

BRAZILIAN FEMALE ARTISTS AND THE MARKET

A Very Unique Encounter

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ABSTRACT

Various historical and sociological studies focusing on the relationship between gender and art show that women's participation in the Western art market, although it has increased, continues to represent a minority. However, the Brazilian case proves to be something of an exception, in that women artists occupy positions of prestige in local and international rankings. This article examines the specificities of the Brazilian art system, which have enabled certain female artists to gain national and international recognition, an extraordinary feat when contrasted with other international contexts.

KEYWORDS: *women artists; art market; validation; art system; Brazil.*

Artistas brasileiras e o mercado: Um encontro peculiar

RESUMO

Diversos estudos em história e sociologia dedicados à relação entre gênero e arte apontam que a participação feminina no mercado artístico ocidental, muito embora seja historicamente crescente, continua a ser minoritária. No entanto, o caso brasileiro configura-se como exceção, na medida em que as mulheres artistas ocupam lugares de prestígio nos rankings locais e internacionais. O artigo aborda as especificidades do sistema artístico brasileiro, as quais permitiram a certas artistas mulheres a possibilidade de obterem reconhecimento interno e externo, fato extraordinário quando contrastado com outras realidades internacionais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *artistas mulheres; mercado de arte; legitimação; sistema da arte; Brasil.*

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This article came about as a consequence of two works that made uncomfortable reading. It stemmed from curiosity awakened by, on the one hand, Alain Quemin's book *Les Stars de l'art contemporain*, published in 2013, and on the other, a brief survey carried out for the project "Atelier como Espaço de Conversa" ("Studio as Venue for Conversation"), winner of the Women in Visual Arts Prize 2013, awarded by Funarte (Brazil's National Arts Foundation) — this institution's first public competition dedicated to exploring issues of gender in the context of Brazilian artistic production. In the course of his rigorous research,

Quemin sought to understand how the contemporary art world constructs notoriety, by means of a systematic study of the classification indices applied. The author thus illustrates how this system, although seeking to present itself as global and increasingly democratic, ultimately reiterates the central role that social markers such as origin (nationality), generation and gender play in attributing recognition to artists. Quemin shows how most of the highest-ranking artists are either from countries like the USA, Germany, England and — more recently — China, or have studios in the major cities of those countries. This concentration indicates a shift in the relationship between the centre and the periphery, altered by the specific rules of the cultural field. Although such assertions are fundamental, our concerns did not exactly stem from them, but rather from the analyses presented in chapter 6, which explored the influence that gender has on the processes of consecration. The listings analysed by Quemin, such as Artprice and *Kunstkompass*, amongst others, left no room for doubt: in general women find themselves in lower positions in the rankings and are much less represented than men in the international art market.

QUANTIFYING THE RISE AND PRESENCE OF FEMALE ARTISTS IN THE MARKET

The statistics collected by Quemin demonstrate that there has been a historical increase in female participation, which amounted to just seven women in the hundred highest ranking in the 1970s and reached its lowest level in the early 1980s (3.5 female artists in the top one hundred). The proportion of 20% reached during the 2000s has remained relatively stable, despite some fluctuations that were explicable due to the economic context, such as in 2009, when the proportion of women peaked at over 30% of those listed.

In Quemin's opinion, the figures for 2009 were due to the impact generated by the emblematic exhibition "Elles", held at the Centre Pompidou, for which more than five hundred works by two hundred female artists, belonging to the collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, were taken out of storage and exhibited to the public. This exhibition, which was accompanied by extensive debates in intellectual and artistic circles about the unequal place occupied by women in art historiography, represented a landmark in reflections on art and gender. However, this one-off situation did not have a long-term effect as regards the economic valorisation of works produced by female artists. After all, just the following year women returned to representing just 20% of artists whose works achieved the highest prices in the global market.

