Connecting through Collecting:  
20 Years of Art from Latin America  
at the University of Essex
Contents

Preface / 3 /  
Professor Anthony Forster, FHEA FRSA AcSS  
Vice-Chancellor  
University of Essex

ESCALA: An Open Invitation / 4 /  
Dr Joanne Harwood  
Director, ESCALA

Connecting through Collecting: 20 Years of Art from Latin America at the University of Essex / 9 /  
Dr Andrés David Montenegro Rosero  
Curatorial Assistant, ESCALA

Artworks and Research Texts / 21 /  

Latin American Art and the UK: An Interview / 57 /  
With Professor Dawn Ades  
School of Philosophy and Art History and Founding Director, ESCALA  
By Dr Taína Caragol  
Former Senior Research Officer, Latin American Art and the UK, School of Philosophy and Art History  
Current Curator for Latino Art and History  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC

Latin American Art from a UK Perspective: Politics, Ethics, and Aesthetics / 71 /  
Professor Valerie Fraser  
School of Philosophy and Art History and Founding Director, ESCALA

List of contributors / 82 /
Preface

Professor Anthony Forster, FHEA FRSA AcSS
Vice-Chancellor

As Vice-Chancellor of the University of Essex I am delighted in this, our fiftieth year, to bring a selection of artworks from ESCALA to Southend for the first time with the exhibition Connecting through Collecting: 20 years of Art from Latin America at the University of Essex, at the Beecroft Art Gallery. Although housed at our Colchester Campus, ESCALA, as a university collection, is a resource for all of our students and staff. With its Latin American specialism as well as its broad and deep themes, the Collection embodies the aims of our founding Vice-Chancellor, Sir Albert Sloman, to “dispel prevailing prejudice and ignorance” of Latin America, as expressed in his 1964 A University in the Making.1 At the same time, ESCALA responds to Sloman’s desire for the University of Essex to be a place for living as well as learning; a place where inspiring art and architecture are integral to a broad and rich education.

Now in its twentieth year, ESCALA has matured and some of its roles have changed. It was originally established to provide physical access to art from Latin America for art historians. Now, as this book demonstrates, it is a research and teaching collection that supports a far broader range of users; from members of our Centre for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) to students of curating, museology and digitisation. The Collection welcomes anyone whose teaching and research might benefit from observing artworks at first hand in order to complement and challenge their own disciplinary perspectives. As such, ESCALA, like the Albert Sloman Library, offers unexpected opportunities for personal and professional enrichment and the possibility that art can become part of life’s journey.

---

Often one of the first questions we are asked by those new to ESCALA is “Why is there a collection of art from Latin America at the University of Essex?” We hope that this book and related exhibition will help to answer that question, although the genesis and subsequent development of collections are rarely straightforward. Since this book reflects on the first 20 years of ESCALA and coincides with the first 50 years of the University of Essex, one way of charting ESCALA’s progress is by acknowledging the contribution of those who have shaped it into its current form. The list of those who have supported ESCALA, both inside and outside of our parent institution is very long, however, and to attempt to include it here fully runs the risk of omissions. Needless to say, ESCALA is grateful first and foremost to the artists we represent, without whose artworks our collection would not exist. We are also indebted to those whose original impulse it was to start the Collection, especially Art History alumni and staff: Charles Cosac, Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, and Professors Dawn Ades and Valerie Fraser; and all those at the University and beyond who have nurtured and supported it since 1993. In recent years, ESCALA and students of art from Latin America have also been supported by a range of external organisations.

Our change of name in 2010 from the University of Essex Collection of Art from Latin America (UECLAA) to the Essex Collection of Art from Latin America (ESCALA) reflected a concerted effort to be understood not only by our international, and specifically Latin American supporters, but also by our own institution in the widest sense: to those in professional services who help us to function as a resource and to remain accessible and to those in the academic community; students and staff who make use of us in their teaching and research. While UECLAA as an acronym was easily pronounced by native Spanish-speakers, speakers of other languages struggled to say our name, which was a severe disadvantage in articulating our role and reaching out to new audiences. The original inspiration for ESCALA came from LoCALA, the Lodeveans Collection of Art from Latin America, formed by London-based collectors Stuart and John Evans in 2008 and, for a while, curated by University of Essex Latin American Studies and Art history alumnus María Tidball-Binz. The acronym has the advantage of being both pronounceable and meaningful. In Spanish and Portuguese ‘escala’ in fact has many meanings, including ‘scale,’ ‘step’ (reflected in the ‘E’ of our name-logo) and also ‘stopover’ in relation to international flights and airports.

This last meaning is particularly helpful as a reflection of the way we, as a small, specialised operation within a much larger and incredibly diverse academic institution, prefer to work. With the resources we have and in the context in which we operate, it makes little sense for us to try to rival larger, specialised collections of art from Latin America with their national and international audiences and levels of public

---

1 ESCALA’s supporters include The Art Fund, Contemporary Art Society and Pinta London Museum Acquisition Programme for acquisitions; Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA) for scholarships for postgraduate students in Art History, and Linklaters for our museum education work with schools. In addition, through ESCALA, the Albert Sloman Library has received significant donations of often rare collections of books in the field of art from Latin America; including from the Fundación Cisneros in Venezuela and Fundación Espigas in Argentina.
engagement. Instead, our academic context provides the perfect setting in which we can assume the positive position of being a broad and deep research and teaching museum. This was how and why the collection was established in December 1993; for the benefit of postgraduate students of Latin American art, but also to enhance the campus and the profile of the Latin American Centre, now Centre for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS), as outlined in the original statement of aims.

As ESCALA we are, therefore, reminded daily of our function as a place where people can come in order to then continue their academic and personal journey elsewhere at and beyond the University of Essex. Sometimes those who use us know what they are looking for and find it easily among our 750 artworks, our 4,000 archival items, our accumulated knowledge and that of our colleagues at the University. Sometimes we are able to connect them to others among our wider network who can help. Others come to us by an apparently indirect route and are surprised to find such an unlikely and unexpected resource available for their use. The wonder and depth of feeling that our artworks provoke in those who view our artworks, whether in our stores, in a classroom, or in an exhibition, reaffirms the value of collections of any kind to formal and informal education.

As we embark on the next twenty years we invite people to step in to ESCALA, to step out into the world having exchanged ideas and knowledge with us and to step up to work with us so that we can continue to thrive and to support others. ‘Connecting through Collecting’ as a phrase or ‘strapline,’ was the idea of Matthew Terrington, an alumnus of the MA Curating Latin American Art in the School of Philosophy and Art History (SPAH), who became ESCALA’s Learning and Communications Frontrunner, then Project Officer for the development of our new collections management system, website and brand. He now works as Digital Media Assistant at the National Gallery and Project Manager at System Simulation Ltd., the company that supplies our digital collections management system. Matthew’s journey through ESCALA offers just one example of how, as a university collection, we offer opportunities for development and, in turn, how we benefit from the huge range of skills and knowledge that students and staff bring to us.

As such, Connecting through Collecting is more than the title of our anniversary exhibition at the Beecroft Art Gallery in Southend; it also sums up our approach to building a collection of art from Latin America at the University of Essex that is global, vital and embodies thoroughly the ‘Essex Spirit.’
DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY AND THEORY
University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, CO4 3SQ Telephone 0206 872200

AIMS
To develop a specialist permanent Collection of high-quality 20th-century Latin American art at the University of Essex

To construct a purpose-built museum, with stores, study areas and a gallery for temporary exhibitions

ACQUISITIONS POLICY
To build the Collection on a broad geographical and historical base, with special emphasis on areas of research within the Department of Art History and Theory

Actively to seek donations

To encourage donations of related archival and bibliographical material and generally to strengthen the Albert Sloman Library in the field of Latin American art

Decisions concerning the acceptance of donations will normally rest with the Executive Committee in consultation with the Board of Management and the International Advisory Panel

PURPOSES OF THE COLLECTION
To promote interest in Latin American art in Britain and Europe

To establish a Collection that will become the basis of future research (by encouraging research into items in the collection, and by attracting postgraduate students to work in the area of Latin American art)

To disseminate knowledge about Latin American art and the Essex collection in particular by loaning items to temporary exhibitions

To enhance the campus and the profile of the Latin American Centre at the University
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

UECLAA will be run by a Board of Management, from whom will be drawn an
Executive Committee. An International Advisory Panel will be appointed whose functions will be
to promote the Collection outside the University and to advise the Board as appropriate.

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Social), Professor Joan Busfield
The Registrar & Secretary
Professor Dawn Ades (Director)
Dr Valerie Fraser (Executive Director, 1993-94)
Professor Peter Vergo, Director, MA in Gallery Studies
The Librarian
Chris Anderton, Latin American Subject Librarian
Jeremy Theophilus, Exhibitions Curator, University Gallery
Assistant Curators:
Charles Cosac
Gabriel Perez-Barreiro
Paula Terra Cabo
Pauline Antrobus

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

(The UECLAA Sub-committee, reporting to the Arts Committee of the University,
and meeting at least once a term)

Dr Valerie Fraser
Professor Peter Vergo
Chris Anderton
Jeremy Theophilus
Assistant curators

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY PANEL

Marcos Curi, Director, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Buenos Aires
Roque De Bonis, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Buenos Aires
M. Josefinde Duini de Wollak, Durini Gallery, London
Dr Oriana Baddeley, Camberwell School of Art
Sylvia Chittenden de Condylis, Latin American Arts Association

December 1993
Connecting through Collecting: 
20 Years of Art from Latin America 
at the University of Essex

Dr Andrés David Montenegro Rosero 
Curatorial Assistant, ESCALA
This essay introduces Connecting through Collecting: 20 Years of Art from Latin America at the University of Essex and explores how the exhibition and this associated publication continue the collaborative legacy of both the Department of Art History and Theory (now School of Philosophy and Art History - SPAH) and the Essex Collection of Art from Latin America, ESCALA (formerly known as the University of Essex Collection of Latin American Art - UECLAA). The first section describes the methodology behind Connecting through Collecting and highlights the interdisciplinary dialogue catalysed by the project. The second part provides an historical background of the context that permitted the creation of a collection dedicated to art from Latin America at the University of Essex. The third section focuses on the history of ESCALA, and on its commitment to the production of knowledge based on the artworks under its care.

**Connecting through Collecting**

An important example of ESCALA’s role in the study of art from Latin America, and a key precedent for Connecting through Collecting, was the project UECLAAcross, supported by an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) grant and developed for the Albert Sloman Library in 2006. Organised by former SPAH Senior Research Officer Isobel Whitelegg, the exhibition and publication introduced the Collection to the University through the insertion of its artworks in each floor of the library. According to Whitelegg: “The works are displayed in the balcony foyers of each of the upper floors of the Albert Sloman Library, thus located in proximity to Library holdings relevant to the subject area that each work touches upon”.¹ In this way, the second floor had an artwork related to Psychology, the third floor an artwork related to Sociology, the fourth floor had an artwork related to Human Rights, and the fifth floor had an artwork related to Art History. In the publication, each work was accompanied by a short text written by one scholar from each of the aforementioned departments and from their specific disciplinary point of view. Articulating what Whitelegg called a “cross-disciplinary” perspective, UECLAAcross sought to introduce the Collection to a broader audience beyond the specialised public for art from Latin America at the University.²

² Ibid.
Connecting through Collecting marks twenty years of the Essex Collection of Art from Latin America, by expanding the legacy of interdisciplinary exchanges at the heart of UECLAAcross. This exhibition is one of the most diverse display of ESCALA to date, with works selected by more than a dozen students, researchers, and academics from disciplines as wide-ranging as Art History, Human Rights, Literature, Film and Theatre Studies, Psychoanalysis, and Government. Each of the collaborators selected an artwork based on their own research interests. ESCALA’s museum professionals then arranged individual viewings to foster a more intimate relationship between writer and artwork. These exchanges became the basis for the production of original texts from a range of disciplinary perspectives offering ‘first-person’, often unexpected, accounts of a series of artworks in a variety of media. Through this collaborative process, the exhibition and associated texts establish connections between ESCALA and other disciplines with the aim of producing new and varied knowledge and encouraging the development of object-based learning and teaching across the University.

In this edited volume, these contributions are underpinned by two previously unpublished documents; a 2007 interview between Professor Dawn Ades and Dr Taina Caragol, and a 2012 essay by Professor Valerie Fraser. Ades’ and Caragol’s conversation took place as part of the Latin American Art and the UK, a year-long AHRC-funded project that was “a preliminary investigation into the presence and critical reception of art and artists from Latin America in the UK from the 1960s to the present”. It offers an important testimonial account of the challenges faced by the Department of Art History and Theory during the development of the study of Art from Latin America at the University of Essex, from 1968 to 1999. Fraser’s contribution, a transcript of a presentation for the conference Zones de convergence: l’actualité de la recherche en théorie et histoire de l’art latino-américain, held at the University of Rennes, is an in-depth discussion of the history of ESCALA, and on how the study of art from Latin America at the University of Essex relates to other centres of production of knowledge on art from the region. Underscoring ESCALA’s presence in the classroom, beyond the walls of the gallery or museum, these texts introduce audiences to the Collection’s commitment to collaboration as a guiding principle of its continuous development.

Contrary to curatorial models where the selection of displayed works is made by one person, or a small group of people, the artworks included in Connecting through Collecting are selected by all scholars and students participating in the project. The exhibition and publication follow a de-centralised curatorial model that prioritises the exchange, production, and dissemination of knowledge, over a thematic, theoretical, or chronological arrangement. In this respect, Connecting through Collecting re-inserts ESCALA into the specialist field of study of art from Latin America in the United Kingdom and highlights its important academic and educational role. The project seeks to embed the Collection within a broad range of disciplines in the University, turning ESCALA into a meeting ground for interdisciplinary conversation about Latin America.

Connecting through Collecting, as a title, reveals ESCALA’s commitment to building a Collection that can support an ample array of research interests from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. As the title suggests, ESCALA’s growth—in tune with the study of art from Latin America at the University of Essex—rests on establishing connections with, and outside, of the discipline of Art History. This implies a careful programme for collecting that is directly tied to the research interests and projects developed by members of staff, students, and researchers across the University. One of the key criteria

---

3 For more information see: http://www.escala.org.uk/research/latin-american-art-and-the-uk
for ESCALA’s collecting policy is that the works must fit in, expand, critique, or contribute, to a specific academic project studying an aspect of Latin America, from any disciplinary background. In this way, ESCALA—quite literally—connects various departments and academic interests within the University through the unique platform of art.

