

**Regional Plots: The Bienal de São Paulo and Its Impact on
Latin America (1960s)****Maria de Fátima Morethy Couto****Abstract**

This article discusses the impact of the Bienal de São Paulo on the art circuit of South America and Central America in the 1950s and 1960s. It intends to demonstrate that even though they never adopted a Latin Americanist stance, the first iterations of the Bienal de São Paulo led to the strengthening of regional exchanges in the 1960s, as well as to the creation of new and recurring contemporary art exhibitions in neighbouring countries, by providing a successful model of a cultural business alliance with great symbolic gain.

Keywords

Art Biennials, São Paulo Biennials, Latin America.

Regional Plots: The Bienal de São Paulo and Its Impact on Latin America (1960s)¹

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The creation of the Bienal de São Paulo, in 1951, was a bold initiative; modeled after the Venice Biennale, it was the first of its kind in Latin America. It remains the longest-running contemporary art exhibition in the region, having been held without interruption since its foundation. This article intends to demonstrate that the Bienal de São Paulo led to the strengthening of regional exchanges in the 1960s by generating more egalitarian cultural flows and creating new and recurring contemporary art exhibitions in different countries neighbouring Brazil. It did this by providing a model of a cultural business alliance – between cultural agents, artists, businessmen, and governments – with significant symbolic capital gain. The Bienal's continental connections will be privileged here, thus reaffirming its status as a protagonist in Latin America, a strategic site of agency, without, however, neglecting the criticism it received, especially for repeating, without major revisions, the Venetian format established in 1895.

The Bienal de São Paulo only became possible due to a combination of socio-political-cultural factors that were present in the post-war period, from which there appeared a new type of patronage in Brazil, coming from industry and mass media, that competed for symbolic capital and cultural status. It concerned private patronage (or semi-private, given that it often relied on public funds) aimed at affirming modern art and architecture. It should be noted that the country had timidly participated in the Second World War and was experiencing a period of economic growth, which was driven above all by the actions and projects of an urban and industrial bourgeoisie.

Under the initiative of a few members of this bourgeoisie, several cultural institutions of primary importance were created in Brazil, such as the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), in 1947, the Museums of Modern Art of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro (1948), the Brazilian Comedy Theater (TBC, 1948), the Vera Cruz Cinema Company (1949), and TV Tupi (1950), the first television station in Latin America. It is worth pointing out that similar projects related to the renewal and updating of the local/regional artistic-cultural field took place in other metropolises throughout Latin America during the same period, several of which were supported by public authorities. In Buenos Aires, let us mention the creation of the Institute of Modern Art in 1949, with private capital, and the Museum of Modern

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Translated from the Portuguese by Marco Alexandre de Oliveira.

Art in 1956, a public institution associated with the Ministry of Culture. In Bogotá, the founding instrument of the Museum of Modern Art was signed by the Minister of Education in 1955, but the museum only began its activities in 1963. The Museum of Modern Art of Mexico, another government initiative, was opened in 1964. Finally, let us note the creation of the Museum of Contemporary Art at the University of Chile, in 1947, as a consequence of the actions of the Institute for Extension in Plastic Arts (IEAP), at the same university.

In Brazil, the city of São Paulo distinguished itself from other Brazilian metropolises due to its continuous growth and intense industrial activity and “accelerated its economic and industrial rise as a synthesis of Brazil and a showcase of the world”.² In this context, participation in major cultural undertakings may be understood as a form of struggle for visibility and power in relation to other social groups, both national and foreign. Two characters proved prominent in the consolidation of a certain form of modern patronage in São Paulo that was not focused on the art trade, and their paths constantly crossed in the 1950s and 1960s: Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho (Ciccillo Matarazzo), a key figure in the creation of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, the institution responsible for holding the first biennials, and Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand Bandeira de Mello (Assis Chateaubriand), the director of the largest media network in Brazil in the first half of the 20th century, *Diários e Emissoras Associados* (Associated Daily Press), and co-creator of MAM-SP with the couple Pietro and Lina Bo Bardi.

Ciccillo Matarazzo was the nephew of Count Francisco Matarazzo, who arrived in Brazil in 1881 in search of better living conditions and worked as a peddler before becoming a successful businessman and founding Indústrias Reunidas Fábricas Matarazzo (IRFM), the largest industrial conglomerate in Latin America at the beginning of the 20th century. Ciccillo was born in São Paulo in 1898, but received his formal education in Italy. He and one of Count Matarazzo’s sons-in-law assumed control of one of the family’s metallurgical plants in 1922 and demonstrated that they knew how to expand the business into other areas. In 1935, their company was dissolved and Ciccillo became the sole director of Metalma (Metalúrgica Matarazzo), where MAM-SP began its activities, before moving to the centre of the city of São Paulo, on Rua 7 de Abril.

There are several assumptions about the reasons that led Ciccillo Matarazzo to organise a recurring contemporary art exhibition as an extension of the activities of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, despite his personal preference for classical art.³ Among them, it is possible to mention the ties he had with Italy, due to belonging to an immigrant family, and his desire to project himself nationally and internationally. The fact is that the Bienal had the decisive support of successive mayors and governors of São Paulo, of intellectuals involved in the São Paulo cultural modernisation project, such as Sérgio Milliet and Lourival Gomes Machado, as well as the international coordination provided by Ciccillo Matarazzo’s wife, Yolanda Penteadó, who came from a traditional coffee growing family from the countryside of the state, and who established several preparatory contacts for the first two iterations of the show with embassies and cultural institutions abroad. The power of Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho at the head of the biennials was practically unlimited. Aracy Amaral recalls hearing him say that “he would do the Biennial one way or another, with critics or without critics, with artists or without artists”.⁴ He held the power, having contact with the spheres that made the preparation of the bi-

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Rita Alves Oliveira, “Bienal de São Paulo: impacto na cultura brasileira”, *São Paulo em perspectiva* 3, no. 15 (2001): 19, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-88392001000300004>.

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“I must confess that, when I started, I was the most academic of all. I liked classical painting, everything that looked as much like me as possible. Then I started to see the evolution of art”. Statement by Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, here cited from Fernando A. de Almeida. *O franciscano Ciccillo* (São Paulo: Livraria Pioneira Editora, 1976), 31.

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Aracy Amaral, “Bienais ou da impossibilidade de reter o tempo”, *Textos do Trópico de Capricórnio*, vol. 3 (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2006), 90.

ennials possible, and as the author states, “he exercised this power with the *aisance* [ease] of an experienced administrator in relation to his undertakings”.⁵

The Bienal de São Paulo changed the cultural life of the country and placed its host city on the route of major international exhibitions, thus granting it special prominence in the Americas by providing a showcase, for neighbouring countries, of what was happening in the world of “high art”.⁶ Furthermore, its first iterations (in the 1950s and 1960s) promoted a significant and unprecedented circulation of works, artists, and cultural agents in Brazil and South America, at a time when the number of art journals published in the country was limited and traveling abroad was still difficult, unless you belonged to the wealthier class. They therefore fostered not only the creation of social networks, but also of transnational interests that became visible in the selections of artists, exhibition commissioners, and jurors, as well as in the awards granted.

