

2019

### The exhibition “Contribuição da mulher às artes plásticas no país” and the silence of Brazilian art criticism

Marina Mazze Cerchiaro  
*University of São Paulo*, mmcerchiaro@gmail.com

ana paula simioni  
*Universidade de São Paulo*, ana.simioni@hotmail.com

Talita Trizoli Ms  
*Universidade de Sao Paulo*, ttrizoli@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Cerchiaro, Marina Mazze; ana paula simioni; and Talita Trizoli Ms. "The exhibition “Contribuição da mulher às artes plásticas no país” and the silence of Brazilian art criticism." *Artl@s Bulletin* 8, no. 1 (2019): Article 14.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC-BY-NC-SA license](#).

# The exhibition *Contribuição da mulher às artes plásticas no país* and the silence of Brazilian art criticism

Marina Mazze Cerchiaro  
Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simioni  
Talita Trizoli

*University of São Paulo*

## Abstract

In 1960 the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art inaugurated the exhibition *Contribuição da mulher às artes plásticas no país*. This was the first female collective exhibition of a large scale to happen in Brazil. However, although it happened in a prestigious institution and it gathered renowned artists, this exhibition did not get extensive press coverage and it did not inspire similar initiatives during the decade. This article proposes a reflection on this silence and on the resistance of Brazilian artistic circles to treating women artists as a collective, which could explain the late impact of feminism in this field.

## Resumo

Em dezembro de 1960, o Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo inaugurou a mostra “Contribuição da mulher às artes plásticas no país”. Trata-se da primeira exposição coletiva feminina de grandes dimensões ocorrida no Brasil. No entanto, mesmo tendo sido realizada numa instituição prestigiosa e agrupado artistas de renome, a mostra não teve repercussão na imprensa e não suscitou outras iniciativas semelhantes ao longo da década. Pretende-se refletir sobre o silêncio e as resistências do ambiente artístico brasileiro ao tratar das mulheres artistas enquanto coletividade, o que talvez possa explicar o impacto tardio do feminismo nesse campo.

## On the exhibition

Between December 1960 and January 1961, the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo - MAM), which was a leading institution for the Brazilian arts field,<sup>1</sup> held the exhibition *Contribuição da mulher às artes plásticas no país* [The contribution of women to visual arts in the Country]. The show was initially conceived by Paulo Mendes de Almeida – who was the director of the museum from 1959 to 1960 – but it was his successor, the art critic Mario Pedrosa, that presented and finalized the exhibition that featured the participation of 65 guest artists, Brazilian women or foreign women who lived in the country. The selected works included a total of 260 works including paintings, engravings, sculptures, drawings and the so-called “applied arts.” This was the first female collective exhibit of large scale to happen in Brazil, as up to that point there were only female salons organized in the country.

Since the 19th century Brazilian women artists could exhibit their works in the General *Exhibitions of Fine Arts* organized by the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, in Rio de Janeiro. The Academy was founded in 1826, and in 1844 it began to regularly promote annual exhibitions that allowed the most visibility and consecration to artists in the country. Following the exact same principles of its French role model, the Brazilian institution did not envision women as students, but tolerated them as exhibitors. During the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the female presence in official exhibitions wavered between 5% and 20%,<sup>2</sup> and some of these women were awarded with prizes such as medals and even the most important among all – the rewards of travelling abroad. It was only in 1892 that, as a part of a series of reforms promoted by the Republic in the country (1889), women were granted the right to attend the Academy as students, and the academy was

now renamed as National School for the Fine Arts (Escola Nacional de Belas Artes).

This situation of relative institutional exclusion motivated, in other countries such as England, the United States, and France, the creation of women’s associations that fought for the right of women artists to join training institutions while they provided exclusive spaces for the exhibition of their works. This is the case of the famous Union of Women Painters and Sculptors created in Paris in 1881 and that promoted for many decades the Salon of Women Painters and Sculptors. In Brazil such an organized and institutionalized movement did not happen. As a rule, women artists did not try to create their own training and exhibition spaces but tried to insert themselves in the existing spaces even if in minor positions. For this reason, there were few female salons in the Brazilian artistic system.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, it is possible to understand the importance of the exhibition. It was an uncommon occurrence of unprecedented scale and promoted by a very pivotal institution. It is worthy of note that the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (MAM-SP) was, along with its equivalent in Rio de Janeiro, the first museum dedicated fully to modern art in the country and both were inaugurated in 1948, just one year after the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP) opened its doors. This institutional importance must be heightened by another element, that from 1951 to 1963 the MAM was also responsible for promoting the biggest art event of the Brazilian art system, namely the São Paulo Art Biennials. Indeed, during this period both institutions were under the guidance of their promoter, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, who became the first patron of the MAM-SP by the donation of his own personal collection. At that same time and with the help of his wife, Yolanda Matarazzo, they conceived the Biennial, the event responsible for including São Paulo in the

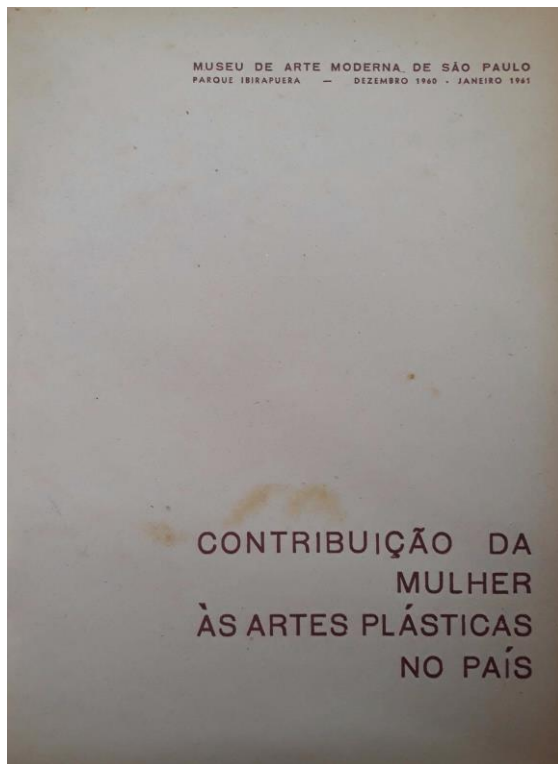
<sup>1</sup> The São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo) was created in 1948 by the initiative of Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, and it can be situated amongst a series of actions of the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie of São Paulo in the development of cultural institutions in the capital. Between 1951 and 1962 the museum was responsible for the execution of the São Paulo Art Biennials in its building at the Ibirapuera Park.

<sup>2</sup> Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simioni, *Profissão artista: pintoras e escultoras acadêmicas brasileiras, 1884-1922*, (São Paulo: EDUSP/FAPESP, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Research conducted in newspapers shows that in 1931 the 1st Female Salon of Arts (I Salão Feminino de Arte) was organized by the Society of Fine Arts at the National School for the Fine Arts of Rio de Janeiro. The second edition of this event occurred years later, in 1939, and later in 1949 there was a new Female Salon, this time organized by the Association of Brazilian Artists. During the decade of 1950 the Military Club had annual Female Salons of Fine Arts, as did the Association of Brazilian Artists in Rio de Janeiro.

international artistic scene.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that this exhibition followed the example of the Venice Biennale and it was the second of its kind to appear in the world, preceding even the Paris Biennale launched in 1959.