Art from Latin America at the University of Essex

To tell the story of ESCALA, one has to tell the story of UECLAA and the former Department of Art History and Theory (now a part of SPAH). The Department of Art History and Theory was founded in 1968 following the multidisciplinary and comparative principles of the University’s Vice-Chancellor, Sir Albert Sloman. The Department was sited within the School of Comparative Studies and, as such, it contributed to the establishment of a programme of area studies centred on the geopolitical regions of Europe, Japan, Latin America, the US and the USSR. In relation to the School, the University supported the creation of two Centres dedicated to research and teaching: the Centre for Russian Studies and the Latin American Centre (later renamed the Centre for Latin American and Caribbean Studies-CLACS). These centres, and their associated undergraduate degree schemes brought together scholars, professors, and students from several departments, including Art History, Sociology, Government, and Literature.4

According to Valerie Fraser, the establishment of CLACS, with financial support from the Nuffield Foundation, responded to a general growing interest in Latin America in the United Kingdom at the time, exacerbated by the ideological pressures of the Cold War. In a 1965 government review, historian Professor John H. Parry called for the UK to direct its academic efforts in strengthening the, largely non-existent then, field of Latin American Studies. After Liverpool, Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow, and London, the Universities of Essex and Warwick were the two newly established Universities of the time to respond to this call and found Latin American Studies research centres.5 In a context such as the University of Essex, with a strong background in Marxist and Post-Marxist thought, this meant that the University’s interest in the cultural expressions from Latin America was based on a project of solidarity with the region, and in a strong rejection of the interventionist policies established in the continent after the Second World War, and in particular, after the military Coup in Chile in 1973.6 This early and sustained commitment has led to the Albert Sloman Library holding one of the best libraries for Latin American Studies in Europe, with some hundred thousand volumes, eight thousand of which focus on art from Latin America.7 This means that the University of Essex holds the de facto national

---


---

Full text included in this publication for the first time.

7 In 2007 the Latin American book collection in the Albert Sloman Library was recognised by COPAC as being of national importance and was invited to send its catalogue records to them for inclusion in their database. Since the initial major batch of records the Library has submitted the records of recently catalogued Latin American material every six months.
library collection for Latin American art, which includes one-off, specially selected donations of rare and out of print material from, for example, the Fundación Cisneros (Venezuela) and the Fundación Espigas (Argentina).

Notwithstanding this increase in broad interest in the region, during the decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, there was very little information available —especially in English— that was dedicated to the study of art from Latin America. Additionally, there were very few images, or examples, of art from Latin America in public circulation or exhibition in the UK. Given this general lack of resources, one of the biggest challenges that the Department had to face once it established its programmes of study on art from Latin America, was the gathering of visual and bibliographical material specialised on the topic. Motivated by the Department’s emphasis on the ‘first-hand’ study of artworks as the departure point for any art historical considerations, in 1970 the Department sent one of its experts, Dawn Ades (at the time an expert in Surrealism and Dada, not art from Latin America), to investigate the field from and in Latin America. This trip was fundamental as it allowed Ades to, not only photograph key examples of art from the region, but also gather key texts in the history of art from Latin America, such as manifestoes, and other important critical texts, from Mexico to Argentina. Additionally, this trip catalysed the development of the milestone exhibition *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era*, organised by Ades for the Hayward Gallery in 1989.⁸

In parallel to these initiatives, during the 1980s and early 1990s there was an explosion of exhibitions dedicated to the study of art from Latin America in both the USA and the UK —taking advantage of the literary boom of the previous decade and the anticipation of the ‘commemoration’ of the five hundred years of ‘discovery’. Contrary to exhibitions such as *Art of the Fantastic* (1987) or *America: Bride of the Sun* (1991), the work associated with Essex researchers did not reduce the art and culture from Latin America to certain clichés of the time, such as the Magical Realist thrust behind *Art of the Fantastic*, or the romantic indigenist undertones that characterise *America: Bride of the Sun*. Evading rigid categorisations and pre-judgements on what is and is not art in Latin America, *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era* investigated and highlighted the cultural diversity of the region, successfully de-emphasising entrenched, but exhausted, issues of identity-driven art. In this respect, *Art in Latin America* proposed a new methodology for the study of art and visual culture from Latin America.⁹

Ades’ exhibition and similar initiatives at Essex contributed to the establishment of then UECLAA, now ESCALA, by bringing audiences of the time in first-hand contact with examples of art made in Latin America. In this sense, the University of Essex Collection of Latin American Art, took *Art in Latin America*’s intentions one step further, and founded one of the first collections dedicated to the art of the region in the United Kingdom.

**From UECLAA to ESCALA**

The Collection was founded in 1993 after the donation of a painting named *Memória* (1990-1992) made by Brazilian artist Siron Franco. Brazilian student Charles Cosac donated the painting with the express desire that the artwork be used in the classroom to spark discussions on art and socio-political issues. The painting itself commemorates an environmental disaster that occurred in 1987 where the artist lived

---

in Goiânia, the state capital of Goiás. An international company illegally disposed several containers of a radioactive element (Cesium-137) in the Bairro Popular, the city’s lower middle-class district, and the texture and light reflective qualities of the substance attracted children’s attention. As a result, many of them died, while some are still suffering from ailments related to this event. According to Fraser:

“I can tell you that the beautiful shining silver surface draws the unsuspecting visitor in, but you can’t appreciate this from this reproduction; and this reinforces the importance of seeing works of art at first hand: it reinforces the importance of being able to teach from real works of art and so of having a collection of Latin American art in order to teach the subject well.”

Memória effectively triggered a process of collecting works of art, the majority of which were acquired through donations by students, artists, scholars, and private collectors. For the Essex Collection, the term ‘Latin American’ was transformed into ‘from Latin America. As Fraser recounts:

10 Ibid.
“...we assumed that if people wanted to give art to a collection of ‘Latin American’ art, then they were happy with that designation. So if an artist born in Venezuela and resident in London, for example, or born in Japan and resident in Brazil —if they wanted to be included, then that was good enough for us”.11

ESCALA does not provide a stable definition —either geographical or ideological— regarding the art from Latin America, and it includes artists such as Aubrey Williams or Yolanda López, who would usually be studied in the contexts of, either, Afro-Caribbean diaspora, or Latino and Chicana art historical frameworks. This inclusivity also extends to the definition of what ‘art’ is. The Collection does not create hierarchies between ‘high’ and ‘low’ forms of art, between ‘popular art’ and art with a capital A.

A fundamental aspect of the Collection is its commitment to making the artworks available for the production of knowledge. Several donations have been made possible thanks to the professional links established between researchers —students and professors alike— and artists from Latin America. For example, several works by Argentinian artist León Ferrari made it to Colchester thanks to former UECLAA Curator Gabriela Salgado, for the exhibition *León Ferrari: The Architecture of Madness* (2002).12 This show not only exhibited an important corpus of the artist’s work in the University Gallery, now Art Exchange, but also included the production of a catalogue publication combining texts by members of staff and students of the Department. This collaborative exchange between artist, curator, staff, and students, prompted Ferrari to donate an important series of heliographic prints to the Collection, including *Autopista del sur* (1982-2000).

Yolanda López, *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe*, 2007, hand touched giclée on paper, 92 x 53 cm

11 Ibid.
ESCALA’s acquisitions, now through purchase, rather than donation, are as such linked closely to research and to teaching. In recent years, ESCALA has chosen to acquire more selectively and slowly, on a project-basis or through purchase grants from the Art Fund and the PINTA Museum Acquisitions Fund. An example of this model is the project *Unravelling Threads*, led by PhD candidate Valeria Paz Moscoso in 2012.
The research programme explored aspects of textiles from the Andean region of South America in relation to artworks from ESCALA’s holdings, such as León Ferrari’s *Sin título (Caligrafía: texto de ‘Elogio de la sombra’, J.L. Borges, 1969)* (1997) and Esteban Álvarez’s *Poncho* (2000). Importantly, this project involved the collaboration with contemporary Bolivian artist Aruma-Sandra De Berduccy, whose works provide a unique platform to study the legacies of Andean text and textiles from a contemporary point of view. Her works, as Paz Moscoso argues, are inspired by Andean weaving and weavers, and excavate the contemporary afterlives of ancestral traditions. As starting points for this discussion, Aruma’s works were not only included in the exhibition, but one of her pieces, *Efectivo* (2010), was purchased by ESCALA in 2012. For the piece, according to Moscoso, the artist “has adapted the indigenous Andean loom to reweave such quotidian objects as banknotes, removing their value while creating equivalences between textiles and money and vice versa”.13

ESCALA’s academic role and commitment also includes the establishment of personal bonds with the artists that become part of it. Paraphrasing Fraser, behind every donation and exchange between artists and ESCALA, there is a pact assumed by the Collection: a commitment to the rigorous research of the objects under its care. As a Collection, as Fraser argues, ESCALA has the responsibility of “trying to understand the works’ political, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions, and to communicate this to students”.14

From its spontaneous beginnings to now, ESCALA has been closely linked to the research interests of staff and students who have investigated many topics related to the art and visual culture of Latin America, including Peruvian photography from 1900 to 1945,15 the role of printmaking in the Southern Cone,16 or themes of Human Rights and Transitional Justice.17 Under this organic model, the Collection has grown to over seven hundred and fifty artworks of artists from seventeen countries and has contributed to the study of art from the region within the UK by participating in more than fifty exhibitions. Through independent exhibitions, loans, and students’ shows the Collection has been instrumental for the production of a wide variety of publications and academic projects. ESCALA’s Archive paired with the specialised bibliographical collection held at the Albert Sloman Library constitute one of the most complete resources for the study of art from Latin America in the European context.

Connecting through Collecting: 20 Years of Art from Latin America at the University of Essex, is a project that does not seek to be representative of the artistic variety of ESCALA, nor is it an exhibition that tackles the complexities and contradictions of what is—or is not—art from Latin America. Activating the multidisciplinary drive at the heart of ESCALA and SPAH, the exhibition seeks to expand this dialogue by including other disciplines such as Psychoanalysis, Translation Studies, or Philosophy. Additionally, the process of collaboration between ESCALA and members of staff from other departments has opened a door for a more thorough integration of the Collection into the academic curriculum of disciplines beyond Art History.
Artworks and Research Texts

Á caminho da festa de Iemanjá
Dr Matthias Röhrig Assunção, Department of History

Sin título (Caligrafía)
Dr Sanja Bahun, Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies

Estructura completa
Marina Barsy, School of Philosophy and Art History

Transnational Anthem 2
Dr Marian de Vooght, Department of Government

Untitled
Dr Sarah Demelo, Essex Collection of Art from Latin America

In-Out Antropofagia
Ian Dudley, School of Philosophy and Art History

Vidas paralelas
Dr Taisuke Edamura, School of Philosophy and Art History

Chac Mool
Gisselle Girón, School of Philosophy and Art History

La Patria II
Dr Joanne Harwood, Essex Collection of Art from Latin America

Lesson of Dissection
Jessica Hughes, School of Philosophy and Art History

La muerte sonriendo en paz sobre los caimanes
Stefanie Kogler, School of Philosophy and Art History

1er año, 6ta división, 1967
Professor Todd Landman, Faculty of Social Sciences

Alucinaciones
Professor Roderick Main, Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies

Chatto III
Dr Jak Peake, Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies

Untitled (Nuevas Floras)
Professor Jules Pretty, Deputy Vice-Chancellor

350, Intervención urbana
Dr Clara Sandoval, School of Law

Buenos Aires Tour
Dr Jörg Schaub, School of Philosophy and Art History
Iemanjá is the Afro-Brazilian Goddess of large rivers and the sea. Her name derives from a river in present-day Nigeria, and a Yoruba expression meaning ‘the mother whose sons are fish’. European and American slave traders shipped around fifteen million enslaved Africans across the Atlantic to the Americas. Life on board of the slave ships was particularly harsh and many died of dehydration and disease. Grateful survivors may have thanked their own African deity of the sea, and hence the worship of Iemanjá and its cognates, such as the Central African Kianda, eventually became more prominent in Cuba and Brazil than in Africa. In Brazil Iemanjá is also known as Dona Janaina, Mãe d’água (Mother of the Water) and is syncretized with the Catholic saint Our Lady of the Conception. Although detail of worship may vary according to the specific ‘nation’ of Afro-Brazilian religion, Iemanjá’s core attributes are always the colours blue and white, a silver fan and a sword, and pebble from the ocean. Iemanjá stands for spiritual harmony, maternity and the family. As such she has become an iconic figure in Brazilian popular culture. In the Candomblé religion only female animals such as duck, goat, and sheep are sacrificed for her, and practitioners devoted to her must avoid eating crabs, and killing mice or cockroaches. Her favourite food is baked fish and rice covered with egg white and her weekday is Saturday.

Á caminho da festa de Iemanjá (On the way to the Iemanjá celebration), by Tiíta Machado, depicts a group of seven worshippers on their path to a celebration in the deity’s honour —which in Rio de Janeiro takes place on New Year. The artist has de-emphasised the individuality of the participants by leaving their faces blank, although the great variation in skin tones suggests that the worship of Iemanjá is no longer restricted to any particular ethnic or racial group —Afro-Brazilian religion today is an universalist faith open to everyone. Tiíta devotes particular attention to the shoes, the delicate lacework on the women’s white garments and the flowers that will be offered to Iemanjá. The white dunes in the background —which may be inspired by the artist’s residence in Cabo Frio— and the dark blue sky with a faint light in the horizon, contribute to the mystical atmosphere of the painting. We can imagine that the atabaque drums, which are played only by men, will soon resonate and call Iemanjá to come and incorporate her ‘daughters-of-saint’, the initiated who ‘receive’ her in ritual trance.
On 9 January 2000, a mere thirty days after taking up office, the Argentine government of President Fernado de la Rúa issued a curious press release. In the communiqué, reported in an article in the major Argentine newspaper *La Nación*, the government admits poor diffusion of messages about its activities and highlights a need to establish “a more fluid contact with the public”. Failing to live up to the pre-election promises, and sensing an impending economic crisis and social unrest (issues over which De la Rúa would eventually resign in December 2001), the new government of Argentina had recourse to an ancient tool: *philophronesis*, a figure-mode of speech in which one mollifies the anger of a superior addressee and creates amicable rapport by using gentle words, or even a submissive apology. Yet, as it tends to happen with discourses that subsume in themselves conflicting aims and affects, and get disseminated through a multiplicity of relays, the lack of clarity is precisely what distinguishes the government communiqué on communication. The apparent irony of this state of affairs was not lost on León Ferrari, a long-time devotee of artistic re-transcription of ideological messages.

In his 2000 *Sin título (Caligrafía)*, Ferrari juxtaposes the newspaper clipping of the article in *La Nación* and its transcription in barely legible script, reverse to each other. Ferrari’s ‘deformed’ calligraphic transcription of the government’s communiqué omits punctuation, splits and rearranges sentences, phrases, and words so that meaning and non-meaning are both upheld, and their conflict is visually represented. In this particular piece, the words and phrases wash up against each other in a wave-like movement that comments on the purported ‘fluidity’ of the contact between the holder and the recipient of the ideological message. The surprising three-dimensionality of this calligraphic interaction is relayed by the alteration of emphatic brush strokes, accentuating random portions of words, and the thin, seemingly timid scribbles, withdrawing in the background. The latter, however, also appear generative of the flashes in the foreground. The end visual effect is, then, one of the power-struggle for communication that coils around itself; for, enforced communication, in this case at least, can only result in its exact opposite.