Based as it was on the Venice exhibition, the Bienal de São Paulo established an elaborate system of awards, and consequently of legitimisation, which was in force, with adjustments, until its 14th edition (1977). These included regular awards (with emphasis on the Grand Prize, which began to be granted from the 2nd exhibition onwards to an artist who stood out for the work they presented as a whole), honourable mentions, and several acquisition prizes sponsored by companies, public agencies, and individuals, with the aim of composing a collection for the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, with occasional donations to other museums in the country.⁷ It is worth recalling that artists could also have their works sold during the event, as occurred in Venice, which boosted the timid trade in modern and contemporary art that existed in Brazil in those years.

The Bienal de São Paulo was, therefore, part of what Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, upon analysing the Argentinian art scene of the period, defined as a modernising institutional circuit, which consisted of new official or private institutions and specific awards that sought to “give visibility to alternative ideas in the local art scene, and even postulate (at least imaginary) conditions for their international inclusion”.⁸ It was not a homogeneous space, but one permeated by conflicts and tensions, vested interests, and relationships of affinity, in which “institutional agents implemented strategies that pointed to different (more moderate or radical) expressions of experimentation”.⁹

Systematically, the festivities surrounding its anniversary make it possible to launch, in Brazil, new publications related to it.¹⁰ In the past few years, consistent academic research has been addressing its impacts on the Brazilian and international cultural milieu from new perspectives, by focusing, among other topics, on the geopolitical plots that supported foreign delegations, on the controversies

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Amaral, *Trópico de Capricórnio*, 90.

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This fact is highlighted by Aracy Amaral, who considers that the first São Paulo biennials were the “showcase, for artists from Brazil and Latin America who came here, of what was happening in the world”, thus stimulating “a curious phenomenon: what a Biennial showed, internationally, we saw appear in the tendencies of many Brazilian artists – and Latin American ones who regularly came to visit, such as Argentinians and Uruguayans – in the following biennial”. Amaral, *Trópico de Capricórnio*, 92 and 95.

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The works acquired with these resources are now part of the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art at the University of São Paulo (MAC- USP) and no longer of the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo.

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Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, *Del Di Tella a “Tucuman Arde”*. *Vanguardia Artística y Política En El 68 Argentino* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 2010), 42.

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Longoni and Mestman, *Del Di Tella a “Tucuman Arde”*, 42.

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As an example of publications that accompanied the festivities surrounding the Bienal de São Paulo, see the dossier “Cinquenta anos de Bienal de São Paulo”, *Revista USP*, no. 52 (2002), and the collections: Agnaldo Farias (ed.), *50 anos da Bienal de São Paulo: 1951/2001* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal, 2001), and Paulo Myada (ed.), *Bienal de São Paulo desde 1951* (São Paulo: Fundação Bienal, 2022). Other significant work on the topic includes the books by Leonor Amarante, *As Bienais de São Paulo/1951 a 1987* (São Paulo: Projeto, 1989), and Francisco Alambert and Polyana Canhete, *Bienais de São Paulo. Da era do museu à era dos curadores* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2004).

that involved specific awards, on the participation and (lack of) visibility given to women and black artists, and on its most troubled or controversial iterations. Caroline Schroeder, for example, recently analysed the 10th Bienal de São Paulo, from 1969, which was known as the Boycott Biennial, and which, as it will be discussed, was held in a situation marked by the arbitrariness of a dictatorial regime.¹¹ Renata Zago focused on the so-called National Biennials, which were held between 1970 and 1976 and which were designed by the military government as a way of once again attracting the sympathy of Brazilian artists towards the event, as well as of internally reducing the repercussions of criticism directed at the exhibition by the international community.¹² Marina Cerchiaro, for her part, discussed the participation of female sculptors in the Bienal de São Paulo, while Carolina Rossetti de Toledo dedicated herself to the United States representations in the first five iterations of the event, thus aiming to demonstrate how the image that the country sought to project internationally changed over the course of the 1950s.¹³ Bruno Pinheiro, in an article published in 2021, revisited the circumstances behind awarding the black artist Heitor dos Prazeres at the 1st São Paulo Biennial.¹⁴

However, few authors have addressed, in depth, the repercussions of the Bienal de São Paulo in Latin America.¹⁵ It is repeated, not without reason, that the internationalist character of the event led its organisers to constantly look to Europe, eager to build bridges with hegemonic centres of art and to show themselves to be up to date. In fact, the Bienal de São Paulo never assumed, throughout its history, a Latin Americanist bias; nevertheless, it cannot be said that it completely neglected its ties with other countries on the continent. As the article will seek to demonstrate through data and comparative analyses, the event gave visibility, albeit temporarily, to other nations in Latin America. Although it cannot be affirmed that the representations of these nations achieved great prominence in the view of the public or critics alike, the Bienal provided them with a hitherto unprecedented space to promote their artists, even helping them to launch themselves in a more professional way into the arena of international artistic disputes in the 1950s and 1960s.

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Caroline S. Schroeder, *X Bienal de São Paulo: sob os efeitos da contestação* (São Paulo: Escola de Comunicação e Artes da Universidade de São Paulo, 2011).

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Renata C. O. M. Zago, *As Bienais Nacionais de São Paulo: 1970-1976* (PhD Diss.: Instituto de Artes da Unicamp, Campinas, 2013).

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Marina Mazze Cerchiaro, *Escultoras e Bienais: a construção do reconhecimento artístico no pós-guerra* (PhD Diss.: Interunidades em Estética e História da Arte, Universidade de São Paulo, 2020); Carolina Rossetti de Toledo, *Arte moderna dos Estados Unidos: obras e origens do acervo do Museu de Arte Contemporânea da USP* (PhD Diss.: Interunidades em Estética e História da Arte, Universidade de São Paulo, 2022)

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Bruno Pinheiro, "Moenda de Heitor dos Prazeres, medalha de prata na I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo", *Revista de História da Arte e da Cultura*, no. 2 (2021): 119-141, <https://doi.org/10.20396/rhac.v2i2.15139>. Other comprehensive academic studies on more recent iterations of the Bienal de São Paulo include Vinicius Spricigo, *Modos de representação da Bienal de São Paulo. A passagem do internacionalismo artístico à globalização cultural* (São Paulo: Hedra, 2011), and Tálisson Melo de Souza, *Transações e transições na arte contemporânea: mediação e geopolítica nas Bienais de São Paulo (1978-1983)* (PhD Diss.: Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Sociais da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2021).

