German-speaking countries, are among the major centres of development and diffusion of Concrete Poetry, a transnational movement that focused, starting in the post-war period, on the intersection between literature and the visual arts, in the wake of Mallarmé's Symbolist experiments, the early Futurist and Dadaist avant-garde, and the poetry of Apollinaire, Pound and Joyce.



**Fig. 1.** Cover of the first issue of *Modulo. Rivista di cultura contemporanea*, 1966

A definition that is still valid today for this specific poetic line of research in the verb-visual area, close to but also different from Visual Poetry and Technological Poetry, is the one given by the physicist and philosopher Max Bense in the 1966 issue of the journal “Modulo”, directed by Arrigo Lora-Totino (also the ideator of the journal “Antipiugiù”, which came out from 1961 to 1966), whose editorial committee included, in addition to Bense, some of the most important art critics such as Umbro Apollonio, Gillo Dorfles and a young Germano Celant. The special issue was the first anthology of Concrete Poetry of international scope to be published in Italy, and was conceived as a response to the anthology on Visual Poetry edited in 1965 by the co-founder of Gruppo 70, Lamberto Pignotti, who had excluded authors ascribable to the Concrete trend in order to underline the distance between the two movements. Bense writes: “We speak of Concrete texts (or of Concrete Poetry) when linguistic elements are used in their triadic verbal, visual and vocal function at the same time and in a semantic as well as in an aesthetic way, when the text (in part or in full) identifies its linguistic world with its linguistic exterior world, or, one might say, when what the words express in reference to the content (with their morphemes or connections) is reflected in the visual adaptation and vocal reproduction.”<sup>1</sup>

In the pages of “Modulo” – as in many of Arrigo Lora-Totino’s later editorial and exhibition projects – ample space is given to the research developed in Brazil by the poets who gathered in 1952 (so at a very early date) around the journal “Noigandres” and the groups Invenção and Praxis, founded in São Paulo in 1960 and 1961 respectively, which Lora-Totino considered essential references for his work and more generally for the Italian and international Concrete Poetry scene. In the booklet, together with works by Ronaldo Azeredo, Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, Mario Chamie, José Lino Grünwald, José Paulo Paes, Luiz Angelo Pinto, Décio Pignatari and Pedro Xisto, the first Italian translation of the *Plano-piloto para poesia concreta* was published<sup>2</sup>, the manifesto of Brazilian concrete poetry by the de Campos brothers and Décio Pignatari that had appeared almost ten years earlier, in 1958, in the fourth issue of “Noigandres”. In “Modulo”, Lora-Totino also includes the artist and critic Carlo Belloli among the pioneers of

Concrete Poetry, an exponent of the second futurism, whose *Teste poème poème texte* (Gomringer Press 1961) is described as the “first experiment in Concrete Poetry carried out by an Italian”<sup>2</sup>. On this occasion, however, Lora-Totino did not mention either Belloli’s previous experiences in the field of visual poetry, which began in 1944 with the panels *Tipogrammi per Marinetti* and *Parole per la guerra*, or his repeated contacts with Brazil and the possible influence of his work on the Noigandres Group.<sup>4</sup> It is only since the 1990s that historiography has begun to examine this latter issue, thanks above all to the literary studies of Paola Rolli and Maria Gloria Vinci<sup>5</sup>. The lack of first-hand sources, however, still leaves some questions open: Belloli remains a “mysterious” figure<sup>6</sup>, due to the lack of studies and the difficulty in finding documents relating to his verbal-visual beginnings, starting with the single issue of the journal “Futuristi in armi” (where the panels cited above were published), not present in the Italian catalogue of periodicals, nor in the major collections of Italian Futurism, and whose content is only known thanks to later publications. The reopening of the Belloli collection at the Istituto Internazionale di Studi sul Futurismo in Milan (the International Institute for Futurism Studies), which is currently closed to the public, could perhaps help shed new light on his role and on his relations with the Noigandres Group. However, even the few examples I have just mentioned allow to say that the exchanges between Brazilian and Italian Concrete Poetry were intense from the earliest stages: this text will therefore reflect on the dense network of relations established between the two countries during the movement’s greatest expansion, between the early 1950s and the end of the 1970s. I will start by analysing Belloli’s experience in Brazil, and then trace an initial map of the circulation of Brazilian Concrete Poetry in Italy, in order to focus on the fortune and effects of this current in the Italian artistic scene of the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Carlo Belloli in Brazil**

In the anthology *Concrete Poetry: A World View* edited by Mary Ellen Solt in 1968, the author acknowledges Belloli’s pioneering role in the field of Concrete Poetry. In fact, she stresses how Belloli’s reflections, in the

introduction to TESTI-POEMI MURALI published in 1944 (edizioni “Erre”, Milan) with an introduction by Marinetti, anticipated the first theories on Concrete Poetry that were to appear in the following decade<sup>7</sup>. Solt, however, speaks of Belloli as an isolated figure and believes that at the beginning of the 1950s neither the Swiss Eugen Gomringer, a leading figure and theorist of concrete poetry, author of the successful collection *Konstellationen, Constellations, Constelaciones* (1953) nor the members of the Noigandres Group were aware of his work. Lora-Totino had also expressed a similar view two years earlier: in his opinion, the Brazilian group had in fact operated independently, “without entering into contact – at the beginning – with analogous European experiences.”<sup>8</sup> In *Piano pilota*, the de Campos brothers and Pignatari had identified a rich genealogy of predecessors that included, for poetry, Mallarmé, Pound, Joyce, Cummings, Futurism and Dadaism, Apollinaire and the Brazilians Oswald de Andrade and Joao Cabral de Melo Neto; for music, Webern, Boulez, Stockhausen; and for the visual arts, Mondrian, Max Bill and Albers. However, the fact that Belloli is not mentioned in the manifesto is not enough to rule him out as a possible source of the Brazilian group. In more recent times, Solt’s position has been questioned by critics who, despite the lack of documents attesting to direct contact between the Brazilian authors and Belloli in the early phases of Concrete Poetry, have nevertheless put forward the hypothesis of a link between the two events. According to the reconstruction proposed by Maria Gloria Vinci, in the mid-1940s Belloli met the future founder of São Paulo Concretism, Waldemar Cordeiro, who was a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome. In 1946 Cordeiro moved to São Paulo, where he met the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari and where he founded the avant-garde group “Ruptura” in 1952.