Yet, this piece, where reproducibility and semantic authority are both explored and exploded, need not be understood as defeatist in intent. Remembering Ferrari’s commitment to an art that is “neither beauty nor novelty” but “efficacy and perturbation”1, one may reinterpret the piece as a pointer to human agency and a more genuine, perhaps more effective, renegotiation of political and ideological spheres. Here I recall Bruno Latour’s discussion of transmission of ideological tokens (by which he meant the dissemination of scientific and artistic discoveries in the economy of knowledge), and his final concession that, symbolic exchanges, rather than being subject to unilateral diffusion of power, are ultimately “in the hands of people”; and people can react in a variety of ways—“by letting the token

---

drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or appropriating it.” In its press release the De la Rúa government dropped one such symbolic token into the public sphere: it inserted in the discourse of the turn-of-millennium Argentina its desire to establish a “more fluid contact” with the disenchanted citizens. In the hands of Ferrari, however, the ideologically over-charged token ‘fluidity’ transforms into an innovative artistic practice—waves of transcribed phrases washing ashore—thus inscribing an irreducible human component in the discursive field of transmitting and transacting in Argentine society. It is the human hand, the artist’s hand, that persists as the criterion for action in Ferrari’s piece.

---

Proximity in body geographies

david pérez karmadavis has worked in several performance actions with the conflict between Dominicans and Haitians as citizens of a shared Island. *Estructura completa* understands the geography of the island of Hispaniola as “a body divided in two nations, with a ground that unites them, a border that divides them, two governments that commercialise it, and a long history that withholds them”. Comprehending the island as torn flesh, *Estructura completa* investigates the body as a territory of the Self and, through it, the cartography of the social.

In the video, a mestizo, blind, Dominican man, carries a black Haitian woman, who has had both legs amputated. Due to their physical impairments, the woman guides the man through the public sphere. The ‘incomplete’ bodies were chosen as an allegory for individual alienation, for only through a symbiotic arrangement dictated by physical necessity, can they successfully operate in a public space. The notion of two distinct nations is embodied as an amputated woman and a blind man, obscured from public recognition. At an emotional and sensorial level, the work takes into account the social performativity of gender, race, and physical and sensorial disability, to bring to the fore the relational character of purported stable definitions, such as national identity.

As the video documentation of *Estructura completa* demonstrates, the camera operates as a flâneur in close proximity to the bodies touching and being touched, feeling each other’s weight, movement, smell, voice, breath, and pulsations. The limits of each body are contested through an uncomfortable, yet necessary, proximity—they are brought together by the absence of a bodily margin, which, in turn, reflects the border that marks the island’s geography.

A dialogue is created between the two protagonists of the work by the cognition of language. In their physicality, the bodies come together through an intimate encounter: a phantom limb is supplanted by the carnal presence of the other and the blind body can only see through the mediation of the other. Embodied as dual wholeness, *Estructura completa* constructs a space for the dialogical proximity of bodies inscribed by their histories, and experiences, of difference.

The protagonist’s citizenships, Haitian and Dominican, are foregrounded by a sense of nationality characterised by its relationship to the ‘other’. In the case of the Dominican Republic, the erasure of the Haitian other was at the heart of the creation of the nation in 1865, which guided by the explicit rejection of Haitian and black ancestry. In its origins, the Dominican Republic was founded on the distancing of the Haitian other, a practice that still continues in the twenty first-century through governmental policies of denationalisation of Haitian immigrant residents, and the denial of Dominican nationality to children of Haitian women born inside the Dominican Republic.

By inserting a dialogical proximity of bodies coming together in the flux of the public sphere, karmadavis’ work invites us to understand that a complete structure is built on the mutual care of the body-geography of two nations sharing an island. Moreover, it posits that the malfunctioning of either of these bodies is the result of their distancing.
The medium of Jaime Gili’s object *Transnational Anthem 2* is catalogued as “customised car plates”. It is indeed made of license plate plastic and reflective material in white and yellow, the UK colours for front and rear plates. Gili added narrow, horizontal strips of colour to suggest the national flags of three South American countries. Further ‘customisation’, however, is done in a different and less tangible material: the medium of language.

Gili plucked famous words from the Brazilian flag and from Argentinian and Venezuelan anthems, translated them into what looks like txt-speak and had them put onto the plates. These words are composed of letters and numbers, but are recognisable as Portuguese and Spanish, with a hint of English (P8O6RES instead of P8O6RESSO). They follow a long tradition of vanity-plate eloquence that started in the US in the 1930s and became also widespread in the UK. The adaptation of an English-language practice whilst maintaining foreignness through Spanish and Portuguese, shows the work as a product of cultural translation. Tomislav Longinovic advocates such products as “opening up a space of the international in-between, the gold of hybrid and mobile identities”.¹

The work consists of loose parts and there are many possible ways for its exhibition. Gili emphasises mobility by his proposed installation of the plates on two sides of a concrete column. You have to move and walk around the corner to see the whole work, but you can still read/translate the plates according to your own order of vision. You get a chance to physically connect with the ideas of transportation, migration and change.

With *Transnational Anthem 2* Gili performs a double act of cultural translation. First, he has grouped iconic words designating specific Latin American identities into an overarching, ‘transnational anthem’. Second, he has chosen a practice associated with British identity to be the vehicle of this anthem. Through this act, we are made to consider Jaime Gili as an itinerant artist. Gili was born in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1972, of Spanish parents. He came to London for his studies in 1993, lived in Barcelona afterwards but returned to both the UK and Venezuela. He currently lives in London. *Transnational Anthem 2* is a non-permanent balance of elements from various languages and cultures. Using these signs from different backgrounds, the artist successfully creates the ‘in-between’ that is his work.

Additional meanings of the work hover between irony and nostalgia. A comment on government rules as well as on people’s creativity regarding their identity, the work shows that individuality is buyable within the parameters of established power and its revenue offices. An ironic note on the prestige of car ownership itself —which spans continents— may also be included, as if the value of possessing a motor vehicle is on a par with the high-flown ideals expressed in the words from the flag and anthems. Those same words, however, may still hold traces of melancholy for the migrant artist or observer.

Carlos Cruz-Diez's career spans more than sixty years with exhibitions around the world. This includes a long relationship with ESCALA, which began in 1996, three years after the Collection was founded, with the donation of a work from his Physichromie series and the commission of this untitled print. This long-term partnership also led to the production of two exhibitions in 2003: Chromointerference, held at the University Gallery (now Art Exchange) and Chromosaturation, co-organised by the University of Essex and firstsite in Colchester.

Cruz-Diez was born in Venezuela in 1923 where he studied fine arts and later worked as the creative director at McCann-Erickson, an advertising company in Caracas. In the late 1950s, he taught at, and was co-director of, the Caracas School of Fine Art, the same school he attended as a young man. During this time he first began his experimentations with colour through the Physichromie series. This exploration forged his career as one of the leading figures of Kinetic art, a style that explores movement; either through the viewer moving around the artwork, or embodied in the artwork itself. In his works, Cruz-Diez melds colours, lines, and patterns to often disorientating levels. A characteristic of most of his works is his use of moiré patterns, which are created by overlapping several designs, at different angles, to create new ones.

When I look at Untitled (1996), I can see how ESCALA and other museums are enraptured and drawn to his artworks. They are visual cacophonies that pull the viewer in with their vibrating colours and patterns, or as Cruz-Diez writes himself, “they resonate”. In this untitled work, Cruz-Diez arranges extremely precise, straight, bold lines of orange, purple, and grey (colours chosen to resonate in the UK) to create the background. In the centre, he overlays more bold lines, now in a dark green and grey-green. The lines are slightly offset in their spacing, allowing varying amounts of the background colours to show through, creating an unstable, almost intoxicated, square pattern of colour in the middle of the artwork. The orange brightens against the green and ripples downward through the square; it seems to vanish as quickly as it appears. In 1983, Cruz-Diez wrote that he wanted viewers to ‘live a changing situation which allows [them] to discover colour’.¹ I would argue that it is through the movement in the patterns and the way the colours appear to come alive, like the mythological statue Galatea by Pygmalion, where this discovery is made, as we experience with Untitled. This is the continual and evolving beauty of Carlos Cruz-Diez’s artworks.

In-Out Antropofagia is a playful and unsettling super-eight film by Brazilian artist Anna Maria Maiolino, in which a sequence of close-up shots of the human mouth and lower nose explore various combinations of expression and manipulation. The female and male mouths open and close, smile and grimace, bare their teeth and tongues or attempt to speak. In some shots the lips are adorned with lipstick, in others the mouth is covered with tape, blocked with an egg, or fed with coloured string, which is later ejected in a masticated tangle; elsewhere the nostrils flare and contract exaggeratedly, contrasting with another shot in which the mouth remains eerily placid while smoke issues ominously from it like a sulphurous emission from a tectonic fissure. The film, as a whole, appears as a collection of incomprehensible experiments or unexplained ritualistic gestures that are at once humorous, grotesque and uncanny, while the close framing prevents the establishment of any clarificatory context or identity for the performers. An arrhythmic soundtrack of ambient electronic noise and a distorted voice compounds this ambiguity. It evokes a dream or hallucination, in which the accustomed structures of everyday language have dissipated or remain in formation.

Maiolino’s focus upon orificial functionality, echoed in the work’s title, highlights the body as a site where biological and cultural consumption and reproduction are in continuous elision and enactment—through bodily sustenance, sexual reproduction, language production and labour, including artistic creation. The reference to “anthropophagy”, derived from Greek and literally meaning “man-eating”, adds a further layer of significance. Cannibalism was a meaningful ritual practice among various indigenous peoples across the Americas, within warfare and funeral observance. The word itself derives from European reports of such practices during the invasion of the Americas in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; within Brazil specifically, writers such as Hans Staden gave detailed accounts of ritual anthropophagy among Tupi-speaking peoples during the period.1 Anthropophagy also resonates within historic debates concerning the formation of Brazilian national culture, particularly through its thematisation by Brazilian Modernist poet, Oswald de Andrade, in his 1928 Anthropophagist Manifesto.2 Here, cannibalism is invoked poetically as a process by which American artists should actively consume and reconstitute external experience and influence through creative practice; what Andrade termed the absorption and transformation of the “sacred enemy”. A reference to the Tupi’s ritualised treatment of consumed victims is elegantly encapsulated in his appropriation of William Shakespeare in the manifesto’s opening lines: “Tupi, or not tupi that is the question”.3 Similar acts of transformative absorption constitute In-Out Antropofagia. The ingestion and regurgitation of string was a central action of Anthropophagist Slobber, a performance work from the same year by Maiolino’s mentor, the artist Lygia Clark. Likewise the taped cross covering the mouth in the opening shot, with its distinctive upward-curving horizontal, recalls

---

3 Ibid.

This line makes explicit reference to Shakespeare’s famous line in Hamlet: “To be or not to be, that is the question”.

Ian Dudley
PhD candidate
School of Philosophy and Art History

Anna Maria Maiolino
In-Out Antropofagia
1973
Video
8 min., 20 sec.
architect Lúcio Costa’s ground plan for Brazil’s then new modernist capital, Brasília, inaugurated in 1960 by President Juscelino Kubitschek. The symbol’s deployment by Maiolino refers to the censorship and violence suffered under Brazil’s military dictatorship, which had seized power in 1964, poignantly contrasting the grim backdrop of In-Out Antropofagia’s production with the optimism associated with Kubitschek’s previous rule.
Broken Glass and Chance

This is one of a series of works by Jorge Macchi that juxtapose identical twins of everyday objects. This particular work presents two broken panes of glass whose cracking patterns and missing shards are exactly alike. The secret is simple yet apparently daunting: one’s breakage is given by chance, while the other’s by the artist’s precise replication of the original breakage. Macchi has repeated this process of production several times since 1996, each time producing a different pair of identical broken panes. In another example of *Vidas paralelas* (1998), an open box of matches shows the identical distribution of the contents in two compartments, which can highlight a perfect matching in a literal sense.

The fabricated sameness of the broken panes in the example in ESCALA may indicate the possible existence of perfect doubles in this miraculous universe, “and so finding two identically broken panes of glass is ultimately only a question either of time, luck, or patience”. The work may also refer to Plutarch’s series of biographies often with the same title—a model typology pairing exemplary lives of famous Greeks with those of famous Romans to illuminate their common moral virtues and vices. Each reference is, however, pitted against the futility of reproducing banal objects unworthy of being valued and imitated. *Macchi’s Vidas paralelas* series rather destabilises the concept of privileged singularity through imitation and multiplication. The reiterated interrogation of uniqueness and authenticity embodies complex interactions between identity and difference, whereby the relationship between one’s own and surrounding things would have an infinite number of variations.

Macchi’s broken panes duplicating each other more importantly appear as a reference to Marcel Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors: Even* (1915-1923), often known as the Large Glass, whose two large glass panes were symmetrically shattered in transit since they were put on top of one another in a crate. Duchamp described what created this symmetry as “a curious intention that I am not responsible for, a ready-made intention, in other words, that I respect and love”. Duchamp’s *Large Glass* is the earliest aesthetic examination of broken glass as chance. Macchi expanded the potential of this curious material in his project entitled *Buenos Aires Tour* (2003), in which a broken pane of glass became a device to defamiliarise the city he was born and raised in. The cracking patterns of the pane that had been superimposed on a map of Buenos Aires provided Macchi and his Argentine collaborators, Maria Negroni and Edgardo Rudnitzky, with chance itineraries through which they could renew a conventional understanding of the city with a sense of displacement. Here, broken glass no longer emerges as an ominous symbol of violence and destruction, and instead becomes a source of spontaneous creativity and infinite change.

---

Photograph of Parallel Lives installed at the National Glass Centre, Sunderland, for the exhibition The Glass Delusion, 2010. Image © National Glass Centre
Colombian artist Nadín Ospina plays with local and global cultural icons in order to subvert preconceptions of art from Latin America. In the early nineties, Ospina’s personal quest to grasp the relationship between the contemporary subject and the region’s pre-Columbian past prompted him to travel throughout Latin America and explore original stone, ceramic and metal sculptures of this era. One of the pieces that drew his attention was the Chac Mool, a distinctive icon in what is now Mexico that represents a reclining figure with its head facing forward, perpendicular to its body and holding a bowl on its stomach. In pre-Columbian times, it would have been a ceremonial stone found at the centre of Maya and Aztec pyramids which served as a table of gifts for deities ranging from feathers and alcoholic beverages to blood and human hearts. Nowadays the Chac Mool is an iconic symbol of Mexico’s tourist industry and can be found in souvenir shops on objects from key rings to fridge magnets.

In *Chac Mool* (undated), Ospina has replaced the body of the ‘ancient’ reclining figure, dressed as a warrior wearing a butterfly-shaped chest plate, with that of the modern Disney character Mickey Mouse, dressed in shorts, large shoes and gloves. The encounter between these two iconic figures sheds light on the infiltration of the culture of the United States into Latin America, challenging preconceptions of the region’s fantastical and untouched culture. For the execution of this piece, Ospina worked with famous Colombian specialist forgers from the town of San Agustín. Known for their skilled replicas, Ospina asked them to sculpt the reclining Mickey Mouse in the same style as their identical reproductions of pre-Columbian sculptures. Though sculpted in limestone and aged to emulate centuries of deterioration, *Chac Mool* does not intend to represent a messenger between mortals and deities which serves ceremonial purposes, nor does it a multinational mass media corporation mascot that attends to marketing aims. Rather, it intends to be an original hybrid character, symbolic of the complex dynamics of cultural exchange.