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The relation between the Bienal de São Paulo and Latin America is usually evoked in articles and dissertations that discuss the holding of the 1st Latin American Biennial in São Paulo, in 1978. It concerns a project that counted on the initial support of different art critics who were committed to the search for common denominators or shared conditions for art in the region, but who were disappointed with the way the event was held. There was the intention to grant continuity to the exhibition, by replacing the National Biennials or the Bienal de São Paulo itself, but the idea did not prosper. See, among others, Gabriela C. Lodo, *A I Bienal Latino-Americana de São Paulo* (PhD Diss.: Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, Unicamp - Campinas, 2004); Isobel Whiteleg, "Brazil, Latin America: The World. The Bienal de São Paulo as a Latin American Question", *Third Text* 16, no. 1 (January 2012): 131-140, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2012.641222>; Carla F. Fatio, *Processos artísticos no continente slatino-americano: uma perspectiva histórica e crítica da I Bienal Latino-Americana de 1978 e o seu legado para a América latina* (PhD Diss.: PROLAM, Universidade de São Paulo, 2012); and Maria de Fátima M. Couto, "La cuestión latinoamericana en las Bienales realizadas en Brasil", *Caiana* 10 (2017): 49-60.

An art critic who closely followed the evolution of the Bienal de São Paulo and was the curator of its sixth iteration (1961), Mário Pedrosa, recalls that the São Paulo event attracted the attention of art circles in neighbouring countries and intensified cultural exchange in the region. At the time of the Biennials, Pedrosa stated, “São Paulo became, in effect, a vivid center where critics and artists from around the world, and especially from Latin America, could come into contact and exchange impressions and ideas”.¹⁶

The Strengthening of Regional Exchanges: The Bienal de São Paulo as a Platform and Space of Negotiations

One of the immediate effects of the Bienal de São Paulo on the regional art circuit was the acceleration of the transit of information, tendencies and tastes, as well as the strengthening of exchanges between countries on the continent. In this sense, the article will first point out the growing number of nations in Latin America that participated in the show, recalling that delegations were predominantly organised in their countries of origin by government agencies, such as the Ministry of Education and Culture or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but also by cultural and educational institutions. Nonetheless, regional inequalities in dealing with art and culture were also made visible, since these delegations differed in number of members and works, and consequently, in potential impact, thus revealing the existence or not of State policies in the field of soft power.

If in 1951 – “the unrehearsed, improvised, experimental Biennial”, in the words of Pedrosa¹⁷ – only seven countries from the region participated (Bolivia, Chile, Cuba, Haiti, Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay)¹⁸ with highly differentiated and mostly modest submissions, in the 2nd Bienal (1953), this number rose to eleven, with emphasis on the inclusion of Argentina, Peru, Mexico (which set up a special room dedicated to Rufino Tamayo, the winner of the award for best foreign painter, together with the Frenchman Alfred Manessier), and Venezuela. In the 4th and 5th Bienais (1957 and 1959), there were fifteen countries from the region, including Colombia and Ecuador, which presented for the first time at the event, with delegations consisting of few artists and limited numbers of works. Excluded from this count are Brazil, the host country, and the Pan American Union delegation organised by the Organization of American States (OAS), which will be commented later in the text. In 1967, as can be seen in Table 1, the number of countries from Latin America represented at São Paulo reached its peak, within the time frame considered here, only to decline in the following iteration, in 1969. Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay were the most constant participants over the first ten exhibitions of the Bienal de São Paulo, followed closely by Argentina and Venezuela.

It is worth noting the high number of countries from Central America and the Caribbean that took part in the event, aiming to gain visibility, however relative or precarious, for their artists. Cuba, Guatemala, Haiti, Panama, and the Dominican Republic sent delegations to six or seven iterations of the Bienal de São Paulo in this period. Their strategies were differentiated and varied over the years. The submissions from Guatemala, the first country in the region to suffer a *coup d'état*, in 1954, which was supported by the United States, occurred between 1961 and 1969. They were organised by the Director General's Office of Fine Arts and Cultural Extension and were limited to a few artists, which were repeatedly invited to participate. Haiti, whose representation was under the responsibility of the Port-au-Prince Art Centre,

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Mário Pedrosa, “A Bienal de cá para lá”, *Mundo, homem, arte em crise* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1986), 256. Article originally published in 1973.

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Mário Pedrosa, “A Bienal de cá para lá”, 252.

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Although they appear listed in the first edition of the catalogue, neither Argentina (as we will discuss later) nor Ecuador took part in the 1st Bienal de São Paulo.

table 1
Participation of Countries from Latin America in the Bienal de São Paulo (1951-1969). Created by the author.

opted, from its first participation in 1951, to send larger delegations, debuting with eighteen artists, but always with only a few works of each participant.¹⁹

| São Paulo Biennial | 1951 | 1953 | 1955 | 1957 | 1959 | 1961 | 1963 | 1965 | 1967 | 1969 |
|----------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|--------------|
| Netherlands Antilles | - | - | x | - | - | x | x | x | x | - |
| Barbados | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | x | |
| Argentina | - | x | - | x | x | x | x | x | x | x Partial |
| Bolivia | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Chile | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | - Boycott |
| Colombia | - | - | - | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Costa Rica | - | - | - | x | - | - | - | - | - | x |
| Cuba | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | - | - | - |
| El Salvador | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | x | x |
| Ecuador | - | - | - | x | x | x | - | - | - | x |
| Guatemala | - | - | - | - | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Haiti | x | - | - | x | x | - | x | x | x | x |
| Honduras | - | - | - | x | - | - | - | - | x | - |
| Mexico | - | - | x | - | x | x | x | x | x | x Partial |
| Nicaragua | - | x | x | - | - | - | - | x | x | x |
| Panama | x | - | - | x | x | x | - | x | x | x |
| Paraguay | - | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x Partial |
| Peru | - | x | - | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Dominican Republic | x | x | x | x | x | - | - | - | x | - |
| Trinidad and Tobago | - | - | - | - | - | - | x | x | x | x |
| Pan-American Union | - | - | x | x | x | x | x | x | - | - |
| Uruguay | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Venezuela | - | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | - Boycott |

It may be inferred that as the Bienal de São Paulo acquired a less personalistic air, it was institutionally consolidated and consecrated internationally, thus gaining a greater number of adherents. However, both internal political issues and geopolitical tensions affected the selection and sending of national delegations. Cuba, for example, was present between 1951 and 1963, with its first three participations curated by José Gómez Sicre, a Cuban resident in the United States who, as we will see, worked at the OAS and opposed the Fidel Castro regime. The subsequent representations were organised by government agencies: the National Institute of Culture, for

The Art Centre was created in 1944 by the American watercolourist DeWitt Peters, who served as its first director, and a group of Haitian intellectuals and artists. In 1947, it was recognised as an “institution” of public utility by the Haitian state. Its building and its collection were hit hard by the 2010 earthquake. Peters and José Gómez Sicre established a few professional partnerships.