In Rome, in the mid-1940s, Belloli was also in contact with Emilio Villa, whose collaboration with Pietro Maria Bardi for the Museo di Arte di San Paolo (MASP) is well known, as is his acquaintance with the Noigandres Group. In the same period in which Villa was in Brazil, Belloli exhibited his works in São Paulo for the first time: according to Vinci, in 1951 some pieces from the series *Corpi di poesia* (still to be identified) were exhibited at the

Círculo Cultural Paulista<sup>9</sup>. The exhibition would therefore precede the foundation of the journal “Noigandres” by one year and Belloli’s arrival in Brazil by two. In fact, the artist arrived in São Paulo for the first time in 1953 on the occasion of the fourth centenary of the city’s foundation, together with a delegation from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of which he was secretary general. In São Paulo, at the Club Ipitiranga, Belloli presented a selection of verbo-visual works, dated between 1943 and 1951, belonging to the series *Parole per la guerra*, *Testi-poemi murali*, *Tavole visuali*, *Corpi di poesia*, accompanied by a recital of *Testi-poemi* at the Italian-Brazilian Cultural Institute.



**Fig. 2.** *Poesia visuale. Omaggio a Carlo Belloli*, exhibition catalogue and brochure, Studio Santandrea, Milan 1977.

Many years later, in 1977, the writer Lúcia Machado de Almeida, on the occasion of the exhibition *Omaggio a Carlo Belloli*, held at the Studio Santandrea in Milan, directed by Gianfranco Bellora, recalled the strong impact the 1953 exhibition had on the Brazilian avant-garde circles: “Carlo Belloli’s bodies of poetry, made of Plexiglas and transparent plastic materials, produced in numbered series by an American company, were sold at very high prices for the time by the book dealer and gallery owner Francisco Pignatari, destined for the libraries and salons of Paulist high society, for the fazenderos of southern Minas, but also for the many intellectuals who, like me, saved their money to buy them (...) Belloli’s poetry constituted an absolutely new and revolutionary phenomenon in the Brazil of those years.”<sup>10</sup>

Belloli’s relations with Brazil from 1957 onwards were further strengthened by his marriage to the sculptress Mary Vieira, whom he met at the beginning of the decade and who won the prize for Sculpture at the second edition of the São Paulo Biennale in 1953. Lacking further documents, as Matteo D’Ambrosi argues, it is difficult to ascertain a direct influence of Belloli on the developments of the Noigandres Group<sup>11</sup>; however, in my opinion the hypothesis is not only plausible, but also probable, given the close formal affinity between his panels and those of the Brazilian Concretists. In this regard, it is useful to compare two famous works: Belloli’s *Guerra* (1944) and Décio Pignatari’s *Terra* (1956). In both cases, these are works in which the transparency of the poetic text is challenged, the undermining of the referential function of graphic signs goes hand in hand with the use of precise structural solutions. The graphic space is understood as a structural element of the poetic composition and the alphabetical signs are arranged according to precise modules and visual patterns. A very limited number of words are repeated on the page, conceived as a spatial field, following a permutative logic. “Alphabetical letters, words, phrases and fragments of phrases are used in their printed form and for their visual and physical characteristics, aiming to make the poem a real (concrete) object.”<sup>12</sup> For Brazilians, concrete poetry is in fact the antithesis of individual

communication, it works against a poetry of subjective and hedonistic expression, the same way Belloli claims that “words are no longer means to communicate analogical images or psychic hiatuses, they become form-content.”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Noigandres Group in Italy**

In establishing a link between Belloli and the exponents of Noigandres in the 1950s, as we have seen, we are moving in the field of hypotheses and stylistic comparisons. On the other hand, numerous traces document the circulation of the works of Concrete Poetry in Italy starting from the following decade. The theoretical and artistic activity of the members of Noigandres had a significant and long-lasting resonance in Italy, culminating in 1991 with the exhibition *Poesia visiva in Brasile*,<sup>14</sup> curated by Lenora de Barros and Paola Mattoli at the Archivio di Nuova Scrittura in Milan, founded in 1988 by Ugo Carrega and the collector Paolo Della Grazia (now in part kept at the MART in Rovereto, in part at the Museion in Bolzano)<sup>15</sup>.

Thanks to artists such as Carrega himself, Adriano Spatola, Mirella Bentivoglio, Stelio Maria Martini, as well as the already mentioned Arrigo Lora-Totino, Brazilian Concrete Poetry circulated widely in anthologies, official journals, *esoeditoria* publications and exhibitions of Visual and Concrete Poetry throughout Italy. An unpublished letter written by Haroldo de Campos in response to Stelio Maria Martini, dated 2 December 1965, documents the first relations between the Noigandres Group and the Italian artists connected to “Linea Sud”, an avant-garde journal directed by Luca (Luigi Castellano), which appeared in Naples in 1963 taking over from the previous “Documento Sud” (1959-1961). In the letter de Campos accepts the invitation to collaborate with “Linea Sud”, of which he had already received a copy in Rome from Mario Diacono, at that time very close both to Martini – the two had been co-directors of the journal “Quaderno” (January-May 1962) – and to Villa, with whom he had founded “Ex” (1963-1968). De Campos writes:

I had our anthology *Noigandres / Dal verso alla poesia concreta* sent to you a week ago (by sea; unfortunately the postal air service is extremely expensive here...), which includes our *piano-pilota per la poesia concreta* (pilot plan for concrete poetry). Décio Pignatari will soon send you issue number 4 of our journal 'Invenzione'. You will be able to take what you want in the anthology and/or in the journal: most of the texts are unpublished in Italy. This is in answer to your invitation to collaborate with 'Linea Sud'. I believe that you may be interested in our *Teoria della Poesia Concreta (1950/1960. Testi critici e manifesti)*, which appeared this year.<sup>16</sup>



**Fig. 3.** *Poesia visiva in Brasile*, exhibition catalogue, Archivio di Nuova Scrittura, Milan 1991.

Although the contacts between the Brazilian group and “Linea Sud” continued over time – as documented by another unpublished letter in the

Mart archives, sent by Pignatari to Martini, dated 24 January 1967<sup>2</sup> – the journal ceased publication in April 1967 without having hosted either the works or the posters of the “Noigandres”.