At last, it must be mentioned that this exhibition was organized and presented by Mario Pedrosa, who is to this day a person of extraordinary importance in the Brazilian artistic system.<sup>5</sup> When he took on the direction of the Museum of Modern Art in 1961, Pedrosa already had a solid career. Since 1957 he became vice-president of the AICA (International Association of Art Critics). He regularly participated in the São Paulo Biennials as organizer and as a jury member between 1953 and 1963, and was the general director of the 4th edition, in 1961. (Fig. 1)



**Figure 1.** Front cover from the exhibition catalogue *Contribuição da mulher às artes plásticas no país*, presented at the Museum of Modern Art from São Paulo, between December 1960 and January 1961.

The exhibition *Contribuição da mulher às artes plásticas no país* was headed by two prestigious critics and it counted on the support of a leading institution in the Brazilian artistic scene. For the reasons presented, it should have had central importance in the history of Brazilian women artists, or even in the history of Brazilian exhibitions. This is, however, not what happened, and the exhibition seems to have fallen into a collective memory vacuum, including its material record – save from a few passing mentions from Aracy Amaral and Paulo Herkenhoff, aimed at asserting that the large presence of female artists in the Brazilian art world and the absence of gender discrimination. Exemplary of this mentality is the comment made by Aracy Amaral about the exhibition:

The fact is that the Brazilian woman stands out in the artistic milieu of the 20th century, shouldering naturally with the men who make art, and even in the context of Latin America the number of Brazilian women artists is remarkable, both as initiators of movements and as principal participants in modern and contemporary trends.

Long before modern and contemporary Brazilian art had repercussions on the international art scene (which really only began to occur in the mid-1980s), the presence of the female artist in the midst of the visual arts was so evident that the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo, on the initiative of the critic Paulo Mendes de Almeida organized, in 1960, the retrospective exhibition under the title “The Contributions of Women to the Visual Arts in the Country”. Writing the introduction of the catalogue, the writer Maria de Lourdes Teixeira proves that, until that date, the participation of women in the International Biennials of São Paulo, begun in 1951, was increasing statistically. The director of MAM-SP, Mário Pedrosa, acknowledges that the contribution of the role of women in this century in Brazil is “of such relevance”, that “we no longer distinguish between those stronger creators, who are of one sex or another.” This situation, he adds, when compared to other countries like France, Italy, Spain, England

<sup>4</sup> On this subject see also: Francisco Alambert and Polyana Canhête, *As Bienais de São Paulo da era do Museu à era dos curadores (1951-2000)* (São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2004); Ana Gonçalves Magalhães, “A Bienal de São Paulo, o debate artístico dos anos 1950 e a constituição do primeiro museu de arte moderna do Brasil”, *Museologia & interdisciplinaridade*. Vol. 1, no. 7, October-November 2015.

<sup>5</sup> From April to October 2017 the Museo Reina Sofia organized an exhibition about the career and the work of the critic, titled *Mário Pedrosa. De la naturaliza afectiva de la forma* (Mario Pedrosa. Of the affective nature of the form) and this showcases his importance, even in international circles. Among the many publications about the critic, please note: Otilia Arantes and Beatriz Fiori, *Mário Pedrosa: itinerário crítico*, (São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2004).

and the Netherlands, shows that “in Brazil, the contribution of the female creative genius is considerably greater.”<sup>6</sup>

The prestigious critic uses the exhibition as an example of the notable role women artists have historically played in Brazil, and as proof that, in this country, gender issues are of little relevance. However, a minor repercussion of the show in its time, which resulted in a near inexistence of sources, images or reviews, suggests that the Brazilian artistic field was actually less receptive to female artistic productions than thought. In this article, we use the catalogue of the exhibition and a few mentions found in the national archives as a starting point to analyze the exhibition and its sparse repercussion. We argue that, although women artists have indeed enjoyed an unusual insertion in the Brazilian art world, this was due to a formalist reading of their works, which tended to dismiss other possible readings, such as those of a more political nature (including those pertaining to gender issues).

### The exhibition: choices and curatorial postures

According to the catalogue introduction, the exhibit aimed to demonstrate in a “documentary” way the important role of women in Brazilian modern art. Mario Pedrosa wrote:

This exhibition, which is devoted to the women who dedicate themselves to artistic activities, is an initiative of my dear and illustrious predecessor in this museum, Dr. Paulo Mendes de Almeida.

If at first sight one could, in certain sophisticated circles, turn up their nose at this initiative, truthfully it is revealed to be of unprecedented documentary and cultural value. Indeed, it comes to expose something that has been overlooked by our best observers: the truly exceptional importance of the

role of women on the evolution of modern art in Brazil.<sup>7</sup>

It is interesting to note that the text stresses the importance of women in the history of “modern” art in Brazil. And indeed, the exhibition’s first initiator, Paulo Mendes de Almeida, published in 1961 – the same year as the exhibition – a book that professed exactly that. In *De Anita ao Museu* [From Anita to the Museum], Paulo Mendes de Almeida, the former director of the MAM and organizer of the Biennial, stated that the starting point of modern art in the country had been the exhibition of the painter Anita Malfatti (1889-1964), who had just arrived from the United States in 1917, and the reaction it caused.<sup>8</sup> According to him, the exhibition had ignited a “consciousness of the modern” that initiated a series of events like the *Semana de Arte Moderna de 1922* [1922 Modern Art Week], the creation of the *Klaxon* magazine, the *Salões de Maio* [Salons of May], the establishment of the *Clube de Arte Moderna* [Modern Art Club] and of the *Sociedade de Arte Moderna* [Modern Art Society], all of which were connected steps that culminated in the foundation of the modern art museums in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in the 1940’s. The book narrated the development of the artistic field in Brazil based on the continuity between modern and contemporary art, a field in which it was the actors linked to modern art that ultimately created the conditions for the emergence of contemporary art, and in particular those linked to the Biennial exhibitions. This narrative emerged during the 1950s and mid-1960s and it was cemented in the following decades.<sup>9</sup> Thus, it should not come as a surprise that the modernist women were well-represented in the exhibition, although it did not have a historical angle, but was intended to promote “contemporary” production.

A careful analysis of the catalogue and of the list of exhibitors indicates that, although the selected

<sup>6</sup> Aracy A Amaral, “A Mulher nas artes”, *Textos do Trópico de Capricórnio. Artigos e Ensaios (1980-2015)*. Vol. 3: *Bienais e artistas contemporâneos no Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2006), 217-218.

<sup>7</sup> Mário Pedrosa, “Prefácio”, *Contribuição da Mulher às Artes Plásticas no País* (exhibition catalogue) (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1960).

