

## Dekolonizując to, co widzialne – lekcje z transformacji w muzeach prywatnych w Ameryce Łacińskiej

### Decolonising the visible: Lessons in transformation at private museums in Latin America

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**ABSTRAKT:** W pierwszej części niniejszy artykuł nakreśla, czym jest proces dekolonizacji tego, co widzialne w polu sztuki. Koncentruje się na czterech istotnych instytucjach z Ameryki Łacińskiej: MASP, MAC Lima, Museo Amparo, MALBA. Opisuje różnice w podejściach i istotę zmiany, jaką przeszły badane muzea. Stanowi to podstawę do rozważań na temat uwarunkowań ludzkich i organizacyjnych przebiegu dekolonizacji. Wreszcie oferuje wnioski płynące z doświadczeń latynoamerykańskich..

**ABSTRACT:** The article begins with an outline of the process of decolonising the visible in the field of art. The focus of this paper is on two extreme cases from Latin America: MASP and MALBA, to be seen as two opposite poles in a broad spectrum of attitudes and strategies employed by the managers of the Latin American institutions under study. The article discusses different approaches and the changes introduced to the museums, providing a basis for further reflection on human and organisational circumstances of decolonisation. Ultimately, the text offers some conclusions drawn from Latin American experiences.

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**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** dekolonizacja, muzea latynoamerykańskie, sztuka latynoamerykańska, muzealnictwo inkluzywne

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**KEY WORDS:** decolonisation, Latin American museums, Latin American art, inclusive museology

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ALICJA GŁUSZEK jest absolwentką stosunków międzynarodowych na Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim i sztuki współczesnej na Uniwersytecie Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie. Otrzymała stypendia Fundacji Kościuszkowskiej oraz Tokyo Foundation. Jest latynoamerykanką, wykładowczynią i badaczką na UJ, Universidad Nacional Autónoma México, Georgetown University, El Colegio de Mexico. Zajmowała się badaniem kultury, bezpieczeństwa i systemów politycznych od 2006 roku, obecnie przedmiotem jej zainteresowań badawczych jest semantyka mediów w kontekście teorii dekolonialnych i neomaterializmu. Koordynuje wystawy w polskich instytucjach publicznych i prywatnych. Obecnie jest doktorantką na Facultad de Bellas Artes, Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

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**DECOLONISING THE VISIBLE:  
LESSONS IN TRANSFORMA-  
TION AT PRIVATE MUSEUMS IN  
LATIN AMERICA**

Colonisation structured Latin America's social life and culture for centuries, making a distinct division into white which was good and granted all rights, and brown or black which was bad and denied any rights. Such a pronouncement fundamentally crippled social forces and doomed all ethnic groups not traceable to Europe to inferiority. Such a pronouncement dictated what was to be viewed as beautiful, aesthetic, and worth looking at.

This article is an abridged version of a broader study investigating the work of five museums: MASP, MAC Lima, Museo Amparo, and MALBA, which have reformulated their exhibition, educational and research programmes in the last ten years with a view to decolonising their activities. The focus of this paper, prepared to be translated into English, is on two extreme cases, MASP and MALBA, which can be seen as two opposite poles in the broad spectrum of attitudes and strategies employed by the managers of the Latin American institutions in question. The first part of the article provides an outline of the process of decolonising the visible in the art field. The text does not, and cannot, pursue the ambition to explicate the complex macrostructural processes and conditions that have facilitated the decision to realign the museums' agendas. A study doing so would require a separate monograph. For reasons of space, the structural, political, and economic issues that condition the functioning of Latin American art world and market are not addressed here.

While consistent with a global shift towards challenging and rejecting hegemonic structures and practices in museums, efforts expended by the institutions in question to decolonise museum practices do not only go into the restitution of objects looted in the course of colonisation or as a result of colonial regimes' dominance, nor into changing the narrative and publicly acknowledging that the collection (or the institution as such) has benefited from colonisation, slavery, and the exploitation of conquered lands and people.

In Latin America, coloniality (*colonidad*) is a continuing reality that organises and regulates the lives of societies. As a result, the problem is approached differently in the provinces than in the metropolises. According to Argentine scholar Walter Mignone and Peruvian philosopher Anibal Quijone, decolonisation (*decolonidad*) constitutes an epistemological approach to the deconstruction of power structures founded on racism which separates social reality into white-only and non-white spaces. The process begins by exposing the structures of European dominance which, having fused with the process of modernisation, may be transparent and difficult to get hold of. Colonial power structures are embedded in ethnographic, art and natural history museums that emerged in Latin Amer-

ica in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> They sanctioned an aesthetic that was not determined by local conditions but external criteria from Paris, London and Madrid. A colonial effect is also identifiable in museums of modern and contemporary art established in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> It manifests itself in lack (for instance, the lack of a vernacular aesthetic, the absence of indigenous artists) or in an unconscious, and therefore transparent, reference to Europe and the United States as regards ways of incorporating into the canon. It is also visible in collecting policies and the creation of private museums that follow the strategies of American capitalist magnates such as Getty, Whitney, Rockefeller, and Guggenheim. Local millionaires have also built their own museums, including Eduardo Constantini's MALBA in Buenos Aires, Manuel Espinosa Yglesias's Museo Amparo in Puebla, Eugenio López Alonso's Jumex in Ciudad de Mexico, Paulo Assis Chateaubriand's MASP in São Paulo. Latin America's ecosystem of museums was created to serve a colonial order that rested on the exploitation of local populations and racism in order to maintain power and wealth.

