

## Leopoldo Haar: trajektoria eksperymentu w sztuce nowoczesnej, z Polski do Brazylii

### Leopoldo Haar: a trajectory of experimentation in modern art, from Poland to Brazil

Luis Sandes

ORCID 0000-0003-1762-1412

**ABSTRAKT:** Artykuł śledzi eksperymentalną, transnarodową i wciąż niedostatecznie zbadaną drogę artystyczną Leopolda Haara, żydowskiego artysty urodzonego w Polsce, którego kariera rozwijała się między przedwojennym Krakowem, kulturowym i militarnym kontekstem 2. Korpusu Polskiego podczas II wojny światowej, a powojenną Brazylią. Muzyk, projektant, fotograf, artysta wojenny, typograf i nauczyciel, Haar doświadczył niewoli, wygnania i przesiedlenia, które na nowo ukształtowały jego praktykę artystyczną. Artykuł analizuje jego wkład w sztukę nowoczesną i design, zwracając uwagę na udział artysty we wczesnym stadium rozwoju edukacji projektowej w São Paulo, jego działalność w środowisku włoskim oraz wpływ na grupę Rupture poprzez wprowadzenie idei konstruktywistycznych i integrację sztuki, techniki i funkcjonalizmu. Zawiera również krytyczną ocenę jego działalności, ról i dorobku, a także analizuje znaczenie twórczości Haara w kontekście transnarodowej historii sztuki XX wieku oraz historii designu. Opierając się na skąpych materiałach archiwalnych odnalezionych w Polsce i Brazylii, zrekonstruowano dziedzictwo postaci niemal zapomnianej, wskazując, w jaki sposób jej twórczość łączy europejski modernizm, kulturę wizualną wojny i modernizację kulturową w powojennej Brazylii, poszerzając tym samym naszą wiedzę o obiegu artystycznym w XX wieku. Główną wartością artykułu jest przywrócenie postaci Leopolda Haara dla narracji sztuki i designu w XX wieku. Śledząc drogę, którą przebył z przedwojennej Polski do powojennej Brazylii, artykuł pokazuje, że ta osobista i zawodowa podróż odegrała kluczową rolę w kształtowaniu dyskursu na temat sztuki konkretnej i w tworzeniu podwalin pod nowoczesną praktykę designu w przybranej ojczyźnie.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** sztuka nowoczesna, sztuka polska, sztuka brazylijska, wygnanie, 2. Korpus Polski, biografia artystyczna

**LUIS SANDES** to niezależny kurator, pisarz i badacz. Zajmuje się głównie sztuką brazylijską od okresu powojennego do dzisiaj. Autor wywiadów, wykładów, artykułów, haseł encyklopedycznych i tekstów kuratorskich publikowanych w Brazylii oraz poza jej granicami. Jest doktorem historii sztuki (Uniwersytet w São Paulo, Brazylia) oraz magistrem socjologii sztuki (Katolicki Uniwersytet w San Paulo). Pracę magisterską poświęcił grupie artystów działających w ramach sztuki konkretnej w latach 50. w São Paulo, w której skład wchodził Leopoldo Haar. Członkostwo w Association for Art History (Wielka Brytania), AICA oraz Sekcji brazylijskiej AICA.

**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the experimental, transnational, and still largely understudied trajectory of Leopoldo Haar, a Jewish artist born in Poland whose career unfolded between prewar Kraków, the cultural and military context of the Polish 2nd Corps during WWII, and postwar Brazil. Active as a musician, designer, photographer, war artist, typographer, and teacher, Haar experienced imprisonment, exile, and geographic displacements that shaped the reinvention of his artistic practice. The paper analyses his contribution to modern art and design, addressing his participation in the early development of design education in Sao Paulo, his work within the Italian community, and his influence on the Rupture group through the introduction of constructivist ideas and the integration of art, technique, and functionalism. The article also offers a critical assessment of his activity, roles, and oeuvre, and examines the significance of his creative output to twentieth-century transnational art history and the history of design. Drawing on scarce archival materials in Poland and Brazil, the study reconstructs the legacy of a figure nearly forgotten, revealing how his work connects European modernisms, the visual culture of war, and cultural modernisation in postwar Brazil, thus expanding our understanding of artistic circulation in the twentieth century. The paper's main contribution lies in restoring Leopoldo Haar's agency within the narratives of twentieth-century art and design. By tracing his passage from prewar Poland to postwar Brazil, it demonstrates that his personal and professional journey was instrumental in shaping the discourse on concrete art and in laying the groundwork for modern design practice in his adopted country.

**KEYWORDS:** modern art, Polish art, Brazilian art, exile, 2nd Polish Corps, artist biography

**LUIS SANDES** is an independent curator, writer and researcher. His research focuses on Brazilian art from the postwar period to the present. He has published interviews, papers, articles, encyclopedia entries and curatorial texts in Brazil and abroad. He holds a PhD in Art History (University of Sao Paulo, Brazil) and an MA in the Sociology of Art (Catholic University of Sao Paulo). His MA research focused on the group of concrete artists in 1950s Sao Paulo, which included Leopoldo Haar. Member of AAH (UK), AICA and AICA Brazil.



Luis Sandes

**LEOPOLDO HAAR: A TRAJECTORY  
OF EXPERIMENTATION IN  
MODERN ART, FROM POLAND  
TO BRAZIL**

## Introduction

Born in Tarnów, Poland, on 10 April 1910 to a Jewish family, Leopoldo Haar was a musician, lyricist, photographer, sculptor, painter, graphic designer, teacher, typesetter, draughtsman, poster artist, official war artist, and window display designer. He spent much of his adulthood in exile, first as a war prisoner, then with the Polish Armed Forces in the West, later with the 2nd Polish Corps, serving as a war artist and PR officer during their journey from the Soviet Union to the United Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Later, in 1947, he left Europe for Brazil with Zygmunt Haar (1909–1974), his older brother and close collaborator. They first arrived in Porto Alegre, a place with a strong Jewish community, although Leopoldo would later move away from Judaism.