Nevertheless, *Chac Mool* can also be understood as an updated Mickey Mouse. Perhaps it embodies the fears of enforced uniformity triggered by globalisation, and suggests that, slowly, *everything* will be Disney-fied. These ideas echo misconceptions of art from Latin America as derivative of the United States. Yet, *Chac Mool* owes its identity to the Mouse as much as to the Chac Mool. Its authenticity no longer lies in being faithful either to the United States or to the remains of pre-Columbian cultures. Instead, it relies on the fusion of characters of different degrees of ubiquity. Whilst the Mouse is known internationally, the Chac Mool remains a local icon. Ultimately, *Chac Mool* suggests that no matter how strong and pervasive a dominant culture intends to be, it will always be modified upon entering a different one. Perhaps, as in this case, even the Mouse changes its identity by getting a new name.

---

1 Pre-Columbian refers to the time before Christopher Columbus encountered the ‘Indies’ in AD1492.
ESCALA purchased this untitled panel from the series *Fatherland II* by Demián Flores in 2010 at the first London edition of PINTA, the modern and contemporary Latin American art fair. Having already worked with Flores at the Colchester Campus we were drawn to the display of his works, which included several panels from the series. In particular we were struck by the curious combination of what appeared to be the outline of a fallen Christ with a parrot on his back, hammered delicately into a block of cedar wood, covered in gold-leaf.

The parrot was recognizable as an image from an Aztec painted book or codex, such as the *Codex Féjérváry-Mayer*, a type of book known as a *teoamontli*, or cosmic book, produced before the arrival of the Spanish in 1519 and hand-written in pictorial, or iconic, script.\(^1\) The parrot or *tozontli*, in this and other codices, appears as one of thirteen ‘fliers’ which is the meaning of *quecholli* in Nahua, the language of the Aztecs,\(^2\) which is still spoken in central Mexico today. Each of the thirteen *quecholli* have numerical values and the Aztecs believed that the characteristics of the bird influenced the fate of human beings through their *tonalli* or soul. The parrot is associated with the number thirteen, with the southern part of the Aztec empire, and with preciousness. According to Gordon Brotherston, among the *quecholli*, the Parrot, together with the Macaw and the Quetzal, was associated with “the tropical plumage that was traded far to south and north, even as currency”.\(^3\)

With the arrival of Catholicism after the Spanish conquest of 1521, the *teoamontli* were both suppressed and replaced by European rituals books including the Bible and Catechisms brought by missionaries who built vast monastery complexes that still survive throughout Mexico. Feathers as currency were replaced by coins of gold, the substance prized most highly by the Spanish who bathed their church altars in this precious metal. Flores’ panel was made with the community of one of these colonial churches; that of the town of Santa Ana Zegache, near to Oaxaca. Through his cultural centre, La Curtiduría (The Tannery Cultural Centre) in Oaxaca, Flores worked with Georgina Saldaña Wonchee to teach young people the technique of water-gilding (also known as ‘gilding on bole’) in which wood is covered in red clay (bole) before gold leaf is applied. The aim was for the community to be able to continue to restore its own church and furniture as well as to create new artworks.

---

\(^1\) This sophisticated script combines images, words and mathematics. The Codex *Féjérváry-Mayer* is in the World Museum Liverpool and one of a number of pre- and post-hispanic Mexican painted books in UK museums. More information on these books can be found in Gordon Brotherston’s *Painted Books from Mexico: Mexican Codices in UK Collections*. London: British Museum Press, 1995.

\(^2\) At its height when the Spanish invaded, the Aztec empire (AD 1325 – 1521) stretched as far as what is present-day Michoacán in western Mexico to Nicaragua in the east, echoing the extent of the historically culturally unified area of Mesoamerica or Middle America.

Despite the religious context of this piece, the fallen figure is in fact a secular image, of a man in the recovery position, apparently copied by Flores from an old first-aid manual. The same figure recurs in Flores’ first *Fatherland* series of prints, oil paintings and flags, along with other male figures either bandaged or being resuscitated. In this first series, the figures are physically merged with a range of gods, warriors and animals from the Aztec ritual books. Flores, however, replaces the opposing ritualised forces of nature and of warriors in the original codices with clashes between, or convergences of, the past and present; between the religious and artistic traditions of Europe and the US and those of indigenous America. The contemporary Mexican fatherland that Flores exposes in both series, then, is multi-faceted and highly mixed. Like the Aztec codices to which it refers, which themselves were often rewritten over time, this panel is also a palimpsest, embodying Mexico’s long history of physical, artistic and intellectual layering.

4 The Thirteen Quecholli of the Aztecs and their antecedents the Toltecs (AD 900 – 1100), appear too in the calendar of lunar months of the Chibcha, who extended from the isthmus between Central America to Northern Colombia (Gordon Brotherston, Image of the New World: The American Continent Portrayed in Native Texts. London: Thames and Hudson, 1979: 86).
Regina José Galindo is a prolific Guatemalan artist who uses her body to convey the immense hardship her country has suffered, both past and present. She was born in 1974 and raised in Zona 3 in Guatemala City near the notorious barrios of La Ruedita and El Gallito, by a father who was initially violent and a submissive mother.\textsuperscript{1} Her oeuvre makes evident issues of violence, racism, sexism, poverty, repressed sexuality, rape and the inadequacies of the Guatemalan government. Galindo has gained international notoriety through the extremity of the measures she is willing to utilise in order to raise awareness of Guatemala’s situation; her work brings the silenced women of Guatemala into international discourse and challenges the world to hear them. Galindo’s main preoccupation is with the inscription of indelible memories, with embodying crimes that still take place on a daily basis but which are, for the most part, invisible. Galindo does this for the sake of memory and social awareness, using ‘shock value’ in order to create a call to action.

The performance piece \textit{Lesson of Dissection} (2011) references Rembrandt’s masterpiece \textit{The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp} (1632) by drawing comparisons between the clinical precision with which Dr Tulp and his students opened up the cadaver, and the ruthless butchering of innocent people which took place throughout the thirty-six year Guatemalan civil war — described by Galindo as “evil” with “spine-chilling corruption”. She uses her own body as the focus of the performance; this is made all the more poignant by the fact it is a female body. According to Amnesty International reports, Guatemala has the worst record for violence against women and the world’s highest rate of femicide. During the performance, supervised medical students draw on Galindo’s naked body, as they are instructed to mark out the lines through which they would cut the flesh during a dissection. Soon covered front and back with a network of lines, Galindo is reduced from a human being to a meat carcass ready for butchery — as have the victims of violence in Guatemala. Galindo represents the social body of Latin America, and exposes the injustice of methodically calculated political killings.

Galindo has produced numerous profoundly politically works, including \textit{Who Can Erase the Traces?} (2003), which was awarded the Golden Lion prize at the 2005 Venice Biennale. The award demonstrates the relevance of her work beyond Guatemala.

\textsuperscript{1} ‘An interview with Regina José Galindo’ by Francisco Goldman. Translated by Ezra Fitz and Francisco Goldman from Performancología: Todo sobre Arte de Performance y Performancistas; http://performancologia.blogspot.co.uk/2007/04/interview-to-regina-jose-galindo.html, accessed on 1 July 2014.
This print, created for ESCALA as a limited edition of 50, appears to be one of Rodríguez’s most sombre works of art. A large black sphere inhabits the centre of the composition, set against a background painted in muted turquoise, applied in generous brushstrokes allowing the paper to show through in places. The sphere is divided vertically by three identical, photographic images of a skull that is imposed upon the almost abstracted ridge of a caiman’s back. The disproportionally large skull inhabits the ridge or peak, while pointing upwards to the sky.

Rodríguez was born in Barranquilla, a Colombian city on the Caribbean coast where caimans are native. These reptiles play a significant role in indigenous cultures and are a recurring image in Rodríguez’s body of work. In an essay written by Dawn Ades, the author asks: “Does [the caiman] stand for the Caribbean with all its teeming, lively, colourful and dangerous creatures?”¹ She further mentions the popular cumbia song “Se va el caimán/ There Goes the Caiman” whose lyrics tell the story of a man from the village of Abolato, who became a caiman and went to Barranquilla.² This story with its anthropomorphic theme, and the recurring presence of the caiman in Caribbean popular culture, as well as the colours predominant in the nature of the Caribbean, inspire Rodríguez’s artistic practice.

While the caiman is a recurrent symbol of the Caribbean in Rodríguez’s work, the sombre palette and seemingly solemn theme were, at that time, unusual. The completion of this commission coincided with the moment at which her elderly and much-loved elderly mother-in-law’s life was fading in Denmark. In this work, then, Rodríguez avoids a stereotypical perception of the Caribbean and its luscious colours, addressing instead, the inevitability of Death and its triumph over one of the Caribbean’s most powerful creatures. The image and the title nonetheless suggest a serene state between them.

² Cumbia is a popular music genre that originated on the Caribbean coast of Colombia.
Many times the strongest messages come from the power of an everyday object. This piece is an incidental photograph that could have been taken in any high school in the world. Well-aligned and smartly dressed students sit together, smiling, and wearing expressions that are full of hope for the future. The context and reason for this piece from Marcelo Brodsky, however, stands in stark contrast to the ebullient feeling communicated through the young faces in this simple photograph.

Of the thirty-two students in the picture, two were dead and one was ‘disappeared’ as a result of the ‘Dirty War’ in Argentina between 1976 and 1982. Four of the students suffered prolonged trauma from this period, while others had moved away from Buenos Aires to other parts of Argentina; from Argentina to other parts of Latin America; or from Latin America to countries further afield. While the cohesion of high school classes is always beset with changes and possible tragedies, the scale of the impact of authoritarian rule on the young people of Argentina has been immeasurable.

My father was engaged in business for DuPont in Argentina during this same period. His slide collection shows a bucolic Buenos Aires with tree-lined boulevards, cafes, and bright sunny days without a soldier or a victim in sight. Because of his Latin American experiences, I have spent my whole academic career researching the politics of authoritarian rule, transitions to democracy and the patterns of human rights violations that emerge during these periods of profound political transformation. Like the photograph, the case of Argentina (and I would argue other cases of post-authoritarian politics) is one of deep issues that remain unresolved and the absence of closure. Public acknowledgement of past wrongs have been made, attempts at justice partially achieved, and the scars from the period are a visible reminder of the repressive policies that destroyed the social fabric of the country, the privatised violence to the point that families and friends stopped talking about politics, and the profound dislocations of human lives that have ruptured any sense of national identity.

Some years ago, I had the pleasure of meeting Marcelo Brodsky and hosting him for an afternoon discussion of his work in London. After two hours of stories about the period from Marcelo and audience members, an Argentine woman who left her country for Madrid in 1978 claimed that this occasion was the first time she had ever heard of any of the atrocities committed by the regime. At that time, we were shocked at her revelation, but over the years I have learned that like this photograph, the real story is not evident to all observers. Indeed, as the case of Argentina shows, that which is immediately observable can hide a much darker truth.
These hallucinations of Susana Rodríguez seem not personal but to hail from an archetypal, visionary region of the mind. Three separate forms have appeared on the surface of the paper, each of them part recognisable part unknown. The snake-like form in the centre, the scythe-like blade in the upper left, and the veined floral trumpet in the bottom right are details that create an immediate but tenuous and uncomfortable sense of familiarity. And they are fused with much else that remains profoundly strange.

The ‘snake’, muscular, arching upwards, seems phallic and mobile, the kink in its segmented body a contraction prior to a forward thrust: raw instinct on the move. But the fit between the shape of its wounded head and the scoop-like form at its tail suggests that the kink may also be the hinge of an opened ouroboros. The ouroboros, or snake biting its own tail, has been taken as a symbol of eternal self-regeneration as well as of pre-egoic consciousness. Here the security of such cyclic enclosure seems to have been painfully broken.

Meanwhile, the ‘scythe’, curving downwards, is set in a handle that looks like a carved foetus from whose posterior a dishevelled feather protrudes: germinal life sprouting the implement of Death while evacuating the means of transcendence. And emerging from the same source as the blade, on a similar curve, is what looks like a plane of sliced flesh, inset with a curious double-ridged object that could be a vertebra or the cutting-head of a tool. The cut is fused with the cutter, the organic with the instrumental.

Finally, the quiet growth in the bottom right corner, a kind of stem wrapped round with a pale veined calyx and a fleshy ribbon, seems to radiate shadow that sketches another dimension—a behind—to the picture plane: a surreptitious invitation deeper into the world from which these forms have come.

For the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung incomprehensible hallucinations such as these could be normal as well as pathological phenomena, and in the hands of a creative artist could be visionary intimations of transformations underway in a part of the unconscious mind shared by all humanity. One wonders what transformations in our collective instinctual and spiritual life might have rendered necessary the vivid hallucination of these enigmatic and disturbing forms.
Aubrey Williams’ Archaeological Art, Empire and the Olmec Colossal Head

Aubrey Williams’ *Chatto III* is a striking representation of pre-Columbian art in oil on canvas. A disembodied head peers back at the viewer with an expression that seems to hold a mixture of bewilderment and loss. While Williams captures the stone-grey, basalt structure of an Olmec ‘colossal head’, an iconic type of pre-Columbian sculpture, he also portrays fragility in its features. The slightly downturned mouth and doleful eyes might be read as Williams’ gloss on the loss of indigenous culture throughout the Americas. Alternatively, the head’s otherworldly gaze might be read as something far more existential: man’s confrontation with place and time, akin perhaps to Heidegger’s notion of *in-dewelt-sein* (“being-in-the-world”).

Ultimately, the head is mysterious, an artefact from a pre-Columbian world which seems impenetrable to the modern viewer. There are two frameworks here: Williams’, and a pre-Columbian one. *Chatto III* is a representation of a representation in which any sense of the originary purpose behind the Olmec sculpture eludes us. Perhaps the beauty of Williams’ painting, then, is to be found in its sense of awe?

The colossal artefact brings to mind the bust of the Egyptian pharaoh, Ramesses II, whose Greek name, Ozymandias, forms the title of Shelley’s famous sonnet. Shelley’s oft-cited line serves as an appropriate compliment to Williams’ work: “Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!”

On the one hand, Shelley’s poem emphasizes the notion that time is the great leveller of empires and tyrants alike; on the other, it celebrates the endurance of art through time. In many respects, Williams’ *Chatto III*, seems to bear a similar relationship with the Olmec head. Whether Williams also invites the viewer to read an anti-imperial message in *Chatto III* is debatable. It is the artwork, moulded by sculptor’s or sculptors’ hands, that arguably receives the greatest homage.

