Art in America

INTERNATIONAL ● REVIEW

HOME AND AWAY: LATIN AMERICAN ART

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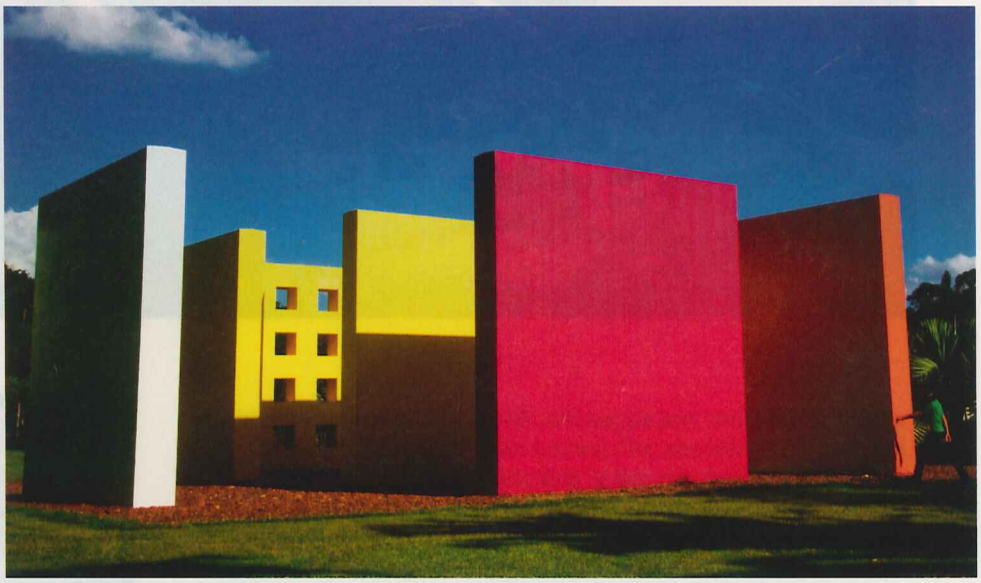
DRIVING THE NARRATIVE

Private collectors in Latin America are expanding the institutional tent by founding their own museums.

BY ADELE NELSON



TWO ADOLESCENT BOYS hang on to the edge of a pool and kick up water. The pool, its flanking white concrete deck and the surrounding lawn are pristine, encircled by lush trees. A teenage lifeguard stands nearby in the shade. Her good-natured boredom, the boys' audible delight and the well-cared-for grounds all suggest an easy, privileged leisure appropriate to a warm June afternoon.

That this common summer scene, unfolding in and around *Piscina* (Pool), 2009, a work by Argentine artist Jorge Macchi, plays out at an art museum—and not at a recreation center or country club—is a welcome diversion, if not entirely surprising as an art-world experience. Participatory pieces in which the public physically interacts with works of art like Macchi's—permanently installed at the Instituto Cultural Inhotim, a little over an hour outside Brazil's third largest city, Belo Horizonte—have proliferated in recent years. And we museum visitors have come to expect all kinds of leisure-time activities alongside edification. Macchi delivers his own formula of learning and fun, printing the alphabet on a narrow set of stairs descending into the pool, as if to combine learning with a sensorial immersion in water.

The selection of works installed at Inhotim before and after *Piscina*—often site-specific pieces created since the 1980s by an international roster of artists weighted toward Latin Americans—is often excellent, though perhaps somewhat predictable. On view inside the institute's numerous galleries and pavilions or outdoors throughout a 240-acre park sited within several thousand acres of nature preserve, Inhotim's collection includes both commissions and acquisitions. They range from video and audio works by the Bahamian Janine Antoni and Canadian Janet Cardiff to sculptures by the American Chris Burden and Brazilian Alexandre da Cunha. Several artists are displayed in depth, including Brazil's Cildo Meireles, Hélio Oiticica and Tunga.

Affinities abound, even between disparately placed works. An example is Meireles's *Através* (Through), 1983-89, and Colombian Doris Salcedo's *Neither* (2004). Both installations incorporate barriers and space to reflect on confinement and surveillance, yet avoid heavy-handedness. In *Através*, Meireles arranged a dense, shifting grid of different types of barriers on a large square of floor covered with shards of glass. Materials sinister and benign commingle, at times humorously. Shower curtains,

Above, Hélio Oiticica: *Invention of Color, Penetrable Magic Square #5, Deluxe*, 1977, approx. 50 by 50 by 15 feet. Courtesy Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil. Photo Andre Mantelli.

Left, Jorge Macchi: *Pool*, 2009, white concrete, stone and water, approx. 39 by 39 by 6 feet. Courtesy Inhotim. Photo Scott Campbell.

Left, aerial view of Casa Daros's renovated 19th-century building in Rio de Janeiro. Courtesy Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zurich. Photo Fábio Caffé.

Below, Oscar Muñoz: *Re/trato*, 2003, video, approx. 30 minutes. Courtesy Daros Latinamerica Collection.

Opposite, view of the exhibition "Poule!," 2012. Courtesy Colección Jumex, Mexico City.

white picket fences and aquariums filled with fish are contrasted with barbed wire, barricades of wood and metal, and prison bars, all guarding an enormous, spotlit cellophane ball. For *Neither*, Salcedo embedded expanded steel mesh, which resembles chain-link, in Sheetrock walls, deploying a quiet, exacting facture to transform the white-cube gallery into a subtle prison of great formal beauty.

What is surprising is that these works are found not at Tate Modern in London or the Museum of Modern Art in New York—which is to say not at a preeminent institution in an established cultural capital—but in the midst of a large complex carved into the Brazilian countryside. Inhotim is the most remote of a number of Latin American museums of modern and contemporary art recently founded by private collectors, partly in reaction to straitened funding for art museums throughout the region. The brainchild of Brazilian mining magnate Bernardo Paz, Inhotim opened its gates to the public in 2006, joining the ranks of Colección Jumex outside Mexico City and Malba—Fundación Costantini (Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires).[1] All three function as private museums with a public mandate, meaning they are open to the public without appointment and undertake extensive educational programming. In 2001, Colección Jumex and Malba inaugurated museum buildings commissioned by their respective founders: Eugenio López, owner of the Mexican juice company Jumex, and Eduardo F. Costantini, Argentine real-estate developer and venture capitalist.