1957 and 1959, and the National Council of Culture, for those involvements that took place after the Cuban Revolution, in 1961 and 1963.

The 10th Bienal de São Paulo (1969) deserves a separate mention for having suffered an international boycott due to the political situation in Brazil.²⁰ Here, it is necessary to point out that a few countries from Latin America decided to support this protest by not sending their delegations to the event. This was the case for Chile and Venezuela, which thus broke with a tradition of participation that began in 1951 and 1953, respectively. Furthermore, countries such as Argentina, Paraguay, and Mexico arrived with exhibitions that were either of secondary importance or missing their main artists.

The case of Argentina can be used here as an example of the gradual acceptance of the strategic role of the Bienal de São Paulo in the regional scene. According to María Amalia García, and her extensive research on the cultural relations between Argentina and Brazil in the post-war period, “in Argentina, the institutional panorama linked to modern art in the late 1940s was redefined at the beginning of the 1950s as a result of interrelations with the Brazilian scene, moving toward abstraction and the search for international projection”, a statement which reiterates the regional protagonism of Brazilian cultural institutions after World War II.²¹

It is worth noting that Argentina did not participate in the 1st Bienal de São Paulo, perhaps because, as García suggests, the government of Juan Domingo Perón, then in his first term, “remained indifferent to the aesthetic codes of the new post-war order”²² and was disconnected from the modernist cause. Some negotiations had been undertaken, however, both with Argentinian diplomats and with Marcelo de Ridder, the director of the aforementioned Institute of Modern Art in Buenos Aires.

The Argentinian Jorge Romero Brest, a key figure in the process of cultural renewal in his country, as a critic and manager of far-reaching institutions (the National Museum of Fine Arts and Torcuato Di Tella Institute), took part in the awarding jury of the 1st Bienal de São Paulo and wrote a lengthy article about the event for the magazine *Ver y Estimar* in November 1951. A few months later, in April 1952, he published a new text in the same periodical, in which he questioned the reasons why Argentina did not participate in that exhibition, where “the great European countries and most of the countries in the Americas that could present a homogeneous set of art”.²³

Romero Brest suggests the constitution of a commission in charge of resolving the problems of Argentinian participation in art exhibitions abroad. “Since at the same time there are few good exhibitions of foreign art taking place in the country – some in Buenos Aires, none outside the capital –, we are dangerously closing ourselves off”, he asserts.²⁴

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The boycott of the 10th Biennial was coordinated abroad, based on complaints sent from Brazil, and was taken up by artists, curators, critics, and intellectuals of different nationalities, with the French critic Pierre Restany leading the protests in Europe. Restany organised a manifesto *Non à Biennale*, which circulated in Europe and in the United States. Subsequently, a few countries decided not to send their delegations to the show. Restany gave up organising the special room on Art and Technology, which he had been preparing together with the Belgian artist Pol Bury. However, although broad and with significant support, the boycott was not complete and the 10th Bienal de São Paulo took place on the scheduled date, with various absences and last-minute invitations.

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María Amalia García, “A cena artística argentina nas duas primeiras bienais paulistas”, *Anais do XXIV Colóquio do CBHA* (2005), par. 1. http://cbha.art.br/coloquios/2004/anais/textos/62_maria_amalia_garcia.pdf

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In the catalogue of the 1st Bienal de São Paulo, which was published before the event, the participation of the Argentinian delegation is listed, with thirty-three artists, each with one work, under the auspices of the IAM. Nonetheless, in the corrected edition of the catalogue, also from 1951, there is no mention of Argentina, which proves that the country, in fact, did not take part in the event.

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Jorge Romero Brest, “A participação argentina nas exposições internacionais”, *Ver y Estimar* 27 (April 1952): 3.

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Brest, “A participação argentina”, 4.

The Argentinian cultural scene changed from the late 1950s onwards, as demonstrated by García and Andrea Giunta. Both authors highlight how the model proposed by Brazil in the cultural sphere rapidly impacted the Argentinian panorama, thus leading the political and business classes to implement strategies that would allow Argentina to compete for cultural hegemony on the South American continent.

In *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política. Arte argentino en los años sesenta* (Avant-garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentinian Art in the 1960s), Giunta analyses the internationalisation projects implemented in the country in those years, by detailing the varied actions to promote new Argentinian art both internally and externally. In her view, these projects counted on “a programme of economic support, promotions, and incentives aimed at ensuring the path of a definitive transformation based on the intensified and strident discourse of culture”.²⁵ In 1953, Argentina managed to send a significant set of forty-nine works by twenty-eight contemporary artists to the 2nd Bienal de São Paulo, most of whom were linked to constructive abstraction, in addition to some former members of the Madí Group (Gyula Kosice, Tomás Maldonado, Raul Lozza, and Lydi Prati). The country won an acquisition prize, sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, for *Anécdota sobre rojo* (Anecdote on Red, 1953) by Alfredo Hlito.²⁶ It should be noted that a few months before the inauguration of the Bienal, MAM Rio hosted the *Argentinian Modern Artists* exhibition, with sixty-five works by ten Argentinian artists linked to abstraction, including Hlito. Jorge Romero Brest wrote the text for the catalogue and went to Rio de Janeiro to give a lecture on tendencies in contemporary art. Furthermore, he also participated in the jury of this second iteration of the Biennial.

The Organization of American States (OAS), for its part, played an active role in the expansion of the Latin American art circuit in the period in question, and directly interfered in the Bienal de São Paulo. In this context, one should note the actions of the Cuban José Gómez Sicre, who was head of the OAS Visual Arts Division from 1948 to 1976. During this period, Gómez Sicre promoted several small exhibitions devoted to Latin American art and gave support and consultancy to larger-sized exhibitions inside and outside the United States, in addition to organising the Esso Salon, an inter-American event that selected and awarded artists under forty years of age. For Claire Fox, the author of a book on the subject, Sicre was a defender of free trade in the arts and based his transnational curatorship projects on the principle of exchange and circulation of merchandise.²⁷ Furthermore, he believed in the possibility of creating international art centres that could replace Paris as the capital of the arts in the Western world.

Gómez Sicre actively participated in the Bienal de São Paulo, as evidenced by the various letters he exchanged with the event team, especially with Arturo Profili, the secretary-general of the first exhibitions.²⁸ He also helped to implement the Cordoba Biennial, taking part in the jury of its 1st and 2nd iterations, and corresponded with Leonel Estrada, the organiser of the Coltejer Biennial (Medellin), advising him on the format of the event and on artists and countries that should be

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Andrea Giunta, *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política. Arte argentino en los años sesenta* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2004), 33-34.

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The delegation was organised by the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In that same Bienal, Rufino Tamayo (Mexico), as we have seen, was consecrated as the best foreign painter while Luiz Martinez Pedro (Cuba) received an acquisition prize.