Certainly, the rise and fall of empires would not have been lost on Williams. Born a British colonial subject in Georgetown, British Guiana, in 1926, he left the colony at the height of its independence movement in 1952 for London. Like many Caribbean artists of his generation, Williams no doubt saw the move as a necessary step in his own career progression. Having lived for two years with indigenous tribes people in Guyana, an encounter which he claimed altered his view of art indelibly, his love of indigenous culture nevertheless remained a constant touchstone in his work—a touchstone which went against the grain of certain spheres of Modernist and Postmodernist visual art. As a lecturer in American literature, with a particular interest in Caribbean art and culture generally, I cannot but help admire Williams’ tenacity and fascination with archaeology. To some extent, the archaeologist can serve as an apt metaphor for the scholar, a digger in search of new discoveries. It is Williams’ love of bold colour and this profoundly subterranean pursuit that brings a healthy earthiness to his work, keeping it in touch with the world in a way that makes it neither wholly abstract, nor utterly prosaic.

---

1 The Olmec civilization developed from 1500 BC in the tropical lowlands of what are now the Gulf Coast states of Veracruz and Tabasco in present-day Mexico. The Olmec are often considered to be the ‘mother culture’ of Mesoamerica, developing the calendars later used by the Maya and Aztecs.
María Elvira Escallón has created photographs of trees that inhabit space that is both wild and domesticated. Branches and trunks of these Nuevas Floras trees have been carved by craftsmen using motifs from traditional and colonial wooden furniture. The trees are living, and so over time they will grow and change. The carved wood will weather, insects will chew, birds will search for food and bore holes, and deer will graze to add to the work of the craftsmen. In this way, the wild and managed will come closer together over time.

It has long been assumed that non-agricultural societies represent an earlier stage of cultural evolution: cultures progress from hunter-gatherer to agricultural to industrial. Hobbes observed in 1651 that the life of ‘natural man’ was “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short”, and since then cultural evolutionary views distinguishing between ‘natural’ and ‘civilised’ peoples have persisted.

In 1968, Richard Lee and Irven DeVore’s landmark Man the Hunter conference and book showed hunter-gatherers to be knowledgeable, sophisticated, and above all different from one another. There is no single stage of human development, just different adaptations to ecological and social circumstances. Now we know that farmers are cultivators of the wild; and that hunters and gatherers are active managers of what appears to be the wild. Culture and nature are thus bound together.

Many cultures and groups directly manage trees on and off. The forest islands of Amazonia emerged as a result of Kayapo directly planting-up mounds. In the lower Amazon, smallholder farmers enrich the forests with desirable fruit, timber and medicinal trees, often broadcasting seeds when cutting timber. In dryland Kenya, Acacia tree recruitment occurs on the sites of abandoned pastoralist corrals: Acacia seedpods are a favoured fodder, and some pass through the animals to germinate in the next season, and the result is circular woodlands. In China, there is widespread use of wild trees in integrated systems of land management, and wild plants and animals are gathered from a variety of microenvironments, such as dykes, woods, ponds, and irrigation ditches.

To many cultures, the idea of wilderness remains problematic. The term wild is commonly used today to refer to ecosystems and situations where people have not interfered, yet we know that people influence and manage most if not all ecosystems and their plants and animals. In Papua New Guinea, wild pigs are hunted and managed: boars and sows are brought together to breed, females are followed to their nests, litters and piglets removed for raising, and wild pigs are fed with sago and roots. Some groups raise extra gardens of sweet potatoes just for pigs. Similar merging of the wild and raised occurs in reindeer herding and hunting communities of Siberia.

What is common in all cases is that people pay close attention to what the land is telling them. Such knowledge and understanding is then encoded into stories with norms and rules, and thus form the basis for continued adaptive management over generations.
Yet today, much conservation centres on the creation of ‘protected areas (PAs)’ from which people are excluded or in which their actions are severely limited. Nature is thus protected from people in what we call parks, wildernesses, reserves: there are 30,000 PAs worldwide, and people are excluded from a half of this area (some 7 million square kilometres).

Reason and evidence have not compelled us to care enough for nature. A good future will not be a return to something solely rooted in the past: we need medical, farm and transport technology, certainly computers and modern communications. But hybrid vigour might be created through both-and practices rather than either-or. A new green economy in which material goods have not harmed the planet would be a good economy: even better if production processes could improve nature. If we wish to convince people to manage the planet sustainably and consume in different ways, then we will have to embed twenty first-century lifeways in a new texture of beliefs, emotions and experience. We will need moral teachings and wisdom about the environment and our duties as individuals. Through a different kind of consciousness of the world, perhaps our impact can be changed.

Myths which evolve in sympathy with nature are different from myths that compete with it. María Elvira Escallón has given us new myths with these evolving carved trees.
Fighting sorrow; preserving memory

Any one approaching one of the bicycle silhouettes’ drawn by Fernando Traverso in the city of Rosario would face innumerable questions: What is that silhouette? Why is it black? Why is it drawn in that place? Is it real? What does it represent? His silhouettes are so provocative that it is difficult to avoid their invitation: to remember, to understand the empty spaces that inhabit the cities we live in… And there are answers: The bicis (the bicycles) are not any manifestation of art but an artistic expression of the sorrowed experienced by an activist artist who lost three hundred and fifty ‘comrades’ in Rosario during the dictatorship and who wishes to remember; to keep his comrades always present in his beloved city. Yes, the city now holds three hundred and fifty silhouettes of the bicis, the means of transport that students, trade unionists and others used at the time, most of which have been drawn in the places where they were left before their owners went missing.

These artistic expressions are not detached from transitional justice; the field that helps states deal with mass atrocities that took place during dictatorship or conflict. Indeed, Argentina has not been indifferent to this field and has tried to reckon with the past of approximately ten thousand disappearances and killings that took place in the country between 1976 and 1983, as a result of the dirty war carried out by the military junta. Argentina established a truth commission, a reparation programme; re-opened the trials of those who perpetuated those atrocious crimes and has taken measures to preserve memory, building important places like the Espacio Memoria y Derechos Humanos at the former site of the ESMA (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada).

However, parallel to the efforts of the Argentinian State, artists, among others, have been crucial in Argentina to remember and to let others know how they saw or lived those terrible events in the history of their country and to pay tribute to those who were sacrificed. From filmmakers to artists, including Traverso, memory has not been left to the state to be preserved. Indeed, as Ruben Chababo, Director of the Rosario’s Museum of Memory indicates, “Rosario’s memory art is not in the museum, really, but out in the streets”.¹ The bicis are a good illustration of this. They have taken over their city to plague abandoned and cold spaces with the presence of those Traverso loved or respected. This is a unique way to show the many dimensions of memory and of remembering. The bicis represent a meaningful way to fight our capacity to forget and to turn those who went missing into permanent memories and moments in our lives, even in the lives of those who never met them. Once you walk any street of Rosario, and you know the history behind the bicis, you are destined to remember…

The Short-Lived Gift of a World that is Rich and Flat

Jorge Luis Macchi produced a Buenos Aires tour guide together with two artists who are also from the same city: Edgardo Rudnitzky and María Negroni. According to the artist, it covers “eight itineraries that reproduce the net of lines drawn by the breaking of a pane of glass over a map of Buenos Aires. Forty-six spots have been chosen along the different lines.” The guide encompasses a map, a CD-ROM, photographs taken and objects collected by Macchi at these spots, as well as sounds recorded by Rudnitzky and texts written by Negroni.

Typically, city guides inform us about places worth seeing and suggest paths through the city worth taking. They direct our attention towards some things and away from others, and tell us how to makes sense of what we see. To borrow a notion from the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, they (re-)produce an order of the sensible: a hierarchical order of the parts that have a part, the parts that matter, that have a place and significance.

Macchi’s Buenos Aires Tour is an anti-guide. First, it challenges the dominance of the visual sense, as his guide includes found objects alongside recordings of fleeting sounds and written down thoughts provoked by chance encounters. Second, guides usually aim at reproducible experiences, whereas in the case of Macchi’s guide, already the attempt to repeat the tour seems pointless, given that it is the outcome of a random procedure (that is, we have no reason to favour his eight itineraries through the city over any others). Third, unlike ordinary guides, the contributions and choices of all three artists are so personal that they tell us as much about themselves as about Buenos Aires. But most importantly, by deliberately deploying a chance strategy, Macchi subverts the established order of the sensible and transforms Buenos Aires into an utopian place in which everything is, in principle, equal to everything else again (not in terms of characteristics but in terms of worth). The random procedure gives expression to a presumption of equality among all objects, sounds, sights and thoughts that together make up Buenos Aires. The (cracked) glass itself is therefore a metaphor of the dominant order of the sensible and its subversion. It is the hierarchical ordering that allows us to orient ourselves in the world as it creates things that have a place, a role, a relevance, a meaning. The world becomes sensible for us through this hierarchical ordering but this ordering itself remains most of the time invisible; unless, of course, we adopt a strategy that challenges the existing hierarchical ordering, like cracking a glass diverts our attention from what is behind the glass to the glass itself. Macchi reminds us that the world we take for granted is not just there, it is the effect of a hierarchical structuring. However, if we follow the cracks, we can encounter different things, sounds, sights and thoughts that are and make, as much as everything else, Buenos Aires.
Latin American Art and the UK: An Interview

With

Professor Dawn Ades
School of Philosophy and Art History and;
Founding Director, ESCALA

By

Dr Taína Caragol
Former Senior Research Officer, Latin American Art and the UK
School of Philosophy and Art History

Current Curator for Latino Art and History
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC
Editorial note

This previously unpublished interview took place on 10 August 2007 as part of Latin American Art and the United Kingdom, a year long research project (2007-2008) funded by the AHRC. This dialogue between Dr Taína Caragol (TC) and Professor Dawn Ades (DA) discusses important issues regarding the teaching of art from Latin America in the United Kingdom, as well as Ades’ landmark exhibition Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820-1980.

I / I / Questions about the teaching of Latin American art

TC I understand that you were the first lecturer of Latin American art at the University of Essex. When and how did you start teaching?

DA The University began in 1964-66 and I started teaching in 1968. There were no courses (at the University) on Latin American art. The Art History Department had just started itself, so you wouldn’t expect any courses on Latin American art then. Instead, there was a link between the Area Studies degree in Latin American Studies and the Art History department, because back then in the late 1960s-early 1970s the departments each contributed to the Latin American Area Studies degree, including the History of Art department. So that was one of the reasons for starting to look at Latin American art and also it was decided to run an optional course in the Art History Department on Latin American art, which could be taken by Art History or Latin American Studies students.

TC So it was not really a programme per se on Latin American art but rather classes that would contribute to Latin American Studies?

DA There were two things: one was a course in the Art History Department which was open to the Latin American Studies students and the other was a contribution to the first year general course for the Latin American Area Studies degree. There was an idea of a particular course on Latin American art within the Art History Department but I think it would be fair to say that it was prompted by the presence of the Latin American Area Studies degree.

TC How did you become interested in Latin American art?

DA Well, I had already been to Mexico and Guatemala before I started teaching, so I was really interested in the architecture, the archaeology and, to an extent, the art of Latin America. Although it wasn’t my specialization, I had seen it and I was interested in a very general way, basically, in everything from pre-Columbian to the present day. I had done Spanish at school and then going to University of Essex to teach, it seemed kind of natural to develop that. I was at a very early stage in my career. My own PhD specialization was Surrealism but it was important to develop other things; the Department was new, there was a lot of potential, a lot of things to explore. I think there was a sense at Essex also that we were able to break out of the normal Art History curriculum. There was a sense that we were allowed to explore other kinds of areas and really widen the whole canon of what was studied and that was certainly how I approached it. I wanted to bring in other kinds of things in a year-long course which included pre-Columbian, colonial and modern.

TC You did everything. That is amazing…
DA Well there was very little literature. You have no idea how different it was. There was very little even on pre-Columbian art. That whole field, which is now almost forty years old, has completely changed. If you look back at what was published in the late 1960s you’ll find that there really wasn’t a lot. So it didn’t seem so insanely ambitious to try and teach it all, as it would do today. So we began by trying to cover everything, and then of course, you know, as it developed, we began to divide up the areas.

TC And were there any other universities teaching in the UK teaching Latin American art? Did you have any other colleagues?

DA Not that I’m aware of. Whether they taught it at Liverpool at the time I’m not sure. There were a few isolated individuals who were interested in some aspects of Latin American art or photography, certain pre-Columbian things. This area was already established at the Institute of Archaeology and Warwick Bray was teaching there, so he was an important contact and, in a way, that was probably the best support in terms of scholarly research in this country and in terms of collections because there was a big collection of pre-Columbian art at the Museum of Mankind, which is now back with the British Museum. So we were close to Warwick Bray, but I’m not aware that there were other courses. I did have colleagues at the University of Essex in other departments, particularly literature. They were very interested. And I taught a joint course for a while with Gordon Brotherston, as well as the course I was doing within the department on the art and architecture of Latin America. The course with Gordon was on the art and literature of ancient Mexico, and that was an exciting course. It was very successful.

TC So it was interdisciplinary from very early on.

DA From very early on; from the beginning.

TC You’ve talked about how much the field has changed since its beginnings. How have students changed? How were they then and now? Do you think they come with at least a general knowledge of the field? Perhaps they knew less about it forty years ago, when they came to you for the first time?

DA They may have known less about it then. But I have a sense that they were more courageous in taking on courses in a field where there was very little existing published material. They were very, very keen. Nowadays students tend to be a bit more conventional. They may know a bit more. I think now there are obviously students, particularly graduate students, who come to Essex because it is Essex. They come because they know that’s where we carry on research on the subject of Latin American art, and that’s quite true, because that wasn’t the case in the late 1960s, early 1970s, because there was no sort of existing structure.

TC Do you think there is a difference in the way that Latin American art is taught here vis-à-vis the US, or even countries in Latin America?

DA Well I think there are many, many more places in the US that teach Latin American art, and so that’s obviously a difference from the very beginning, and there’s more variety in the way is taught in the States, I think, whereas here there hasn’t been very much, in the way of a set model for it. I am indebted to people who were teaching in the States at the beginning; Stanton Catlin and Terence Grieder, both of whom I know. I say I knew them, and I knew their published work, but I have no idea how they taught. Whether they taught in the same way that I initially taught, which was in this three-part programme of ancient, colonial, and modern, which is following the Mexican model, in some ways.
I think that particularly the teaching of the pre-Columbian area, whether it was in the archaeological or art historical context was much more established in the States. I think the teaching of Latin American art in the States has a different genesis from that in this country, quite different, and I think it’s long established and it’s always been global, at least in some places it’s been global. At Harvard they’ve always had an American specialist. Which is not at all the way it’s been developed in this country, which is more on a kind of German European model. I think that’s something that is very well worth looking in relation to the teaching. Someone like George Kubler was in that group who were sent out and given an area to specialize in. He got America.

TC Some students of yours, like Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro are not very comfortable anymore with the categorization of Latin American art, and he’s even said several times at different symposia: “I’m just longing for the day when I won’t be called a Latin American art curator”. I don’t know if he has different views in terms of the teaching, if he thinks the categorization should also disappear there. What do you think?