**Fig. 4.** *Poesia Concreta. Indirizzi concreti, visuali, fonetici*, exhibition catalogue, The Venice Biennale 1969

The exchange with the already mentioned Lora-Totino was more productive: one year after the release of the Concrete Poetry anthology in “Modulo” (where the *Piano pilota* had appeared) and after the publication of an article in “Graphicus” (December 1966),<sup>18</sup> accompanied by the image *Luxo-Lixo* by Augusto de Campos, Lora-Totino introduced the “International Exhibition of Concrete Poetry and Electronic Music” at the Salone Audizioni of the Teatro Donizetti in Bergamo<sup>19</sup>, together with Enore Zaffiri (a musician with whom he had founded The Aesthetic Information Studio in Turin), Belloli, Pietro Grossi and Lara Vinca-Masini. The exhibition, organised by Studio 2B, inaugurated in April of that year by two active supporters of Programmed and Kinetic Art, Lorenzo Boggi and Elio Cenci, included a great number of Brazilian artists: in the section dedicated to Concrete Poetry, in addition to the de Campos brothers and Pignatari, there were also José Lino Grünewald, Luiz Angelo Pinto, Pedro Xisto, Ronaldo Azeredo and Edgard Braga. The same group, with the exception of Pinto and Xisto, was presented in September 1969 by Lora-Totino in the exhibition *Poesia Concreta. Indirizzi concreti, visuali, fonetici*,<sup>20</sup> co-curated with Dietrich Mahlow at Ca’ Giustinian/Sala delle Colonne as part of the Venice Biennale; an exhibition that, due to the prestige of its venue and its international scope, can be considered the most significant on Concrete Poetry held in Italy during the decade.

The similarities between Lora-Totino’s works and those of the Brazilian Concrete Poets are many: in the modular structure of the “Verbotecture” – a neologism coined by the artist in 1973 – it is possible to trace the influence of the constructivist tendency present in Brazilian Concrete Poetry. The use of coloured letters in his *Cromofonemi* also follows in the footsteps of Augusto de Campos with his *Poetamenos (Poesie in tono minore, 1953)*, which, however, in Lora-Totino’s work, achieves more radical optical-perceptual results, bordering on Optical and Kinetic Art. From a stylistic point of view the connection with Adriana Spatola is not as close, although the latter was, together with Lora-Totino, among the most active promoters of exchanges with Brazilian poets: in the spring-summer of 1967, the first issue of “Malebolge” – the journal founded in 1964 together with Corrado Costa and Giorgio Celli, published by Scheiwiller with a graphic

design by Giovanni Anceschi – hosted the text *Poesia concreta brasiliana* by Haroldo de Campos, which opened with the quotation from Dante “esto visibile parlare, novello a noi perché qui non si trova” (from the 10th Canto of the Purgatory), and continued with a detailed explanation of the origins and the aims of the movement<sup>21</sup>.



**Fig. 5.** Augusto de Campos, *Profilograma 1, Pound/Maiakovski*, 1966, work belonged to Mirella Bentivoglio, courtesy Archivio Lettera\_E.

In the same period, the Brazilian group was invited to the exhibition *Segni nello spazio*,<sup>22</sup> co-curated by Spatola, at the Castello di San Giusto in Trieste (8/31 July 1967), where almost everyone of the Brazilian group was once again present (Braga; the de Campos brothers; Grünewald; Pignatari; Pinto; Xisto). On this occasion, Augusto de Campos and Pignatari exhibited, respectively, the aforementioned *Lixo-Luxo* (1966, *Spazzatura-lusso*) and *Cristo é a solução* (Christ is the Solution), both openly political and anti-capitalist, where the iconic quality of the image, of Pop derivation, has a greater weight than in the past, and the boundaries with non-concrete visual poetry become more blurred. In my opinion, these are the experiences that an Italian artist such as Mirella Bentivoglio looked at most closely. Her ties with Brazil were strong starting from the early 1970s, when she exhibited in a solo room at the 12th São Paulo Biennial in 1973.

The same edition of the exhibition featured the founder of the “Poema processo” group Neide Dias de Sá, who a few years later would be invited by Bentivoglio to the exhibition “Materializzazione del linguaggio” (Materialization of Language) at the 1978 Venice Biennale. The exhibition brought together for the first time in the Biennale’s spaces more than eighty women artists, including Anesia Pacheco E Chavez, then active in Brazil. Some of the works that Bentivoglio exhibited at the 12th São Paulo Biennial, including *Successo*, dated 1968, or works such as *La firma* (1973), reveal the influence of the works by de Campos and Pignatari we have just mentioned. But it is perhaps with the *Cuore della consumatrice ubbidiente* that the link with Pignatari’s earlier *Beba Coca-Cola* becomes more evident and highlights a similar ideological stance towards American consumerism. Bentivoglio acknowledged this influence on more than one occasion; in a self-presentation in 1996 she wrote: “I was among the followers of Concrete Poetry, a movement born in Brazil, which promoted a poetic analysis of language not only on the basis of the sound of the word but also on the basis of its form.”<sup>23</sup> Even more explicit is her introduction to the exhibition *Poesia concreta. Bentivoglio Lora-Totino Sandri Spatola*, held in 1977 at the Santandrea Studio in Milan, which in my opinion clearly expresses the importance of the Brazilian experience for Italian Concrete poets: “The