This article will retrace his trajectory as an artist starting from his youth in Kraków, where he attended, in the late 1920s, the State School of Decorative Arts and Artistic Industry and, later, the Academy of Fine Arts (currently, the Jan Matejko Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków), graduating in 1931. Around this time, he was engaged in a drama group and played music in bars and nightclubs.<sup>2</sup> In 1936, still in Kraków, Haar and his brother founded the Haar Studios, an applied arts studio which designed posters for Suchard and the Polish Post Office.



A window display by Haar for Olivetti products, 1950, Sao Paulo. Source: *Habitat* 1950, vol. 4, p. 89

Haar's trajectory as an artist was marked by an experimental approach. In the 1950s in Sao Paulo, he not only was affiliated with Rupture (originally known by its Portuguese name *Ruptura*), the local avant-garde group of concrete artists, but also designed posters for several companies and window displays for Olivetti and others. The window displays employed some of the advancements of modern art.

- 1 K. Dąbrowska and M. Sołoduzkiewicz, *2nd Polish Corps 1943–1947*, Gdańsk n.d.
- 2 T. Lerski, "Springer, Chaskiel", *Biblioteka Polskiej Piosenki*, 2025. <[https://www.bibliotekapiosenki.pl/osoby/Springer\\_Chaskiel](https://www.bibliotekapiosenki.pl/osoby/Springer_Chaskiel)> [accessed: 22.10.2025]

Despite having fallen into oblivion after his early death in 1954, Leopoldo Haar was well known, alongside his older brother, in prewar Poland, among soldiers of the 2nd Polish Corps, and in both the Brazilian cities where they lived. In 1950, only three years after their arrival, the Haar brothers were described by a Brazilian journalist as “almost an institution.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Outlining and situating this article, notes on methodology**

The aim of this paper is not only to present a brief biography of Leopoldo Haar focusing on his experiments in modern art and starting from his youth in Poland, in an attempt to shed light on an artist who experimented with various art trends and media throughout his career, even combining art with advertising and propaganda or creating a friction between them. It also offers a critical assessment of his mature work and examines the significance of his creative output to twentieth-century transnational art history and the history of design.

Years of my research have failed to fill in all the gaps in what is known about the artist; thus, this narrative is necessarily lacunary. Haar first appeared in my research in 2015, when I started my Master's in Sociology of Art at the Catholic University of Sao Paulo, studying a group of concrete artists and poets active in Sao Paulo in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> He was one of the fifteen people associated with it, but very little information on him was available. Motivated by the uniqueness of his life and work, I began researching for his biography in 2022. After two years of extensive work in Brazil and Poland, the materials collected were too scarce for me to proceed with the original plan to publish a biography. I therefore decided to present the findings and reflections on him in academic papers (another one is coming soon).

In short, this paper is not merely a historical account of the art and life of Leopoldo Haar, today an obscure artist in both countries, but also an attempt to understand him, his brother, and their relation to the broader context. It aims to bring him back to the stage, not only for himself or his achievements, but also for the evaluation of the roles he played in the European and Brazilian circles over the 44 years of his life. The idea is to present this lacunary story so that future research can complete it

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3 N. Dutra, “As reuniões no Studio dos Haar”, *Correio do Povo*, Porto Alegre, 7 May 1950, n.p.

4 L. Sandes, “Geração concretista em Sao Paulo: uma biografia coletiva”, MA diss., Sao Paulo 2018. See also L. Sandes, “Concretismo paulista: uma tentativa de a arte ir além da arte?”, R. Leite, *Anais do 11º Congresso Internacional de Estética e História da Arte*, Sao Paulo 2018 and L. Sandes, “Uma análise da formação artística dos concretistas paulistas pelo método da biografia coletiva”, *Art & Sensorium* 2021.

with further information or yield a better insight through contextualisation work at various levels.

The next section sets out the reasons for studying Haar, then the article looks at his years in Poland and Europe as a whole – there is almost no information about his imprisonment in the Soviet Union and his military journey in the Middle East. Then Brazil, where he spent seven years, in different cities. After that, there is a section that investigates Leopoldo Haar's roles, activity and oeuvre, and another that examines the significance of Leopoldo Haar's creative output to twentieth-century transnational art history and the history of design. It concludes with a comment on the article's relevance and some final remarks.

### **Sources and a critical commentary on them**

Despite my best efforts, many aspects of Haar's life and work remain unclear or unknown. Very few artworks or utilitarian works (a term I use to refer to the window displays he did for Olivetti, among others) have survived. Some archives could not be researched or held no registry about him (which is the case of Olivetti). Even Polish art historians have not heard about Haar – as a result, he is not included in Natasza Stryna's 2009 book which documents the work of hundreds of Polish/Jewish artists active in Poland in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>5</sup>

Sources include interviews with Mira Haar, his daughter, and Renata Haar, his granddaughter; Mira Haar's archives; MASP's archives in Sao Paulo; Pinacoteca do Estado de Sao Paulo's archives; the collection of Moreira Salles Institute; the Institute of Contemporary Art (IAC) in Sao Paulo; the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro's archives; Tecnogeral-Securit corporate archives in Sao Paulo; the Brazilian National Library's Digital Collection; the Museum of Art of Rio Grande do Sul (MARGS) in Porto Alegre; Brazilian art history books; Polish and Brazilian press from the 1940s and 50s; the Marc Chagall Jewish Cultural Institute in Porto Alegre; the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków's archives; the Museum of Photography in Kraków (MuFo); Olivetti archives; YIVO archives; interviews with Polish art historians and experts; etc. Research has been conducted online and in person in Kraków, Tarnów, Sao Paulo and Porto Alegre.