Late in 2012, a new institution, Casa Daros, will open in a restored 19th-century building in Rio de Janeiro. Casa Daros is the Latin American offshoot of Daros Latinamerica, a private collection-based museum in Zurich founded in 2000 by Ruth Schmidheiny (who was married to Stephan Schmidheiny, from the prominent Swiss family of industrialists) and curator Hans-Michael Herzog. Daros Latinamerica, in turn, is a sister institution to the Zurich-based Daros Collection, founded in the 1980s by Alexander Schmidheiny (the late brother of Stephan) and dealer Thomas Ammann, which is focused on European and U.S. contemporary art.

COLECCIÓN JUMEX, Daros Latinamerica, Inhotim and Malba are symptomatic of a larger, ongoing narrative of art patronage in which collectors establish their own institutions in lieu of donating their works to an existing one. It is not a new history. In the U.S., private collection-based museums established in the early 20th century alone include the Barnes Foundation, the Frick Collection and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. In the last several decades, collectors across the U.S. have similarly founded

autonomous institutions, from the Rubell Family Collection and the De la Cruz Collection, both in Miami, to the Nasher Sculpture Center and the Broad Art Foundation, in Dallas and Santa Monica, respectively. In contrast, two prominent collectors of modern and contemporary art from Latin America have taken the approach of cultivating relationships with established museums—though in the U.S. and not Latin America. Such is the case with gifts and promised gifts to MoMA by the Venezuelan Patricia Phelps de Cisneros and the acquisition of Brazilian Adolpho Leirner's collection by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Casa Daros, Colección Jumex and Malba are sited in or near cities with established cultural infrastructures, and frequently collaborate with local private and public art institutions. Colección Jumex is currently building an additional, more centrally located venue in Mexico City, to be inaugurated in late 2013. Like the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, founded by Walmart heiress Alice Walton in Bentonville, Ark., Inhotim is situated in a decidedly noncentral, seemingly quixotic locale close to the founder's business interests. Inhotim's curators argue that the location fosters a more symbiotic relationship between art and nature, and provides artists with enough space and resources to create ambitious site-specific works.[2] In addition, it encourages a broadening of Brazilian artistic activities beyond Rio and São Paulo.

In 1991, Brian Wallis wrote in these pages of "selling nations," referring to the effort is of countries to improve their economic and political fortunes by promoting their cultural heritage in exhibitions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1991 "Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries."[3] Similarly, the new private Latin American museums, too, engage in activities that can perhaps be described as selling nations, or, in some cases, selling the region as a whole. But the image of "nation" and "region" proffered is not an exoticized picture of difference. Colección Jumex and Inhotim define themselves as international and cosmopolitan, and contextualize their respective in-depth holdings of Mexican and Brazilian art within an unfolding global narrative.

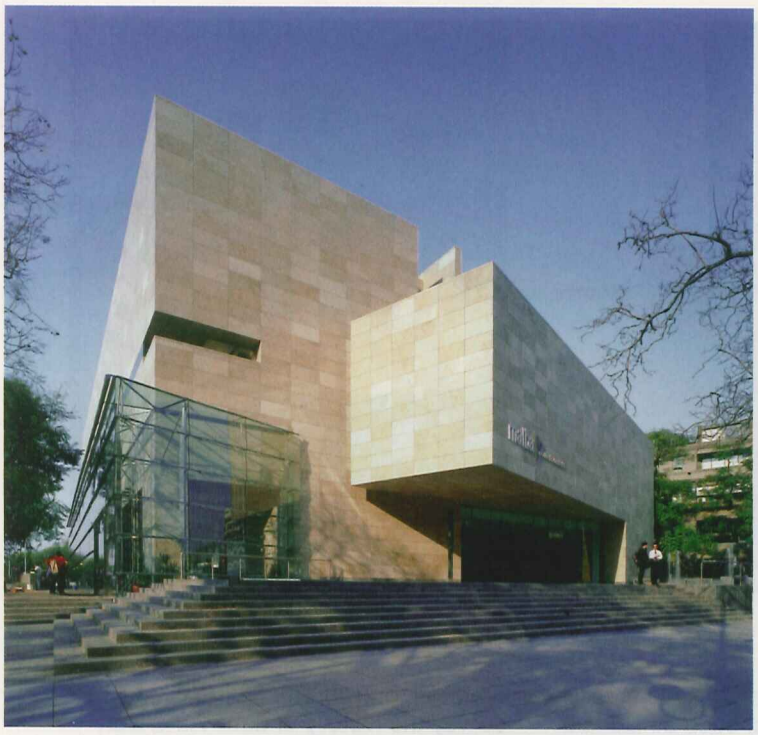
Colección Jumex has built substantial holdings of art dating from the 1980s to the present by European, Mexican and U.S. artists, as well as work by key U.S. and European artists of prior generations, such as Donald Judd and Andy Warhol. In addition to sending its exhibitions abroad, the institution has sponsored collection-based shows organized by invited curators, among them Alma Ruiz from the Museum of Contemporary Art in L.A. and the Tate's Jessica Morgan, and has hosted traveling exhibitions such as the Walker Art Center's 2007 "Brave New Worlds," organized by Doryun Chong and Yasmil Raymond.

Malba and Daros Latinamerica define their purviews regionally and historically: both collect exclusively Latin American art, Malba from the turn of the 20th century to the present and Daros Latinamerica from the 1960s forward. Like Colección Jumex and Inhotim, they frame their activities in terms of international parity. For example, in 2008 Daros Latinamerica organized an exhibition in Zurich titled "Face to Face" that staged a showdown of sorts: Latin American vs. European and U.S. art from the two Daros collections. In its acquisition program, Malba aims to survey the history of Latin American modernism, understood as being on par with and parallel to European and U.S. modernism, by assembling iconic works by high-profile artists, including Tarsila do Amaral, Frida Kahlo, Wifredo Lam, Roberto Matta, Diego Rivera and Joaquín Torres-García. In 2005, Malba also established a multi-year partnership with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The museums have exchanged exhibitions of the significant Latin American figures Carlos Cruz-Diez, Gego and Xul Solar, and of highlights from their respective permanent collections.[4] (The most recent fruit of this partnership, an exhibition of works in Malba's collection, closed in Houston in early August 2012.)

It was during World War II and the Cold War that the notion of collecting Latin American art and founding Latin American private museums of modern and contemporary art arose. Starting in the early 1940s, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., at MoMA and José Gómez Sicre at the Visual Arts Section of

SYMPTOMATIC OF A LARGER TREND IN PATRONAGE, LATIN AMERICAN COLLECTORS ESTABLISH THEIR OWN INSTITUTIONS IN LIEU OF DONATING THEIR WORKS TO AN EXISTING ONE.

RATHER THAN AN EXOTICIZED PICTURE OF DIFFERENCE, THESE COLLECTIONS PROFFER AN IMAGE OF "NATION" AND "REGION" THAT IS INTERNATIONAL AND COSMOPOLITAN.