Rubicon of institutional literariness was crossed with the first manifesto of the founders of Concretism; or – to use a specific expression of theirs – with their pilot plan. They were Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, Décio Pignatari and the group gravitating around the Brazilian journal ‘Noigandres’. In São Paulo, more than two decades ago: the two decades of the new poetry.”<sup>24</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. Max Bense, "Stili sperimentali", *Modulo, rivista di cultura contemporanea*, no. 1 (1966): 8.
2. Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos, and Décio Pignatari, "Piano Pilota per la poesia concreta di A. de Campos, D. Pignatari, H. de Campos", *Modulo, rivista di cultura contemporanea*, no. 1 (1966): 103-104.
3. Arrigo Lora-Totino, "Ragioni di una scelta per un'antologia della poesia concreta", *Modulo, rivista di cultura contemporanea*, no. 1 (1966): 23.
4. Only many years later Arrigo Lora-Totino makes a connection between Belloli's experience and that of the Noigandres Group. He reports the passage in the essay *Poesia concreta*, in Claudio Parmiggiani, *Alfabeto in sogno: dal carne figurato alla poesia concreta* (Milan: Mazzotta, 2002), 406.
5. Gloria Maria Vinci, "Carlo Belloli in Brasile: un geniale precursore della poesia concreta", *Mutatis Mutandis*, no.1 (2016): 53-67; Paola Rolli, "Anglo-American concrete and visual poetry", (Master diss., I.U.L.M., Milan, 1994).
6. Teresa Spignoli, *La parola si fa spazio. Poesia visiva e poesia concreta* (Bologna: Patron Editore, 2020), 67.
7. Mary Ellen Solt, *Concrete Poetry: A world view*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 5.
8. Arrigo Lora-Totino, "Ragioni di una scelta", 22.

9. Maria Gloria Vinci, "Carlo Belloli in Brasile", 53-67.
10. Lúcia Machado de Almeida, "Attualità di Carlo Belloli precursore della poesia visuale e concreta," in *Poesia visuale. Omaggio a Carlo Belloli* (Milan: Studio Santandrea, 1977), 2.
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12. Sauro Fabi, *L'avanguardia per tutti: concretismo e poesia visiva tra Russia Europa e Brasile* (Macerata: EUM – Edizioni Università Macerata, 2008), 23.
13. Carlo Belloli, "Poesia audiovisuale," in *Poesia visiva. Storia e teoria*, ed. Pino Masnata (Rome: Bulzoni, 1984), 204.
14. "Poesia Concreta in Brasile" exhibition (21<sup>st</sup> March to 21<sup>st</sup> June, 1991) Archivio di Nuova Scrittura, Milan, edited by Leonora de Barros and Paula Mattioli. On the occasion of the exhibition Augusto de Campos gave the "Non-conferenza" (Unconference) on Brazilian concrete poetry and its relationship with Italy The reading was repeated in Rome, at Palazzo Doria Pamphili, on the 25<sup>th</sup> November of the same year. It was introduced by Elio Pagliarani on the occasion of the second stage of the exhibition. The audio is a digitization of the audiocassette (Fuji ER Type I 60' model) containing the recording of the "Non-conferenza" preserved in the Archivio di Nuova Scrittura collection at the Archivio del '900 of the Mart in Rovereto, <https://archive.org/details/augusto-de-campos-non-conferenza-milano-archivio-di-nuova-scrittura-26-marzo-1991-audio> [accessed September 18th 2021].
15. On the history of the Archivio di Nuova Scrittura see: Daniela Ferrari, *Archivio di nuova scrittura Paolo Della Grazia: storia di una collezione / Geschichte einer Sammlung* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2012).
16. Unpublished letter sent by Haroldo de Campos to Stelio Maria Martini, dated 2 December 1965, Fondo Stelio Maria Martini, Archivio del '900, MART. The letter is written in Italian: "Le ho fatto spedire ormai da una settimana (per via marittima; purtroppo il servizio aereo postale è eccessivamente caro da noi...) la nostra antologia *Noigandres / Dal verso alla poesia concreta*, con il nostro *piano-pilota per la poesia concreta*, a corredo. Décio Pignatari le manderà, fra poco, il numero 4 della nostra rivista *Invenzione*. Lei potrà prendere ciò che voglia (sic) nell'antologia ed/o nella rivista: ci sono dei testi nella maggioranza inediti in Italia. Questo per ciò che riguarda il suo invito a collaborare con Linea-Sud. Credo che la (sic) potrà forse interessare la nostra *Teoria della Poesia Concreta (1950/1960. Testi critici e manifesti)*, apparsa appunto quest'anno".
17. Unpublished letter sent by Décio Pignatari to Stelio Maria Martini, dated 24 January 1967, Fondo Stelio Maria Martini, Archivio del '900, MART.
18. Arrigo Lora-Totino, "Poesia Concreta," *Graphicus* (December 1966): 14-15.
19. *Mostra internazionale di poesia concreta e musica elettronica* (Bergamo: Studio 2B, April 1967).
20. *Poesia concreta. Indirizzi concreti, visuali e fonetici*, exhibition catalog edited by Dietrich Mahlow and Arrigo Lora-Totino, The Venice Biennale, 25 September-10 October 1969.
21. Haroldo de Campos, "Poesia concreta brasiliana (Gruppo Noigandres)", in *Malebolge*, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 1967): 80-82.
22. *Segni nello spazio*, exhibition catalog edited by Franco Verdi, Castello di San Giusto, Trieste, 8-31 July 1967. Exhibition committee: Marcello Mascherini, Flavia Paulon, Adriano Spatola, Franco Verdi.
23. Mirella Bentivoglio, "Percorso," in *Mirella Bentivoglio: dalla parola al simbolo* (Rome: Edizioni De Luca, 1996), 49.
24. Mirella Bentivoglio, in *Poesia concreta. Bentivoglio Lora-Totino Sandri Spatola* (Milan: Santandrea Studio, Milan, 1977).