TABLE I

Evolution of the participation of female artists in the international art market according to the annual *Kunstkompass* ranking

Year	No. of women in the ranking (out of 100)	Highest position achieved by a woman in the ranking	No. of female artists among the top 25
1970	7	35 th Bridget Riley	-
1973	6	45 th Bridget Riley	-
1976	6.5 (1 coproduces works with her husband)	47 th Bridget Riley	-
1981	5.5	43 rd Hanne Darboven	-
1986	3.5	45 th Hanne Darboven	-
1988	8	48 th Jenny Holzer	-
1990	10	42 nd Jenny Holzer	-
1993	12.5	10 th Jenny Holzer	3: Rosemarie Trockel (17); Cindy Sherman (22)
1995	16	9 th Rosemarie Trockel	4: Cindy Sherman (11); Jenny Holzer (13); Jeanne-Claude and Christo (19)
1997	18 (3 produce works in partnerships)	4 th Cindy Sherman	3: Rosemarie Trockel (7); Jenny Holzer (19)
2000	20	4 th Rosemarie Trockel	4: Pipilotti Rist (5); Cindy Sherman (6); Louise Bourgeois (8)
2003	21	4 th Rosemarie Trockel	4: Louise Bourgeois (5); Cindy Sherman (6); Pipilotti Rist (11)
2007	23	4 th Rosemarie Trockel	4: Louise Bourgeois (5); Cindy Sherman (6); Pipilotti Rist (19)
2009	30.5	13 th Louise Bourgeois	3: Kara Walker (18); Isa Genzken (19)
2010	23.5	5 th Louise Bourgeois	4: Cindy Sherman (6); Rosemarie Trockel (8); Pipilotti Rist (19)
2011	22.5	4 th Cindy Sherman	4: Rosemarie Trockel (6); Pipilotti Rist (17); Jeanne-Claude and Christo (20)
2012	22.5	4 th Rosemarie Trockel	4: Cindy Sherman (6); Pipilotti Rist (17); Jeanne-Claude and Christo (20)

Source: Quemin, 2013.

However, it is important to consider Quemin's explanation for this shift as merely a hypothesis: we cannot categorically state that the exhibition "Elles" was the determining factor in the growth of female participation in the market. It is possible that the financial crisis that befell the USA and Europe that same year also affected the percentage in some way, reducing sales in general in the art market, particularly of the most expensive works that fetch record prices at each auction (and

which as a general rule are produced by male artists), and thus making way for the sale of less commercially valued works (as is the case of a large number of works by female artists).

Consequently, despite the evolution of the presence of female artists in the international art market, they do not represent more than a quarter of the overall number of artists. Furthermore, it should be noted that most female artists are to be found in the lower half of the ranking, in other words, below 50th position, and in reality few occupy the higher positions. These statistics led Quemin to conclude as follows:

[...] malgré la croyance très répandue dans le monde de l'art selon laquelle un artiste réussit fondamentalement en raison de son talent, voire de son génie, sans que s'exercent sur lui de déterminismes de nature sociale — [...] l'accès à la notoriété apparaît toutefois très genré.¹

Virtually at the same time as his book was published — late 2013 — information began to circulate in the Brazilian media about the value of Brazilian artists in the international market. In these rankings particularly aimed at a domestic readership, the names of female artists were constantly in a prominent position, especially those of Adriana Varejão and Beatriz Milhazes. Although the sources used in such articles are not always cited, the names of the artists and their respective positions coincide with those made available by Artprice² based on the results of sales in international auctions. Taking into consideration this criterion alone, the five most highly valued Brazilian artists, between July 2013 and June 2014 were: Vik Muniz, Beatriz Milhazes, Adriana Varejão, OSGEMEOS and Cildo Meireles.

[1] “[...] in spite of the generalised belief in the art world that an artist is recognised because of his/her talent or genius, without any determinisms of a social nature having any impact — [...] access to notoriety seems however to be highly gendered” (Quemin, 2013, pp. 355-356, authors’ translation).

[2] Artprice is an on-line platform (www.artprice.com) that collates information about the global art market. With its large database on the evolution of the market, the price of works, biographies of artists, reliable statistics relating to the market, auctions and records, and so on, it also functions as an intermediation tool for the purchase and sale of works. Each year it makes available a report that analyses market movements in the previous year and identifies the main trends in the sector.

TABLE 2
Contemporary Brazilian artists among the top 500 artists listed by Artprice 2013-2014

Rank 2014	Artist	Volume of business at auction	Number of lots sold	Maximum hammer price
65	Vik Muniz (1961)	€ 3,449,263	122	€ 125,170
94	Beatriz Milhazes (1960)	€ 2,323,406	10	€ 1,373,240
166	Adriana Varejão (1964)	€ 1,085,694	3	€ 524,664
280	Osgemeos (1974)	€ 521,565	10	€ 330,820
305	Cildo Meireles (1948)	€ 467,883	17	€ 164,076

Source: Artprice, 2014.