Most sources date back to the artist's lifetime and include photographs, newspaper and magazine articles, personal documents and belongings, exhibition catalogues, correspondence, and interviews, among others. The archival sources vary enormously in size, language and physical condition. There is only one posthumous study dedicated to him, as well as to another European artist based in Brazil, written by Heloisa

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5 N. Stryna, *Zrzeszenie Żydowskich Artystów Malarzy i Rzeźbiarzy w Krakowie (1931–1939)*, Warsaw 2009.

Espada.<sup>6</sup> He was often cited in Brazilian books on concrete art and the Rupture Group, but only briefly in the main text and with very short and inaccurate biographies.

Haar's legacy in general is in fragments, memories, and traces. No single institution holds a great number of records regarding him. Even Mira Haar, his daughter, only has few documents. No period of his life is thoroughly documented.

It is important to note that much of the information about Leopoldo Haar is no longer available worldwide. Some archives, including Olivetti Brazil, could not be traced or accessed. Some archives that would have contained information about him no longer exist: they belonged to such institutions as, for instance, the Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente Art Club (Rome, Italy) and to synagogues in Porto Alegre. Also, archives from the war period could not be researched physically.

Here, it is necessary to comment on the type of sources that require further research. A future researcher should examine the archives from the war period in Europe, including those of the British Red Cross. Few letters were discovered – hence, no large body of correspondence is there to be carefully studied (it is unlikely that more will be found, considering the vastness of the archival materials I have consulted). Finally, a few reviews dating from Haar's days were found, but there may be more in Polish and Italian newspapers and magazines, especially of the 1930s and 1940s.

It is then clear that many facts or specific stories from his life are missing or remain undocumented. Some unconfirmed stories were included in the text if the source seemed reliable enough – leaving such stories out would make writing this text extremely hard at this time, considering what is known of Haar's life and art. Some facts that were supposedly true were disputed in the text, with reference to relevant documents. This approach to the limited documentation was necessary to construct a narrative about the artist; future research can contest and expand it. Such methodological openness does not represent a lack of rigour; rather, it was a necessary way of dealing with a life defined by displacement, followed by erasure.

### **Why study Leopoldo Haar today?**

Nowadays, the artist is undoubtedly obscure in Poland and Brazil, the countries where he spent long periods of his life. It has been this way for decades, especially because of his early death – rarely does an artist who has passed away find a good advocate for his work. It seems necessary to explain why he has been chosen as a subject of study. There are at least four reasons for that.

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6 H. Espada, *O grupo Ruptura e o Abstracionismo na Europa Central: Histórias e Obras Perdidas de Kázmér Fejér e Leopold Haar*, New York 2025.

First, it is intriguing that a person who got through so many extreme situations throughout his life – imprisonment, war attack, war, exile, to cite but a few – not only survived them, but kept moving ahead and producing art. Despite this not being surprising for a Polish researcher I have met, it certainly is from a Brazilian perspective. Second, his Olivetti window displays formed a special chapter in the blending of art and utilitarianism in Brazil, highly welcome by and crucial to concrete artists. Lastly, the roles he occupied in the arts and design in Brazil help us to understand the Brazilian modernisation in the 1940s and 1950s. This paper also aims to focus on an axis other than the Paris-Brazil one, which began in the nineteenth century and lasted until the mid-twentieth century.

Leopoldo Haar allows us to gain a more nuanced view of the art circles of mid-twentieth-century Brazil. Bringing to the foreground this obscure figure and analysing his achievements in the context of his time makes it possible for a more complex reading of those years.

As an artist, he stood out from his contemporaries for at least three reasons. The first was his knowledge of the then new trends in European art which had not yet reached Sao Paulo, Rio, or any other major city in Brazil. Secondly, he was active in the avant-garde movement of concrete artists that employed the interplay of art and utilitarianism to great degree, a theme central to their work (I shall discuss this in more detail in a forthcoming paper on Haar). Finally, at the school of design he was the teacher with the most professional experience in the area.

He does not explicitly fit into the research projects that examine artistic exchange between Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America not because of his uniqueness or specificity, but because of the nature of those projects which, in general, deal with other periods, different art genres or other geographies, as they do not include Sao Paulo or Brazil.<sup>7</sup>

### European years

Leopoldo Haar was born on 9 April 1910 as Chaskel Springer to an assimilated Jewish family in Tarnów, son of Hermann Haar and Amalja Springer. However, his birth record lists no father, and the given mother name is Mirel Springer. In Europe, he was known as Leopold; in Brazil, he was mostly known as Leopoldo, a name also used by his descendants. In Tarnów, Leopoldo Haar reached the 4th grade of the junior high school.

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7 The projects in question are journal volumes, exhibitions or books by researchers from different countries, including Marta Dziewańska, Dieter Roelstraete, Abigail Winograd, Klara Kemp-Welch, Cristina Freire, Artpool Művészeti Kutató Központ, and Laura Petruskaitė.

It is also important to understand Haar by relating him to the history of design in Brazil, which was strongly influenced by the developments of design abroad. Rafael Cardoso, a Brazilian art historian, shows that, after the first era of modernism in Brazilian design (1900–1945), design entered a multinational world (1945–1989).<sup>25</sup> From the early to the mid-twentieth century, concepts such as functionality, balance, and rationality governed design, favouring geometric forms, simplicity, fewer colours, and standardisation. During his Brazilian years, Haar belonged to an emerging multinational world, as he worked for many international companies, as mentioned before, and generally followed novel design concepts.