# Lionello Venturi between Italy and Brazil: from the CIHA Congress in Venice (1955) to the Sixth São Paulo Biennial (1961)

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## **ABSTRACT**

Lionello Venturi (1885-1961) returned to Italy from exile in 1945, begun in 1931 following the refusal to take an oath of loyalty to fascism. He resumed teaching at the La Sapienza University of Rome until 1955. In that year, as President of the Italian CIHA, he promoted the International Congress of Venice with the title "Venice and Europe". The Congress saw the participation of 115 scholars from all over the world, who placed the complexity of Venice's role in the arts and cultural relations with the European continent and beyond. In 1961, the year of Venturi's death, he was a member of the Organizing Committee of the VIth Biennial of São Paulo (september 1961).

This paper aims to investigate the figure and role of the great Italian art historian on the two international occasions mentioned. In particular, the rich documentation on the 1955 Congress will be taken into account: letters, organizational and scientific documentation, public and programmatic speeches, public and critical reactions to the event in the general framework of the role of art history in the second post-war period in Italy and in the rest of the world. The documentation regarding the São Paulo Biennale, although incomplete, due to the sudden death of Venturi on August 15th '61, is one of his last public documents to join an international project.

## **KEYWORDS**

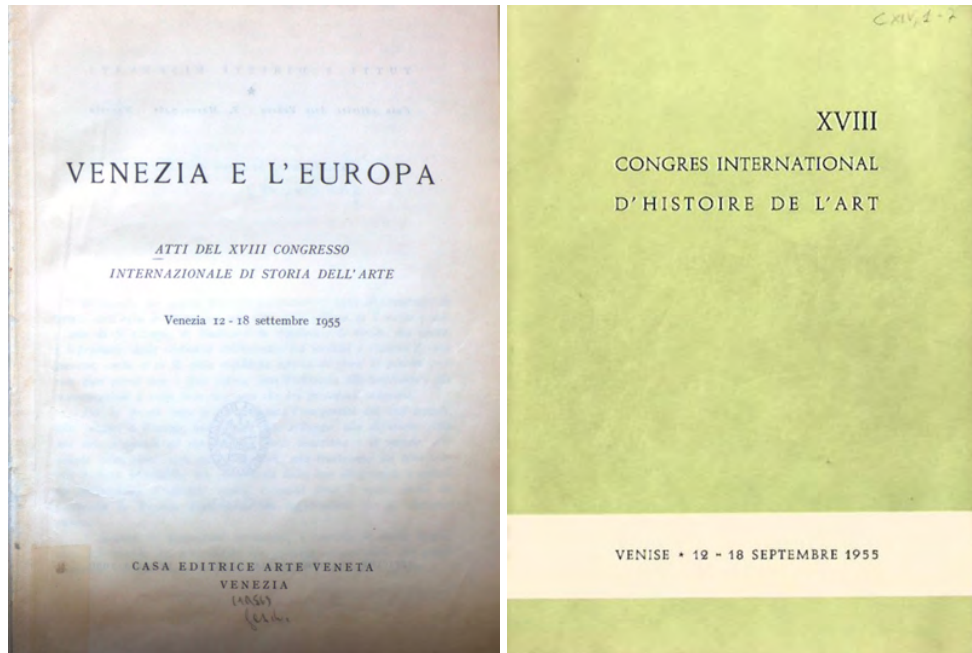
Lionello Venturi; CIHA; CIHA Venice Congress 1955; São Paulo Biennial 1961

The paper is a reconnaissance based on unpublished materials contained in three of the 428 boxes of the Lionello Venturi Archive kept at the La Sapienza University of Rome I have been able to consult and reproduce. These documents unknown even to those who have dealt with the history of the Italian and international C.I.H.A. in the past. I am thinking of the important works by Thierry Dufrêne, Jane Anderson, Claudia Cieri and Giovanna Perini Folesani, Jennifer Coke and recently Virve Sarapik<sup>2</sup>. The new documents allow for a greater completeness of information and knowledge of the international organisation and its role in post-war Italy.

Lionello Venturi (1885-1961) returned to Italy in 1945 from exile, which had begun in 1931 following his refusal to join the fascist party. After an absence of 14 years, he began teaching at La Sapienza University in Rome until 1955. In that year, as President of the Italian C.I.H.A., he directed the 18th International Congress of Art History held between the Cini Foundation in Venice, Vicenza and Grado. It was a congress attended by 115 scholars from all over the world, who focused their critical attention - for the first time - on the complexity of Venice's role in the arts and in political and cultural relations with the European continent and beyond. The volume of the proceedings was published the following year.

The second aspect I'll consider for my paper in the biography of the last seven years of Venturi's life, concerns the year 1961, when the Italian scholar was invited by the Brazilian art critic Mário Pedrosa, director of the Museu d'arte Moderna in São Paulo, and by the committee of the Sixth São Paulo Biennial, supported by the Italian-born industrialist and patron Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, to take part in the International Jury. The SPB, the second oldest Biennial after Venice, which was due to open on 4 September and close in December of that year.

The details of the trip, from Rome to São Paolo, were prepared in detail - as was Venturi's planned stay of over a month for visits and lectures in the country. Venturi - who had turned 76 on 25 April (the day that became the Italian national holiday for liberation from Nazi-fascism) - was unfortunately unable to undertake the trip because he suffered a fatal heart attack on 14 August of that year.



**Figs. 1 and 2.** Program Cover of C.I.H.A. Venice Congress 1955 (Archivio di Lionello Venturi, Rome; Title page of the proceedings of Venice Congress 1955, (Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome)

My intention is to propose - in the light of a selection of documents - some characteristic aspects of the figure and role of this great Italian art historian whose international outlook was rooted in his decision to leave Italy during the twenty-year Fascist Regime.

I have considered the rich documentation on the C.I.H.A. Congress of 1955, consisting of about a hundred letters with international and national correspondents, scientific, administrative and accounting texts; manuscripts and typescripts of public and programmatic speeches, also other material from previous C.I.H.A. congresses in Amsterdam; last but not least the numerous critical and journalistic reactions to the event. These materials are a cross-section of the role of art history after the Second World War in Italy and the rest of the world.