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Claire F. Fox, *Making Art Panamerican. Cultural Policy and the Cold War* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 4-5.

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The letters are available for consultation at the Wanda Svevo Historical Archive/São Paulo Biennial Foundation.

invited.²⁹ In the case of his relation with the Bienal de São Paulo, it was very much a two-way street, for while Gómez Sicre sought to increase his personal prestige and consolidate the international position of the artists he protected, the organisers of the first iterations of the Bienal de São Paulo relied on him “to overcome their own lack of contacts and systematic knowledge about the rest of Latin America”.³⁰

In addition to being the commissioner of the delegations from Cuba on three occasions (1951, 1953, 1955) and creator and commissioner of the Pan-American Union, or OAS pavilion, between 1955 and 1967, Gómez Sicre helped in the conception of an exhibition on pre-Columbian art, with pieces from Argentina, Colombia, and Peru in 1963, and was a member of the award jury for the 1959, 1963, and 1965 iterations.

The Pan-American Union delegation was composed of artists from different countries in the region, with a greater focus on the Andean and Central American ones. In the words of Gómez Sicre, the initiative resulted from the desire to “make known [...] in such an important international event, the work of artists from the Americas who, for various reasons, are not part of the delegation from their countries or [whose] countries do not participate in the meeting in question”, thus revealing to the public “values from the Americas that deserve special attention”.³¹ In presenting the first set of artists selected by him for this purpose, Gómez Sicre declared that “through the Pan-American Union, contemporary artists from the continent have another platform from which to transmit their plastic message”.³²

This “platform” was available over seven iterations of the Bienal de São Paulo and I would like to highlight here some of the awards obtained by artists that Gómez Sicre supported: the Guatemalan Carlos Mérida, in 1957, and the Nicaraguan Armando Morales, in 1959, each obtained an acquisition prize, and their works *Estabilidades sobre Dois Pontos* (Stabilities on Two Points, 1956) and *Sereias II* (Mermaids II, 1958) are currently part of the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art at the University of São Paulo (MAC-USP).³³ The Costa Rican Carlos Poveda and the Colombian Edgar Negret won an honorable mention at the 8th Bienal de São Paulo (1965). But certainly the most prominent award – and possibly the most satisfying for Gómez Sicre – was that of the First Prize in Drawing awarded to the Mexican artist José Luiz Cuevas at the 5th Bienal de São Paulo, in 1959. Cuevas was a friend of Gómez Sicre, who followed his career closely, even helping him to write a few of his texts. The work of Cuevas represented, for the Cuban critic and curator, an example of the overcoming of muralist ideals in Mexico, a movement that he (Gómez Sicre) rejected.

Cuevas had joined the OAS (Pan-American Union) pavilion in 1955; in 1959, he participated in the Mexican delegation with thirty drawings. Gómez Sicre, on this occasion, was making his debut as a member of the Bienal de São Paulo award jury. Though we evidently cannot attribute Cuevas’s victory exclusively to his friend’s interference, it is possible to infer that he acted in his favour. In a letter addressed to Lourival Gomes Machado, the director-general of the 5th Bienal de São

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According to Federico Ardila Garcés, Gómez Sicre even recommended to Leonel Estrada, in a letter dated June 7, 1971, that he should not accept the participation of Cuban artists residing on the island in the 3rd Coltejer Biennial, asserting that it was a request in favour of democracy. Federico A. Garcés, *Las tramas del modernismo: mecenazgo, política y sociedad en las Bienales de Arte de Coltejer, 1968-1972* (PhD Diss.: Universidad Nacional de Colombia - Medellín, 2018), 113.

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Alessandro Armato, “Una trama escondida: la OEA y las participaciones latinoamericanas en las primeras cinco Bienales de São Paulo”, *Caiana* 6 (2015): 33. Armato points out that the influence of Gómez Sicre on the Brazilian event peaked at the 5th Biennial (1959) only to progressively decline thereafter.

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José Gómez Sicre, “União Pan-Americana”, *Catálogo geral da IV Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1957), 381.

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José Gómez Sicre, “União Pan-Americana”, *Catálogo da geral da III Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo* (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1955), 255.

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For images of the works see: <https://acervo.mac.usp.br/acervo/>, accessed December 2023.

Paulo, Gómez Sicre complains about the stance of the Brazilian, who had spoken out against Cuevas's nomination for the international drawing prize. In a provocative tone, he asserts that he is "unaware of [Machado's] reasons for opposing [Cuevas's] candidacy since he had launched it, together with [Spanish art critic] Luiz Gonzáles Robles. I don't think that you can organize a whole campaign against an artist only due to the fact that he does not please a certain critic".³⁴ Evidently, this is yet another episode in the dispute for the creation of a "modern" regionalist network, which, in Gómez Sicre's opinion, should be aimed at disseminating works capable of mixing continental and universal values and of being included in the canon established by the hegemonic art institutions of the period, above all from the United States.

Also with respect to the awards for Latin American artists, I would like to expand the discussion and point out other distinctions obtained at the Bienals de São Paulo, recalling, however, that the delegation in which the artists participated was not necessarily determined by their nationality but could instead be defined by their place of residence and activity. Furthermore, we must recall that until the 8th Bienal (1965) the awards were granted by category (painting, sculpture, engraving, and drawing) to Brazilian and foreign artists. In 1967, in the midst of the Brazilian military dictatorship, the event regulations were changed, and this system was modified.³⁵ The awards increased in number and were unified under the Bienal de São Paulo Award. Replacing the Grand Prize, the Itamaraty Prize was created, in accordance with the agreement established between the Biennial Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which began to finance the awards and guaranteed a regular subsidy for the event. This award, initially set at a value of ten thousand dollars, was granted to the artist who, regardless of nationality or means of expression, obtained seven out of nine of the jurors' votes.

Also dating from this year was the institution of the Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho Latin American Grand Prize, an initiative undertaken with a double intention: to pay homage to the industrialist founder of the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art and the Bienal, who was leaving the directorship of the exhibition, and to ensure at least one prominent award for Latin American artists. In this new scheme, acquisition prizes, honourable mentions, and a few special awards were still in force. For the 15th exhibition (1979), all awards were abolished, a fact which had already occurred in major international exhibitions, such as the Venice Biennale and the Paris Youth Biennale (created in 1959).