In the 1920s, the Haars, or at least the brothers, moved to Kraków. Leopoldo attended the State School of Decorative Arts and Artistic Industry in Kraków in the academic years of 1926/1927 and 1928/1929, a period that was possibly vital for his formation as an artist and professional, considering his later career. Among the courses he took were



A photographic portrait of the artist Leopoldo Haar (ca. 1929). Found among his personal papers held in the archives of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków

General Forms, Ornamental Forms, Lettering and Heraldry, Nature Studies, Technical Drawing, Anatomy, Studio Workshops, Chemistry for Artists, and Bookkeeping. In 1927, he missed 187 classes without justification. His final document states he was not classified or categorised, probably due to prolonged absence. As this was not a passing grade, he probably did not get a diploma.

In 1929, Haar entered the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków where he studied in the studio of Władysław Jaroński in the academic years 1929/1930 and 1930/1931. In 1931, he obtained a mark for a nude study. He attended courses similar to those he had taken at the previous school, graduating in 1931.

The brothers were very active in the Kraków art and music scene. In 1930, during Leopoldo's studies at the Academy, he and his brother founded the Szał Academic Orchestra, a jazz band in which he played the drums, possibly also the piano and clarinet, and conducted. It was a great success, and they travelled to many Polish cities. The Haar brothers' biggest hit was "Tango Łyczakowskie." After the disbandment of Szał, Leopoldo started a jazz orchestra named Silver Jazz, which also toured the country. In 1936, the brothers established the Haar Studios, providing photographic and advertising services. In 1938, they were joined by eight other musicians in forming a band called Gang.

The Holocaust and World War II tore the family apart. A few of them survived but lost contact. When the Germans invaded in 1939, Leopoldo and Zygmunt fled leaving their mother and sister behind, were taken prisoners by the Red Army and sent to a gulag in the Soviet Union. After the Sikorski–Mayski agreement in 1941, they were released by the Soviets, that year or the following, and made their way to Iran, where the Anders Army was being

formed; Leopoldo was assigned to the Arts Department of the Department of Culture and Press (sometimes referred to as the Polish Public Relations or the propaganda section), there he produced lettering, graphic designs, photomontages, photographic registers, and others.

Haar was a public relations officer, more precisely an official war artist, in the Anders Army. As an obituary in a Polish newspaper noted upon his death in 1954, “The name of the artistic collective Haar Brothers [...] was known throughout prewar Poland, and many soldiers of the 2nd Army Corps, on their journey from Russia to England, came into contact with them – whether directly in the Propaganda Department or through their numerous exhibitions, drawings, photographs, posters, and illustrations in publications.”<sup>8,9</sup>

Still with the Anders Army, they were transferred to the Italian front and stayed there from December 1943 to February 1944. From 1944 to some time before January 1947, Haar lived in Rome, where he and his brother designed various materials, including several posters, the second volume of a book commemorating the Battle of Monte Cassino, Melchior Wańkowicz’s *Bitwa o Monte Cassino* (with 671 illustrations, 293 photos, 203 portraits and 7 photomontages), and a commemorative badge of the 2nd Corps. During this time, he continued creating his own artistic work; it is unclear whether he worked for any companies. When doing the graphic design for the commemorative book, “Leopold Haar came up with copious and ingenious graphic tricks,” as Wańkowicz put it.<sup>10</sup>



The commemorative badge of the 2nd Corps, designed by the Haars. Source: *Historicon*.



A poster by the Haar brothers, after July 1944. Litography, 70 × 50 cm. Source: Antykwariat Antiquo Modo.

- 8 J. Pomian, “Zgon Leopolda Haara”, *Orzeł Biały* 26 March 1955, p. 2.
- 9 E. Millie and Z. Kantorosinski, *The Polish Poster: From Young Poland through the Second World War*, Washington, D.C. 1993.
- 10 Quoted after: A. Woźny, “Monte Cassino”, *Akowiec – Biuletyn Informacyjny* *Śżzak* 2007, p. 4.

The artist exhibited at many group shows in Rome. From June to July 1946, he participated in *Agli amici Artisti Polacchi* in the Salon of the Circolo Artistico Internazionale on Via Margutta. It put on show works by eleven artists from the school of Marian Bohusz-Szyszko, as well as the teacher's. "The exhibition served as a concluding event for the activities of the 2nd Polish Corps on Italian soil, which is presumably the reason why it attracted a wide audience," including diplomats and the local high society, as Mirosław A. Supruniuk pointed out.<sup>11</sup>

In Italy's capital, the artist met Waldemar Cordeiro, a Brazilian-Italian journalist and artist who attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome. Initially, Cordeiro was a figurative artist, but he then oriented his work towards geometric abstraction. From 1946 to 1948, he lived between Rome and Sao Paulo. In 1948, he settled permanently in the latter, where he would, four years later, become the leader of the concrete art group of which Haar was a member. Since they were close, Cordeiro may have influenced Haar to choose Brazil. Both joined the Associazione Artistica Internazionale Indipendente Art Club, founded by Józef Jarema and Enrico Prampolini.

After the end of World War II, Haar decided against returning to his homeland, like many other Polish Jews or members of the 2nd Corps who preferred to settle down and start over in a new country. They did not want to face antisemitism and the now Soviet-controlled country. In 1946, the 2nd Corps was sent to the Resettlement Camp in the United Kingdom, a country in which most of its members would stay; it was from there that Haar travelled to Brazil. He knew he could go anywhere – in a letter from Rome dated July 1946, he stated that "With the trade in our hands – we are commercial graphic designers and interior architects – we can earn our living anywhere in the world." On the other hand, as he wrote in the same letter, it had been seven years since he left home.