DA Well, I think it’s obvious that there’s a danger of a kind of ghetto. It’s a big question, of course, but when you’re looking at it from the perspective of teaching, you need to have some sort of framework in which you’re going to present your material. I would be very, very happy to teach a course on constructivism that includes Latin America as well as European material. Now, I actually wouldn’t want to have an exhibition or course that taught one without the other. I know Gabriel has taught quite a lot of Latin America without looking very much at the European, I think one has an ambition of looking at an area where there is obviously sufficient common ground to be able to bring together these various groups of artists from very different geographical locations, and one should do so, and that’s important. One could say the same about Surrealism, Rococo, I don’t know, I’m just looking at these big terms. At the same time there is a specific history to be told about art in Latin America. I think that, again, it’s something for proper discussion. Art history has, curiously, been demographically determined or, let’s say, geographically determined. You know, you study with a specialist who works on French eighteenth-century art, or Russian, twentieth-century art, or American colonial art. It has tended to have these geographical specifiers. To break that down you have to find some other way of putting things together that is not completely arbitrary. I mean putting things together in terms of a coherent plan for a course in a university context, or coherent for an exhibition.

TC I agree with you and I think there is great potential for that now. The Hélio Oiticica show at the Tate is great in that it makes you see his exploration of colour, if you have the art historical references, in relation to Josef Albers, to Paul Klee. I think the more exhibitions there are at mainstream spaces that explore perhaps one less well-known artist in depth, the more probabilities there are of integrating that artist into a broader dialogue.

DA Well, I think it is very important. Of course it was quite difficult to say this twenty years ago, because if you’re trying to draw parallels and comparisons, people would say: “oh, you’re trying to denigrate Latin American art, or you’re trying to make it look weak next to European art”. And that wasn’t the intention. I don’t think that’s actually true. I think nowadays people are much easier with it. But to get back to this sort of ghettoizing that Gabriel is so worried about, there is a very odd thing that happened in the United States that is particularly irritating for him, which is that if you look at the sales of what’s called

---

Latin American art’ at Christie’s and Sotheby’s, it’s only one particular kind of Latin American art. It’s sort of the picturesque.

TC  Yes, the colourful…

DA  Exactly, and it doesn’t include Gabriel Orozco, Doris Salcedo or whomever you want to mention who could just as well be part of that, but aren’t, because they are seen as international, or global. That is clearly a contortion of the situation, and something that one has to work against, I mean the way that the term Latin America in art has become identified with a very narrow aspect of what goes on. I find that very disturbing. I don’t think that’s happened here in the UK. We don’t have the same Latin American sales, we don’t have the same collecting depth that you have in the United States.

TC  So that can be an advantage.

DA  It can be an advantage. One’s a little freer of those kinds of stereotypes.

TC  That is very interesting. So you think there is a more inclusive vision.

DA  I think people don’t know what to expect. Twenty, thirty years ago the only relatively well known artists were the Mexican mural painters. People knew what they’ve seen at an exhibition. Perhaps they’ve read a bit.

TC  They don’t have expectations?

DA  They don’t have expectations. They don’t say: “ah, that is Latin American art”. So Oiticica is a real puzzle for many people. And the other thing is, of course, that, for ages, he was only looked at in a Brazilian context. That was quite controversial. You know, people might mention Max Bill, or conceivably one of the other Constructivists, but Oiticica was not seen in a broader context. He lived outside Brazil for some time, in New York, in France, which is also quite interesting.

TC  And speaking about what has changed in the field since you started teaching, can you elaborate on that?

DA  I think the main thing is the quantity and quality of research. From my point, or the academic view, the whole area of pre-Columbian art and architecture has just mushroomed and it’s now huge. And we have a whole undergraduate and an MA course on that. So what in the very early days used to be a one-year course, was divided into a two-year course, which people could take individually, but it was also a career path, so that they could take pre-Columbian art and then a course on Latin American art, which included colonial and contemporary. So then things developed, Valerie Fraser did her PhD and starting developing her own interests and doing a lot of the teaching. Tim Laughton did his PhD and started teaching in Pre-Columbian art, specializing in the Maya. So one thing would be to say that the area became more specialized. I think there was a lot of interest in particular areas … and the reason I’m pausing is that I guess I’m trying to think of areas in which it has expanded outside Essex to other places. Our students, particularly in the contemporary field, are including artists from Latin America in their graduate topics without necessarily calling themselves specialists in Latin American art. I think now, because artists from that area are being so extraordinarily successful and inventive, you know, brilliant, they’ve become the subjects of PhDs by people who would think of themselves as
only specializing in modernism. Quite a lot of people at the Courtauld work on Oiticica, Doris Salcedo, Ana Mendieta, artists who have become part of the canon of contemporary art.

I think there are universities where there are courses on the muralists, or photography in Latin America, specialized areas. I haven’t been teaching the Latin American art course for a few years.

TC  Do you think there’s a different way of conceiving Latin American art now, compared to when it was first taught? I mean, now do you look back and say: “I used to think about this in this way and I don’t anymore”?

DA  Oh, very much so. I think it has to do with a broader change in the study of art. Most of our students and the public, in a way, are much more at ease with contemporary art, at ease with what’s happening now. And I think that thirty or forty years ago, you know, people tended to look at what is happening now as rather difficult, and sort of experimental and remote. The emphasis was much more on history. Now the emphasis is much more on the contemporary. The same is true at the Courtauld. And that, of course, makes it easier for people to look at Latin American artists because there are so many very active and prominent artists from Latin America around at the moment. When I began my research the question was, you know, where do you go? All my trips to Latin America were discoveries, because there was so much to see that was not being reproduced or disseminated at all.

So I do feel that there was a real job to do in terms of trying to collect material and make it available to people and to students. Now it has developed, changed...

TC  So people don’t feel as removed from it now. They have a much closer relationship because of the contemporary art world.

DA  Yes, part of it is the contemporary art world. But I think there’s been another shift away from thinking about art history as a means of sifting the really good artists out of the mass of ordinary artists and studying them. So you study Picasso, and not everybody else. I think that has really changed and I think there is now, generally, not everywhere, of course, but there’s a real interest in all kinds of different artists, in visual culture, more generally. And that also makes it easier to look at Latin American art, where hitherto some of the artists look quite bizarre to people who were trained in the study of Ingres and Monet and Picasso. I’m not saying that they find it difficult to appreciate certain kind of compositions or certain kinds of visual traditions outside their own but I think that has changed. I mean, I was very interested in history and you couldn’t get away from identity.

TC  That is a good question.

DA  And of course identity was the thing ‘different’ from Europe. There were particular factors that fed into this, like indigenous traditions of various kinds in Brazil, Mexico, etc. So I was interested in those, and I think perhaps, you know, there was a time for that. There are still things to be done, but now it is no longer the only way of approaching Latin American art.

TC  Yes, that’s a real change in the last decade. There’s a real difference in the way that Latin American art is approached. Finally, in terms of teaching, what texts, what scholarship, do you consider necessary for the teaching of the subject?

DA  There’s a lot now of course… I suppose Kubler is still crucial, sometimes, in order to contrast the way things have changed since he wrote. I don’t necessarily advise students to read his books as gospel. They have to read them as something they can then criticize. I think Olivier Debroise’s book *Figuras*
en el trópico is really good on actually looking really for the first time at artists, not just the muralists, in the modern period of Mexico. ² That was a real breakthrough. I think that Gerardo Mosquera’s essay on Lam is another kind of milestone, even though I don’t necessarily agree with it all, it’s good.³


TC I wanted to ask you some questions about the show you curated; Art in Latin America: The Modern Era. Has that been the only show on Latin American art that you have curated?

DA I think the only one that was exclusively Latin American. I mean, I’ve been involved in other exhibitions like the Francisco Toledo one, but not primarily as the curator. And if we’re thinking about teaching and then the exhibition, the exhibition was very closely linked to the way I taught. In that way it was very different from the kind of approach of Guy Brett, which started not so much with history and identity issues, as with what is going on among artists today. There are two very different approaches. And I think you will find out that Andrew Dempsey was as close to Guy as he is to me. You know, he’s very aware of both ways of approaching art from outside the centre.

TC What were your motivations to curate a show that became a landmark?

DA Well, it’s natural when you teach something you want to have an opportunity to curate an exhibition because it gives you a chance of framing the material, in particular. I wanted to introduce the public to an art of which I thought they were unfortunately completely unaware, and Andrew Dempsey was the Deputy Director of the Hayward Gallery at the time and I think we were just talking. He knew I taught Latin American art, and I said: “Well let’s do an exhibition”. And he said: “Well, I wanted to do a Latin American exhibition for ages”. So I said: “OK, let’s plan it”. And then I decided to give it the shape that it had. We always thought we would do a second one. This was meant to be ‘Part One’, which is like ‘history’, and Part Two was going to be ‘contemporary’. Only things changed and we never managed to do it.

TC So that’s not in the plan anymore?

DA No, I think it’s probably in the past. It would have to be something more inclusive, less a geographical thing. Anyway, those were some of the reasons. There was a sense in those days that Latin America had lessons for artists. I think it was felt that artists in Latin America were very often more committed. And the Hayward had slightly hidden agenda of showing left-wing artists. It had shown quite a lot of Russian art, it had shown Hungarian art, and I think Latin America, in a way, was seen as fitting into this. You know, an examination of artists working in dictatorship in a hard to understand context who were very often committed. There had been a Diego Rivera exhibition at the Hayward shortly before my show.⁴

---


So that prepared the ground…

That prepared the ground for it.

What else prepared the ground? Why was it a propitious moment to do this show?

Well, it was obviously 1992. But we wanted not to coincide because we thought everybody else would be doing something.

That was a good idea

So we thought get in first, have it a bit earlier.

What has changed since then in curating Latin American art? You were saying that if you did the second part now it would be different. What has changed?

Well actually, I think one of the things that has changed is that if you look back over these eighteen years, and you look at the artists who’ve become most prominent in the contemporary field, an awful lot are from Latin America. Now that wasn’t the case in the 1980s. Fernando Botero was very well known, Toledo was known, but things have exploded since then. Guy Brett did an exhibition at the same time as mine called Transcontinental, with a few contemporary artists.

But just going back to that question of whether you think it’s necessary to have Latin American art shows now, do you think it is still necessary or that it belonged to a particular moment?

Well I think the other thing that we haven’t really raised—but I think it’s a relevant question—is what we mean by Latin American art. You know, it’s not studied very much in Latin America. In Mexico you study Mexican art, in Colombia you study Colombian art. Not exclusively, and it’s changing. But that has been the case. And I was, of course, very surprised by the kind of nationalism in the curatorial field when I went to Latin America and was at a meeting with fellow academics, curators, museum professionals. It was something quite odd, because here we’re slightly ashamed of British art! We think Britain is rather at the bottom. So the idea that nationalism would be the dominant language of curatorial practice and art history was very surprising for me!

Cuauhtémoc Medina at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas is introducing courses of Latin American art and this is the first time it’s being done in Mexico.

It’s the first time it’s being done?

Yes, apparently. So you might say that, from another perspective, there is a world for Latin American art, which is introducing people to certain kinds of common interests with other artists and other congruent art historical traditions. You have specialists in French art, specialists in German art, specialists in US art. But I think people are particularly sensitive to Latin American art possibly for the

---

5 1992 marked 500 years since Columbus ‘discovered’ America on route to the Indies; an anniversary that institutions sought to engage with critically.
wrong reasons, like the sales and collecting implications that we talked about already.

In terms of shows, I think exhibitions of a more inclusive and extensive kind would be preferable, like I said, of Constructivism, or the 1930s.

**TC** It’s interesting that the model of that geographical categorization is not very much used anymore. The closest you get to it is Mari Carmen Ramírez’s exhibition *Inverted Utopias*, where there was huge debate about whether it was a survey or not. Certainly it was only on artists from Latin America from the 1930s to the 1960s and, in that way, you could see a geographical unity in it. But in terms of varying the title and labelling it ‘Latin America’ so that the public understands it in a certain way, that is not really done anymore.

**DA** I think that should be a sort of transparent title, like there is, for example, for French art. It doesn’t mean anything in particular. And of course, if you go to the Courtauld you study Picasso and Miró as well, because they count as French (or at least they used to), in terms of the slide library catalogue. I mean, it’s not tied to any identity in particular, it’s just descriptive of an area. I think the term Latin American art is less and less useful. I would like to see exhibitions where you take a particular moment. One may have to be a little elastic in terms of chronology, but exploring artists like Victor Grippo, for example, together with other artists, in Italy, in this country, in the States, that were working in that sort of interface between found objects, minimalism and politics, is interesting. I would like to see a really ambitious exhibition of that kind.

**TC** That’s a great idea!

This is not a question, but just a comment, and I would like you to perhaps respond to it. I have the impression, in my research of exhibitions that have occurred since your show and since the 1990s, that there has been a shift in the art from Latin America that is shown. I think in the 1980s and 1990s there was a lot of interest —perhaps because of the whole discourse of identity politics— in folk art; Latin America as tied to popular art and more conventional art forms, like painting and sculpture, or figurative sculpture. Now, since the mid to late 1990s, most of the work from Latin America that is being shown in the UK is of a more conceptual nature. For example, artists like Gabriel Orozco have been shown numerous times since the 1990s, Allora y Calzadilla... lots of artists who work in a more conceptual mode and who even demystify completely the idea of Latin America, but taking it to an extreme, as if it was a direct response, like saying, “I’m not painterly”, “I’m not colourful”.

And I think that change is the result of many factors: there is a change in the period that the art is being produced, being created. The market has also played a role. Recently I was reading an interview with Teresa Giadowne where she was saying that some artists from Latin America, like Hélio Oiticica, were being rediscovered now and that the curatorial masters programmes that were created in the 1990s were trying to instil in the students a different form of curating that is not the ‘art historical’ way —which places the accent on history and artist trajectories— but one that is more about thinking about the exhibition itself as a medium, and how to criticize how art is shown. And this is precisely why someone like Oiticica is so popular now, because there is an inherent problem in exhibiting a *Parangolé* (1964-1979) without wearing it. What do you think about that?

---

7 *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America*. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2004

DA I think that there’s certainly been a terrific shift in terms of approaching things not from an art historical perspective. The emphasis has been very much on the curating in programmes of contemporary art. Of course, Oiticica is not contemporary from that point of view. You know, he’s long dead, and so he is an historical artist, and it’s not quite the same as collaborating with Cildo Meireles—who is another of the artists that Teresa introduced in her programme of curating at the Royal College of Art. But there is definitely a shift and the approach is certainly a much more direct one by not arriving at somebody by tracing their history in relationship to their particular environment or formation or whatever it might be. I think in this country, the dominant taste has been for a certain kind of minimalism and installation art for much longer than the mid-1990s. I mean it goes back quite a way. It’s certainly the dominant taste at the Tate, and I think that has contributed to the fact that Oiticica has finally been, twenty years later, rediscovered by the Tate. And I do think that those sorts of artists who have been shown here like Doris Salcedo, like Meireles, Oiticica, have been much more ‘successful’ than other artists like Sirón Franco who don’t really fit in that particular box of the conceptual, or the minimal. I’m using those terms very broadly.