Decolonising museums in Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, and the like, countries peopled with descendants of those who colonised and those who were colonised, where indigenous communities and those whose ancestors were black slaves have survived and created their own cultures, is an altogether different process than in London, Paris, Madrid, or Amsterdam. The goal Latin American museums strive for is to redesign the relationships that have been based, among other things, on aesthetic judgment (white – beautiful, civilised; non-white – ugly, inferior, savage, cultureless) by working with the visible, by causing a shift in research and knowledge building in relation to contemporary art.

### **The Four Horsemen of Decolonisation: MASP, MAC Lima, Museo Amparo, MALBA**

The institutions discussed here are foundation-run private museums, built around private collections of contemporary and modern art. Their funds come from donations, public grants, sponsorship agreements, and tickets. None of them is institutionally dependent on a political, local or national power. Still, they are dependent on their owners, their personal or corporate interests. The selection has been made intentionally, this study looks at entities similar in terms of structure and organisation which have intro-

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- 1 Conference at the Getty Institute: *The Birth of the Museum in Latin America* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOWTVitRqcw&list=PLdcw4RhcVx8ud-j2Fzoq2XD2tsDp0gRT3G> [accessed 22.12.2024].
  - 2 *Art museums of Latin America structuring representation*, ed. M. Greet, G. McDaniel Tarver, London 2018.

duced changes to how they devise exhibition programmes over the last two decades. This selection has been made intentionally to provide a constant against which other variables are observed, including exhibition themes, artists' ethnic, racial and gender identity, composition of curatorial teams, acquisitions and collection development policy.

The research premise has sprung from the observation that, in the case of private museums, there are pros and cons to following the direction of decolonisation. The decision to take such a route had to be made by people in charge of the institutions. The path of decolonisation is not an obvious one to choose. As entities founded by members of the elite, with political and economic capital, they could be used to maintain the *status quo*, safeguarding the position of their owners and the social groups associated with them. Institutional decolonisation can entail the loss of conservative groups, traditionally or historically associated with the liberal and modernisation paradigm. However, decolonisation may also translate into a larger social base for museum activities. The latter is only true if there is free admission to the museum or if excluded groups grow wealthy enough to be able to pay for an entrance ticket.

Public museums have been excluded from the study because their decision-making and institutional processes are different; the criteria for allocating state funds are different. Mingling state-owned and private institutions would not serve the purpose of this analysis.

The Museu de Arte São Paulo<sup>3</sup> (hereinafter MASP) was founded in 1947 by Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand Bandeira de Melo, a media mogul, also to make his collection of early and modernist European art available to the public. The Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Lima<sup>4</sup> emerged in 2013 from the Instituto de Arte Contemporáneo<sup>5</sup> which had commenced its activity in 1955, transformed from of a commercial gallery in Lima started in 1947<sup>6</sup> by a group of Peruvian intellectuals, promoters of modernist and avant-garde art, led by Francisco Moncloa.<sup>7</sup> The Museo Amparo,<sup>8</sup> located in Puebla, Mexico, was created in 1991 by banker and philanthropist Manuel Espinosa Yglesias together with his daughter Ángeles

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3 <https://masp.org.br/en> [accessed 14.05.2024].

4 <https://maclima.pe/>[accessed 14.05.2024].

5 M. B. Guinassi, "La nueva imagen del IAC", *Oiga* (Lima, Perú), 1966, no. 191, p. 23, <https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/1142594#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-2001%2C-184%2C6551%2C3666> [accessed 14.05.2024].

6 *Inauguración del IAC* <https://maclima.pe/2020/04/01/inauguracion-iac/> [accessed 14.05.2024].

7 F. Moncloa, *Historia de una galería*, <https://icaa.mfah.org/s/es/item/1142578#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-2001%2C-113%2C6551%2C3666> [accessed 14.05.2024].

8 <https://museoamparo.com/>[accessed 14.05.2024].

Espinosa Yglesias Rugarcía, via the Amparo Foundation, and named after his wife. MALBA, or the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires,<sup>9</sup> is an institution founded by Argentine businessman Eduardo Costantini.<sup>10</sup> Run by the Fundación MALBA – Constantini, it opened in 2001 and displays the businessman’s collection of works by modern and contemporary artists from the region.