If we consider *origin* as an analytical category over and above *nationality* and we think about *place of residence and work* as a fundamental factor in the establishment of professional networks and of inclusion in the international art scene, this list of Brazilian artists would immediately alter. That is because Vik Muniz has been based in New York since the late 1980s and undoubtedly his career has been made possible by, or at least benefitted from, him being professionally active in the city considered the epicentre of the art market since the second half of the 20th century.

Therefore, if we understand *Brazilian artists* as those that were not only born in Brazil but also work there, are represented by Brazilian galleries, and began their professional lives in their home country, the list would change slightly and the two leading Brazilian artists with an international profile would be two women. This observation, derived from the small sample that constitutes this select Brazilian delegation with an international profile, seems to contrast with the wider analyses conducted by Quemin, and leads to a series of other questions regarding the specificities of the Brazilian context.

Is gender an issue in Brazil, after all? Is it a way of classifying, creating a hierarchy, like it is in the contemporary international art system? What are the historical reasons for this state of affairs? What may have led the Brazilian system to have such characteristics?

To attempt to answer these questions, we will draw on the research carried out by Ana Letícia Fialho and Maria Lucia Bueno, pioneers in the study of the Brazilian art market.³ Whereas Fialho focuses her research on the evolution of the domestic art market and on the processes of internationalisation of Brazilian art, Bueno concentrates on the training, working conditions and professionalization of Brazilian artists between 1960 and the present day. Despite neither of them examining gender issues, the data that they collected and systematised has been fundamental for the analyses presented in this article.

The data collated and kindly shared by Ana Letícia Fialho shows that between 2008 and 2011, of the eleven works that achieved the highest prices in auctions at Christie's, Sotheby's and Phillips de Pury, five were by women, and at the top of the list is a work by one of those five, Adriana Varejão. In an updated version of this table, Fialho includes the figures for 2011 to 2014. In that context, of the twelve artists most highly valued in international auctions, seven are women, and once again Adriana Varejão enjoys top position in the ranking.

It is important to remember that the period of time under consideration here is much less extensive than that analysed by Alain Quemin. This is because there is no systematised historical data

[3] Fialho, 2014a; Fialho, 2012; Bueno, 2012.

TABLE 3

Maximum price per work achieved by Brazilian artists in international auctions (1998-2011)⁴

	Artist	Sale price (US\$)	Place	Type of auction	Date
1	Adriana Varejão	1,527,450	Christie's, London	Contemporary Art Sales	2/16/2011
2	Sergio Camargo	1,350,000	Sotheby's, New York	Latin American Sales	11/8/2009
3	Beatriz Milhazes	957,000	Phillips de Pury, London	Contemporary Art Sales	6/27/2011
4	Lygia Clark	469,700	Phillips de Pury, London	BRIC Sales	4/23/2010
5	Cildo Meireles	430,000	Sotheby's, New York	Latin American Sales	5/25/2011
6	Hélio Oiticica	300,000	Christie's, New York	Latin American Sales	11/17/2010
7	Mira Schendel	240,000	Christie's, New York	Latin American Sales	2005
8	Vik Muniz	220,000	Sotheby's, New York	Contemporary Art Sales	11/12/2009
9	Saint Clair Cemin	80,000	Christie's, New York	Latin American Sales	2004
10	Lygia Pape	70,000	Christie's, New York	Latin American Sales	5/28/2009
11	Waltercio Caldas	55,000	Christie's, New York	Latin American Sales	6/2/2000

Source: Fialho, 2014b.⁵

TABLE 4

Maximum price per work achieved by Brazilian artists in international auctions (2011-2014)

Artist	Value of sale (US\$) ⁶	Final price (US\$)	Place	Date
Lygia Clark	1,850,000	2,225,000	Phillips, New York	5/23/2013
Sergio Camargo	1,800,000	2,165,000	Sotheby's, New York	11/20/2013
Beatriz Milhazes	1,800,000	2,098,500	Sotheby's, New York	11/4/2012
Adriana Varejão	1,527,980	1,777,684	Christie's, London	2/16/2011
Tarsila do Amaral	—	1,300,000	Christie's, New York	11/20/1995
Mira Schendel	700,000	845,000	Sotheby's, New York	5/28/2014

Source: Fialho, 2014b.