<sup>8</sup> In 1917 Anita held an exhibition that received very negative criticism from Monteiro Lobato, who was then the most active critic in São Paulo. The text titled “Paranóia ou Mistificação” (Paranoia or Mystification) stirred an immediate reaction from young intellectuals, such as the poet Oswald de Andrade, and it contributed to what would

become known as the “modernist group” in São Paulo. There is a large bibliography on the subject, such as: Tadeu Chiarelli, “Tropical, de Anita Malfatti: reorientando uma velha questão”, *Um modernismo que veio depois* (São Paulo: Ed Alameda, 2012); Mário da Silva Brito, *História do modernismo brasileiro 1. Antecedentes: a Semana de Arte Moderna*, (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1974).

<sup>9</sup> Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simioni, “The Brazilian modernism, between consecration and contestation”, *Perspective* 2, 2013, published online on June 30, 2015, and accessed on March 18, 2018. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/perspective/3893>; and Frederico Coelho, *A Semana sem Fim* (Rio de Janeiro: Casa da Palavra, 2012).

artists showed a certain aesthetic plurality, the curatorial choices were far from creating “an almost statistical view”<sup>10</sup> of the participation of women in the Brazilian visual arts. The timeline of the exhibition intended to encompass the period from the beginning of modern art in Brazil in 1920, according to the mythology, to the period when the exhibition took place in 1960. Among the modernists presented were Tarsila do Amaral (1886-1973), with four works from the 1910s;<sup>11</sup> Georgina de Albuquerque (1885-1962); Zina Aita (1900-1967); Anita Malfatti (1889-1964); Regina Gomide Graz (1897-1973); Hilde Weber (1913-1994); and Pola Rezende (1906-1978). This effort to show the female participation at Brazilian art system is made explicit in the following excerpt, from an essay by Maria de Lourdes Teixeira:<sup>12</sup>

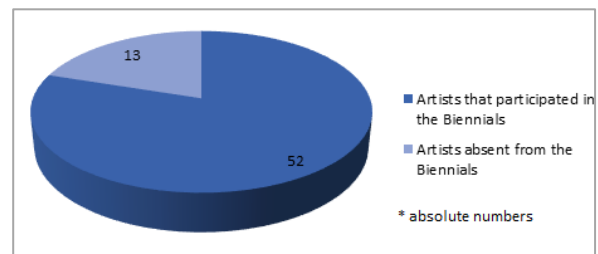
Close to us, in Brazil, we can establish the starting names of female activity in the contemporary visual arts: the new objectivity of Zina Aita, the expressionism of Anita Malfatti, the cubism, the Pau Brasil Movement and the ANTROPOFAGIA [sic] of Tarsila do Amaral, some of these tendencies had even manifested before the MODERN ART WEEK [sic] of 22.

Now, this contribution has the tendency to become progressively more symmetrical, in binary, with male activity. It is easy to prove this initiative by perusing the catalogues of the São Paulo Modern Art Biennials.<sup>13</sup>

If the exhibition was intended to represent the “origins of modern art” as the women who participated in the 1922 Modern Art Week, especially the acclaimed Anita Malfatti, Teixeira’s text indicates that the main criteria of selection for the contemporary women artists was the Biennials organized by the São Paulo Museum of Modern

Art.<sup>14</sup> A comparison between the two events indicates that, of the 65 women artists that participated in the exhibition, 52 had also participated in the Biennials, twelve doing so after the exhibition, which suggests that the exhibition may have contributed to the visibility of some of these artists. When the exhibition was inaugurated, most of its participants were at the beginning of their careers or starting their ascension. This is the case of Amelia Toledo (1926-2017), Maria Bonomi (1935), Lygia Clark (1920-1988), and Wega Nery (1912-2007), just to mention a few. (Graph 1)

The exhibition clearly tried to include a substantial number of women artists who had received prizes at the São Paulo Biennials from 1951 to 1961: of the seventeen recognized women, twelve were featured in the exhibition, namely Tarsila do Amaral, Sheila Branningan (1914-1994), Lygia Clark, Maria Leontina (1917-1984), Yolanda Mohalyi (1909-1978), Isabel Pons (1912-2002), Felícia Leirner (1904-1996), Wega Nery, Hilde Weber, Elisa Martins da Silveira (1912-2001), and Maria Bonomi.



**Graph 1.** Number of participant artists in the exhibition *Contribuição das Mulheres às Artes Plásticas no País*.

<sup>10</sup> These were the words used by Maria de Lourdes Teixeira in the introductory piece of the exhibition catalogue.

<sup>11</sup> The works are: *The Black Woman* (A Negra), *E.F.C.B.* and *Landscape* (Paisagem) created by Tarsila do Amaral during the 1920s and that were part of the museum’s collection, and *Portrait of Clarice Lispector* (Retrato de Clarice Lispector) from 1915 and by Zina Aita (Brazilian artist settled in Italy that participated in the Modern Art Week of 1922).

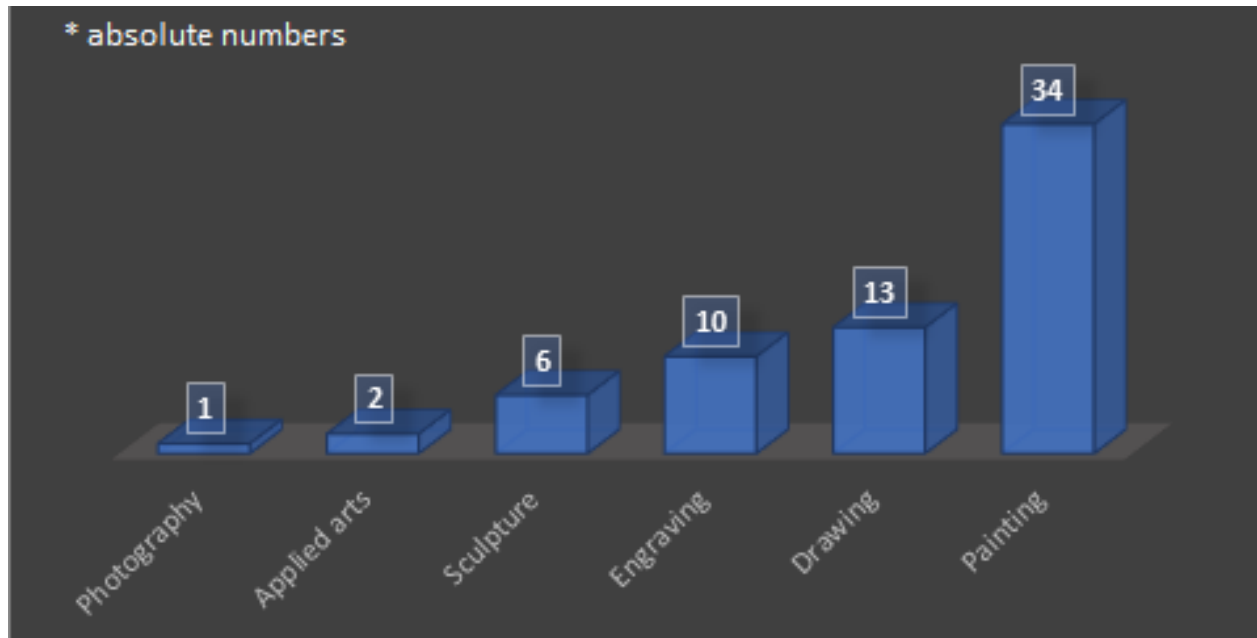
<sup>12</sup> Maria de Lourdes Teixeira (São Pedro, 1907-1989) was a writer, author of *Bitter Root* (Raiz Amarga, 1960). She was the first woman to enter the São Paulo Literature Academy (Academia Paulista de Letras). In 1961 she was honored with the biggest prize in the Brazilian literary field: the Jabuti, for her novel *Augusta Street* (Rua Augusta).