All four museums remain at the forefront of modern programming as regards educational activities and spreading knowledge about art and culture. Amparo was the first in the region to introduce digital technologies in exhibition spaces as well as online to disseminate information. They are prestigious and prosperous institutions that collaborate with other centres in Latin America and around the world.

Corporate governance in these institutions causes a separation between the art department and the managerial position within organisational structure.

The fact that these museums are private could imply a programme policy that is conservative, oligarchic and exclusive, and meets their owners’ class interests. The corporate management style and having to constantly appeal for funds to be able to operate could also suggest that they might pursue a conservative line on exhibiting, research and education, favoured by corporate stakeholders. However, this is not so. The content introduced by all four institutions in the last ten years does not represent the class or ethnicity of their owners or management bodies, nor does it replicate previous collecting and curatorial practices.

What have these transformations involved, how have they manifested themselves, and what underlies the new course taken by these institutions? An analysis of their exhibition programmes, staff changes, and methods of financing will hopefully allow me to arrive at answers to these question.

### **What is the expansion and change of the visible field in the context of postcolonial societies?**

The continuance of both colonial structures and indigenous cultures into the twentieth century has given rise to regional studies of oppressed peoples. Encompassing postcolonialism and decolonisation, these studies provide a theoretical framework for analysing changes in Latin American art, including those that have occurred in museums. While not delving

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9 <https://www.malba.org.ar/>[accessed 14.05.2024].

10 G. Haupt & P. Binder, “Interview with Eduardo Costantini”, *Universes in Universe*, <https://universes.art/en/specials/malba-buenos-aires/eduardo-costantini-interview> [accessed 14.05.2024].

into these theories, this article refers to them to examine the transformation of visibility in the four selected museums.

Anibal Quijano, a Peruvian sociologist, proposed the concept of ‘coloniality of power’ to indicate the persistent structures of dominance and inequality created by colonialism which continue to this day in political, economic, social, and epistemological spheres. He claims that the coloniality of power relies on the imposition of a racial-ethnic classification of the world’s population as the foundation for a global pattern of capitalist power. It operates on the material and subjective planes of everyday life. He criticised Eurocentrism and the rationality of modernity, arguing that they are deeply rooted in the colonial matrix of power. Colonialism and modernism instituted the concept of race to govern a conquered society. Quijano postulated epistemological liberation and recognising the diversity of knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

When applying this postulate to museums, decolonisation should be interpreted as the abandonment of old mainstream narratives regarding history, the nature of inequality, and the reasons why black and indigenous people occupy their social positions. This would imply emancipation from the notion that there is only one model story, vision or aesthetic. It would lead to staging exhibitions and devising educational programmes that would challenge all kinds of power relations and centres of power. It would also involve a more collective, interdisciplinary, and diverse process of generating exhibition scenarios, research and educational activities surrounding exhibitions. This method would constitute a countermodel to individualism and liberalism.

More postulations are put forward by Walter D. Mignolo in his 2019 article *Reconstrucción epistémica/estética: la aisthesis decolonial una década después* pointing out the necessity of thinking in terms of *aisthesis* (rather than art or aesthetics). By using the Greek term *aisthesis*, which can be translated as “sensual perception” or “sensing,” we can break away from the “hegemonic” concepts of epistemology and aesthetics in order to revolutionise the colonial structures of power/knowledge and liberate ourselves from them. Mignolo believes that reconstruction is possible provided that we go beyond the dichotomy between knowledge and sensuality, intellect and corporeal perception. One might add: beyond the male/female binary.

Developing new, decolonial exhibitions and research/educational programmes consistent with Mignolo’s views would entail opening up to other forms of knowledge, to creating engaging events, accepting the knowledge and experience of the marginalised and subordinate: queer,

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11 A. Quijano, “Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad”, *Perú Indígena* 1992, v. 13 (29), pp. 11–20, <https://arqueologiageneralunca.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/quijano-colonialidad-y-modernidad-racionalidad.pdf> [accessed 14.05.2024].

black, tribal and indigenous communities, to incorporating vernacular materials and techniques<sup>12</sup> which require a combination of the realms of knowledge referred to by the Greeks as: *episteme* (theory), *metis* (practical, corporeal), *poiesis* (causative, creative knowledge).

Operationalising these theoretical approaches to investigate decolonisation processes in museums situated in countries once subordinated, I check whether the following events have occurred in them over the last decade:

- Incorporation of works by minority artists into permanent exhibitions, symbolising expanded field of visibility and canon of art in the collection.
- Temporary exhibitions presenting minorities in a new light, avoiding stereotypes and old models of representation.
- Exhibitions of artists from discriminated groups, indicating a reconstruction of the art world and the emancipation of these communities.
- Full authorship attribution identifying all involved in the execution of the works on display, equal treatment of working-class artists.
- Staging exhibitions that question the postcolonial order and dominant aesthetics, while also showing class and race resistance.
- Changes in the curatorial staff and management made by hiring people from outside the dominant elite to support the diversity of visions and representation of minorities.
- A research and educational programme available in minority languages with emphasis on a revision of official history and alternative narratives.