TC So it probably has to do with the taste here, you think? Because I link it to the market too.

DA No, I wouldn’t. Is there a market for it here?

TC There’s a huge market, at, for example, Art Basel…

DA Now there is, but ten years ago?

TC Maybe not ten years ago, no.

DA I don’t think ten years ago. Now it has completely changed. The prices for little paintings by Gabriel Orozco and Francis Alÿs are extraordinary! That has been a new factor in the last ten years.

TC I would be interested to hear about the relation between curating and teaching, when it’s not professors who are the curators. For example, are the artists that you, Valerie or Oriana Baddeley have taught, better known here?

DA Well, I don’t know. My experience within the Surrealist field is that there is a curious disparity between the artists that one teaches and values and those who have command of the market. It’s very curious. I mean, there’s obviously some overlap. But André Masson, for example, has never been that successful an artist, yet he’s tremendously important for Surrealism, and I think the same is probably true of some Latin American artists.

TC To go back to *Art from Latin America*, to the exhibition, the catalogue says in the introduction that it does not pretend to be complete, that it’s not a survey, and yet the catalogue has nevertheless become such an important text in the teaching of Latin American art in the US and here I’m sure too.

DA Well, I suppose it was ambitious in terms of theme and the years it covered. You know 1820 to 1980 is really a long period, and perhaps I didn’t do enough to narrow it down and make it a focused show. I was trying to choose these particular interesting moments from that history, and that was what each chapter was meant to be looking at. But I suppose those were kind of summaries, in a sense, of what I thought was the most important thing going on. But you know, it was impossible to cover everything!
TC Yes, absolutely.

DA Well, I think the nineteenth-century material was the most useful in a way, because that was the least available.

TC That was incredibly useful. I think the whole catalogue is an incredible tool!

DA I saw every single work that I chose for the exhibition and I was amazed. I had no idea that there were portraits of Pancho Fierro, for example, or of Bolivar, that had never been seen here before. They just weren’t available.

And I suppose I was trying to cover, even in a rather skeletal way, as much as possible, from the point of view of teaching —from the point of view of making material available to students.

TC So you were thinking of dissemination…

DA I’m always interested in making things available to people and disseminating material that they can then work on. I know this is not a very fashionable academic position.

TC It’s great. And I think it was the first catalogue of Latin American art that had that a section on documents, and now every catalogue has that section!

DA Yes, I always thought that manifestos were very important!

TC Yes, and it is interesting how publications and exhibitions work, you can see it particularly in our field very much, in Latin American art, because even though there is still much more research than before, the scholarship is largely driven by exhibitions.

DA Yes, that’s true.

TC Since they appeared in your catalogue some of the nineteenth-century paintings have re-entered the canon, and now you could not study for your oral exam in the US without studying that painting, for example. (José Gil de Castro, *The Martyr Olaya*, 1823).

DA Oh, good. Well I think some of these paintings had the status of celebrity in the nineteenth-century. Some of them had been shown in Europe, but they had completely fallen out of circulation, really. And very often, if they were shown, it was very much within the context of a nationalist story that was being told; nineteenth-century painting in Mexico is very much part of that.

TC So was there an arbitrary element in choosing some of the works?

DA Not really. I tried to identify the ones I thought were the most important, the most impressive. Some I couldn’t get, for one reason or another: not being able to locate them, or borrow them. So in the case of some artists, it was availability, like with Antonio Berni.

TC Was it also availability that restricted the participation of certain countries, like Cuba or Puerto Rico?

DA There were one or two things from Cuba but there were certain places I couldn’t get to. There could
have been more from Chile. There’s quite a lot from Uruguay but in Colombia, for example, I couldn’t get to Medellín.

TC You were talking about Stanton Catlin and your relationship with him. Your exhibition was similar to the one that he curated in 1966.\(^8\)

DA Absolutely.

TC Why did you choose that as a model?

DA I saw it.

TC You saw it.

DA I was on my honeymoon! It seemed a sort of very logical way of doing it. His emphasis was slightly different. As far as I recall, he started with Jean-Baptiste Debret and the so-called academic painters in Brazil. But basically it started with Independence, which seemed to me to make sense.

TC And it was the first show in the US that looked at Latin American art since that period in a comprehensive way. It was also a landmark exhibition, and it is interesting that you used that model decades later in the UK.

DA Certainly in terms of the period. I was in contact with Stanton and also with Terence Grieder, who was the other person involved.

TC That is interesting because in the US we usually study that exhibition as a product of Stanton Catlin. We know that Terence Grieder worked with him, but no one seems to know much about him.

DA Well, I went to see him. I think he was in Texas. But he had switched to colonial. He moved back to an earlier period.

TC How was your exhibition received by the general public? What was the attendance like?

DA I don’t know the figures. It wasn’t hugely successful. It was perfectly respectable, but it wasn’t a blockbuster. They didn’t expect it to be a blockbuster. It was one of those sorts of shows that the Hayward was prepared to do in those days, which was pushing the boundaries and trying to raise in people an awareness of the unexpected, the lesser known. I can’t remember the exact attendance. It had mixed reviews. Some were very positive and some were extremely negative. I remember Tim Hilton’s review. I think it was in the Guardian and he said that there was only one interesting painter in the whole exhibition.

TC Wow!

---

DA  This is the kind of attitude that existed at the time. He said the only artist of any real interest was Manuel Blanes. And if you look at it you see why because, in a way, his work looks most painterly in a European way.

If you look at the reviews of the Toledo exhibition, which was in 2000 they weren’t that dissimilar!

TC  Thank you.
Latin American Art from a UK Perspective: Politics, Ethics, and Aesthetics

Professor Valerie Fraser
School of Philosophy and Art History and; Founding Director, ESCALA
This presentation about the growth of interest in Latin American art in the UK necessarily focuses on my own university, the University of Essex, which has played an important —indeed, a central— role in this growth of interest and so I apologise in advance if this is at times a bit autobiographical.1 The University of Essex was founded in 1964 (and I joined as an undergraduate student in 1968) and the founding Vice-Chancellor’s vision was for a scheme of study in the arts and humanities which was essentially interdisciplinary, and comparative across different geographical regions. The initial choice of regional specialisms for the new School of Comparative Studies were the USSR (this was the Cold War era) and Latin America (Europe was taken for granted), and all students were offered the opportunity of intensive language tuition in either Russian or Spanish and Portuguese. The first four departments in the School of Comparative Studies were Government, Sociology, Literature and Art History. Each department was required to appoint specialists in both the USSR and Latin America who could teach at least one course in that area. Russian and Latin American Centres were established to help facilitate interdisciplinary study and research.

I think it is also worth noting how fashionable Latin America was in the 1960s and 1970s, for both political and cultural reasons —the Cuban revolution, Ché Guevara, and then Chile, with Allende’s “democratic road to socialism”; Mexican murals, Cuban posters, Latin American films and novels: these were not the specialist interests of Latin Americanists but part of a broader interest in the so-called ‘Third World’, and wide-spread left-wing solidarity with the oppressed. We were reading people like Frantz Fanon and Régis Debray, for example, and a key text for those of us interested in Latin American culture was Jean Franco’s *The Modern Culture of Latin America. Society and the Artist* of 1967 —Jean was a lecturer in the Literature Department at Essex at the time. But in the art historical field there was very little indeed, especially in English, which was suitable for undergraduates.

It is indicative of the lack of scholarship in Latin American art in the 1960s that when the Art History department appointed Professor Dawn Ades, a specialist in Dada and Surrealism, they also expected her to develop a course on Latin American art. It is difficult now to appreciate how little information there was —so few books, no Internet to provide images—Dawn had no choice but to be a pioneer in the field. In 1970 the University funded her to travel to Mexico and Peru to see and photograph examples of art and architecture, ancient, colonial and modern, an itinerary necessarily shaped by the literature available.

// Pelican/Yale History of Art Volumes on pre-Columbian (George Kubler, 1959) and Colonial art (George Kubler and Martin Soria, 1962)
// Stanton Catlin’s exhibition catalogue *Art in Latin America since Independence*, Yale University Press, 1966
// Some general volumes by Leopoldo Castedo (especially his 1969 *A History of Latin American Art and Architecture from pre-Columbian times to the Present*, published by Pall Mall)
// And a number of books on Mexican art — Justino Fernández’s general Guide to Mexican Art from its Beginnings to the Present, University of Chicago Press, 1961, trans 1969; and more specialist, on the Olmec (for example Ignacio Bernal’s *The Olmec World*, University of California Press, 1969), the Aztec (Miguel León Portilla’s *Aztec Thought and Culture: A study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, University of

---

1 Transcript of a presentation for the conference “Zones de convergence: l’actualité de la recherche en théorie et histoire de l’art latino-américain”, held at the University of Rennes, 2012.
These were the texts that formed the basis of Dawn Ades’ course in Latin American art in the 1970s.\(^2\) So at first she concentrated mainly on Mexico —ancient, colonial and the muralists. (This is ‘Latin American’ art in the inclusive sense of the times, as in Castedo’s *A History of Latin American Art and Architecture: from Pre-Columbian Times to the Present*.)

I joined the department as a member of staff in 1979. Dawn and I expanded the Latin American teaching to include two undergraduate courses, one in Pre-Columbian art and architecture, and one in Colonial and Modern, as well as MA courses in Latin American and Native American material, the latter in collaboration with colleagues in the Literature Department (Gordon Brotherston was a key figure here —fascinated by indigenous American forms of literacy).

Then the field really exploded in the run-up to 1992, the five-hundredth anniversary of the ‘discovery’ of America, with a series of major exhibitions in Europe and the US.

// *Magiciens de la Terre*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (not exclusively Latin American), 1989

And in the UK:


*Magiciens de la Terre* and, in a different way, *Dawn’s Art in Latin America* both aimed for an inclusive view of the art they were presenting, including work by those who had received no formal training, and who were usually not of European descent, as well as the more Western types of art familiar to their European audiences. In the case of Latin America, the tendency was (and often still is) to make a distinction between ‘art’ in the Western/European sense, and craft; between high art and popular art. Dawn was well aware that by including examples of this ‘other’ art (popular/indigenous, etc.) there was a real danger that —given the general ignorance about art from Latin America at the time, and the deep-rooted prejudices about what constitutes ‘good’ art, or ‘real’ art —that the artists who were working more or less within the Western/European tradition would be in a sense tainted by this, and that their

---

\(^2\) There was other material in Spanish especially by Damian Bayón and Marta Traba; and in Portuguese by, for example, Aracy Amaral.
art would be judged as provincial, derivative or folkloric. Dawn’s solution was to be as broad-ranging as possible, to include such a variety of material that no tidy generalisation about ‘Latin American’ art would be possible. One section of the show curated by Guy Brett focused on some of the most radical developments in Latin America at the time — material that could not possibly be classified as provincial or derivative. Guy Brett was another pioneer in the UK at the time in being interested in contemporary Latin American art, and in his Transcontinental show of 1991 he drew attention to the tremendous creativity of the continent, introducing us to artists we had, in most cases, never heard of before.

This cluster of ground-breaking survey exhibitions of art from Latin America generated an interest in the field that in turn resulted in publications, especially, during the 1990s, of surveys of the art of the closing century. (I am concentrating on English language material — there were parallel developments in French).

// Edward Lucie-Smith, *20th Century Latin American Art*, Thames and Hudson, 1993

And then, from the beginning of the twenty first-century, a series of dictionaries of Latin American artists:

// *Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures*, Taylor and Francis, 2000 (including literature, film, music, etc., as well as art)
// *St James Guide to Hispanic Artists*, St James Press, 2002

The description of the scope of this book is interesting: “This guide provides critical analysis of ....twentieth-century Hispanic artists from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America, and American artists of Spanish descent”. I’ll return to this question of US relations with Latin America later.

All this interest was paralleled by an increase in activity in the commercial art market in the 1990s. Until the mid-1990s Sotheby’s and Christie’s had usually had only one specialist Latin American art sales per year; from the mid-1990s they started to have two, and with more works in each sale. The specialist Latin American art fair, PINTA, opened in New York in 2006, and a London version was opened in 2010 with exhibitors including commercial galleries from Europe, the US, as well as Latin America.

And of course alongside all this growth of interest, of exhibitions, of general survey textbooks and dictionaries and interest from private collectors, there has been a growth in more specialist research, analysis, theory and criticism. Obviously I’m not going to try and summarise all this in detail — just to identify a few key points, especially those with a UK link.

The first relates to the *Art of the Fantastic exhibition* in Indianapolis in 1987. This show gathered together a range of examples of art from Latin America from the previous sixty years that the curators
classified as exotic and different, magical realist and fantastic. Not surprisingly, this show generated some heated responses, not least from Latin America where many saw this as condescending caricature on the part of their powerful northern neighbour. In 1995, a particularly serious response was the volume edited by Gerardo Mosquera entitled *Beyond the Fantastic*, which brought together texts by artists and critics from Latin America offering a variety of more nuanced characterisations of their art. Published in English but in London, not in the US, this book was important in reinforcing the idea that had been established by Dawn Ades’ *Art in Latin America*: that the UK could provide a platform for an alternative English-language interpretation of art from Latin America; that the UK could offer a less contested venue for debate than the US, with its repeated claims to authority over Latin America from the Monroe Doctrine onwards; or than former imperial powers Spain or Portugal (the most obvious exception being Las Malvinas). Mosquera followed this up with a further, much-cited, contribution to the debate: “Goodbye Identity, Welcome Difference: from Latin American Art to Art from Latin America” published in *Third Text* in 2001, in which he argued for moving away from the adjectival, descriptive use of ‘Latin American’, which suggests something identifiable as ‘Latin American’ about this art, in favour of the more geographical ‘from’ Latin America. This is of course just one of many texts from the 1990s onwards to address the problem of attempting to label this area.

The increased interest in Latin American art in the UK from 1989 on generated a rush of graduates coming to study with us as Essex—from the UK, but also from Latin America, especially Brazil and Mexico. And this energetic graduate community was central to the founding of our art collection, ESCALA, formerly UECLAA.

But first a bit of context. A central aspect of the Art History department at Essex, since its foundation, has been the importance of studying works of art at first hand. Visits to London galleries and museums and a study trip to Italy are an integral part of undergraduate teaching, but in the case of Latin American art this was simply not possible. In the 1970s and 1980s, apart from the British Museum’s archaeological holdings of Mexican material there was really no art from Latin America on public display in the UK. This was one of the reasons Dawn Ades organised the show at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1989: it was designed to expose the British public, including Essex students, to real works of art, at first hand, and so to generate interest in the field. It was also, of course, an opportunity for her to explore the field in greater depth (the show took four years of research, including travelling to view and select works).

So in 1993, when one of our students, Charles Cosac (who went on to found the Cosac Naify publishing house in Brazil), offered to donate a work of art that we could use in our teaching, we accepted with enthusiasm: we decided this could be a start of a dedicated collection of Latin American art that could support our teaching and generate research. The work was a painting by Brazilian artist Siron Franco: Memória, 1990-1992.