<sup>13</sup> Maria de Lourdes Teixeira, “Contribuição da Mulher às Artes Plásticas no País”, *Contribuição da Mulher às Artes Plásticas no País* (exhibition catalogue) (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1960), 15.

<sup>14</sup> The São Paulo Visual Arts Biennials (Bienais de Artes Plásticas de São Paulo) emerged in 1951, promoted by the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art and sponsored by Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho. Their objective was to expose the most significant national and international tendencies of modern art. They were based on the traditional Venice Biennales that had begun in 1895. As was the usual in universal fairs, the works were exhibited by country. Candidates to participate in the national delegation had to be either natural Brazilians or foreign resident in the country for at least two years. It was necessary to send three original pieces – as a condition to be exhibited – and submit them to a selection jury. Two of the jury members were selected by the registered artists and three others were selected by the directors and by the president of the Biennials, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho. Artists invited by the organizing committee could also participate and were granted the benefit of exemption from the jury.

Women artists awarded in the São Paulo Biennials	Prize Category	Biennial edition/year
Maria Leontina	Acquisition	1 <sup>st</sup> (1951)
Tarsila do Amaral	Acquisition	1 <sup>st</sup> (1951)
Mary Vieira	Acquisition	2 <sup>nd</sup> (1953)
Hilde Weber	Acquisition	2 <sup>nd</sup> (1953)
Maria Martins	Acquisition and regular	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> (1953 and 1955)
Elisa Martins da Silveira	Acquisition	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> (1953 and 1955)
Fayga Ostrower	Acquisition and regular	3 <sup>rd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> (1955, 1957 and 1963)
Felícia Leirner	Acquisition and regular	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> (1955 and 1963)
Tereza Nicolao	Acquisition	4 <sup>th</sup> (1957)
Zélia Salgado	Acquisition	4 <sup>th</sup> (1957)
Lygia Clark	Acquisition and regular	4 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> (1957 and 1961)
Wega Nery	Regular and acquisition	4 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> (1957 and 1963)
Yolanda Mohaly	Acquisition and regular	5 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> (1959 and 1963)
Maria Bonomi	Acquisition and regular	5 <sup>th</sup> , 7 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> (1959, 1963 and 1965)
Sheila Branningan	Acquisition	6 <sup>th</sup> (1961)
Anna Letycia Quadros	Acquisition	6 <sup>th</sup> (1961)
Isabel Pons	Regular	6 <sup>th</sup> (1961)
Liuba Wolf	Acquisition	7 <sup>th</sup> (1963)

Table 1. Women artists awarded in the São Paulo Biennials (1951-1963).



Graph 2. Number of women artists per artistic category.

As we can see in table 1, women were significantly recognized at the São Paulo Biennials from 1951 to 1961, both in the regular prize category – in which the artist was recognized for the works presented – and in the acquisition category – in which the works were acquired for the modern art museums in the country (mainly for those in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and later also for the museums in other Brazilian capitals). This indicates that, although exhibitions dedicated to women artists were rare, they had influence and visibility in the main art institutions of the country. To get a measure of it, of the 51 Brazilian artists awarded in the first eight editions of the São Paulo Biennials eighteen were women.<sup>15</sup> This number is quite significant when compared to the international prizes awarded: out of 108 foreigners recognized, only nine were women. (Table 1)

Another important asymmetry displayed by the catalogue is in the distribution of techniques. It is evident that the exhibition followed a modern hierarchy between painting, sculpture, printmaking, engraving and drawing, and less prestigious art forms, such as applied arts and photography, which were clearly under-represented. For instance, Emilie Chamie was the only photographer presented,<sup>16</sup> and the applied arts were represented by only two artists, Regina Gomide Graz with tapestries<sup>17</sup> and Rosemarie Babnigg with marionettes and puppets. In contrast, drawing was represented by thirteen artists, sculpture by six, printmaking by 10, and painting by 34. Considering the importance of the medium, printmaking was also relatively under-represented, even more since women printmakers were

<sup>15</sup> The women honored by the Biennials absent from the investigated exhibition were Mary Vieira (1927-2001), Maria Martins, Maria Tereza Nicolao (1928), Anna Letycia Quadros (1928-2018) and Zélia Salgado (1904-2009). Such absences could be partly connected to their place of residence, as the curatorial choices favored the artists that lived (permanently or temporarily) in São Paulo (47), followed by Rio de Janeiro (14) and other cities (5), and none of the absent women lived in the São Paulo capital.

<sup>16</sup> There were a lot of women photographers active in Brazil, such Hildegard Rosenthal (1913-1990) and Alice Brill (1920-2013).

Yara Schreiber Dines, "Hildegard Baum and Alice Brill development and awakening of sensitivity: between the forefront and shadows". *Labrys, études féministes/estudos feministas*, no. 9, January-July 2016, 1-32.

<sup>17</sup> Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simioni. "Regina Gomide Graz: Modernismo, arte têxtil e relações de gênero no Brasil". *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*, no. 45, September 2007, 87-106.



very well represented in the salons and exhibitions of the time.<sup>18</sup> (Graph 2)

The painting section was the largest one, which reflects the importance of the medium in the Brazilian artistic field. The exhibition sought to include painters from very diverse styles, starting with those associated with different abstract experimentations and connected to the informal trends;<sup>19</sup> those associated with expressionism be it lyrical or pulsional;<sup>20</sup> (Figs. 2-5) and those that involved concrete art and geometry.<sup>21</sup> The exhibition also featured figuration, with landscapes and human figures from prominent modernist artists such as Tarsila do Amaral, Anita Malfatti, Zina Aita (1900-1967) and Georgina de Albuquerque (1885-1962), as well as then lesser known painters, including Cidinha Pereira (1934), Lisette Emma Troula (dates unknown), and Marianne Overbeck (1903-1970). Finally, the exhibition presented some so-called “naïve” painters, who were purportedly representative of the “popular culture”, such as Edelweiss de Almeida Dias (1917-?), Tereza d’Amico (1914-1965), Rosina Becker do Valle (1914-2000), Marianne Peretti (1927), Elisa Martins da Silveira (1912-2001), Maria Antonieta Amaral de Souza Barros (1911-1979) and Yola Cintra Flosi (dates unknown).