### Revolutionary upheaval at MASP

When Adriano Pedrosa was appointed as director in 2014, a radical transformation of MASP's mission and its vision was in store. The new MASP was now on its route to become diverse, pluralistic and multiple (*diverso, multiplo, plural*).<sup>13</sup> Boasting a highly substantial collection of European

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12 I use the term 'material or immaterial vernacular culture' in reference to a spectrum of practices followed by minority groups (as opposed to a dominant culture of groups which enjoy social, economic and/or political advantages within a given society). These groups can be identified by applying mixed symbolic, normative and class criteria. I deliberately avoid the terms 'folk culture, traditional culture' because, in the Latin American context, racial and ethnic minorities do not necessarily live in rural areas, engage in agriculture, or are traditional as in having their origins in a given region.

13 M. do Carmo M. P. de Pontes, "A. Pedrosa and the MASP: an interview", *Conceptual Fine Arts*, <https://www.conceptualfinearts.com/cfa/2016/03/09/interview-director-adriano-pedrosa-on-his-quest-to-make-masp-multiple-diverse-and-plural/> [accessed 14.05.2024]; L. Neri, *Multiplo, diverso, plural: Museu de arte de Sao Paulo*, <https://gagosian.com/quarterly/2020/05/28/multiplo-diverso-plural-museu-de-arte-de-sao-paulo-interview/> [accessed 14.05.2024].

art, it used to specialise in mounting blockbuster exhibitions. For years, its programme had only involved bringing masterpieces of Italian, French, German, Japanese, Korean, and American art to Brazil. In the decade preceding the revolutionary collapse, it had held shows featuring the creative output of Vermeer, Freud, Caravaggio, Modigliani, de Chirico, Chagall, Rodin, and Poussin. At that time, it had worked in collaboration with private and corporate collections, readily presenting them in its spaces (e.g. Itau, MAPFRE, Farnesina, Sattamini, Caixanova).

By restoring Bo Bardi's glass easels, Pedrosa defied hierarchies and canonical narratives at MASP. The objective behind taking pictures off the walls and moving them to easels was to "desacralise the works" and bring them closer to the public. Captions were placed on the backs to render the first impression free from art historical contexts, making the museum more humanistic, pluralistic and democratic. This reflects Paulo Freire's educational philosophy that rejected the "transfer" of knowledge from the teacher to the passive student. Freire advocated a problem-based pedagogy founded on dialogue, critical thinking and collective action towards emancipation through education. Knowledge should be born in dialogue, through observation, deconstruction and action. Similarly, the curators at MASP, by deconstructing the segregation of paintings, encouraged the visitors to come up with their own interpretations, trusting their abilities and relinquishing a position of power.

The permanent exhibition, *Acervo em transformação*, is in constant transformation, with objects being added and removed. This is to let the public know that the canon is fluid. Over the past ten years, the exposition has included works by outsider artists (Djanira da Motta e Silva, José Antônio da Silva, Maria Auxiliadora da Silva), black artists, such as Rubema Valentim (pieces reminiscent of geometric abstraction but, in fact, representing Afro-Brazilian symbols), Dalton Paul (portraits of abolitionists João de Deus Nascimento and Zeferin, leaders of slave rebellions in Brazil, consigned to oblivion by official history for a long time). Finally, it has also contained objects produced by indigenous artists: Carmézia Emiliano of the Macuxi people, an indigenous tribe living in the state of Roraima in northern Brazil,<sup>14</sup> and Duhigó Tukano of the Tukano group,<sup>15</sup> from the Pari Cachocheira community in the state of Amazonas.

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14 "Carmézia Emiliano: a árvore da vida", <https://www.masp.org.br/exposicoes/carmezia-emiliano-arvore-vida> [accessed 14.05.2024]; "Masp apresenta mostra com obras de artistas mulheres doadas recentemente ao museu", *Artsoul*, 2021, <https://artsoul.com.br/revista/eventos/exposicao-acervo-em-transformacao-doacoes-recentes-1> [accessed 14.05.2024].

15 "Artista amazonense Duhigó Tukano é destaque em exposição na Argentina", *Acritica*, <https://www.acritica.com/entretenimento/artista-amazonense-duhigo-tukano-e-destaque-em-exposico-o-na-argentina-1.307467> [accessed

As a result, the aesthetic universe created within this exhibition encompasses various styles, media, schools, eras, and trends. It presents native and imported cultures. It combines different visions of the world and philosophies unsegregated and unselected. There to be seen are the Catholic Christ, African orishas, the Wazaka tree of life from the myth explaining the emergence of Mount Roraima where the Macuxi tribe lives.