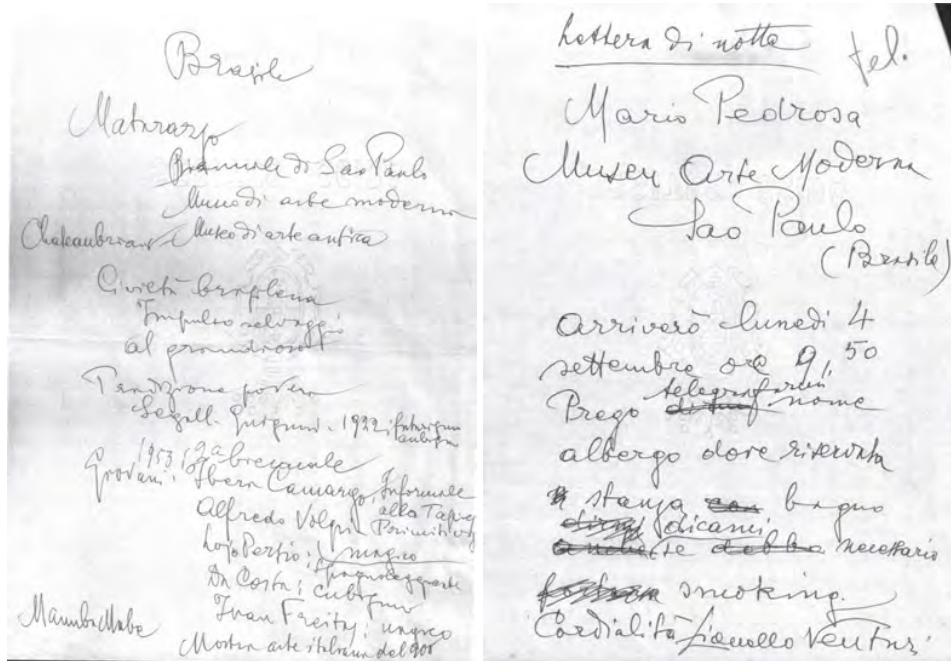
The documentation regarding the São Paulo Biennial, although incomplete due to Venturi's sudden death, is to be considered the testimony

of the master's last public commitment to an international project. This Internationality and wide openness to the world of art and culture that Venturi developed with great scientific breadth and weaving of human relationships characterized the thirty years that dramatically began with his self-imposed exile.

The documentation is composed, also in this case, of numerous letters of invitation and description of the Sixth Biennial project by Pedrosa and Matarazzo; a series of very detailed typewritten "bulletins" regarding the structure of the event; handwritten notes by Venturi on the artists present and to be considered; a series of cables on the details of the trip, dated between March and June 1961.

I will return, in the conclusion to Venturi's non-participation in the Jury of the Biennale and his commemoration held by the Brazilian AICA in December.

Venturi's existential condition - from 1932 onwards - is that of a "Migrant" for reasons of political necessity. The self-exile he chose was the result of painful decisions induced by an unshakable coherence and ethical-political integrity. Lionello Venturi took a stand in order to affirm his freedom of thought and action, but also of method and interests. In fact, with his personal story Venturi traces the dynamic geography of 20th century art history, which moved from Italy to Paris, then to the United States (Baltimore and New York), to extend after the second World War to South America and India. This geography of travel and permanence is also a reflection of Venturi's scientific interests, spread over a chronological span of the discipline that saw no space-time boundaries: from the Italian Primitive painters to Caravaggio, Impressionists and Cézanne, and militant art criticism. The making of art history was never detached from the awareness of the need to create a historiography of criticism by dynamic definition of the discipline, which his father Adolfo had helped to found.



**Figs. 3 and 4.** Lionello Venturi's notes for the São Paulo Biennial, CCLV, 22-23, (Archivio di Lionello Venturi, Rome)

Lionello Venturi's intellectual biography cannot be separated from his personal and political events.<sup>3</sup>

The publication of *Il gusto dei primitivi* (The Taste of the Primitives) in 1926, and his adhesion to the ideas of Benedetto Croce, marked his detachment from official culture. As Giulio Carlo Argan points out in the 1972 preface to that fundamental book, Venturi took a non-conformist stance, refusing to follow the "Novecentista" current strongly promoted by Fascism.

Against this current, which predominated in the Italian figurative arts, between the wars and was symptomatic of Fascism's cultural closure, Lionello contrasted a strongly open and interdisciplinary approach, rejecting an autarchic and provincial vision of culture, rejecting the primacy assigned by Fascism to figurative painting and expressing his support for the so-called "group of six", the painters from Turin (including Carlo Levi, who was also confined by Fascism in southern Italy), in clear contrast to the neo-Futurists.

At a time when the Italian Academia was moving towards adherence to the regime, Venturi distanced himself from the public events identifiable with Fascism, even receiving a reprimand from the Minister of National Education Giuseppe Bottai and being suffering protests at the University of Turin.

In November 1931, university and college teachers were obliged by law to take an oath of allegiance to Fascism.

Of over 1251 Italian university professors, only 15 refused to take the oath, thus losing their professorships. In addition to Lionello Venturi, they included some of the most prestigious names in Italian scientific and academic culture: mathematician Vito Volterra, orientalist Giorgio Levi Della Vida, jurists Fabio Luzzatto, Francesco Ruffini and his son Edoardo, historian Gaetano De Sanctis, historian of Christianity Ernesto Buonaiuti, philosopher Piero Martinetti, chemist Giorgio Errera, surgeon Bartolo Nigrisoli and anthropologist Mario Carrara. Other intellectuals left Italy, such as the economist Piero Sraffa, who was very close to Antonio Gramsci, or Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, who was in the United States at the time.

The decision to reject the oath meant the loss of his chair, his pension and an endless series of persecutions and prohibitions. In a famous letter to the Rector of Turin University, rejecting the invitation to take the oath, Venturi wrote:

"it is not possible for me to commit myself to 'forming citizens devoted to the Fascist regime', because the ideal premises of my discipline do not allow me to promote any political regime in school".