The sculpture section included six artists, as mentioned, all of whom were part of the São Paulo art scene. Two of them were little known at the time and have been completely forgotten nowadays: Clélia Cotrim Alves (1921) and Helou Motta (1924). The other four – Tereza d’Amico Fourpone, Felícia Leirner, Liuba Wolf (1923-2005) and Pola Rezende (1906-1978) – were already acclaimed at the time

or were rising in their careers.<sup>22</sup> In terms of aesthetic choices and formal vocabularies, the sculptures represented various trends, ranging from geometric abstraction to figurative expressionism and crossing over to experiences at the margins between abstraction and figuration, and to works inspired by popular representations of religious themes.

A notable absence from the selection is Maria Martins, who was the only representative of surrealism in Brazilian sculpture. She had already been recognized twice at the São Paulo Biennials (in the 2nd and 3rd editions), she had participated in the Venice Biennale in 1954, and the MAM had some of her works in its collection. During that time, the sculptor was also one of the few women artist to address gender questions in her work, but the most of her production went unnoticed by Brazilian critics, a great majority of whom opposed this kind of work.<sup>23</sup> Even Mário Pedrosa, in 1957, wrote a very derogatory article about her work, as we can see in the following excerpts:

As an artist, however, she suffers from a capital flaw: excess of personality. It is from this flaw that, mainly, arises the major negative trait of her work as a sculptor: lack of monumentality. [...]

The work is, then, monumental, it lives by itself, in this terrible capacity that the true masterpieces have of isolating themselves, of turning their back at their own creators. The most well-done pieces created by Maria have never detached themselves from her.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> This notable absence draws attention precisely because of the strategic importance of printmaking in the context of the divulgation of Brazilian artistic modernity. The technique became the venue for this kind of promotion not only in regard to the formal aspects of the investigation (and experimental investment) of abstractions and compositional structures, but mainly in regard to themes and how to approach them. On the importance of engraving in the Brazilian arts field, see: Aracy A Amaral, *Arte para quê?: a preocupação social na arte brasileira, 1930-1970: subsídio para uma história social da arte no Brasil* (São Paulo, SP: Itaú Cultural: Studio Nobel, 2003) and Ricardo Ribenboim; Leon Kossovitch, Mayra Laudanna, Ricardo Resende, *Gravura - Arte Brasileira do Século XX* (São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Sheila Branningan and Maria Celia Amado (1921-1988).  
<sup>20</sup> Ismenia Coaracy (born 1918), Ernestina Karman (1915-2004), Clara Heteny (born 1919), Gisela Eichbaum (1920-1996), Alzira Pecorari (1916-?), Yolanda Mohalyi (1909-1978), Tomie Ohtake (1913-2015), Maria Polo (1937-1983), Ione Saldanha (1921-2001) and Niobe Xandó (1915-2010).

<sup>21</sup> Maria Helena Andrés Ribeiro (born 1922), Amelia Amorim Toledo (1926-2017), Lygia Clark, Maria Leontina, Judith Lauand (born 1922), Lisa Ficker (1897-1964) and Mona Gorovitz (born 1937).

<sup>22</sup> Pola Rezende participated in many collective exhibitions during the 1940s and 1950s, and in 1955 she had an individual showing at the MAM-SP. An individual exhibition of Felícia Leirner took place in the same museum soon after the *Contribuição das mulheres as artes plásticas no país*, in March and April 1961. Liuba Wolf had her first individual showing in 1959 at Galeria Ambiente, in São Paulo, the second one in 1962 at Galeria Folhas, also in São Paulo, and the third one in 1965 at the MAM in Rio de Janeiro. Out of these four sculptors, Tereza D’Amico was the only one that had not only participated in collective exhibitions in Brazil but also in exhibitions outside the country during the 1950s, such as the Comparaison Salon in 1955 at the City of Paris Museum of Modern Art (musée d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris) and the international ceramics exhibition held in Geneva, Switzerland, in the same year.

<sup>23</sup> Graça Ramos, *Maria Martins: escultora dos trópicos* (Rio de Janeiro: Arviva, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Mário Pedrosa, “Maria, a escultora (1957)”, Mário Pedrosa and Aracy Amaral, *Dos murais de Portinari aos espaços de Brasília* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981), 88-89.

<b>Mona Gorowitz</b> (São Paulo)		
49 - Fusão — vibração	1960	
50 - Fusão — vibração	1960	
51 - Fusão — vibração	1960	
52 - Fusão — vibração	1960	
53 - Fusão — vibração	1960	
<b>Clara Heteny</b> (São Paulo)		
54 - Sobrado azul	1959	
55 - Capela	1959	Col. Museu de Arte Modern
56 - Composição	1959	
<b>Ernestina Karman</b> (São Paulo)		
57 - Estéreo-Pintura	1960	
58 - Estéreo-Pintura	1960	
59 - Estéreo-Pintura	1960	
60 - Estéreo-Pintura	1960	
61 - Estéreo-Pintura	1960	
<b>Judith Lauand</b> (São Paulo)		
62 - Concreto 9	1955	
63 - Concreto	1956	
64 - Composição I	1959	
<b>Renée Lofévre</b> (São Paulo)		
65 - Bahia-Pelourinho*	1959	
66 - Ouro Preto	1959	
<b>Maria Leontina</b> (São Paulo)		
67 - Episódios II	1960	
68 - Episódios IV	1960	
69 - Episódios V	1960	
70 - Episódios VI	1960	
71 - Episódios VII	1960	

Figure 2. Photograph from the exhibition catalogue *Contribuição das mulheres as artes plásticas no país*, with highlight on the artwork by Maria Leontina, *Episódios II* [Episodes II]. *Episódios* was also exhibited and awarded at the 55th São Paulo's Biennial in 1959.



**Figure 3.** Maria Leontina, *Episódios II* [Episodes II], 1959, oil on canvas. The Museum of Fine Arts Houston. The Adolpho Leirner Collection of Brazilian Constructive Art, museum purchased funded by Caroline Wiess Law Foundation, 2005 1011 © Alexandre Dacosta.



**Figure 4.** Elisa Martins da Silveira, *Praça Paris* [Paris Square], 1953, oil on canvas. Museum of Contemporary Art from São Paulo University.