Adriano Pedrosa came to MASP with a proven concept that had been put to use at the exhibition *Histórias Mestiças* (he staged it together with cultural anthropologist Lilia Schwarcz in 2014 at the Instituto Tomie Ohtake), one that does not apply the theoretical and methodological apparatus of art history and art science, but references anthropology and sociology to construct exhibition scenarios. It was in this way that exhibitions and accompanying conferences, publications, and educational events devoted to the history of women, childhood, sexuality, the black community, descendants of slaves,<sup>16</sup> indigenous people,<sup>17</sup> and queer communities<sup>18</sup> were developed between 2016 and 2024. While focussing primarily on the Brazilian context, each of them also included other cultural perspectives, for instance from the United States, Mexico, or New Zealand. It is Pedrosa's *idée fixe* to create those shows as he wants to expand threads in collective narratives to the maximum. For him, visual arts constitute a tool for communicating what he sees in Latin American literature. In it, facts, legends and magic exist side by side on equal terms, one can start reading particular threads at any point like in Cortázar's work, and then combine them at will. Liberation comes with the ability to choose what we look at, and with freedom of interpretation.

MASP continued to collaborate extensively with foreign institutions, importing and exporting objects and exhibitions. Pedrosa's close ties and earlier international career facilitated contacts with Tate Modern, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, National Gallery in Washington, Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Los Angeles County Museum, and MALBA. The museum still organised temporary exhibitions of white masters and put on presentations of the work of Gauguin, Bacon, Degas. However, they were in the minority. More often to be viewed there were exhibitions of female artists (including Anna Maria Maiolino, Judith Lauand, Beatriz Milhazes, Guerilla Girls, Lygia Pape, Gego, Ana Bella Geiger), black artists (Dalton Paula, Rubem Valenti, Djanira, Maria Aux-

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14.05.2024]; "Duhigó: artista indígena guardiã da cultura Tukano", *Mandala Lunar*, <https://www.mandalalunar.com.br/cultura-regenerativa/duhigo-artista-indigena-guardia-da-cultura-tukano/> [accessed 14.05.2024].

<sup>16</sup> <https://masp.org.br/exposicoes/historias-afro-atlanticas> [accessed 14.05.2024].

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.masp.org.br/exposicoes/historias-indigenas> [accessed 14.05.2024].

<sup>18</sup> <https://masp.org.br/en/seminars/queer-histories-2022> [accessed 14.05.2024].

iliadora, amongst others) and indigenous artists (Glicéria Tupinambá, Alexandre Mortagua, Sheroanawe Hakihiiwe, Sky Hopinka, Bepy Kayapó, Joseca Yanomami).

As it is impossible to discuss all the exhibitions, I shall focus on the presentation of Dalton Paul's works,<sup>19</sup> which constitutes a good illustration of a liberated art of exhibiting, breaking the colonial norms governing race and how it is shown. The exhibition gave the audience opportunity to see a subordinate community. It contained thirty portraits of Afro-Brazilians who, by refusing to take on a victim role, gained great agency. Its focus was on important figures in Afro-Brazilian history, on people from *quilombos* (settlements of refugees, escapees from plantations), elders' leaders, healers, and herbalists.

MASP also put on display as works of art (rather than artifacts) historical fabrics from Peru and Bolivia, and Colombian ceramics. It has refused to separate crafts from the arts, a gesture of inclusion from the museum to other aesthetic traditions developed by ancient and indigenous societies.

In short, the reformulation of the exhibition and educational programme has effected a strategic and comprehensive change at MASP that radically remodelled the institution and its relationship with all levels and groups of Brazilian society. Interestingly, this has not discouraged sponsors and benefactors. Quite the contrary, the number of public and private patrons has increased in the last ten years. The museum has been promoted in local, state and federal media, and has also met with recognition in the American and European trade press. Diverse, multifaceted and pluralistic as it is now, MASP is more notable and attracts greater numbers of visitors than its former version used to.

MASP has also revised its human resource policy. For the first time, it hired minority curators. They were entrusted with a number of tasks, such as preparing temporary exhibitions (*Histórias Afro Atlânticas*, *Histórias Indígenas*), diversifying the collection, new purchases, and appealing for donations. The first black curators, Helio Menezes and Ayrson Heraclito, were not hired until 2017.<sup>20</sup> Sandra Benites, a member of the Guaraní Nandeva, joined the curatorial team for the *Histórias Brasileiras*

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19 <https://masp.org.br/exposicoes/dalton-paula> [accessed 14.05.2024].