### **Brazilian years**

The city in which Leopold and Zygmunt first arrived in Brazil was Porto Alegre, the capital of the most southern state in the country, Rio Grande do Sul. In the 1940s, Porto Alegre had a strong Jewish community, which began to form in the 1900s with Polish Jews escaping from antisemitic laws. In the 1920s, some of them enjoyed social advancement and moved to larger cities, including the capital. In the 1930s, a new direct flow of Polish Jews to Porto Alegre started. Porto Alegre was chosen by the Haars (if there was a choice) over more common destinations in Brazil at the time: Rio, its

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11 M. Supruniuk, "Rzym w biografii Mariana Kościółkowskiego", *Archiwum Emigracji: Źródła i Materiały do Dziejów Emigracji Polskiej po 1939 Roku*, Toruń n.d., p. 153.

then capital, or Santos, a coastal city in the state of Sao Paulo, from which immigrants departed for other towns in the countryside.

In Brazil, Haar's ties to the Italian community were generally stronger than those to the Jewish community. The same applied to Porto Alegre where, shortly after his arrival, he was heard speaking Italian in public by Erico Verissimo, a nationally acclaimed writer by then and editor of the "Revista do Globo," a magazine published by Livraria do Globo, a well-respected bookshop and publishing house specialising in literature and poetry, partially owned by Italians. Books and articles inform that Leopoldo worked as a typesetter and Zygmunt as a photographer at Globo. On the other hand, his employment record states that he was hired in 1947 by Clarim, Globo's advertising branch, as an advertising draughtsman. As such, he was appointed to design window displays for their bookshop. There are no records of any previous window displays he had done.



Erico Verissimo in front of Haar's portrait, ca. 1947. Unknown photographer. Arquivo Erico Verissimo/Instituto Moreira Salles

The artist painted a portrait of Verissimo around 1947, in which he "reconciled a modern aesthetic incorporating synthetic forms, a geometric background, visible brushstrokes, and large monochromatic areas with the need to represent certain physical characteristics" of the writer, according to the researcher Heloisa Espada.<sup>12</sup> Although not an Italian, Verissimo was familiar with Italy's culture and depicted immigrants from that country and their descendants in his novels. Mass immigration from Italy to Rio Grande do Sul started at the end of the nineteenth century. The newcomers gradually moved to Porto Alegre, which in the 1940s initiated a process of metropolisation and received a second influx of Italians.

When the brothers Haar moved to Porto Alegre in January 1947, they found themselves in a city with well-established communities of Jews, Italians, and other Europeans, including Poles. Nevertheless, my research has not revealed deep connections to Jewish or Polish communities in Porto Alegre or Sao Paulo, to which they relocated in 1950.

Despite his loose association with the Polish community in Brazil, Haar's identity here was and still is acknowledged as Polish due to his

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12 H. Espada, *O grupo Ruptura*, p. 5.

passport and nationality. He was not a naturalised Brazilian. Also, not a single source was found describing him a Jewish artist. Considering that Brazil was, and continues to be, a racist country that welcomed white Europeans, one may believe that Poles were always well received here. But it must be stated that there was prejudice and xenophobia against some nationalities, including Germans, Italians and Poles, besides the existing antisemitism.

In December 1947, Leopoldo Haar staged a solo show of paintings and drawings. It was his nineteenth exhibition and it featured oils and temperas, as well as drawings by “this modern brushwork painter,” as described in a short unsigned note in the press, which also stated that the exhibition was “the event of the week.”<sup>13</sup> The one hundred and two works on display were still lifes, nudes, landscapes, day-to-day or war scenes, made in Kazakhstan, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Venice, Rome, Porto Alegre and Espírito Santo, another Brazilian city.<sup>14</sup> They were “simplified, abstracting figurations, with visible brushstrokes and large areas of only one colour.”<sup>15</sup> Unrelated to Constructivism, the pieces had a lot in common with Cubism and Expressionism, trends that largely influenced artists of that time.<sup>16</sup>

The Spanish-born journalist, artist, art historian and critic Fernando Corona, based in Porto Alegre, wrote a review of this show. For him, “Leopoldo Haar comes from the Cubists,” especially in his treatment of perspective. With this show, the city received “a message from artists interested in the removal of limitations,” wrote the critic. Corona also stated that “The drawings by Leopoldo Haar are beautiful poems traced in pure lines, with no artifice. His language is clear. The synthesis is present. The superfluous was eliminated. All that is left is the essence.”<sup>17</sup>

On 25 November 1948, the Haar brothers inaugurated the Haar Studios in Porto Alegre, known as *Stúdio the Two* (originally *Estúdio os Dois*). A display of photos, drawings and posters accompanied the inauguration. In October 1949, they opened the studio’s gallery with an inaugural show of engravings by Honoré Daumier from the artist Vasco Prado’s collection.<sup>18</sup> While serving a number of purposes, it was also one of the first art galleries in that city.

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13 *Jornal do Dia*, 12 December 1947, p. 5.

14 B. Andrzejewski and J. Wiktor Sienkiewicz, *Polish Artists in Egypt: 1941–1946*, Warsaw 2023.

15 H. Espada, *O grupo Ruptura*, p. 4.

16 *Ibidem*.

17 F. Corona, “Leopoldo Haar”, in: *Caminhada nas Artes*, Porto Alegre 1977, pp. 23–24.

18 N. Bohns, “Continente improvável: artes visuais no Rio Grande do Sul do final do século XIX a meados do século XX”, PhD diss., Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, 2005.