After taking the oath without the loyalty clause to Fascism of 1926, Venturi refused to sign the ideological adhesion of November 1931 which foresaw submission to the regime and therefore the full identification, unacceptable to Venturi, between Fascism and the State. The scholar was released from service in February 1932, when he was already abroad. After refusing to take the oath of office and a brief stay in the United States to give a series of lectures at Harvard on the history of criticism, in 1932 Venturi settled in Paris

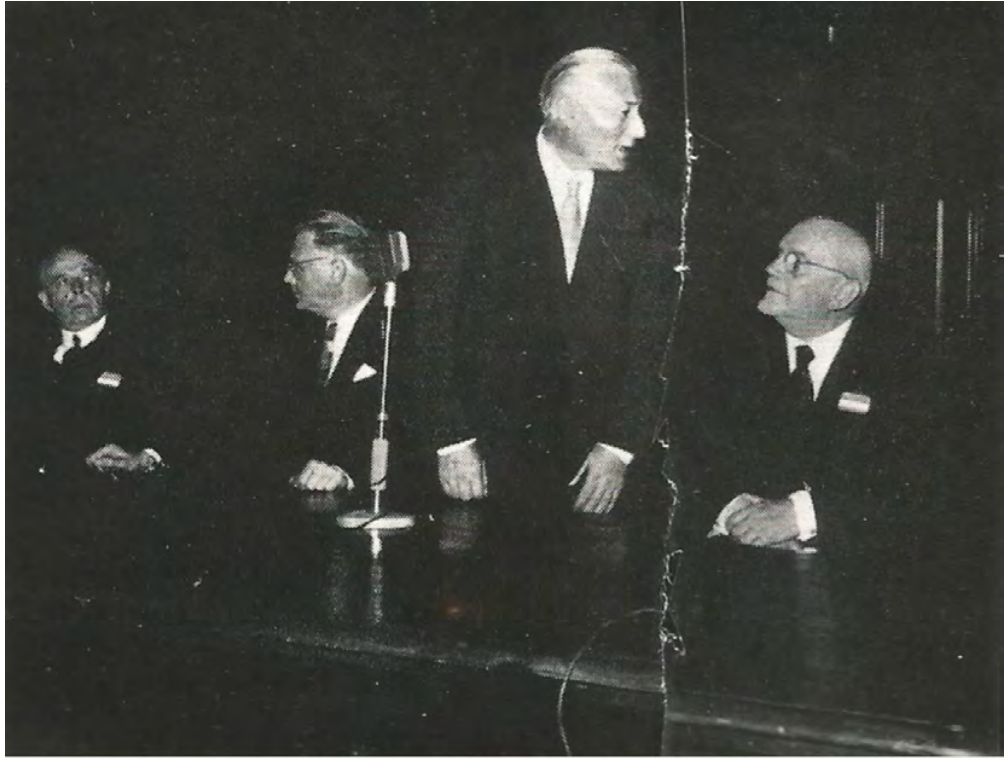
where he was joined by his family and closely watched by the local Italian consulate, which informed the regime's repressive apparatus of his acquaintances in Giustizia e Libertà circles. From the second half of the 1930s, the exile, which had been voluntary in the first phase, became de facto forced: Lionello's and his son Franco's anti-fascist activities were known to the police. An arrest order was issued against him, his mug shot was circulated and the fascist press wrote articles against him.

Venturi who was far from the communist left in terms of culture and education, struggled to find his feet even in the narrow liberal-democratic circles of exile, which merely proclaimed an anti-Fascism far removed from any concrete action and devoid of practical effect. With the arrival in France of the antifascist Rosselli brothers the concentration is hegemonized in the first half of the thirties by the movement of "Justice and Freedom".

Venturi's indignation at what was happening in Italy, and his consequent political commitment to denounce the crimes of the dictatorship, grew progressively during his exile. This was the context in which he promoted the Italian section of the International League Against Anti-Semitism (Lica) which, founded in 1927 as the Ligue contre le Pogroms, had the task of combating anti-Semitism. His indignation at the anti-Semitic laws convinced Venturi of the need to take a clear position on the regime's racial policy as well. On 18 March 1939 Venturi left Paris for New York at the outbreak of the conflict, and his appointment as professor at the University of Baltimore led him to remain in America. In America, his academic and research activities continued in prestigious universities and cultural institutes in California, Mexico City and New York, and he joined the Mazzini Society. In the USA Venturi was also the protagonist of another political initiative of international scope, destined, however, to have no particular success: the foundation of the Latin Union with the goal of bringing together Italian, French and Spanish exiles. In March 1944, together with illustrious Italian exiles including Arturo Toscanini, and at Salvemini's side, he was one of the six signatories of the appeal for the restoration of democratic freedoms in Italy published with great prominence in the magazine 'Life'.

After the liberation of Rome, in 1944 the Bonomi government

reinstated the university professors dismissed in 1931 and Venturi decided to return to Italy, asking to be assigned to the university of Rome where his father Adolfo had taught. In February 1945 he was recalled to university teaching. In Rome he was full professor in Medieval and Modern Art History for a decade. Immediately after the war, his vocation for travelling and studying abroad took him with renewed interest to the Middle East, Greece and Turkey, and again on numerous trips to South America, Brazil and Argentina, as far as India. In this climate, encouraged by Argan (the author of the Italian C.I.H.A. Statute), Venturi matured and led him to chair and organize the 18th C.I.H.A. Congress in 1955, after the one held in Amsterdam in 1952. So Venice in relation to Europe: origins, development and expansion of Venetian art. For example André Grabar discussed the relations between Venice and Byzantium, the early Renaissance to 18th century art with interventions on Vedutist painting and in general the relations of Venice with continental art observed by Rodolfo Pallucchini. Scholars from 26 countries were invited to discuss the subject, with a breakdown by nationalities, including: 150 Italians, 130 French, 60 Germans, 50 Belgians, 50 Norwegians, 40 Swedes, 35 Dutch, 35 Americans and 30 Swiss, the socialist countries were represented by 9 Yugoslavs and 8 Poles, even Japan had its own speaker. In addition, there were over 50 representatives from academies and universities. The Congress featured 7 main lectures and 90 scientific communications. There were over 800 participants in total. The two volumes of the proceedings of the impressive Congress remain, with 99 contributions published.<sup>4</sup> Numerous participants appear in the rich correspondence of the Archives. Particularly frequent among these is Venturi's exchange with Marcel Aubert (1884-1962), art and architectural historian, as well as official of important French museums, head of the Société française d'archéologie, and one of the pioneers of the teaching of art history in France. Another of Venturi's correspondents for C.I.H.A. congresses during his presidency was William George Constable (1887-1976), long-time director of the Courtauld Institute in London and later director of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.