20 E. Bittencourt, "Remembering Jaider Esbell and how his activism challenged art institutions", *Hyperallergic*, <https://hyperallergic.com/700121/remembering-jaider-esbell-and-how-his-activism-challenged-art-institutions/> [accessed 14.05.2024]; "Hélio Menezes", *America Latina*: <https://amlatina.contemporaryand.com/people/helio-menezes/> [accessed 14.05.2024]; T. Trouillot, "Hélio Menezes's radical collective practice", <https://www.frieze.com/article/helio-menezess-radical-collective-practice> [accessed 14.05.2024].

exhibition and the *Historias Indigenas* project.<sup>21</sup> The museum publicised the fact at home as well as internationally. Nevertheless, Benites soon resigned, claiming that her leaving was motivated by censorship as the museum rejected a photograph depicting the communist *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (Landless Workers' Movement), which had been campaigning for agrarian reform and against social injustice in rural areas since the 1980s.<sup>22</sup> Preventive censorship on MASP's part may indicate that, under Bolsonaro's direction, it was acceptable to diversify visibility, but addressing the issues of class and economic exploitation lied outside the scope of what the museum could afford to do. MASP's transformation happened within the symbolic and aesthetic realm. The values of diversity, pluralism and multiplicity have come to condition what we see, whilst what should happen in the heterogeneous and extremely classist Brazilian society has become a new taboo.<sup>23</sup>

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- 21 L. Ribeiro, "Indigenous histories: Stories told, and many more still untold", *America Latina*, <https://amlatina.contemporaryand.com/editorial/indigenous-histories-stories-told-and-many-more-still-untold/> [accessed 14.05.2024].
- 22 J. Langlois, "Brazil's first indigenous curator: 'We're not afraid anymore'", *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/22/arts/design/sandra-benites-brazil-museum-curator.html> [accessed 14.05.2024]; "Brazil's first institutional indigenous curator quits over censorship row", *Art Review*, <https://artreview.com/brazils-first-institutional-indigenous-curator-quits-over-censorship-row-sandra-benites/> [accessed 14.05.2024]; "Sandra Benites, MASP's first indigenous curator, quits amid censorship kerfuffle", *Art Forum*, <https://www.artforum.com/news/sandra-benites-masps-first-indigenous-curator-quits-amid-censorship-kerfuffle-2-251828/> [accessed 14.05.2024].
- 23 Brazilian society is characterised by very low social mobility and great economic inequalities (almost 30% of national income is in the hands of 1% of the population), meaning that the class division remains stable and classes interact with each other in a normative and rigid way. Lower classes are excluded from a number of public services and goods, including culture. For more information see *Social exclusion and mobility in Brazil*, ed. E. Gacitua Mario, M. Woolcock, The World Bank, 2008; R. Pimentel, "Equal before the Law, but not in practice. Brazil's social inequality crisis", *Harvard Political Review* 2022; C. Oliveira, "Brazil drops by one position in Development Index, ranks 2nd in income concentration", *Brasil de Fato* 10.12.2019; G. Moura de Oliveria, M. Verissimo Veronese, "Brasil y el "fenomeno Bolsonaro". Un análisis preliminar", *Revista mexicana de ciencias políticas* 2019, vol. 64, no. 237, pp. 245–267; D. Franca, "Desigualdades y segregación residencial por raza y clase", *Andamios* 2018, vol. 15, no. 36, pp. 163–195; H.M. Murgel Starling, L. Moritz Schwarcz, *Brazil. A biography*, London 2019.

### MALBA's transformation through import

MALBA is the project of Argentine billionaire Eduardo Constantini's life.<sup>24</sup> In the late 1990s, Constantini decided to create a place in which to show his collection, as well as to present historical and current phenomena in Latin American art. MALBA has also developed into a cultural centre, hosting events devoted to design, cinema, theatre, and literature. Its opening in 2001 coincided with the worst financial crisis in Argentina's history. The country's political, economic, and cultural elite were in attendance, including President de la Rúa. The new institution cost a fortune and stood for the success of the democratic-liberal transformation in the country which had been ruled by a military junta in the 1980s.

Thanks to its patron, the museum was able to go ahead with its ambitious plans, regardless of the fact that Argentina seemed to be going through one crisis after another and was on the verge of bankruptcy a number of times. During the first ten years of its activity, the museum organised one main group exhibition and temporary shows featuring the work of individual artists or the art of a given country (Cuba, Mexico). Presenting Latin American art, the permanent exhibition was mainly steered by art history (artworks were selected and segregated with respect to trends, styles and phenomena), sometimes weaving into the script thematic capsules concerning class struggle, resistance against authoritarianism, feminism and the LGBT movement. Other private or corporate collections were also displayed, including abstract art from the Cisneros Foundation Collection, a choice of showpieces from the Jumex Collection or the Daimler Art Collection.

The first decade abounded in retrospectives of masters and stars of the Latin American art scene. Works by León Ferrari, Xul Solar, Guillermo Kuitca, Marta Minujín, Alfredo Volpi, Joaquín Torres-García, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Beatriz Milhazes, Félix González-Torres, Tarsila do Amaral were put on show. When it came to international artists, the museum played safe, too. MALBA treated the public to exhibitions of Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Tracy Emin, Frank Stella, and Yayoi Kusama. This mode of drawing up programme to feature well-known names and maintain the perspective of art studies and art history (i.e.