Exterior of the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires. Courtesy Malba.

the Pan American Union (renamed the Organization of American States in 1948) in Washington, D.C., began acquiring art of the region. "Pan-American" exhibitions were circulated throughout Latin America, and art from the area was integrated into an account of international modernism dominated by European and U.S. art.[5] Barr and Gómez Sicre's activities coincided with, and in some cases directly engaged, efforts by the U.S. government and businesses to firm up influence in the region.

Concurrently, Latin American art professionals and collectors spearheaded institutions to acquire and display avant-garde and recent work neglected by existing public museums and established salons and to provide venues for local artists and viewers to participate as equals in the international scene.[6] Examples include the São Paulo Biennial, established in 1951, and modern art museums founded in cities throughout the region, from Santiago to Bogotá,[7] as well as shorter-lived but historically important initiatives, such as the Instituto de Arte Moderno in Buenos Aires, which functioned from 1949 to 1952. The leaders of these institutions strategically adapted U.S. and European models—from MoMA and the Museum of Non-Objective Painting (the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum's original name) to the Venice Biennale and the Kunstmuseum Basel.

Today, we are witnessing a change in the institutional model deemed most effective within Latin America (and outside, in the case of Daros Latinamerica). Rather than being broadly defined museums of modern and contemporary art, the new institutions are predicated on individual private collections. This change, however, represents a turn of the dial rather than a fundamental shift: the model of private institutions already existed, as did the practice of founding new institutions rather than reforming or reinvigorating existing ones. Still, mid-20th-century Pan-Americanism and internationalism reserved a privileged position for the art of Europe and the U.S. Today, in contrast, the Colección Jumex, Inhotim and Malba (and, soon, Casa Daros) assert a vision of modern and contemporary art in which Latin American art and artists are the central drivers of the narrative. ○

1 The author is grateful to Magalí Arriola, curator at the Colección Jumex, Hans-Michael Herzog, chief curator and general manager at Daros Latinamerica, Eugenio Valdés Figueroa, director of art and education at Casa Daros, and Jochen Volz, former curator at Inhotim, for information regarding their respective collections. **2** See essays by Rodrigo Moura, Allan Schwartzman and Jochen Volz, in Adriano Pedrosa and Rodrigo Moura, eds., *Through: Inhotim*, Brumadinho, MG, Brazil, Instituto Inhotim, 2009, pp. 16-37. **3** Brian Wallis, "Selling Nations," *Art in America*, September 1991, pp. 84-91. I am grateful to Jennifer Josten for bringing this article to my attention. **4** Gary Tinterow, foreword, in Mari Carmen Ramírez, with Marcelo E. Pacheco and Eduardo F. Costantini, *Modern and Contemporary Masterworks from Malba—Fundación Costantini*, exh. cat., Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2012, pp. 9-10. **5** On MoMA and Latin American art, see Kirk Varnedoe, "The Evolving Torpedo: Changing Ideas of the Collection of Painting and Sculpture of The Museum of Modern Art," *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century: Continuity and Change*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1995, pp. 13-73; Miriam Basilio, "Reflecting on a History of Collecting and Exhibiting Work by Artists from Latin America," in Miriam Basilio et al., ed., *Latin American and Caribbean Art: MoMA at El Museo*, exh. cat., New York, El Museo del Barrio and the Museum of Modern Art, 2004, pp. 52-68. On the Pan American Union, see Claire F. Fox, "The PAU Visual Arts Section and the Hemispheric Circulation of Latin American Art during the Cold War," *Getty Research Journal* 2, 2010, pp. 83-106. **6** On the postwar history of art institutions in Latin America, see, for example, Andrea Giunta, *Avant-Garde, Internationalism, and Politics: Argentine Art in the Sixties*, trans. Peter Kahn, Durham, N.C., and London, Duke University Press, 2007; Adele Nelson, "Monumental and Ephemeral: The Early São Paulo Bienais," in Mary Kate O'Hare, ed., *Constructive Spirit: Abstract Art in South and North America, 1920s-50s*, exh. cat, Newark, N.J., Newark Museum, 2010, pp. 127-42; María Amalia García, *El arte abstracto: Intercambios culturales entre Argentina y Brasil*, Buenos Aires, Siglo Veintiuno, 2011; Aleca Le Blanc, "Palmeiras and Pilotis: Promoting Brazil with Modern Architecture," *Third Text* 26, no.1, January 2012, pp. 103-16. **7** These include the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, in Santiago, Chile (1946); Museu de Arte de São Paulo, Brazil (1947); Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (1948); Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, Brazil (1948); and Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, Colombia (1955).

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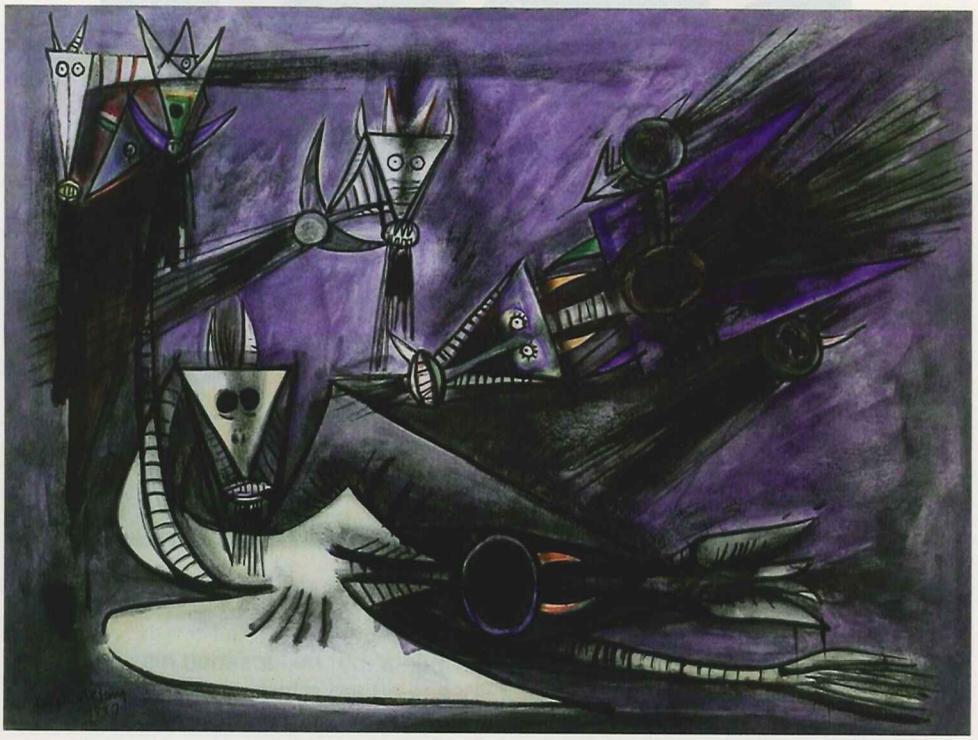
ERASING BORDERS

The globalization of today's art scene presents Latin American artists with a galvanizing dilemma: to engage in a process of "de-Latinization" or retain signs of regional identity.