<b>Elisa Martins da Silveira</b> (Rio de Janeiro)	
111 - Praça Paris	1953 - Col. Museu de Arte Moderna de S Paulo
112 - Casamento	1954 - Col. Museu de Arte Moderna de S. Paulo
113 - Coroação	1959
<b>Amelia Amorim Toledo</b> (São Paulo)	
114 - Estudo	1959
115 - Estudo	1960
116 - Estudo	1969
117 - Estudo	1960
118 - Estudo	1960
<b>Lisette Emma Troula</b> (Rio de Janeiro)	
119 - Confissão	1960
120 - Floresta azul	1960
121 - A noite	1960
122 - O espaço	1960
123 - Caverna	1960
<b>Rosina Becker do Valle</b> (Rio de Janeiro)	
124 - Carnaval	1960
125 - Carnaval	1960
126 - Carnaval	1960

Figure 5. Photograph from the exhibition catalogue *Contribuição das mulheres as artes plásticas no país*, with highlight on the artwork by Elisa Martins da Silveira, *Praça Paris*, 1953.

The “excess of personality” in the work of Maria Martins deeply disturbed the critic. The surrealist works of Maria Martins, strongly focused on the expression of subjectivity and female pleasure, were opposed to the principles defended by concrete art, such as rationality and objectivity, of which Pedrosa was a prominent defender.

To summarize, although the exhibition aimed to be a full documentation of the female contribution to the history of Brazilian art, it also had few criteria. The choice weighed in favor of woman artists that had attained recognition in the previous decades, such as modernist women, and in favor of those that had become relevant at the time through their participation in the Biennials. These two elements – modernism and the Biennials – were connected

by a common institutional ground, as well as by a narrative that proposed a *continuum* between them. At the same time, this ended up conferring central importance to São Paulo, and therefore it allowed for a larger participation of women artists that had originated or worked in that city, which was problematic in such a large and diverse country as Brazil. There was also a clear preference for the more traditional art forms, such as painting, drawing and sculpture, to the disadvantage of the applied arts, photography and even printmaking, which reveals a sort of aesthetic conservatism. The curatorial choices lined up the women artists according to the art forms they were practicing and stylistic similarities, that is, according to eminently formal principles. The introductory texts in the catalogue did not outline any interpretation using

gender as a perspective, whether it favors an essentialist bias, where a “feminine style” could be sought in the works to somehow tie them to each other, and not even in a critical sense in which the pieces could be read as discourses (or testimonies) about the female condition, in a dimension not essentialist but from a historical and political one.

### Critical reception: silence and its meanings

Despite the substantial number of woman artists featured in the exhibition, and its showing in one of the main museums of the country, spearheaded by two influential cultural agents, the exhibition was seldom mentioned by the press. From the few notes, reviews and critiques, one article stands out: “O sexo dos anjos” [The sex of angels] by Lourival Gomes Machado, the first director of the São Paulo MAM, which was released when the exhibition was almost over (January 14, 1961).

With careful writing so as not to discredit the professional career of the women artists or the curatorial and museographic work of his former institution, the art critic focused his analysis on questioning the purpose of an exhibition about the *Contribution of Women to the Visual Arts*. By emphasizing questions that, to this day, animate discussions about the organization of female exhibitions, Lourival points out three issues underlying the concept: it was inspired by “extra-artistic” and “semi-commercial” criteria; it was discriminatory because it “simulated” the overcoming of discrimination by making use of an “annoying tolerance”; and it led to the assumption that women were a priori less capable art producers. The author adds that the curatorial choice of presenting acclaimed modernist artists along with others who had, in his view, an inferior production – with no artistic qualities or far from what could be called “academic,” which means a formal vocabulary used in traditional art schools –

caused the exhibition to reinforce prejudice, as it induced an explanation of weaknesses based on the artists’ gender. This leads him to conclude that:

Not even in the charming nature of women, nor in the mysterious essence of art, can I find a reason, frail as it may be, for us to go and verify what was their creative contribution. In the same way that, incidentally, Mario Pedrosa could not find it in the preface of the catalogue for this endeavor, that he inherited when he assumed the direction of the museum; if he laughingly mentions the possible resistance of ‘certain sophisticated circles’, soon after and with his characteristic frankness, he ends up determining that now “We no longer distinguish, among the great creators, those that belong to one or another sex. This effectively would have been the best reason not to initiate this exhibition, being so evident the uneasiness it caused to the institution that now presents it. For, as expected, it turned into an opportunity for a lot of people that never contributed to the arts to hang themselves in the company of true artists, just because they were female [...].”<sup>25</sup>

Although Lourival’s criticism is justified by a formalist perspective, this is the only article to be found that refutes the exhibition based in a deeper reflection, avoiding the a priori lowering of women artists. Other press members adopted a more ironic posture and used misogynistic vocabulary to approach the subject.

The critic Jayme Maurício,<sup>26</sup> commenting on the exhibition in his article for the newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, used terms such as “reasonably submissive” when referring to Maria de Lourdes Teixeira and “ladies” and “mademoiselles” to refer to the artists, adding to his article a clear example of the still unfavorable place women occupied in the Brazilian art system: “While the contribution of women to contemporary visual arts is truly remarkable, it seems to me that, strictly speaking, they are still very far from standing side by side with men, or having the same strength, as wished the presenters.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Lourival Gomes Machado, “O sexo dos Anjos”, *Correio da Manhã*, January 14, 1961.

<sup>26</sup> Jayme Maurício Rodrigues Siqueira studied the visual arts and worked as an art critic and journalist responsible for the art opinion sections at the *Correio da Manhã*,

a newspaper from Rio de Janeiro that belonged to the director of the Rio de Janeiro Museum of Modern Art, Niomar Muniz Sodré Bittencourt.

<sup>27</sup> Jayme Maurício, “Mulheres no Ibirapuera: 275 obras”, *Correio da manhã*, January 27, 1961.

This demeanor was echoed in later criticism regarding other initiatives that emphasized the female presence in the art system.

An emblematic example is the Brazilian representation in the Cordoba Biennial of 1964, for which Mario Pedrosa acted as a member of the Brazilian delegation, informally directed by Geraldo Ferraz.<sup>28</sup> He proposed that the exhibition to be composed of only women artists – twelve painters that could exhibit three paintings each, according to the regulation.<sup>29</sup> Contrary to previous editions, the one held in 1964 was received by the press with a big silence. One of the few articles we found on the event was called “Mulheres para Córdoba” [Women for Cordoba] and, after a few ironic and sexist jokes, the text belittles the Biennial by disagreeing with the way the jury was composed and concludes that, just like the Argentinian Biennial, women artist exhibitions should not be taken seriously:

At the Córdoba Biennial, each South American country will attend with 12 artists and 3 paintings each. The award jury will be composed of representatives of each participating country, under the chairmanship of the Italian Umbro Appollonio. As we can see, this is a promotional Biennial, with no logical criterion, not even in the jury that this time showed an almost harmonious answer, for to select Brazilian paintings in the basis of womanhood is also a very funny criterion and a somewhat promotional one. And they still say that Brazilian critics do not have spirit nor chivalry.<sup>30</sup>

Both articles from the newspaper *Correio da Manhã* emphasize the gender of the artists to belittle the exhibition, as expressed by the similarities in the titles – “Mulheres no Ibirapuera: 275 obras” [Women at the Ibirapuera: 275 works] and “Mulheres para Córdoba”. The discrimination that Lourival Gomes Machado believed the exhibition could inspire is clearly present in these articles: the artists are seen as women and not as capable

cultural producers, and prejudice turns into mocking tolerance.