In mid-1949, the artist took third place at a national contest for the 1950 World Soccer Cup poster, and received a monetary reward. He was also awarded an honourable mention for another work. The opening of the poster exhibition took place in Rio's grandiose Municipal Theatre. The competition was organised by the Brazilian Sports Confederation with the Fine Arts Society; one hundred and six works were submitted. Haar's poster depicted "a large ball wrapped in the flags of the competing countries with a laurel branch in the lower plane," as described by a newspaper.<sup>19</sup> Curiously, the pseudonym used was ZLH, which may indicate his brother also took part in the designing process.

In 1950, the journalist Neli Dutra wrote about the brothers: "Unconditionally kind and welcoming, the Haars are already part of the city's landscape," highlighting their intense involvement in the city's cultural life.<sup>20</sup>

Haar married Anna Landsberg (1921–1984) in 1950. They moved to Sao Paulo the same year. According to Mira Haar, he wanted to be there upon hearing about the city's growing importance from his wife. In the new place, he established close relations with members of the Italian community in at least two places: the MASP Museum and Olivetti, a giant Italian technology brand operating on a global scale.

A pioneering Brazilian art museum, the MASP Museum was founded by the press mogul Assis Chateaubriand, with Pietro Maria Bardi, an Italian merchant, art critic, and journalist, as its co-founder and director, a position he held for more than forty years. It was designed as a modern museum, despite a substantial collection of ancient European art it held. Alongside its educational exhibitions and in-house magazine, it also ran a school of art and design: the Institute of Contemporary Art, inspired by the ideas of the Bauhaus and the Institute of Design in Chicago.

Haar taught at that school, which existed from 1951 to 1953. Other teachers and lecturers included art historians, sociologists, artists, architects, and other professionals, such as Bardi, Roberto Sambonet, Zygmunt Haar, Flávio Motta, Salvador Candia, Roger Bastide, and Max Bill. Leopoldo Haar was one of the few with professional experience in design. Bardi declared that "The spirit behind the school was a Polish immigrant, Leopoldo Haar."<sup>21</sup> It is unclear what subjects he taught; however, they possibly included graphic design, product design, artistic composition, lettering, and window display design – or, more likely,

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19 "Primeiro passo concreto para o campeonato mundial", *Diário da Noite* 13 June 1949, n.p.

20 N. Dutra, "As reuniões no Studio dos Haars", *Correio do Povo* 7 May 1950.

21 P.M. Bardi, *The Arts in Brazil: A New Museum at São Paulo*, Milan 1956, p. 130.

a combination of these. He was an expert in design and received foreign art and design magazines and materials that few in Sao Paulo had access to at the time, except for a few individuals and some artists who visited the main public library in the town.

Among his students were Emilie Chamie, who would become a renowned designer; Alexandre Wollner, who would abandon his career as an artist to pursue a desire to speak for the masses through design; and Aparício Basílio da Silva, later on an artist and businessman. Maurício Nogueira Lima, who would become a member of the Rupture group of concrete artists, was also his student. So were Antonio Maluf, another exponent of concrete art, and Ludovico Martino, who would become an architect. Chamie later declared Haar was “the one who showed us the pathway.”<sup>22</sup> The design historian Ethel Leon informally told me that “he probably had an impact on the formation of IAC’s students” and “was a major reference for all window display designers that came later.”

He did not work directly for Olivetti, despite several references to it. Instead, he worked for Tecnogeral Securit, a former importer of Olivetti parts and mechanisms for calculators and typewriters. The owner of Tecnogeral Securit was the engineer Aldo Magnelli, the brother of Alberto Magnelli, an artist from the Paris School. The Magnellis were close friends of MASP’s Assis Chateaubriand.