BY EDWARD J. SULLIVAN

THE PERIPATETIC LIFE of contemporary artists, collectors and critics, traveling from one biennial to the next between appearances at fairs, conferences and other art-world events, has become something of a cliché. This is no less true of artists from Latin America and the Caribbean, many of whom are on their way, as this essay is being written, to Kassel, Germany, for Documenta 13. Yet the crossing of geopolitical as well as esthetic borders by Latin Americans has been a constant since the 19th century, when artists from all over the region regularly traveled to Europe. Paris was, for the most part, their principal destination. The French capital continues to be home to a large group of Latin American artists, writers and intellectuals, many of whom arrived in the 1970s, fleeing the repression of military dictatorships in their home countries. Others are more recent arrivals.

This past spring New York audiences viewed "Diego Rivera: Murals for The Museum of Modern Art." The exhibition at MoMA focused on Rivera's portable murals for his 1931 solo show. It did not give a hint, however, of Rivera's role as member of the second generation of Cubists in Paris from 1914 to 1917, when he assimilated both synthetic and analytic Cubism into a very personal—and very Mexican—art form. Some of his most famous Cubist likenesses, such as MoMA's *Young Man in a Gray Sweater (Jacques Lipchitz)*, 1914, not only show their subjects (in this case the Lithuanian-born sculptor) in a classic Cubist web of fractured form, but include references to traditional Mexican arts. Colorful stripes, for example, allude to the serapes worn by Mexican rural laborers.



Wifredo Lam: *The Dream*, 1947, oil on canvas, 30¼ by 40⅛ inches. Courtesy El Museo del Barrio, New York.

There are dozens of other instances in which Latin American and Caribbean artists appropriated foreign forms to create their own versions of modernity. Among the most poignant is Cuban artist Wifredo Lam (included in the current New York exhibition "Caribbean: Art at the Crossroads of the World").[1] Lam blended his inspirations from the international avant-garde with elements from the Afro-Cuban religions he had encountered since childhood. His most famous painting, *The Jungle* (1943), and other works from the 1940s in which the orishas (gods/spirits) of Afro-Cuban Santería are referenced, recall Picasso's interest in tribal art. But Lam lacks the voyeuristic "outsiderness" of his older Spanish contemporary and his works derive more from his heritage and from direct observation of the intensity of the religious experience in Cuba.

The godmother of Brazilian modernism, Tarsila do Amaral (1886-1973), took the lessons of Léger, Brancusi and others and turned them upside down to make images of modern

SOTO'S OPTICAL AND SPATIAL EXPERIMENTS WERE SO MUCH IN CONSONANCE WITH THOSE OF HIS EUROPEAN AND NORTH AMERICAN CONTEMPORARIES AS TO MAKE ANY TRACES OF LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE COMPLETELY INVISIBLE.

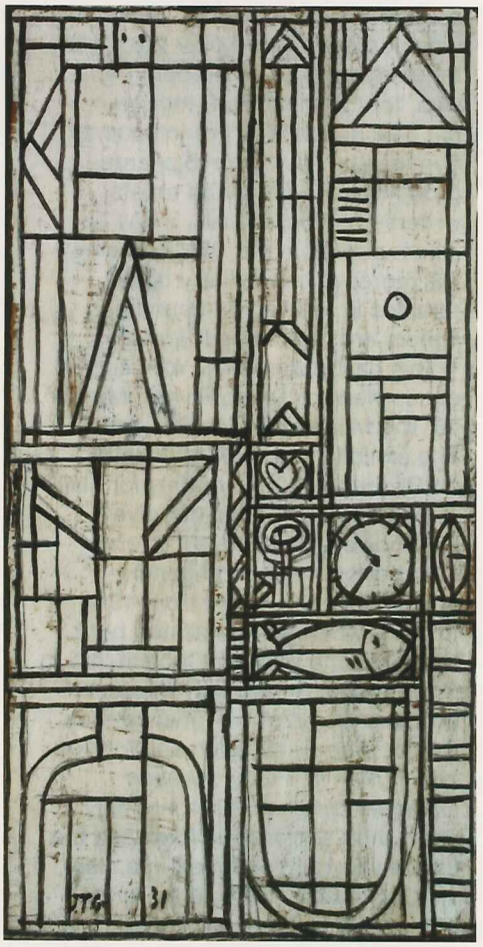
Brazilian cities as well as traditional towns and landscapes of the interior. These appropriations and reconfigurations of European modernism prompted her partner, the theorist Oswald de Andrade, to write his famous 1928 *Cannibal Manifesto*. De Andrade explains the need for Latin American (and especially Brazilian) artists of all tendencies to absorb what they could from abroad and create a new form of culture specific to their own time and place.