Concentrating only on the most prominent awards granted to Latin Americans between 1951 and 1969, we have the following prizes: best foreign painter for the Mexican Rufino Tamayo, at the 2nd Bienal (1953); best draftsman for another Mexican, José Luiz Cuevas, at the 5th Bienal (1959); best sculptor for Alicia Peñalba, an Argentinian based in Paris, at the 6th Bienal (1961), and for Marta Colvin, a Chilean, at the 8th biennial (1965); and the Bienal de Award for the Venezuelan Carlos Cruz-Díez and the Argentinean David Lamelas at the 9th iteration of the event (1967), as well as for the Colombian Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar and Argentinian Marcelo Bonevardi at the 10th biennial (1969). In the 8th exhibition (1965), the Uruguayan Carlos Páez Vilaró won the research stimulus award and the Venezuelan Francisco Hung the Isaí Leirner Prize. The Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho Grand Prize was awarded, in its first year (1967), to the Colombian Alejandro Obregón, and in the following iteration (1969), to the Uruguayan José Cúneo Perinetti. Furthermore, in 1967 the Chilean Juan Bernan Ponce received the Wanda Svevo Prize.

The number of awards won by Latin American artists at the Bienal de São Paulo becomes greater if we include acquisition prizes and honourable mentions, but it is still small if we compare it to the total number of awards received by

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Letter from José Gómez Sicre to Lourival Gomes Machado, dated November 2, 1959. Benson Latin American Collection. José Gómez Sicre's papers, Box 9, folder 9.

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The change in regulations also interfered with the composition of the jury, which came to be formed of nine members, eight of whom were foreigners, whose names were recommended in order to represent the geographical areas at the biennial. For the first time, the participation of commissioners from the delegations of foreign countries in the award jury was prohibited.

European artists at the same exhibitions. The internationalist bias of the Bienal de São Paulo is made evident in the geographical concentration of the awards, as well as in the composition of the award juries, thus making it possible to perceive, as Marina Cerchiaro observes, a “significant relation between participation in the jury and the delegation’s awards”.³⁶ In the case of the first eight iterations of the event, nine countries were recurrently present on the award juries (Germany, Belgium, Spain, United States, Great Britain, Netherlands, Italy, and Japan). It is no accident that these nine countries are all on the list of the eleven most awarded at the first São Paulo biennials, Cerchiaro points out.³⁷

Expansion of the Regional Art Circuit: New Biennials and Art Exhibitions in Neighbouring Countries

In addition to becoming an important platform for art in the region the prestige achieved by the Bienal de São Paulo triggered interest in this type of exhibition in other Latin American countries, by demonstrating its potential to create other geographies for the world of arts and promote cultural tourism, thus granting visibility not only to the host city, but also to its patrons and sponsors. Between the 1960s and 1970s, various art biennials were created in the region, most of them in thriving regional economic centres, such as Cordoba, Cali, and Medellín, or in cities with proven tourist potential, such as Valparaíso, but which were not protagonists in national political debates because they were not federal capitals.

Not all these new exhibitions reproduced the structure of the Bienal de São Paulo, whose scale was grandiose and demanded huge economic and human resources. Furthermore, São Paulo’s submission to the Venetian model and its lack of interest in breaking with the standards of hegemonic centres had been widely criticised, by artists, critics and curators in general.³⁸ The 1960s and 1970s were a period of strong curatorial experiments inside and outside the traditional exhibition space, with a view to building a more consistent discourse on contemporary artistic production which could break with the conventions inherited from modernism. The hierarchical selection, awarding, and evaluation scheme put in place by the Art Salons and improved by the first International Biennials (above all Venice and São Paulo) was shown to be inadequate in relation to contemporary artistic practice and to the historical and geopolitical moment, which was marked by the disputes of the Cold War, by the division of the world into opposing blocs, and, in the case of Latin America, by the aftereffects of the Cuban Revolution.

In those decades, we should point out the creation of the following art biennials in the region: American Art Biennial of Cordoba (three iterations: 1962, 1964, and 1966); American Engraving Biennial in Santiago, Chile (four iterations between 1963 and 1970); American Biennial of Graphic Arts in Cali (five iterations between 1971 and 1986); Coltejer Biennial, Medellín (three iterations between 1968 and 1972 and one in 1981); Inter-American Biennial of Painting and Engraving, Mexico City (two iterations: 1958 and 1960); Armando Reverón Biennial, Caracas (four iterations between 1961 and 1967); San Juan Latin American Engraving Biennial, now San Juan Poly/Graphic Triennial (active since 1970); International Engraving Biennial, Buenos Aires (three iterations: 1968, 1970, and 1972); and Valparaíso International Art Biennial (eleven iterations between 1973 and 1994).

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Marina Mazze Cerchiaro, “As premiações das primeiras Bienais de São Paulo (1951-1965): um enfoque quantitativo e geográfico”, *Modos revista de história da arte* 4, no. 2, (2020): 64, <https://doi.org/10.24978/mod.v4i2.4583>.

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Cerchiaro, “As premiações das primeiras Bienais de São Paulo”, 64.

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For example, the interview given by Pierre Restany to *Correio da Manhã*, in 1965, in which he criticised the 8th Bienal de São Paulo and suggested changes to the exhibition, both in terms of national representations and the composition of the jury. Jayme Maurício, “Entrevista: Restany: Brasília, Bienal e Vanguarda”, *Correio da Manhã* (September 23, 1965), 3.

The formats of these biennials were varied and ever-changing, exploring one or more techniques or supports and establishing differentiated cross-sections by theme, chronology, age, or geography. As a result, they assumed unique, specific characteristics in relation to their counterparts. They also constantly changed their headquarters, between one exhibition and another, for the most varied of reasons, and coexisted with protests organised by artists who felt dissatisfied with their organisation. Simultaneously with the 3rd Cordoba Biennial (1966), for example, happenings and urban interventions were held throughout the city, as part of what would be a critical exhibition titled the *First Argentinian Festival of Contemporary Forms*, which was better known as the ‘anti-biennial’.

The American Engraving Biennial in Santiago was the first event in the region to focus exclusively on graphic arts, following in the footsteps of the Ljubljana Biennial (in the former Yugoslavia), which has been active since 1955, and the Tokyo Engraving Biennial, which started in 1957. It sought to repair a “geographical-institutional deficiency”,³⁹ by accompanying and contributing to the boom in the circulation and commercialisation of engravings and printed images that took place in different Latin American countries from the 1960s onwards and that also opened up new spaces for work of a more experimental nature.⁴⁰

A few of these exhibitions were held with financing from the private sector: the Cordoba Biennial was organised by the automotive company Industrias Kaiser Argentina (IKA), of American origin; the Medellín Biennial was the responsibility of the Coltejer textile factory; the American Biennial of Graphic Arts in Cali was organised by the La Tertulia Museum with support from the company Cartón; and the Armando Reverón Biennial, in Caracas, depended on the patronage of Virgilio Corao. In these cases, the final format was determined by the company involved in the event, which sought to consolidate its prestige and create or strengthen self-promotional mechanisms and new marketing strategies. This applies, for example, to the American Biennial of Graphic Arts in Cali, whose patron was a multinational manufacturer of cellulose, paper, and cardboard and which turned to works on paper, such as engraving and drawing, with the intention “of linking its brand to cultural patronage and not to environmental destruction, in addition to reinforcing the discourse which argued that foreign capital investment in Colombia resulted in significant social and economic benefits”.⁴¹

Another relevant fact to be observed about Latin American biennials is that many of them were preceded by local salons or art festivals, which themselves attracted new audiences, expanded the debate on contemporary art, and provoked the interest of either the government (municipal, state, or federal) or companies in the region for art exhibitions with greater impact and reverberation in the media. The Cordoba American Biennial project was a direct result of the success of the IKA Salons, which had a national scope and were held between 1958 and 1963, it being the case that in 1962, in their place, the 1st American Art Biennial took place. The project of the American Biennial of Graphic Arts in Cali took shape after the *Pan-American Exhibition of Graphic Arts*. In Medellín, the Tejicondor Salons and the Croydon Regional Salons, both financed by textile companies, sparked the first local controversies about different conceptions of modernity in the field of arts.