**Fig. 5.** A.W. Byvanck and L. Venturi to the C.I.H.A. Venice 1955, CXIV, 1, 16 (Archivio di Lionello Venturi Rome)

The papers in the Archive also contain interesting documentation regarding the preparations for the exhibition on Giorgione and the *Giorgioneschi* that was held in conjunction with the Congress.<sup>5</sup>

It ended with a triumphant concert by Arturo Toscanini in the presence of President Gronchi of the Italian Republic.

The Committee promoted meetings and institutional gatherings with the participation of Pietro Zampetti, and Roberto Longhi, Rodolfo Pallucchini, Antonio Morassi and Giuseppe Fiocco in the lively debate and exhibition proposals. Other temporary exhibitions were organized to coincide with the Congress: an exhibition of graphics art at the Cini Foundation, curated by Fiocco, and, at Palazzo Grassi, a vast anthological exhibition of paintings by Bernardo Bellotto from Polish collections. One of the days of the Congress was then dedicated to Palladio with a special session held in Vicenza with

papers by Argan and Nikolaus Pevsner. The activities of the C.I.H.A. in those post-war years were not limited to the organization of the Congresses. In his prologue Venturi recalled the solid scientific instruments sponsored by Unesco such as the *Repetorie d'Art et d'Archeologie*, directed by Marcel Aubert, and the 70 volumes of the *Corpus vitrearum Medii Aevi*, fifteen of which were published under the direction of Hans Hahnloser, until his death in 1974.

Lionello Venturi played a constant and primary role in the important international scene offered by the C.I.H.A. Committee. The Venetian congress probably represented his highest revenge of post-war cultural openness in Italy, after the closures, censures and exile he had suffered during the years of the Fascist regime.

As a migrant by necessity, Venturi acquired the typical characteristic of cosmopolitans in that he made his erudition one the many arrows in his bow rather than a narrow nationalistic perspective. Let us now to 1961.

To commemorate his death, shortly after the São Paulo Biennial, the 2nd Brazilian National Congress of Art Critics, held in December of that year on the theme "The Question of Contemporary Art", paid tribute to Venturi in a special session.<sup>6</sup>

Among the speakers at the session in which the posthumous homage to Lionello Venturi was paid were some of the most important Brazilian critics of the time: Antonio Bento, Mário Pedrosa and Lourival Gomes Machado were chosen to say a few words about the life and work of the Italian critic. Their tributes, expressed in an informal way, had a deep admiration for a man they considered a mentor, an intellectual who had always made himself available to the younger critics as they had been when they met him, and who was highly esteemed for his erudition and acumen. Bento and Pedrosa spoke casually about their encounters with Venturi and the aspects of his critical thought that had marked them. According to Pedrosa, Venturi understood that the work of art carries 'the whole universe and the whole of history in an isolated form'. The Brazilian critic praised Venturi's handling of the analysis of individual poetics, always taking into account the personality of the artist who historically participated in his time.

Pedrosa summarized Venturi's critical approach as a balance between organized ideas and the sensitivity which is essential for critical practice, though insufficient in itself as a means of objective evaluation.

Ideas that become too clear and distinct risk turning criticism into a list of laws and rules. At the same time, sensitivity can overcome those ideas to prompt the formation of new ideas, and in this dialectic there is a continuous and endless rhythm that governs critical judgement. The absence of either produces a critique that is either normative (all organization, no sensibility) or excessively subjective (no organization). Pedrosa also noted that formal interpretation, allied to observation of the surroundings, led to a criticism concerned with defining the fundamental meaning of a work of art "because, for [Venturi], all art criticism is life experience". Thanks to this "life experience", which Pedrosa also calls Venturi's "human behaviour", the Italian critic's work reveals a fundamentally ethical dimension. This agreement between Venturi's critical vision and Pedrosa's approach can be seen in many of the Brazilian critic's statements, such as when he says that art must reach sensitivity through the "dynamism of its forms" or that art must take place "in its own specific field" and according to "its own rules". Thus, while Pedrosa's position might suggest a strictly formalist approach to the artistic phenomenon, the result is actually a tempered formalism, that is, a formalist view according to which the work of art contains subjective meanings that connect it to the world, beyond the relationships between forms, colours and lines. The lay Venturi was trained in the exercise of a militant and practical anti-fascism, like the fighting anti-fascism of another central figure of post-war Italy, Carlo L. Ragghianti, 25 years younger, imprisoned by the regime. Both embodied the lesson of Benedetto Croce and grew up under the influence of Salvemini's socialist and liberal ideas, open to the comparison between cultures, always critical of illiberal regimes, as they observed in the USSR and the real socialist regimes. In 1961 Venturi wrote a to his friend Giancarlo Vigorelli a letter, which is preserved in the Venturi archive, that may appear as a sort of spiritual testament about the heritage of Fascism in Europe:

"Is fascism over in Europe?' Not by a long shot; it becomes more dangerous every year, because it has taught everyone to do as they please in spite of social life, and it takes time to repair such moral miseducation. It should be easier to fight the political force of fascism. It was born, has lived, and continues after death, on the basis of blackmail: the communist danger. Whoever accepts blackmail is a coward, and must be rejected, both by the strength of our faith in freedom and by the conviction that we belong to a superior civilization".<sup>2</sup>

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## Endnotes

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