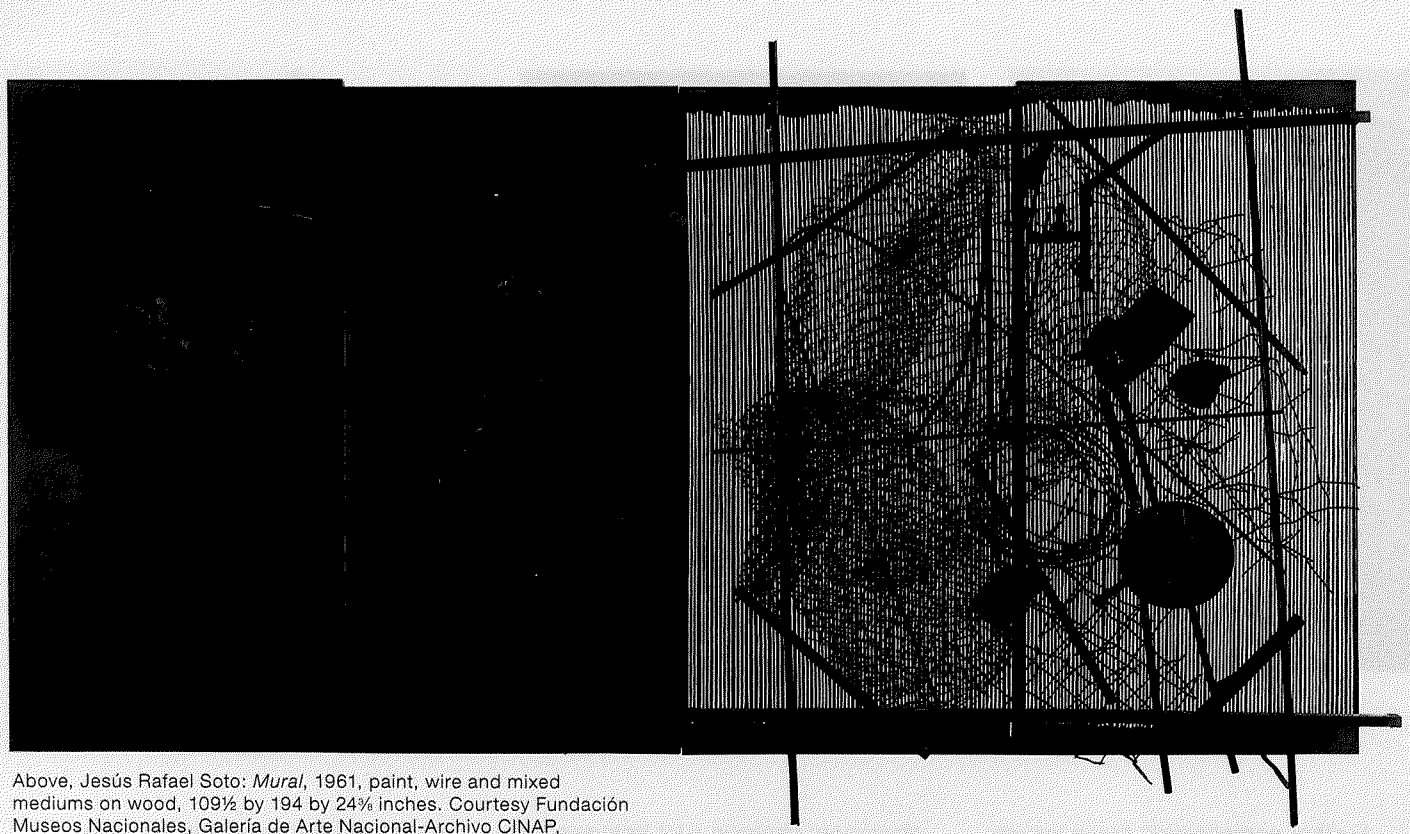
Joaquín Torres-García (1874-1949) is a key figure in the history of Latin American modernism. From his youth until he was 60, he lived in Europe, where he discovered the vanguards of Paris, particularly from the 1910s to the mid-'30s. His unique form of Constructivism, which he brought back to South America in 1934, was initially based upon de Stijl and related movements, but he loosened his style and added references (especially in the later work) to pre-Columbian design, particularly the geometric patterns in Inca textiles and pottery.

Nonetheless, in the art of other key Latin American figures, any signs of cultural identity are completely missing or so interiorized as to be invisible to the viewer. A perfect example of this is the Venezuelan Jesús Rafael Soto (1923-2005), the subject of a splendid exhibition, "Soto: Paris and Beyond, 1950-1970," on view earlier this year at the Grey Art Gallery at New York University [Jan. 10-Mar. 31]. Curated by Estrellita B. Brodsky, the show included rarely exhibited works such as the artist's early Cézanne-derived paintings and his gigantic 1960 *Mural* assembled with found wood, wire and other detritus from Caracas streets.

A resident of Paris for many years, Soto participated in a number of the exhibitions of Concrete art organized by Denise René for her gallery on the Boulevard Saint-Germain. His optical and spatial experiments, as well as those of fellow Venezuelan Carlos Cruz-Diez and the Argentine kinetic artist Julio Le Parc (both living and working in Paris today), were so much in consonance with those of their European and North American contemporaries as to make any traces of what might be construed as Latin American culture completely invisible. In fact, geometric abstraction became the quasi-official art style of Venezuela in the 1960s.

THIS STORY OF Latin American artists erasing borders is complicated and has long been the subject of debates involving notions of "center" vs. "periphery" and ideas about originality and derivativeness. Anyone even remotely interested in the art of the





Above, Jesús Rafael Soto: *Mural*, 1961, paint, wire and mixed mediums on wood, 109½ by 194 by 24⅛ inches. Courtesy Fundación Museos Nacionales, Galería de Arte Nacional-Archivo CINAP, Caracas, Venezuela. © ARS, New York.

Opposite top, Tarsila do Amaral: *Anthropophagy*, 1929, oil on canvas, 49½ by 56 inches. Courtesy Fundação José e Paulina Nemirovsky, São Paulo, Brazil.

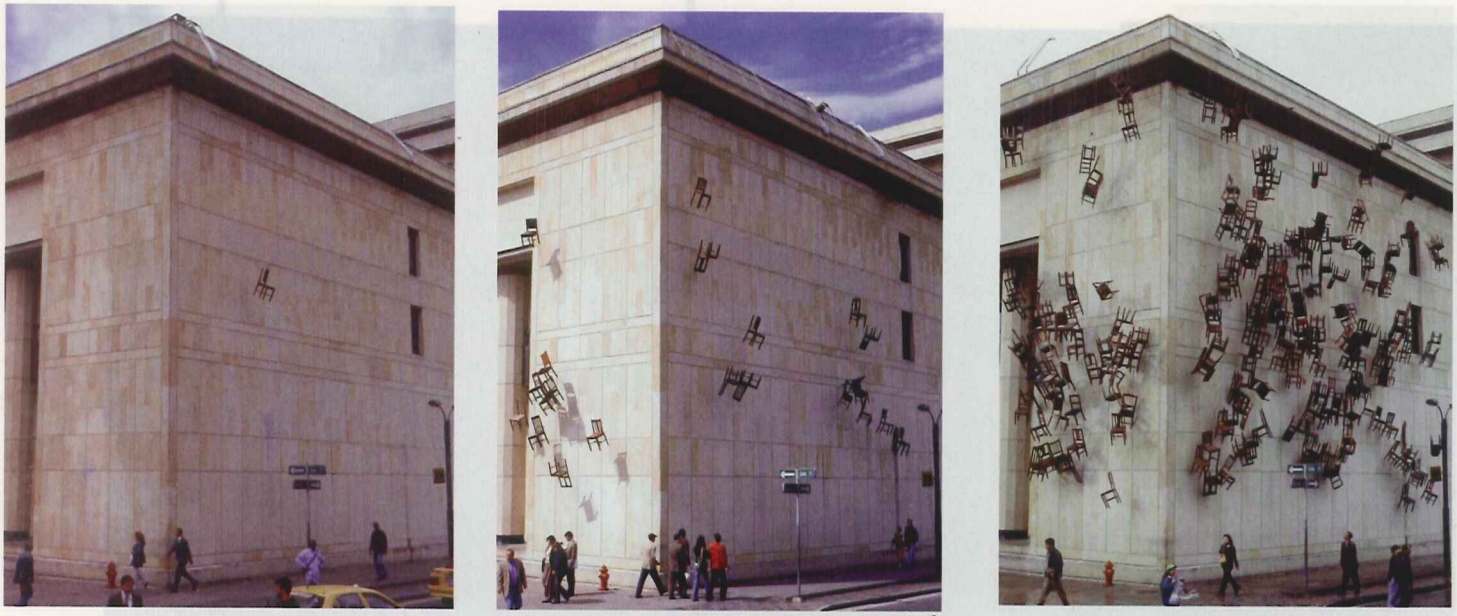
Opposite bottom, Joaquín Torres-Garcia: *Black and White Construction with Fish*, 1931, oil on wood, 27¾ by 14⅛ inches. Private collection. Courtesy Cecilia de Torres, Ltd., New York.