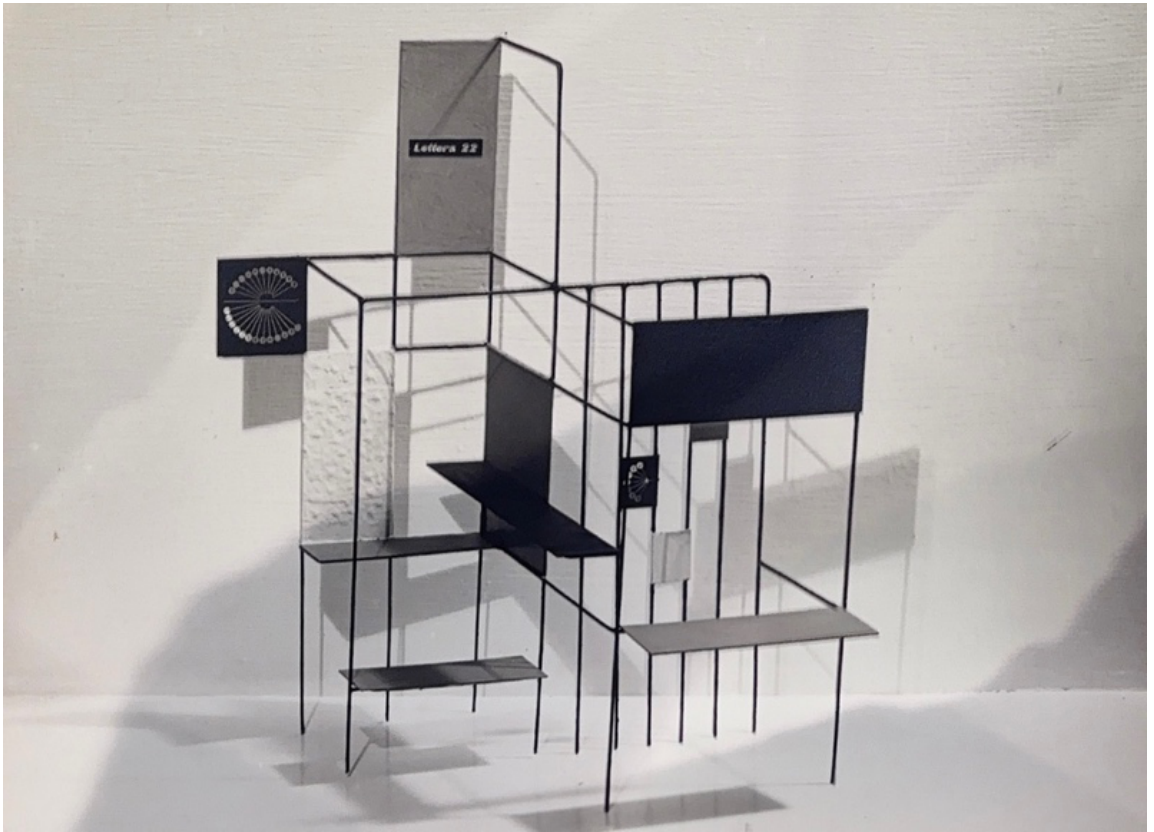


A poster by Haar for Olivetti, ca. 1950.  
Source: *Habitat* 1951, vol. 2, p. 45

At Tecnogeral Securit, by which he was hired in July 1951, he was an advertising draughtsman, according to his work record. That involved designing posters and window displays for Olivetti and other national or international brands or products, such as the English perfume brand Atkinsons, and Goomtex manufacturing raincoats and overcoats, a local company owned by the Zeigers, an immigrant family from Poland. He also staged some events.

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22 C. Viegas, “O círculo infinito de Emilie Chamie”, *Revista Cult.* March 2000, p. 12.



A maquette for a window display with Olivetti products, ca. 1950. Photo by Zygmunt Haar. Source: Archives of MASP

The window displays he did for the Italian brand were art-oriented. Haar wrote an article for the magazine published by the MASP Museum, arguing that art movements – he mentioned Abstractionism, Constructivism, and Neoplasticism – contributed to the creation of functional artworks. Hence, the “artist expresses pure art in a utilitarian language.”<sup>23</sup> He was in favour of constructions that showed “good taste and sobriety.”<sup>24</sup> Finally, he stated that the old-style window displays should adapt to “the conquests of art, science, psychology, etc. – the aesthetic demands of the man that uses the fridge, knows the sulfas and is contemporary to Max Bill.” Bill exhibited at MASP in 1950 and at the 1951 Sao Paulo Biennale. He was a great inspiration for the local concrete artists, a group of which Haar was a member. In a wide and oversimplified view of the development of concrete art in Sao Paulo, Bill’s shows in the city marked a turning point towards geometric art.

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23 L. Haar, “Plásticas novas”, *Habitat* 1951, n. 5, p. 58.

24 Ibidem.

Another poster Leopoldo Haar designed was for the 1951 Sao Paulo Biennale's contest, won by Antonio Maluf.

In December 1952, Haar participated in the first Rupture group show at the Museum of Modern Art in Sao Paulo. The Rupture group had around 11 members in the 1950s, though not simultaneously. Haar and



A draft poster for the First Sao Paulo Biennale, 1951. Photo Zygmunt Haar. Source: Archives of Pinacoteca de Sao Paulo

the leader, Cordeiro, were joined by Brazilian-born Luiz Sacilotto, Geraldo de Barros and Hermelindo Fiaminghi, Polish-born Anatol Wladyslaw, Austrian-born Lothar Charoux and Judith Lauand, also born in Brazil, the only female in the group. It turns out that, unable to put on other collective shows of their own work or create new spaces, the group ended up meeting at cafes, bars, or a public library, to discuss art. Haar seldom came to those meetings, which started in 1950 or earlier. Despite this, he was the one who further developed the relationship between art and utilitarianism, a topic central to their work. He even started working on such projects before the group of concrete artists began its public activity in Sao Paulo.

In Sao Paulo, Haar introduced some local artists to Constructivism. It was from Haar that Fiaminghi learned about it, as well as about the Bauhaus and such artists as Pevsner, Gabo, Kandinsky, Malevich, and Moholy-Nagy. Wollner was another creator to discover Constructivism via Haar.

In June 1954, he was appointed artistic and exhibition design director for the Agricultural Exhibition, part of the 400th-anniversary celebrations of the city of Sao Paulo. Soon after that, Leopoldo Haar passed away. He died from nephritis on 24 November 1954. He was survived by his wife, Anna Landsberg Haar, and their two little children, Mira (b. 1953) and Martin (b. 1951).

### **An examination of Leopoldo Haar's roles, activity and oeuvre**

The significance of Leopoldo Haar's roles, activity and oeuvre may be discussed at both local and international levels, considering that he not only operated in local contexts, whether in Europe (Rome, Kraków, etc.) or in South America (Sao Paulo, Porto Alegre), but was also thrown into transna-

tional flows and contexts of ideas and practices. It is important to state that, both in Poland and Brazil, his influence and a certain amount of fame reached national levels, as confirmed by the Polish and Brazilian press. Discussed here is the Brazilian period and the international/transnational perspective.

In Brazil, Haar lived for longer periods in Porto Alegre and Sao Paulo. It was for at least three reasons that he was influential in the former. The window displays he designed were more modern than those by other designers. Together with his brother, he ran a major photography studio in the city. Lastly, the Haar brothers opened a pioneering art gallery. It is hard, however, to ascertain whether these initiatives exerted a broad and long-term impact in that Southern city, either leaving a legacy in the field of advertising or photography or influencing a younger generation of professionals.

In Sao Paulo, the case was very different: his influence on fellow avant-garde artists and design students was remarkable and is well documented, as stated before. Being the oldest member of the Rupture group, he was probably also the most experienced, with a decades-long background as a multidisciplinary artist and a well-seasoned professional across Europe (and beyond, when in the Anders Army). He shared artistic inspirations with them and was the leading force behind the practice of blending art and functionalism, an aspect of key importance to the concrete artists. At the MASP school of art and design, he excelled in teaching and his impact on students was so profound that the museum director declared he was the soul of the school, as cited above.