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24 S. Karabell, "Eduardo Costantini: A billionaire's eye for business and beauty", *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shelliekarabell/2018/03/28/eduardo-constantini-a-billionaires-eye-for-business-and-beauty/> [accessed 14.05.2024]; S. Karabell, "Argentine mega-collector Eduardo Costantini talks about his future plans", *Galerie Magazine*, <https://galeriemagazine.com/argentine-mega-collector-eduardo-costantini-talks-about-his-future-plans-malba/> [accessed 14.05.2024]; report on the museum's activities [https://www.malba.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/institucional\\_eng.pdf](https://www.malba.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/institucional_eng.pdf) [accessed 14.05.2024].

showing abstraction, pop art, op art, conceptual art, concretism, neo-concretism, postmodernism) is still continued, with minor modifications for greater visibility of black, indigenous and queer communities.

Minor changes took place around 2016, resulting in 2018 in the *Verboamérica* exhibition. It was staged as part of MALBA's fifteenth anniversary, and curated by Andrea Giunta and Agustín Pérez Rubio, the museum's artistic director. "*Verboamérica* is performative and temporal; it testifies to the crisis of a uniform and linear concept of historical time brought about by globalisation," explained Pérez Rubio in the exhibition catalogue. The show broke with the classic chronological order. It included one hundred and seventy works divided into eight thematic groups, containing pieces from different historical periods and executed in different media (painting, drawing, photography, video, book, historical documentary and installation). Introducing the topic of minorities, the curators exhibited works by Claudia Andujar (Yonomami from Brazil), Miguel Covarrubias (idealised prints depicting carefree indigenous people, cultivating their traditions and rituals), Tarsila do Amaral (a picture of Abapor romanticising the African population), Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, Anna Bella Geiger (a critical take on Brazilian identity and racial segregation in the country), Frida Kahlo (pure *indigenismo*, romanticising, unrealistic images of Mexican ethnicity), Wilfredo Lam (cubist visions of orishas, African beliefs in Cuba), Ana Mendieta (references to cave painting and indigenous beliefs about the relationship between man and land). The section devoted to geopolitics touched on the problem of neocolonialism brought about by globalisation and the domination of the United States.

Scheduled for 2022–2025, the latest permanent exhibition, *Tercer ojo*, has been prepared to celebrate the museum's twentieth anniversary and, following the purchase of Frida Kahlo's painting *Diego y yo*, also features the themes of decolonisation and diversity.<sup>25</sup> Its curator is the head of the curatorial department, María Amalia García. The arrangement takes a thematic order, abandoning the method of presentation that centres around trends, phenomena or media, and offers instead a story which explores the visual culture of the region, using the expanded Constantini collection (including acquisitions made in recent years, works by Afro-Brazilian artists: Sonia Gomes, Rubem Valenti and Rosana Paulino, as well as Abel Rodríguez – an indigenous Nonuya artist born in the Colombian Amazon).

The curator carries on with the themes of alterglobalism, class struggle and resistance to globalisation viewed as a neocolonialism driven by the US capitalist empire. She does so by showing pieces created by José Clemente Orozco, Cildo Meireles and Antonio Berni. In a novel fashion,

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25 Website dedicated to the *Tercer ojo* exhibition, [https://www.malba.org.ar/evento/tercer-ojo\\_\\_coleccion-costantini\\_en-malba/](https://www.malba.org.ar/evento/tercer-ojo__coleccion-costantini_en-malba/) [accessed 14.05.2024].

she adopts a broad approach to non-normative body, non-binary images and gender identity, presenting objects by Yeguas del Apocalipsis, Marcia Schwartz, Feliciano Centurión and Teresa Margolles. The *Tercer ojo* exhibition mixes images and problems of subordinated minorities mediated by style and era (Frida Kahlo, Tarsila do Amaral, Emiliano Pettorutti) with more current unmediated approaches created by artists from those communities. It directly and critically addresses the effect great powers and capitalism have had on the region and its culture. It should be noted, however, that this narrative of otherness and alternative worlds is not related through the works of Argentine minority artists (black, indigenous), even though such artists are active in Argentina (e.g. Gabriel Chaile from the Tucuman province, identifying as *afrodescendiente*,<sup>26</sup> or folk artist Claudia Alarcón from the Salta province, who creates Wichi fabrics).<sup>27</sup>

When showing the work of Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña (2023) and Brazilian creator Rosala Paulino (2024),<sup>28</sup> MALBA imports diversity and transforms what has been considered worthy of displaying in the most recent Latin American art. Both artists had achieved remarkable international success by then. Having gained worldwide recognition, they were invited to the museum and their creative output (critical, drawing on indigenous or African cultures and artistic practices) could be shown to Argentine public.