region has read dozens of articles and attended myriad symposia in which the question "what is Latin American art?" or "is there a Latin American art?" has been the central issue. While I don't necessarily want to add to this impossible-to-win argument, it is, I think, necessary to look at some of these questions from a contemporary perspective.

The issues have become urgent in light of today's constant displacements. Contemporary artworks are often made specifically for events and situations far from the place of origin of the creator. There is an inevitable pressure on the artist to make something "legible" for a biennial or an art-fair audience. This raises questions of decontextualization and of whether an artist is committed to the cultural fabric of his or her homeland.

Cuban critic Gerardo Mosquera has discussed the "de-Latinization" (or, in a broader sense, deracination) of the region's art, which he considers in part inevitable because of the internationalization (or globalization) of the art world today.[2] Yet signs of "identity" (a subject very much a part of the U.S. culture wars of the 1990s and, in Latin America, much earlier) are not thought of as positive by all critics. Brazilian writer Frederico Morais denounced the "obsession" with identity in art as a vestige of neocolonialism, although he recognized the need for expressions of the diverse nature of the many regions and traditions that comprise the Americas.[3]

When referring to Conceptualism in Latin America, curator Mari Carmen Ramírez makes a convincing case for the politically committed character of Latin American works. Conceptualists in the region respond to, for instance, the terrors of life under military dictatorships or the pernicious effects of North American capitalism on countries that were emerging (in the 1960s and '70s) from a kind of economic feudalism.[4] I agree that the sangfroid of much North American Conceptualism is absent from works by many Latin Americans, such as the Uruguayans Luis Camnitzer and Carlos Capelán, or the Colombian Oscar Muñoz, whose *Project for a Memorial* (2005) concerns persons who "disappeared" during the violence of his country's recent past. But what about those who began their careers as hard-core Conceptualists 30 years ago and whose work today is almost devoid of either political content or references to time and place? Liliana Porter's most recent video animation or Regina Silveira's monumental works based on shadows and distortions of form and dimension (seen in her recent exhibition "In Absentia," at the Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, Conn.) do not fit any of Ramírez's characteristics.



Three views of Doris Salcedo's *November 6 and 7*, 2002, installed on the Palace of Justice, Bogotá, Colombia. Courtesy Alexander and Bonin, New York. Photos Sergio Clavijo.

Further complicating these issues, we come to someone like Mexican Conceptualist/process artist Betsabeé Romero, who works with discarded tires from Mexico City buses. She sometimes incises them with pre-Hispanic motifs or affixes them to walls in spaces evoking ancient Aztec ball courts. Here, the use of such urban detritus can be understood as both esthetic recycling and a statement about mass transit as an integral factor in the lives of all urban dwellers. Yet if the specific local culture is understood, the work takes on a more historically nuanced authority.

THIS BACK-AND-FORTH, these binaries of the local and (for want of a better word) the transnational are perhaps the point of my observations. During a recent trip to Bogotá I noted the expert restoration of the grand central square, the Plaza Bolívar, which in November of 1985 had been all but destroyed during an attack by the guerrilla group M-19, which besieged and firebombed the Palace of Justice. This and many related acts of violence in Colombia are referenced in the works of Colombian-born artist Doris Salcedo—but in oblique, ironically subtle ways. Her pieces in which cast-off armoires and beds are cemented together, or her installation of hundreds of piled-up classroom chairs in a lot between two buildings—her contribution to the 2003 Istanbul Biennial—may indeed be read as an indictment of the oppression and violence that many people live through today. Nonetheless, Salcedo insists that her work derives, at its core, from the specific trauma that had affected her native country throughout the 20th century.

Finally, two other artists apparently present no references to borders in their work: the Argentine Jorge Macchi and the Uruguayan Marco Maggi (whose recent piece *No Idea* was seen last spring in the placement room of the Museum of Latin American Art in Long Beach, Calif.). Both work with grids, patterns and geometries. Macchi, fascinated by pop culture, music and maps, is participating in the current Sydney biennial with a work that questions the meaning of navigating directions, globes and charts. Again, neither of these two compelling figures in contemporary Latin American art could be said to be overtly tethered to any particular genealogy. Yet when we begin to excavate the iconic visual past of the Southern Cone from which they emerged, the figure of Torres-García, founder of Latin American Constructivism, inevitably looms large. Torres-García's art is unthinkable without charts, maps, grids and patterns. And Torres-García himself is unthinkable without the lessons he learned from Piet Mondrian. Thus we return to the inevitable circularity of any attempt to impose a strictly geography-based identity on artists, and we are back to the paradoxical conundrum with which I started my ruminations. ○

1 "Carribean: Art at the Crossroads of the World" appears concurrently at three New York City venues: El Museo del Barrio, Queens Museum of Art and the Studio Museum in Harlem, June 12, 2012-Jan. 6, 2013. **2** Gerardo Mosquera, "Del arte latinoamericano al arte desde América," in *Caminar con el diablo: Textos sobre arte, internacionalismo y culturas,* Madrid, Exit Publicaciones, 2010, pp. 123-33. **3** Frederico Morais, *Las artes plásticas en América Latina: Del trance a lo transitorio*, Havana, Casa de las Américas, 1996, pp. 7-10. **4** Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Tactics for Thriving on Adversity: Conceptualism in Latin America, 1960-80," in Ramírez and Héctor Olea, *Inverted Utopias: Avant-garde Art in Latin America,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004, pp. 425-39.