It is worth noting that the Brazilian representation was also not well received by the organizers of the Bienal de Córdoba, who judged it “singular” (in no other country was there a predominance of women) and not representative of the quality of Brazilian production. The art historian Cristina Rocca affirms, “in strict relation to the general quality of the samples, those of Brazil and Paraguay were among the weakest.”<sup>31</sup> However, in the Brazilian delegation there were prominent names on the national scene, such as Maria Leontina, Yolanda Mohalyi, Sheila Branningan, Wega Nery, Tomie Othake (1913-2015) and Mira Schendel (1919-1988). The first three had been awarded prizes at the São Paulo Biennials, Tomie Othake had won the Great Gold Medal at XI São Paulo; Mira Schendel had participated in three biennials in São Paulo and in the 1960s sought to project abroad (besides the Cordoba Biennial, she exhibited works in London in 1966 and participated in the edition of the Venice Biennial of 1968). All of them represented tendencies linked to abstraction and were already well-known or emerging names in Brazil.

Although both the Brazilian delegation at the Biennial of Cordoba and the exhibition *Contribuição das mulheres às artes plásticas* included established and rising artists, the reaction to both events was, truthfully, silence. Systematic research on the press resulted in no more than three articles that mentioned the exhibition, apart from a standard note divulged by the São Paulo MAM itself. Our hypothesis is that this silence resulted primarily from deep-seated conditions in the Brazilian art field that generated a lack of aesthetic and political support to initiatives such as the one, that we would now identify as “feminist” or “gender-based analysis”.

<sup>28</sup> Cristina Rocca. *Las Bienales de Córdoba en los '60. Arte, Modernización y Guerra Fría* (Cordoba, Editorial Universitas, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> According to newspapers of that time, the chosen ones were Maria Leontina, Iolanda Mohaly, Sheila Branning, Tomie Ohtake, Mira Schendel, Marília Giannetti Torres (1925-2010), Ana Schultz (dates unknown), Grauben (also known as Maria Grauben

Bomilcar de Monte Lima, 1889-1972), Stol Campos (dates unknown) and Teresa d'Amico.

<sup>30</sup> “Mulheres para Córdoba,” *Correio da manhã*, August 6, 1964.

<sup>31</sup> Rocca, *Las Bienales de Córdoba en los '60*, 187.

In Brazil, the beginning of the 1960s was marked by the advance of formalism as the dominant interpretative guide, in contrast with the social approaches to art that distinguished Brazilian criticism during the 1930s and 1940s, and that only got a second wind in the second half of the 1960s.<sup>32</sup> While the art field was consolidating itself institutionally in the country and becoming independent through the development of internal criteria for the analysis and evaluation of artworks,<sup>33</sup> it was still far from having a theoretical ground coming from feminist interpretations. As some authors have already demonstrated, effectively, the kind of feminism that emerged in California and started to have echoes in the production and analysis of art in the mid-1960s, and that rapidly impacted countries like Mexico,<sup>34</sup> followed a different course in Brazil, a later one, especially in the art field.<sup>35</sup> For instance, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, originally published in 1949, was only translated in Brazil in the 1960s. And the translation did not result in a universal reading,<sup>36</sup> even after the two-and-a-half-month trip of Beauvoir and Sartre to Brazil in August of 1960, when the intellectual couple was received by part of the Brazilian intelligentsia and rejected by newspapers and politicians.<sup>37</sup> This provides a context to this (non)reception.

In Brazil there had been an active feminist movement since the end of the 19th century, concerned with female education and voting rights, and it had been fairly well "tolerated" socially. It afforded recognition to important figures such as Bertha Lutz.<sup>38</sup> The same could not be said for the women activists that were tied to communism, such as Pagu,<sup>39</sup> Alice Tibiriçá,<sup>40</sup> Elisa Branco Batista,<sup>41</sup> and Maria Amélia de Almeida Teles,<sup>42</sup> who were all persecuted and arrested at some point. With the military dictatorship instituted in 1964, these feminist groups had their destinies profoundly changed, or even blocked, especially after the proclamation of the Institutional Act Number Five (Ato Institucional Número 5 - AI-5) in 1968. The few active militants left were pushed to the *guerrillas*, or to exile. Censorship repressed and restricted the circulation of literary works that were considered potentially dangerous, and this included feminist writings that were seen as a threat to "the family, the country and the nation". In this restrictive context full of roadblocks, it was hard to imagine a fertile ground for discussions about female emancipation, whether political or identity related, considering that both threatened the symbology of an authoritarian State that was based on a conservative view of the family.

<sup>32</sup> For more information on the 1960s in Brazil, see: Daisy Valle Machado Peccinini, *Figurações Brasil anos 60: neofigurações fantásticas e neo-surrealismo, novo realismo e nova objetividade* (São Paulo: Itaú Cultural, EDUSP, 1999); Celso Favaretto, *Tropicália Alegria Alegria*, (Cotia SP: Atêlie Editorial, 2000); Lígia Canongia, *O legado dos anos 60 e 70* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Jorge Zahar, 2005). Aracy A Amaral, *Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro na arte (1950-1962)* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna; São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado, FUNARTE, São Paulo, 1977).

<sup>33</sup> In the mid-20th century in Brazil there was the establishment of a somewhat "independent" process that was carefully studied by Pierre Bourdieu in: Pierre Bourdieu, *As regras da arte. Gênese e estrutura do campo literário na França* [The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field] (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> On the reception of feminism in Mexico, see: Andrea Giunta, "Feminist Disruptions in Mexican Art, 1975-1987," *Arteloge*, no. 5, 2013. On Argentina, see: María Laura Rosa, *Legados de libertad. El arte feminista en la efervescencia democrática* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, Serie Artes y Medios, 2014).

<sup>35</sup> Roberta Barros, *Elogio ao toque ou como falar de arte feminista à brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Relacianarte, 2016); Luana Saturnino Tvardovskas, "Tramas feministas na arte contemporânea brasileira e argentina: Rosana Paulino e Claudia Contreras," *Arteloge*, no. 5, 2013; Maria Laura Rosa, "Un triángulo possible. Redes de relaciones entre el arte feminista argentino, brasileño y mexicano durante los años 70 y 80," in: *Compartir el mundo. La experiencia de las mujeres y el arte* (Santiago: Metales Pesados, 2017).

<sup>36</sup> On this subject, see: Talita Trizoli, "Crítica de arte e feminismo no Brasil nos anos 60 e 70", *V Seminário Nacional de Pesquisa em Arte e Cultura Visual, Geopolítica* (Goiania: Anais do V Seminário Nacional de Pesquisa em Arte e Cultura Visual, 2012), when it is possible to verify the rarefied interest on feminism bibliography from the art class, since that was not a interesting topic at the time.