In the same way, the Coltejer Biennial (initially the Inter-American Painting Biennial) was conceived to celebrate the sixty years since the founding of the Compañía Colombiana de Tejidos Coltejer, which had a great impact on the regional economy. The official discourse proclaimed the desire to transform Medellín into a centre of Latin American art with international relevance. At the same time,

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Silvia Dolinko, *Arte plural: el grabado entre la tradición y la experimentación, 1955-1973* (Buenos Aires, Edhasa, 2012), 287.

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On the topic, see Silvia Dolinko, *Arte plural: el grabado entre la tradición y la experimentación* and Maeve Coudrelle, “The Imprint of Hemispheric Exchange: The Bienal Americana de Grabado, 1963-1970”, *OBOE Journal* 3, no. 1 (2022): 38-51.

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Adriana C. Olmedo, “Cali, ciudad de la gráfica: las Bienales Americanas de Artes Gráficas del Museo La Tertulia y Cartón de Colombia (1970-1976)”, *Caiana* 8 (2016), 24.

the aim of the show was to constitute an art collection for the company, through the awarding of three acquisition prizes for each exhibition. For Federico Garcés, the Coltejer Biennial project reflected the sponsoring company's desire for progress and modernisation, but in it "heterogeneous economic and political interests intertwined, which exceeded the objectives of its organisers or the discourses that sought to legitimise them".⁴²

If its inaugural exhibition was based on the model of the Bienal de São Paulo, with delegations organised by the embassies of participating countries and the grouping of works by geographical bias, its second took place by the direct invitation of foreign artists and by the specific selection, by committee, of national artists. In both exhibitions, the awards were granted by three judges invited by the event organisers, two of whom were foreigners. For the third iteration, after protests, the jury and the granting of awards were eliminated, although an advisory board in charge of choosing the three works to be acquired for the company was created.

As Charles Green and Anthony Gardner observe in their extensive analysis of the second wave of art biennials (organised between the 1950s and 1980s), a few of the exhibitions mentioned here aimed to "redirect the axis of cultural and economic influence away from the North (whether that be the United States or Iberia) so as to concentrate on exchange with neighbors in the Caribbean and other parts of South and Central America".⁴³ In this context, the authors highlight the Coltejer Biennial, the Latin American Engraving Biennial in San Juan, the American Biennial of Graphic Arts in Cali, and the Valparaíso International Art Biennial. The case of the Cordoba Biennial, in my opinion, also deserves attention, in part because it makes these classifications more complex.

The Cordoba Biennial was active for only three iterations (1962 to 1966) and perhaps, of this group, it was the exhibition with a structure most similar to that of the Bienal de São Paulo, despite its having a regional focus. María Cristina Rocca points out that the city of Cordoba was very similar to São Paulo in its pace of growth and industrial development, and Industrias Kaiser Argentina (IKA), which had established itself in the city's industrial belt in the 1950s, was interested in combining good commercial results with cultural, artistic, educational, and social interventions. Thus, while local artists aspired to gain greater space on the national scene, IKA yearned for rapid cultural modernisation in order to consolidate and expand its operations in the country.⁴⁴

The Cordoba Biennial counted on official representations from invited countries, international juries (mostly from other Latin American countries), and the awarding of several acquisition prizes for the formation of the IKA collection and eventual donation of some works to provincial museums, as well as a Grand Prize, for the purchase of two works by a single artist.⁴⁵ It differed, therefore, from the annual exhibitions and awards held by the Torcuato di Tella Institute, which was founded in 1958 and based in Buenos Aires.⁴⁶ Organised by Jorge Romero Brest, the

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Garcés, *Las tramas del modernismo*, 6.

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Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta. The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 87.

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María Cristina Rocca, *Arte, modernización y guerra fría: las bienales de Córdoba en los sesenta* (PhD Diss.: Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, 2009), 50. The IKA was incorporated by the French manufacturer Renault and decided to cease its activities in Argentina in 1967, an event which resulted in the dissolution of the Cordoba Biennial.

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The current custodian of the IKA Collection is the Chateau Carreras Contemporary Art Center, but the Emilio Caraffa Museum and the Evita Museum (Ferreyra Palace) also have works from the collection. All are located in Cordoba.

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The Torcuato Di Tella Institute was founded in 1958 by Guido Di Tella, on the 10th anniversary of the death of his father, the businessman Torcuato Di Tella, a highly successful industrialist in Argentina in the first half of the 20th century. Di Tella amassed his fortune through a successful association with his family company, Siam, which manufactured domestic and commercial machinery, with counterparts in the United States. Upon his death in 1948, Siam manufactured refrigerators, washing machines, mixers, fans, and compressors, among other products.

events of the Torcuato di Tella Institute, which also took place in the 1960s, aspired to forge new ties with foreign artists and critics and with renowned international institutions, thus aiming to grant international visibility to Argentinian art. The Cordoba Biennial, on the other hand, sought to establish a circuit that favoured regional interactions, without however discarding the specific interests of the multinational corporation that sponsored it.

If, in 1962, only three countries (Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay) were invited to participate in the Cordoba Biennial alongside Argentina, in the second iteration of the event the number of delegations increased to ten, with the incorporation of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela. In the third and final iteration, the invitation was extended to Mexico and other Central American countries. In total, twelve countries participated in the exhibition in 1966, including Guatemala, Mexico, and Nicaragua, but excepting Ecuador which, for internal political reasons, did not take part in the final iteration of the event.⁴⁷

It should be noted that the actions planned by the biennial's organising committee were not limited to holding the show in the city of Cordoba, but included the selection and submission of a few works for exhibitions in other cities and countries in the region, as well as in the United States.⁴⁸ Another important fact to consider, in terms of an attempt to move the local art circuit, are the exhibitions, conferences, and debates that took place in parallel to the event and that counted on the participation of foreign guests. Thus, Herbert Read and Umbro Apollonio gave lectures when they served as jurors, in 1962 and 1964 respectively, as well as Pierre Restany (in passing after his participation in the 1964 Di Tella Award) and Paul Mills (then director of the Oakland Art Museum).