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UNTIL VERY RECENTLY, THE ART OF THIS VAST REGION WAS CONSIDERED A MARGINAL OR PERIPHERAL MANIFESTATION AND ITS RECEPTION WAS FRAUGHT WITH BIASES AND STEREOTYPES.

Almost every good artist from Latin America wants to resist stereotyping. Most artists don't want to be classified as "black," "Asian," or even as an artist of "institutional critique." There's nothing wrong with saying where an artist is from, but it's what you do with that information that's important. So the problem is not whether the term Latin American is fair or not, but how it is used to describe a certain community. I consider the label to be an occupational hazard, no more and no less.

EUGENIO LÓPEZ

Collector, founder of Colección Jumex, Mexico City

With the globalization of contemporary art and what seems to be a trend toward homogeneity—particularly at biennials and art fairs—work from all over tends to look the same and deal with similar issues. Yet the art that is most powerful stands out by articulating universal ideas through unique formal languages.

From the start of Colección Jumex, I encouraged a dialogue between Mexican and international artists. Our exhibitions, many of them organized by guest curators, focus on art for its formal rigor and curatorial theme rather than a specific cultural identity. Among the Mexican and Latin American artists in our collection—Carlos Amorales, Minerva Cuevas, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Patrick Hamilton, "Moris" Israel Moreno, Rivane Neuenschwander, Gabriel Orozco and Liliana Porter, to name just a few—some deal with cultural identity in their art and others do not. The choice does not define any of them.

Each of us has a distinct cultural identity, yet we live in a global arena. Individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds—myself included—consider themselves international. This is not to imply, however, that I should or should not assert my cultural identity. The question is: why impose duty or obligation on Latin American artists? Art continues to be about freedom and choices.

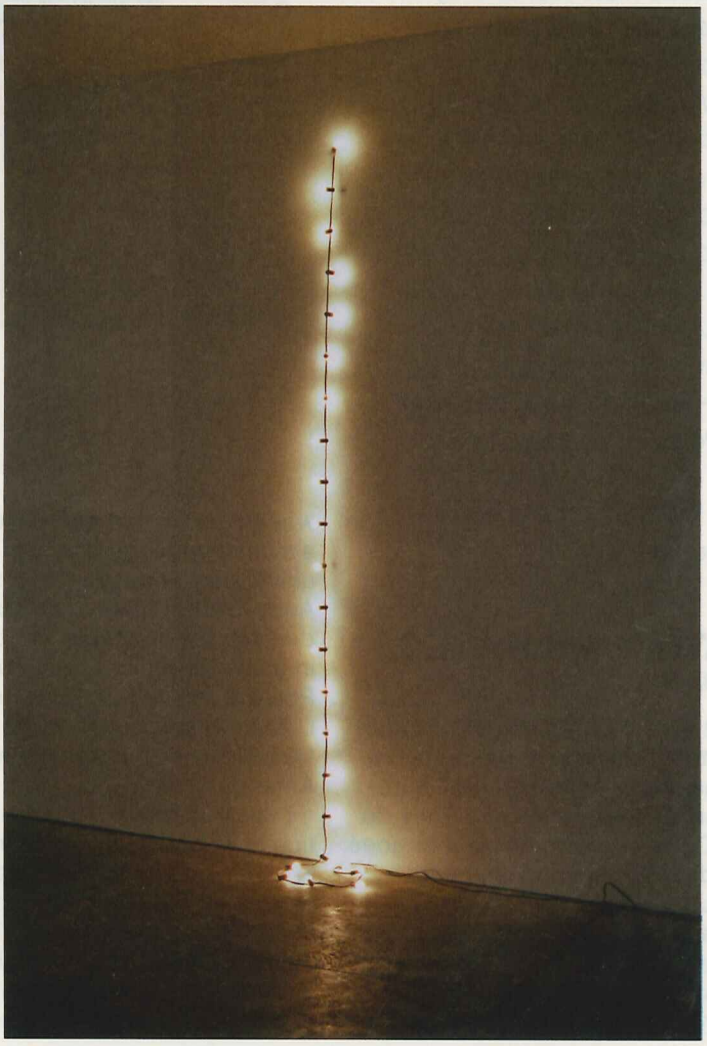
MARI CARMEN RAMÍREZ

Director, International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA), Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

In recent years we have seen a significant expansion of international art circuits to accommodate artists from Latin America as well as other previously neglected regions of the world, such as Asia and Africa. However, I am very skeptical of the view that because of this enhanced visibility Latin American art has "made it" into the mainstream and that there is no need to dig deeper into the cultural specificity that each work represents.

What does the term "global art" mean? An art that has no borders? This is an extremely naive point of view. All art is the result of both local and universal factors. Artists take what they want from previous art, combine it with personal concerns (invariably rooted in local circumstances) and produce new forms of art. Hence, in the case of Latin America, the opposition between a presumably "global" vs. a "local" or "regional" art is a red herring that masks a deeper problem. I refer to the situation of dependency on and subordination to the hegemonic centers that has afflicted Latin American art from its very beginnings in the colonial period. At the ICAA we just published a volume, *Resisting Categories: Latin American and/or Latino?*, that demonstrates in more than 1,200 pages how

Felix Gonzalez-Torres: *Untitled (Last Light)*, 1993, 24 light bulbs, plastic plugs and mixed mediums, dimensions variable. Courtesy Colección Jumex, Mexico City. Photo Laura Cohen.



View of Eduardo Abaroa's installation *Merit Labor Liability Revenue Leisure Property*, 2012, newspaper, tape, paint, cardboard and strobe lights. Courtesy 80WSE and Broadway Windows, New York University. Photo Edward Holland/Hugh O'Rourke.

the identity issue is a smoke screen that ultimately obscures each generation's response to the endemic subordination of the region. In this regard, the debate about cultural specificity today is not unlike the one artists confronted 100 years ago.

Until very recently, the art of this vast region was considered a marginal or peripheral manifestation and its reception was fraught with biases and stereotypes. The economic dynamic unleashed by globalization in the early to mid-1990s did a lot to change that. First, curators and museums had already been reassessing the relationship of Latin American artists to modernism and were in the process of incorporating a few of these artists into the canon. Second, Western institutions were confronted with a steep rise in the prices of modern and contemporary masters even as they wished to expand their collections with prime examples. Third, a new class of "global" collectors emerged—including for the first time collectors from Latin America—who considered art a financial asset. Fourth, there was the boom in art fairs that significantly elevated the role of contemporary art in key Latin American countries (Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Venezuela, Mexico and Puerto Rico), most of which had not previously participated in the art-fair phenomenon. A number of factors converged to create an increased demand for Latin American art in the global circuit.