The cases of the group show of contemporary fibre art<sup>29</sup> from Paraguay (*Aó Episodios textiles de las artes visuales en el Paraguay*, 2022)<sup>30</sup> and Peruvian artist Ana Teresa Barboza's monographic exhibition (*Ana Teresa Barboza, Tejer las piedras*, 2022)<sup>31</sup> are similar. Lía Colombino, the curator of the former, and Verónica Rossi, who curated the latter, displayed foreign art to highlight the division of the artistic field, imposed

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26 *Afrodescendientes* – a person identifying themselves as an heir to or descendant of one of the many ethnic groups brought from Africa as slaves. Gabriela Chaile's profile, La Biennale <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2022/milk-dreams/gabriel-chaile> [accessed 14.05.2024].

27 Website of Claudia Alarcón's collective: <https://www.ceciliabrunsonprojects.com/exhibitions/94/> [accessed 14.05.2024].

28 Rosana Paulino, "Amefricana", <https://www.malba.org.ar/evento/rosana-paulino-amefricana/> [accessed 14.05.2024].

29 The term 'fibre art', *arte textil* in Spanish, stands for a diverse spectrum of artistic phenomena, including forms that are woven, crocheted, embroidered, flat, and three-dimensional.

30 *Aó episodios*, showing fibre art from Paraguay, <https://www.malba.org.ar/evento/episodios-del-arte-textil-en-paraguay/> [accessed 14.05.2024].

31 Ana Teresa Barboza, *Tejer piedras*, <https://www.malba.org.ar/evento/ana-teresa-barboza/> [accessed 14.05.2024].

by Europe, into autonomous art (*arte*) and craft (*artesania*).<sup>32</sup> The collateral programmes were dedicated to decolonisation of the theoretical framework for studying and writing about art from the region, and the question of incorporating artistic crafts, indigenous and folk artists into the art that gets displayed in art (and not ethnographic) museums.

I believe that the reasons for the actions taken to increase the diversity of what is within the field of vision of MALBA's audience being so cautious and intermittent are to be sought in the different socio-political context. In Argentina, indigenous and black people are the least numerous and not very mobilised. The situation in Mexico, Peru or Brazil is markedly different in this respect, which has led to a systemic pressure to increase diversity in museum programmes. MALBA curators ship in decolonisation and the presence of black and indigenous artists as a phenomenon on the Latin American art scene worth documenting in the museum programme. For MASP, MAC Lima, or Museo Amparo, it is more a question of adequate representation and the transformation that has taken place in local societies. This interpretation is also supported by the fact that gender and queer issues and class struggle appeared very early in MALBA's exhibition programme; they were simply of endemic importance in Argentina.

### **How to make change: lessons for those who dare to programme an institution**

In the last decade, the museums in question have redefined their profiles, seeking to expand the art field and challenge traditional power/knowledge relations. This transformation, initiated by oligarchic entities, was based on economic capital and resulted from a colonial neoliberal division of the market.

This reconfiguration involved a redistribution of visibility through the inclusion of artists from marginalised groups, and the application of decolonial *aesthesis* (Mignolo). The employed strategies varied, and the pace of change correlated with how conservative the institutions had been before. The fact they they were private fostered the efficiency of operations, unlike in the case of public museums hampered by bureaucracy. Their cases demonstrate that decolonisation does not have to be steered centrally, which is further confirmed by research on new museum forms (*museo eco-museo, museo comunitario*).

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32 ¿Arte/Artesanía? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEFWc4rl70E> [accessed 14.05.2024]; *Arte contemporáneo peruano*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlYPDaUW-r8&t=4003s> [accessed 14.05.2024]; the conference accompanying the exhibition *Aó episodios*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=va8w6nzP-Lg> [accessed 14.05.2024].

The key role was played by (symbolic and financial) capital as well as curators and artistic directors who established cooperation with minority artists. Their actions, legitimised by their position, minimised resistance. No fundamental change of staff was found necessary, and consultations with experts (anthropology, archaeology) proved useful.

The involvement of artists grouped in collectives and identifying with emancipatory movements was of importance. The museums effectively obtained funds from various sources, including the corporate sector which, however, did not warn off the criticism against neocolonialism with the exception of MASP's self-censorship.

Decolonisation has broadened the field of visibility, but it was only able to undermine postcolonial mechanisms to a limited extent. Identifying problems is a prelude to transformation, and the voice of indigenous peoples can provide a model for a new museum order.

When discussed together, the cases of MALBA and MASP demonstrate even more clearly the effect of a country's social context, its ethnic and class structure, on the space in which change is possible. The environment, the condition of ethnic groups and the strength of social movements mobilised around minority identities in Brazil and Argentina have influenced the course the decolonisation of exhibition programmes has taken. The collective entities (acting on behalf of indigenous people, Afro-Brazilians, women, sexual minorities) cooperating with MASP and included by it in decision-making and creative processes, formulated the scope, shape, and pace of changes when Adriano Pedrosa was appointed its director. On the other hand, the different path of transformation at MALBA was caused by a different social context. Its international character exposes the interdependence of artistic communities in the region, another factor that impacts the operation of museums which not only have to position themselves in their immediate social environment, but also create their image and build up their prestige in relation to other important institutions across Latin America.

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