<sup>37</sup> The travel itinerary, which includes Pernambuco, Bahia, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Amazonas states, was organized by the Brazilian writer Jorge Amado, a close friend of the couple. Besides the translations and a respectful reception at the National Philosophy Faculty (Faculdade Nacional de Filosofia) in Rio de Janeiro, and in the

Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters (Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras, today a department on the São Paulo State University, UNESP), the ideas and political positions of de Beauvoir and Sartre were not well received by the local journalists, and, by our case study, the art system. Basically, they didn't raise any particular interest outside of academic circles. Daniela Lima, "A mulher é um devir histórico: rastros de Beauvoir no Brasil". <https://blogdaboitempo.com.br/2015/09/08/a-mulher-e-um-devir-historico-rastros-de-beauvoir-no-brasil/> and Hazel Rowley, "Beauvoir, Brazil and 'Christina T'", *BookForum*, April-May 2007.

<http://hazelrowley.com/wordpress1/article-4/>; Giulia Lamoní, "Unfolding the present: some notes on Brazilian 'pop'", in: *The World Goes Pop* (London: Tate Publishing, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> With degrees in Biology and Law, Bertha Lutz was a scientist, professor and feminist activist that participated in movements for the female vote in Brazil, which was obtained in 1932, and she also acted in the field of female education and workers fights that focused on female specificities.

<sup>39</sup> Pseudonym of Patrícia Rehder Galvão, who was a writer, journalist, artist and political activist involved with the socialist and communist groups in the country – and for this reason she was repeatedly arrested during her life. She was an active participant in the modern art movement, and during this period she was married to the poet Oswald de Andrade. She worked in theatre, illustration and translation.

<sup>40</sup> Feminist and political activist involved in the fight for the afflicted with leprosy, tuberculosis and mental diseases. She founded the Santa Augusta Institute for the Sciences and Arts (Instituto de Ciências e Artes Santa Augusta) in 1927 to offer women courses in agriculture, and the Women's Federation of Brazil (Federação de Mulheres do Brasil) in 1949 – for this reason she was arrested in that same year, accused of subversive activities and involvement with the Communist Party.

<sup>41</sup> Feminist and communist activist, she was arrested in 1950 for parading with a sash that was critical of the Korean War.

<sup>42</sup> Militant for the Communist Party of Brazil (Partido Comunista do Brasil - PCdoB) during the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985), when she was arrested and tortured along with her husband and children.

In this restrained context there were few spaces in which it was possible to critically discuss “feminine issues”. One of the few channels for this appeared in a women’s magazine, titled *Claudia*,<sup>43</sup> in which the writer Carmen da Silva<sup>44</sup> answered readers’ letters and advised them on how to attain small emancipations in subjects that were controversial at the time, such as divorce and conflicts in the care for husbands and children. But apart from da Silva’s articles, all publications directed to women presented more traditional models of femininity, mainly because feminism in the country was closely tied to socialist and anarchist activism, and it was thus tightly monitored and restricted by government institutions.<sup>45</sup> That is to say, the scant feminist ideas that circulated were highly dissipated because of their radicalism.

Because of the literature available to Brazilian women artists at that time, with rare exceptions – such as that of Lygia Clark, who moved to France and was able to get in touch with feminism and psychoanalytical discussions – one can assume that Brazilian women artists had very little contact with feminist theories during the 1960s and 1970s. The political situation was profoundly restrictive, while the artistic scene was highly purist.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, many of the women artists came from an urban and stable middle class and they had a series of institutions able to receive them, as well as a growing artistic market that was, incidentally, promoted by that same authoritarian State.

Thus, the refusal of the relation between women artists and feminism in the Brazilian context does not come as a surprise. Nonetheless, women artists managed to be exhibited and recognized in privileged institutional spaces such as the São Paulo Biennials and the Modern Art Museums in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, so they did not feel the need to organize spaces dedicated to women, like those that took place in the North-American and

European contexts. For these women, part of the argument used to refute the feminist issues was the appreciation of artistic identity in a formalist sense, that is, isolated from a social context. In other words, both male and female artists shared the common belief that art was a solitary activity, and that it was founded in the innate talent expressed by the term “genius”. At the same time, the collective categories based on gender, style or nationality were usually interpreted as limitations on the space for artistic activity. To assume a woman-artist identity would be, for these generations, to put one’s self in a ghetto, a place separated from the official art system. This idea is confirmed by Lourival Gomes Machado in his article, as these initiatives ended up depreciating and obscuring women artists in front of the critics. Understanding the reasons why *The contribution of women to visual arts in Brazil* was an isolated action during the 1960s and 1970s allows a reflection on the operating gender dynamics of the time and the late impact feminism had in the Brazilian art field.

In later decades, the exhibition and texts by Mário Pedrosa and Maria de Lourdes Teixeira reproduced in their catalogue were used by critics and scholars to support the argument that in Brazil women artists had enjoyed recognition since the 1960s. In doing so, the literature does not address the complex gender asymmetries that permeate the Brazilian artistic system of the period. As we have tried to show throughout this article, the exhibition, rather than denoting female visibility, seems to have been a symptom of the difficulties and also of the rejection to organize collective women’s shows. If some of the artists won recognition individually, they collectively had to resign themselves to silence, anecdotes or even the female columns of newspapers.

Translated to English by Carolina Yuubi Yababse.

<sup>43</sup> Women’s magazine published for the first time in 1961 and still in circulation, it was the only printed publication of large circulation during the 1960s that edited da Silva’s section and its “bold” content, in addition to occasional articles questioning the moral codes in vogue at the time.

<sup>44</sup> Psychoanalyst and journalist who studied in Argentina, she was an important figure for the dissemination of feminism in Brazil. See also: Joana Vieira Borges, “A grande dama do feminismo no Brasil”, *Revista Estudos Feministas*, Florianópolis, Vol. 14, no. 2, September 2006, 553-555.

<sup>45</sup> For a history of the feminist movement in Brazil and its relation to leftist parties, see: Marcela Cristina de Oliveira Morente, *Invadindo o mundo público. Movimentos de mulheres (1945-1964)* (São Paulo: Humanitas: FAPESP, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> The idea of purification comes from Clement Greenberg and his defense of a “pure” interpretation of artwork that was solely based in elements such as color and lines. His article “Modernist painting” that was published in 1960 had large repercussions in Brazil during that decade.



**Biographies:**

Marina Mazze Cerchiaro, PhD student in Aesthetics and Art History at the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo with a FAPESP scholarship. Her thesis focuses on the process of building the reputation of the Brazilian female sculptors from the 1940s to the 1960s who won the firsts Biennials of São Paulo (1951-1965).

Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simioni, Professor at the Institute of Brazilian Studies of the University of São Paulo. She's the author of several researches and publications in the area of sociology of art, in particular on the relations between art and gender in Brazil.

Talita Trizoli, PhD in Education at the University of São Paulo with a FAPESP scholarship. Her research addressed the presence of feminist issues in the works of Brazilian female artists during the 1960-1970s, and the problems of critical reception.