Latin American countries continue to service a demand for art that is generated abroad, and the terms of the exchange in which they are invited to participate are not equal. More importantly, Latin American countries cannot yet impose their own paradigms on the global art circuit. In order for the situation to change, we need stronger institutions and consolidated infrastructures that will allow these countries to compete in art markets at the global level.

An interesting paradox has recently emerged: the emphasis on eradicating the cultural specificity of this art has ended up reinforcing Latin America's regional identity. This is evident in a lot of the region's new art as well as in the programs set in motion by the few museums that are in a position to contribute to this debate (Malba in Buenos Aires, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, MALI in Lima, etc). Yet while there is a more widespread circulation of information about the art of the region, our understanding of this work is still very shallow. In my view, we need to have culturally specific curatorial and academic departments to provide the type of in-depth knowledge that this art demands. We cannot leave it to the economic agents or the markets to fill this gap, which is what is happening now. This is not the same as creating ghettoes—another common complaint of the "global art" advocates. The ultimate goal is not to isolate Latin American art but to incorporate it into the larger narrative of 20th- and 21st-century art.

EDUARDO ABAROA

Artist, Mexico

There are hundreds of distinct cultures in Latin America. Some are versions of the Western civilization that colonized the area. Others are remnants of societies that survived the clash with Europe. Most are mixes of these two main sources, plus influxes from Africa and Asia. They retain many unique traits,

even though most are now infused with American culture, which sometimes feels global. Capitalism is pervasive today, but it has not managed to eradicate all cultural difference.

I do not think that people should always assert their identities. As I understand it, identity is a very complex paradoxical structure that you feel and live, not a T-shirt that you can change when you feel like it. Your background is something you cannot really escape or renounce, nor can you grasp it completely.

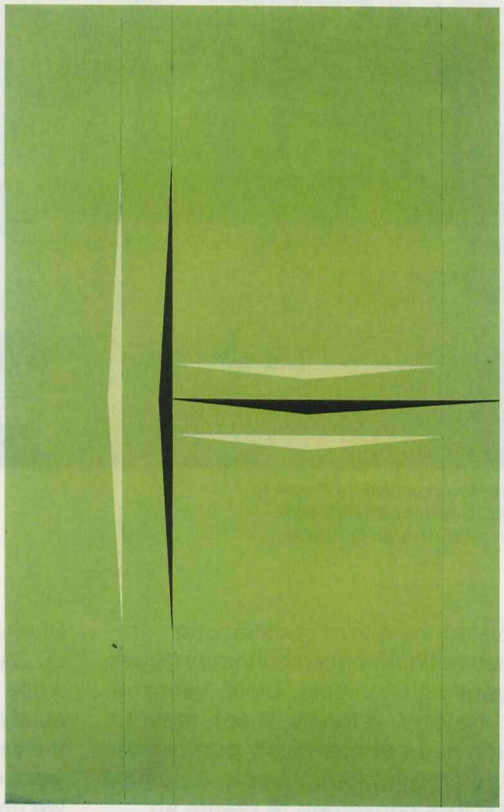
The homogeneous global situation of today's art world must be avoided if art is to remain a valid intellectual enterprise. The "think global, act local" motto is apt. By focusing on local problems with global consequences we may find some way to escape boring homogeneity. There is a strong political force in Mexico that wants the nation to become part of the successful Modern World (whatever that means). In the process, Mexico is to forget cultural traits that tie the country to its past. Because of this pressure, the nation is destroying many of its unique cultural groups by letting them starve or ruining their land and traditions. The country asserts a new global identity by renouncing its own cultural diversity. This is a terrible crime and a big mistake.

CARLOS BASUALDO

Contemporary art curator, Philadelphia Museum of Art

It does not make sense to speak of "Latin American art" today unless you are trying to sell it somehow. To understand the work, it is first a question of locating it, and that requires a critical account of the individual histories of this complex and ever-changing territory. The notion of Latin American art or even the name Latin America has a long history in which the political and—most recently—the commercial take precedence over the individual histories and cultures of the countries in the region.

The category of Latin American art becomes problematic when assessing the extremely diverse artistic production of nations like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico, to mention just a few. This is especially true when referring to the period from the first decades of the 20th century to the 1990s, when you have clearly defined regional schools of art in conversation with either Europe or the U.S., but only occasionally among themselves. In the last two decades, as a consequence of the spread of information via the Internet and the growing influence of the global market, a clear relationship can be noted between certain of today's art practices and those of the 1960s, which only recently became widely available as models far beyond their places of origin. For example, artists like Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark were very little known outside of Brazil, and practically unknown in other countries of South or Central America, until the 1990s.



Lygia Clark: *Modulated Surface No. 5*, 1955, wood and industrial paint, 45¼ by 28¼ inches. Courtesy The World of Lygia Clark, Rio de Janeiro.

THE HOMOGENEOUS GLOBAL SITUATION OF TODAY'S ART WORLD MUST BE AVOIDED IF ART IS TO REMAIN A VALID INTELLECTUAL ENTERPRISE.

LUIS PÉREZ-ORAMAS

Curator of Latin American art, Museum of Modern Art, New York, and chief curator of the 2012 São Paulo Biennial (Sept. 7-Dec. 9)

It seems to me that all individuals—artists included—assert their identity in cultural actions. I am against any essentialist view of identity. If the discussion focuses on identity as expressed or manifested through artistic production, I would say, in a sort of Marxist paraphrase, that rather than identity producing art, it is art that produces identity. Artists as individuals, and communities as collective instances, "invent" as well as discover their own identities through art, not the other way around. This is true of artists from Latin America and elsewhere. Art is a tool to invent identity. Identity is created by our actions.

We speak of Latin American art, since that label seems to be understandable, though also quite confusing. Can we speak of "European art" or "American art"? The problem is not if we can, but to what extent we can. There is a moment when those labels become insignificant and it would be useful to signal that limit in our discussions. I am also not sure our global cultural situation today is all that homogeneous. ○

A **Beatriz Milhazes** survey is on view at Malba, Buenos Aires, Sept. 13-Nov. 20. Another Milhazes solo exhibition will be on view at the Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, September 2013.

An exhibition of recent works by **Eduardo Abaroa** appeared at kurimanzutto, Mexico City Mar. 3-Mar. 31. His 80 WSE/Broadway Windows installation was on view in New York City, Feb. 24-May24.