Haar's impact on the development of modern art in Brazil nowadays tends to be undervalued, probably because his early death prevented his practice and creative output from flourishing and becoming better-known locally. However, in mid-twentieth-century Brazil with no modern art museums or international art publications, he was a key figure in keeping the spheres of art, photography and advertising up-to-date by means of, to name just a few, the classes he taught, the books and magazines he lent, the chats he had with artist friends, and the initiatives he undertook, including starting an art gallery.

From an international/transnational perspective, Haar does not fit into a single category. He was a fleeing Jew, a resistance army's official, and an experienced artist (including all the areas of his artistic work), among others. In each of these categories, he crossed territorial boundaries in search not only of survival as a human but also of new forms of being and creating art.

Perhaps the most difficult to assess is Haar's oeuvre, as only a small portion of it has survived, and most of it remains undocumented (e.g., there are no photos of it). Here, we consider the functional artworks he

designed within the framework of his creative practice; of this even less has survived in terms of actual pieces and their documentation. Nevertheless, what remains of his oeuvre reveals a mature and independent artist who was well-informed about new trends in art and operated within their rules and principles, while also aiming to push the boundaries between art and other disciplines, such as advertising. What remains of his oeuvre also shows an artist who dealt not only with novel forms of art and advertising but also with more traditional ones, which is common among people who must earn their living.

### **The significance of Leopoldo Haar's oeuvre 20th-century transnational art history and the history of design**

In this section, an attempt is made to situate Haar within the transnational art history and within the history of design in the twentieth century. Mid-twentieth-century Brazil was affected by rapid urbanisation and industrialisation.

The aim of focusing on his biography is not only to remind us of his leaving his homeland and being an immigrant. It is related to his work across different sectors, from the art world to trade and industry. He was located in the contact zones of cultural exchange. In the window displays for Olivetti stores in Brazil, for instance, he used new trends of European art in a booming peripheral city. More than that, he represents a core phenomenon of the twentieth century: people affected by war, living in exile, who played a decisive role in cultural and artistic innovation.

It is also important to understand Haar by relating him to the history of design in Brazil, which was strongly influenced by the developments of design abroad. Rafael Cardoso, a Brazilian art historian, shows that, after the first era of modernism in Brazilian design (1900–1945), design entered a multinational world (1945–1989).<sup>25</sup> From the early to the mid-twentieth century, concepts such as functionality, balance, and rationality governed design, favouring geometric forms, simplicity, fewer colours, and standardisation. During his Brazilian years, Haar belonged to an emerging multinational world, as he worked for many international companies, as mentioned before, and generally followed novel design concepts.

Another key aspect is that the Institute of Contemporary Art, the MASP school of art and design where Haar taught, is widely regarded by art and design scholars as a crucial initiative in the implementation of a new approach to these disciplines in mid-twentieth-century Brazil. Scholars such as Ethel Leon, a specialist in the history of design, Antonio Takao Kanamaru, a design professor, and Soraia Pauli Scarpa, a designer

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25 R. Cardoso, *Uma introdução à história do design*, Sao Paulo 2008.

and independent researcher, agree on the school's pioneering quality.<sup>26</sup> As an instructor at ICA, Haar left a mark on a new, modern generation of designers being formed in Sao Paulo who would help modernise the industry and trade sectors.

The significance of Haar to the transnational art history of the twentieth century lies in his capacity to embody the complex routes of circulation, negotiation, and reinvention that are formative of modernisms beyond the main global art centres. He was not, however, merely an importer of European ideas into Brazil. His own biography was at the crossroads of different modernities.

### **A comment on this article's relevance and final remarks**

What constitutes this article's relevance is not only a close study of the trajectory of a once significant and influential artist who has since fallen into oblivion, tracing his career and work as completely as possible (due to the limitations to the article's length and available sources). More importantly, it uses a biography as an analytical tool for academic purposes. That is, it aims to understand the broader context – with focus on art and design – in a dual manner. On the one hand, the context that allowed the artist to exist and develop his manifold work. On the other hand, the study sheds light on the context, exploring such situations as the functioning of Porto Alegre's cultural environment and Sao Paulo's flourishing design and concrete art.

The article also makes a contribution to studies investigating artistic exchanges between regions of Europe other than Paris and Brazil. It complicates the narrative of artistic modernisation in Brazil by indicating Haar's ideas and practice as catalysts for this process, showing that some influences also came from other parts of the Old World. It problematises Haar's national identity by showing his social network across both continents.

To sum up, the article's main contribution is the placing of Leopoldo Haar on the map of twentieth-century art and design in Brazil and beyond as an agent whose professional and personal trajectory enables a more complex and nuanced understanding of transnational artistic flows and the emergence of modern design and concrete art in Brazil.

Throughout Leopoldo Haar's career, he experimented with art and utilitarianism.

Nevertheless, this is not to say that he was always a pioneer or an avant-garde creator as he often reconciled the new and the standard, the

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26 E. Leon, *IAC: primeira escola de design do Brasil*, Sao Paulo 2013. S. Scarpa and A. Kanamaru, "A questão da moda moderna brasileira no Instituto de Arte Contemporânea do Museu de Arte de São Paulo", *ARS* 2018.

up-to-date and the traditional. His versatile style was crucial for his work and artistic life.

In Europe, he left a mark as both a musician and a war artist. In Brazil, he stood out with his artistic and cultural baggage, influencing others as a teacher or a colleague. He connected continents and created bridges across different modernisms. He developed many novel ideas in diverse media (music, propaganda, advertising, and visual arts), and explored how people reacted to them.

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