---

3 I didn’t see the show but it is worth noting that although the premise was flawed, the catalogue did give us access to a range of exciting work by artists we had never heard of before. ‘This was a show that was enormously interesting but only partly successful’ as Edward Sullivan wrote in his review of it, *Art Journal*, 47:4, Winter 1988.


5 This was a development of his essay “El arte latinoamericano deja de serlo” published in a 1996 ARCO Madrid catalogue; reprinted in *Arara* 10, as “Latin American Art ceases to be Latin American art”. See also Metliss, Miriam, “Critical Debates Concerning Latin American art and the ‘Mainstream’: a Brief History”, *Arara*, 10: 2011, both essays available on http://www.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/arara/araraissue10.html

6 Mexico and Brazil now offer MA and PhD programmes in art history, which were not available in the 1990s. It is interesting that now we have students from Bolivia and Puerto Rico. In another 10 years perhaps there will be graduate art history programmes in these countries too.
This is an intriguing and multivalent painting: the spectator is attracted by the shimmering silver surface but on closer inspection this is not a celebratory commemoration. Details hint at two different but equally destructive aspects of Brazil’s involvement in the global economy: shadowy animals and animal skins refer to the illegal trade in fur from the Amazonian rainforests, while a suggestion of a child’s coffin and the silver paint surface itself commemorate a disaster that had recently occurred in the district of Goiânia in which Franco himself lives. In 1987, an international company illegally dumped canisters of the radioactive chemical element Cesium-137 in Goiânia and children, attracted by the shiny substance played with it. As a result many died and many more continue to suffer health problems. *Memória* is part of a series of works—the Cesium Series—Franco executed to draw attention to this scandal.

I can tell you that the beautiful shining silver surface draws the unsuspecting visitor in, but you can’t appreciate this from this reproduction; and this reinforces the importance of seeing works of art at first hand: it reinforces the importance of being able to teach from real works of art and so of having a collection of Latin American art in order to teach the subject well.

Perhaps more importantly, as a founding donation, *Memória* can also serve as a metaphor for the responsibilities of those in charge of building such a collection in the UK. The global market exploits the poor. It exploits those excited by the possibilities offered by the rich and powerful. Casual international intervention can be devastating. A British university, as the custodian of a collection of art from Latin America, needs to take its responsibilities seriously. We can theorise about how art from Latin America does not need to be classified as ‘as good as’ art from elsewhere, nor to be integrated into the ‘mainstream’ as determined by the traditional Western centres of cultural power. However, in practice, for many artists from Latin America, to be included in a collection of art at a UK University is seen as a benefit, even an honour. I don’t think that Charles intended *Memória* as a warning against exploitation when he gave it to us, but I like to use it as a reminder that building a collection in the way we have —that is largely by donation —must be seen as a contract; that in return, it is our responsibility to try to research the works in our care, to take them seriously, to try and understand, as I suggest in my title, their political, and ethical and aesthetic dimensions, and to communicate this to students.

It is interesting that among the first donations are several pieces that engage with the idea of a collection of Latin American art in Europe, and of the ambivalent history of relations between the two continents. A good example is an early donation by the Argentinian collector Marcos Curi, who gave an ink drawing by Oscar Curtino called *Cristóbal Colón* dating from 1966.

Oscar Curtino, *Cristóbal Colón* (Christopher Columbus), 1996, ink on paper, 53 x 76 cm
The work —in the form of a comic strip —shows Columbus as greedy and lascivious while the conquistadors stab each other in the back as they struggle for control of the new territories; on the other hand, the gullible natives welcome gifts of useless wristwatches and worship at a pyramid of imported goods.

But to go back to the building of the collection; Memória was our first donation, but hardly a collection. Another graduate student, Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, (now director of the Cisneros Collection), returning from a research trip to Argentina, was shocked to find that we were proposing to launch a collection of Latin American art with one painting, a Brazilian painting. He had good contacts in Buenos Aires and solicited several donations from collectors and artists. The idea caught on. An Argentinian gallerist who was at that time just opening in London, Josefina Durini, facilitated some important donations, including Room No. 23 (1994), by Fernando de Szyszlo, and artists donated both their own work, and work by others. So Colombian Emma Reyes, for example, donated the drawing Untitled (1953) by the Mexican Juan Soriano. And Siron Franco donated a print by José Luis Cuevas, also Mexican, entitled Quevedo #3 (1969). It was very exciting, and very flattering that artists wanted to be included – presumably because they believed that we would take their work seriously. (I hope we have, and we do). On more than one occasion we have been told that people want to give work to us because we are in Europe, in the UK, and we are not the US.

Fernando De Szyszlo, Habitación No. 23 (Room No. 23), 1994, oil on canvas, 120 x 120 cm

Juan Soriano, Untitled, 1953, pencil on paper, 24 x 31 cm

José Luis Cuevas, Quevedo #3, 1969, screen print on silver paper, 56.5 x 76.4 cm
After the initial euphoria, (we officially launched the collection six weeks after we received the Siron Franco —by which time we had forty-eight works) we soon realised that we needed to have a collecting policy, that we would not remain a credible collection if we accepted anything and everything. We established a committee where we had some very interesting and often heated debates. In terms of the classification ‘Latin American art’ we assumed that if people wanted to give art to a collection of ‘Latin American’ art, then they were happy with that designation. So if an artist born in Venezuela and resident in London, for example, or born in Japan and resident in Brazil—if they wanted to be included, then that was good enough for us. And in line with Dawn’s wide-ranging curatorial focus in the Art in Latin America show, we also tended towards inclusivity in relation to definitions of ‘art’. We had a very interesting meeting when we debated whether or not to include Chuwas (1995), a set of three earthenware vessels made by the London-based Peruvian artist, Warmi.

Cuauhtémoc Medina, then a PhD student, now at UNAM in Mexico, was not interested. I remember him staring out of the window while the rest of the committee members talked about these pots, the use of Spanish, Quechua and Aymara texts, ideas of languages, different types of literacy. After a while he said “You have been talking about these for fifteen minutes, so we should accept them”. His point was that if we can find things to say about a work of art, then it is interesting enough to include: we could, for example, use it in teaching, we could use it in research. If no one had anything to say about a work, however aesthetically pleasing, then we should think seriously about not accepting it. This is an acquisitions criterion we still use.

But sometimes the questions of ‘art’ vs. ‘craft’ could get quite tense. On one occasion someone told us firmly that if we accepted material that was widely perceived as ‘artesanía’, then some of the more snobbish private collectors who had been supporting us with good donations would not donate anything more and might dissuade others from donating too. We have tended to be cautious in this area, and
have accepted pieces that relate to other works in the collection, or which can relate to other significant aspects of art from Latin America.

So the collection grew. It has grown unevenly because donations have often been closely related to our research interests and to those of our students, but that’s OK —there’s a history and so a logic to it. We have a lot of work from Argentina and Brazil, for example, but not a lot from Mexico. We have works in all media but in particular we have works on paper, because these are easy to transport. We have a lot of work from Latin Americans resident in the UK and Europe, for the same reason. Now we have about seven hundred works from seventeen countries —mostly from about the past thirty years, but with a few older pieces.

We have been expanding our definitions of ‘Latin America’ too, with a painting by Guyanese Aubrey Williams and a series of prints by the Chicana artist Yolanda López. Strictly speaking López doesn’t fit in with what is now our official definition of Latin American art which is geographical rather than cultural: “all countries south of the Rio Grande and adjacent islands irrespective of language”. In the US, while López sees herself as Chicana, she is more likely to be classified as ‘Latina’. I want to say a little more about this.

In his famous study How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art/Comment New York vola l’idée d’art moderne of 1983, Serge Guilbaut argued that for political reasons, from the 1940s the US deliberately promoted an image of itself as the successor to Europe and particularly Paris as the creative centre of the world. I think we can see a similarly hegemonic tendency at work in relation to Latin American art, whereby the art of the continent is being theoretically homogenized not just into ‘Latin American’ art, but also increasingly into the much more problematic ‘Latino’ category. This allows the US to position itself and its own (‘mainstream’) art at the centre while relegating other art to the margins. The Smithsonian American Museum in Washington is the most vivid example of this that I have come across, and I’m sure it’s not an accident that it is in Washington. The American Museum’s main focus is, not surprisingly, on American, US artists —John Singleton Copley, John Singer Sargent and the Hudson River School, Abstract Expressionists etc. Except that the oldest ‘American’ works in the collection are from Puerto Rico (no mention of its colonial status) and among the modern artists we find David Hockney who we in England like to think of as English —even though he lived in California for some years. But that’s OK —they include in these main sections of the museum lots of ‘American’ artists that weren’t born in the US but I don’t have a problem with that. What I do have a problem with is that this is presented more or less explicitly as the ‘mainstream’ history of American art. In another part of the museum there is a section dedicated to “Folk Art, African American Art, and Latino Art”. And here, not only do they include Latino with the ‘folk’ art, but also under ‘Latino’ they include artists like Ana Mendieta, Carmen Herrera and Vik Muniz.7 I imagine Mendieta would have thought of herself as a Cuban American. I don’t know how Herrera or Muniz think of themselves but I doubt it is as ‘Latino’, and very certainly not as ‘folk’ artists. (This is of course why people are right to feel uncomfortable about the question of high art and popular art in the context of Latin America—it depends on who is using the categories and to what end.) The Smithsonian American Museum seems to want to integrate Latin Americans into ‘America’ (the

7 By contrast MOLAA in Los Angeles seems to be avoiding using the term ‘Latino’, sticking firmly to ‘Latin American fine art. “MOLAA is the only museum in the United States exclusively dedicated to modern and contemporary Latin American art,” “one of the most significant collections of contemporary Latin American fine art in the nation”, and it has been developing a reputation for some good critical thinking about the field.

For more information see: www.molaa.com
US) by classifying them as Latino; but then to put them away into a category of difference, along with all the other ‘different’ people—the African American artists, naive artists, craftspeople and including (although not advertised on the website) examples of the art of the insane. Not only do they do this without irony; they claim this as pioneering inclusivity.

In contrast, resistance to being ‘Latino-ized’ can be seen at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago. Here the website very deliberately describes its position as follows: “To us, Mexican culture exists sin fronteras, without borders, and we display artistic expressions from both sides of the border.” I am sure it is deliberate that there is no reference at all here to any of the various inclusive, integrative terms: not Chicano, not Latino, not Hispanic, but Mexican, and the web-site explains that they are using pre-Cuauhtémoc in preference to the more Eurocentric pre-Columbian, pre-Hispanic, etc. This is Chicago, of course, not Washington, and this is a museum set up and run by Mexican Americans, largely with a Mexican American audience in mind.

The ‘Latino’ question in the US is a good example of how fields of research can look very different from a different viewpoint: in the US it raises very real political and ethical questions; from Europe we can have the luxury of viewing the Latino question from a more academic perspective; as a matter, I would suggest, for further research.

Which allows me to return briefly to Essex. My own most recent research project has been Meeting Margins: Transnational Art in Latin America and Europe 1950-1978; a collaboration between the University of Essex and the University of the Arts in London. The underlying premise of the project was in some ways a development of Guilbaut: New York might like to think it stole the idea of modern art but in fact history isn’t so simple and all sorts of exciting things went on happening in the areas that, from the US perspective, were marginal. In the post-war decades exchanges between Europe and Latin America, and between the countries in Latin America, were enormously fruitful: art, artists and ideas moved back and forth—a few examples include:

// Pierre Restany, whose archives are here in Rennes, is a very good example of someone who facilitated transnational artistic exchanges, and who himself was endlessly travelling around Latin America and the world; he wrote about mail art, was a friend of Mario Pedrosa, etc.

// Mario Pedrosa, went from Brazil, who went into exile in Chile in 1968, where he later became the energy behind the Museo de la Solidaridad that attracted donations from all over the world in support of Chile and Allende’s radical political project

// Felipe Ehrenberg, went from Mexico, who moved to the UK, to Cornwall, where in 1971 he set up the Beau Geste press with David Mayor

// And many other more general transnational exchanges via exhibitions, biennials and mail art

// And looser influences such as the impact of the writings of Herbert Read in Latin America; or the impact of the Venezuelan kineticists in Paris.

8 But is there an implied hierarchy in the collection, from old to new, from artesanía to art? “With 7,000 objects, the National Museum of Mexican Art’s permanent collection is one of the largest collections of Mexican art in the country. The NMMA strives to maintain, preserve and acquire works for its collection that reflect the diversity and quality of Mexican art in the following categories: Pre-Cuauhtémoc, ephemera, textiles, folk art, prints and drawings, photography, and paintings and sculptures.” For more information see: http://www.nationalmuseumofmexicanart.org/content/permanent-collection
And part of the atmosphere of creativity was a shared sense of opposition to the US—politically (especially during the anti-communist McCarthy era) and also culturally. I asked Carlos Cruz-Diez once why he chose to come to Paris in 1955 instead of New York, and he said: “Why would I want to go to New York? There was nothing going on for me there”. He was genuinely puzzled by the question. For others, of course, it was the opposite, and we obviously don’t want to write New York out of the history of twentieth-century art from Latin America—but Meeting Margins has been working towards a more complex and nuanced history of art from Latin America.

For me, the most exciting outcome of the Meeting Margins project was the forum on Transnational Latin American Art we organised in collaboration with the University of Texas at Austin in 2009. This event was aimed at young scholars and involved around sixty speakers from the US, the UK, Europe and Latin America, with the latter particularly well represented. This was a very successful meeting of minds where certainly, I hope, no one felt that he or she was working in a marginalised field of research. It certainly helped to generate a lot of interest and to stimulate other symposia along similar lines.

So all this activity is helping us to refine our understanding of the bigger picture of what we might mean by ‘Latin American art’. I believe we do still need this broad category, not least as a framework for events such as this here in Rennes, but we need to keep questioning where, when and how we use it.

This event today has an important contribution to expanding the field, but there is still a lot of exciting work to do.
List of Contributors

Professor Dawn Ades, School of Philosophy and Art History
Dr Matthias Röhrig Assunção, Department of History
Dr Sanja Bahun, Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies
Marina Barsy, School of Philosophy and Art History
Dr Taina Caragol, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution
Dr Marian de Vooght, Department of Government
Dr Sarah Demelo, Essex Collection of Art from Latin America
Ian Dudley, School of Philosophy and Art History
Dr Taisuke Edamura, School of Philosophy and Art History
Professor Valerie Fraser, School of Philosophy and Art History
Gisselle Giron, School of Philosophy and Art History
Dr Joanne Harwood, Essex Collection of Art from Latin America
Jessica Hughes, School of Philosophy and Art History
Stefanie Kogler, School of Philosophy and Art History
Professor Todd Landman, Faculty of Social Sciences
Professor Roderick Main, Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies
Dr Andrés David Montenegro Rosero, Essex Collection of Art from Latin America
Dr Jak Peake, Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies
Professor Jules Pretty, Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Dr Clara Sandoval, School of Law
Dr Jörg Schaub, School of Philosophy and Art History