When considering the biennials mentioned here together, including the Instituto Di Tella competition, there is a notable recurrence of several names in the composition of the different award juries, in a list dominated by white men and in which the participation of women is unfortunately a rare exception.⁴⁹ Many occupied positions of power in the hegemonic art scene (in Europe and the United States), such as the management of large museums and important cultural institutions. Others were editors of specialised magazines with an impact on the cultural milieu or had their own columns in newspapers with large circulations, while most acted repeatedly as curators or jurors in other prominent international competitions of the period, such as the Paris Biennale and the Venice Biennale.⁵⁰

The participation of highly renowned cultural agents seemed essential for guaranteeing the success and recognition of these exhibitions abroad, and the strategy implemented by the Bienal de São Paulo was shown to be a promising one. In commenting on the Cordoba Biennial, for example, Andrea Giunta asserts that “it

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The following countries participated, therefore, in the third and final iteration of the Cordoba Biennial, in addition to Argentina: Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

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At the end of 1962 and beginning of 1963, for example, a set of forty-one works from the Cordoba Biennial could be seen in New York (at the Federation of Arts), in Washington DC (Pan-American Union), and in Oakland (Oakland Art Museum and Kaiser Center Gallery). In 1965, a specific commission organised the *Veinte Pintores Sudamericanos* (Twenty South American Painters) exhibition with works that participated in the 2nd Biennial, which was shown in Mexico City (Palace of Fine Arts), in Oakland (Kaiser Center Gallery), and in Washington DC (Pan-American Union).

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It should be mentioned here, by way of example, some of the foreign personalities who participated in the award juries of at least two of the competitions considered throughout this article, remembering that, especially in the case of the Bienal de São Paulo, the role of juror often overlapped with that of national delegation commissioner: Alan Bowness (Bienal de São Paulo and Di Tella); Alfred Barr (Bienal de São Paulo and Cordoba Biennial); Antonio Romera (Cordoba Biennial and Santiago Biennial); Giulio C. Argan (Bienal de São Paulo, Coltejer Biennial, Cordoba Biennial, and Di Tella); Herbert Read (Bienal de São Paulo and Cordoba Biennial); Jacques Lassaigne (Bienal de São Paulo and Di Tella); James J. Sweeney (Bienal de São Paulo and Di Tella); Luis González Robles (Bienal de São Paulo and San Juan Biennial); Pierre Restany (Di Tella and Coltejer Biennial); Umbro Apollonio (Bienal de São Paulo, Córdoba Biennial, and San Juan Biennial); William Sandberg (Bienal de São Paulo and Di Tella).

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It should also be noted that almost all of the art critics who served as jurors at these events were members of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), an entity founded in 1950 that soon became a privileged channel for debate, transmission of knowledge, and taking a stand on sociocultural and political issues.

was fundamental that prestigious figures from the international circuit could appreciate in situ what the country was doing”.⁵¹ Similarly, Leonel Estrada, the organiser of the Coltejer Biennials, in an essay, lists the names of the foreign guests who came to Medellín, as curators or jurors (Giulio Carlo Argan, Lawrence Alloway, Gillo Dorfles, Pierre Restany, Jasia Reichardt, Jorge Romero Brest, Alexander Cirici Pellicer, Vicente Aguilera Cerni, Fermín Fevre, and Jorge Glusberg), to reiterate that, during the time of the biennials, the city was transformed into a museum of contemporary art.⁵²

The members of these juries, who were involved in new transnational sociability networks, could decisively support the much sought-after process of disseminating local artistic production abroad, by writing positively about what they saw or advising on the acquisition of works by artists from the region for private collections or museums and public collections. At the same time, these agents left their mark on the local scene by influencing the awards and reproducing the debates and interests of hegemonic cultural centres. Furthermore, a relevant award in a minor art centre could compensate for or mitigate the consequences of a recent previous “defeat” in a more prominent exhibition on the international scene.

However, instead of contemplating the notion that there were far-fetched plots to promote certain artists or groups, it makes more sense to analyse the power struggles, agreements, and disagreements between different cultural agents (artists, art critics, curators, journalists, and dealers) involved in these exhibitions, by recalling that they shared opinions, tastes, and experiences and were called to help in the creation of other biennials and art competitions. They served as advisors to new patrons and public authorities and often assumed the role of curators or directors in this circuit under construction. In this context, in addition to “national” issues, it is also necessary to take into account the juror’s or art critic’s belonging to specific groups or movements, since this belonging created equally significant affinities and alliances. One should also evaluate the strategies in the field of culture that were put into practice by public and/or private agencies in hegemonic countries, especially France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which believed in the importance of soft power on the international geopolitical chessboard and used it to consolidate their international visibility by obtaining prominent awards.

To conclude, I believe that it is possible to assert that as a result of the holding of the Bienal de São Paulo in the early 1950s and the spread of this type of large-scale art exhibition with great repercussions throughout other Latin American countries in the 1960s and 1970, new inter-institutional relations and regional and international contact networks were established. The programmed mobility of a significant contingent of artists, curators, critics, jurors, and visitors, as well as dealers and collectors, produced clashes, associations, and disputes and made evident the contradictions embedded in local, regional, international, and global categories in a world ruled by geopolitical divisions, economic interests, and complex power relations. Nevertheless, this movement and the efforts undertaken in favour of greater recognition did not result in the effective inclusion or international legitimisation of artistic production arising from countries that continued to occupy a peripheral place in the political and economic fields. As Terry Smith asserts:

biennials are forms of cultural exchange between nations, enacted at a regional center; specifically, they encourage negotiation between local and international artworlds [...] This rather complex quality is the source of much that is positively distinctive [...] about biennials, as well as of much of the confusion, over-hyping, and sense of failed expectation, that they also seem to engender.⁵³

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Giunta, *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política*, 275.

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Leo Estrada, “Lo que significaran y significan las Bienales de Arte”, *Las Bienales de Medellín. Una ventana abierta* (Medellín: Suramericana, 2000), 2.

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Terry Smith, “Biennials: Four Fundamentals, Many Variations”, *Biennial Foundation. BF publications* (December 6, 2016), <https://biennialfoundation.org/2016/12/biennials-four-fundamentals-many-variations/>, accessed December 2023.

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as well as articles on Brazilian and Latin American avant-gardes and postwar abstractions. She has co-edited five anthologies: *Arte e suas instituições* (Zouk, 2012), *Espaços da Arte Contemporânea* (Alameda, 2013), *Histórias da arte em exposições: modos de ver e de exibir no Brasil* (RioBooks, 2016), *Histórias da arte em coleções: modos de ver e exibir em Brasil e Portugal* (RioBooks, 2016), and *Histórias da arte em museus* (RioBooks, 2020). She is editor-in-chief of *MODOS Art Journal*.