[4] Table created from information taken from the Artprice database, available at www.artprice.com (last accessed on 10 Jul. 2011). Prices not including auctioneer's commission and tax.

[5] The data used was kindly made available by the researcher Ana Leticia Fialho, to whom we are very grateful.

[6] Table produced on the basis of information from the Artprice database, available at www.artprice.com (last accessed on 18 Aug. 2014). Sale price (hammer price) and price including auctioneer's commission and tax.

with regard to the art market in Brazil. This lack of information prevents us from tracing the evolution of the presence of female artists in the international market in order to see when these artists began to achieve notable success, and whether the latter is a recent phenomenon or was already evident in the 1980s and 1990s. Whatever the case, it should be underlined that an examination of Table 3 immediately reveals two distinct groups: the first is formed by Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape and Mira Schendel, artists that began producing works in the 1950s-1960s and who have recently obtained international recognition, gaining visibility thanks to exhibitions in leading venues, such as MoMA in New York, and the Tate in London; the second is composed of Adriana Varejão and Beatriz Milhazes, artists belonging to the so-called '80s Generation', who have witnessed major changes in the art system and from early on have managed their careers with a view to gaining international validation and access to a globalised market.

GENDER AND VALIDATION: A COMPLEX ISSUE

Despite the fact that information relating to the performance of female artists in the market is fundamental to enable us to understand their representativeness and participation in the general context, it cannot be taken as straightforward evidence of *symbolic consecration*.

In an attempt to address the complexity of the issue, it would be interesting to add other indicators of recognition in the artistic world, such as prizes awarded, number of solo exhibitions, numbers of catalogues/monographs or reviews received, and the presence of works in private or public collections of recognised legitimacy. At the present moment it would be impractical to work with all these variables, but we would like to use at least one to inform our reflections, namely *the presence of female artists in prestigious Brazilian collections*. In this way it is possible to explore whether, within the Brazilian artistic field, women enjoy as much recognition as they do in the contemporary international market.

Table 5 arose from research carried out since 2012 into the collecting of work by female modernist artists in Brazil. It illustrates that the presence of women in museum collections has tended to increase over time, in accordance with the generation and the historical period of the artists and the works. It is also apparent that this female presence is less evident in academic collections, such as that of the senator Freitas Valle (less than 7%), and is tending to increase gradually as such collections begin to include contemporary works in particular. This statistic not only reinforces the growing valorisation of female artists in the market, but also tallies with the results of the research

TABLE 5
Female artists in Brazilian collections⁷

Collection	Period of coverage	Public or private	Overall number of artists represented	Number of female artists in the collection	Relative number
Freitas Valle	19th century and early 20th century (Academicism)	Private (part of Pesp)	113 (circa)	7	6.19 %
Mário de Andrade	1910-1945 (Modernism)	Public (incorporated into the USP in 1968)	135	22	16.29 %
Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (Pesp)	19th century to Contemporary (Academicism, Modernism and Contemporary)	Public	1,588	321 (circa)	20.21%
Museu de Arte Contemporânea (MAC/USP) ⁸	1920-2014 (Modernism and Contemporary)	Public	655 (circa)*	184	28.09%
Instituto Inhotim	Contemporary	Private	99	22	22.22%

Source: Simioni, 2014b.⁹

conducted by Maria Lucia Bueno¹⁰ regarding the growth in female participation in arts training courses in recent decades.

Around 17% of Mário de Andrade's collection, particularly focused on modernist works, which has belonged to the Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros (Institute of Brazilian Studies) at the Universidade de São Paulo (IEB/USP) since 1968, are works by female artists, and it is important to bear in mind that this critic played an important role in consecrating the work of Tarsila do Amaral and Anita Malfatti. Of all the collections existing in the 1920s and 1930s, Andrade's was the one with the largest presence of female artists.

The collection of the Museu de Arte Contemporânea (Museum of Contemporary Art) of the Universidade de São Paulo (MAC/USP) has the greatest number of women artists, totalling almost 30%. Here it should be noted that, although the museum houses paradigmatic works by modernist artists, numerically the female contingent that contributes most to this figure are contemporary artists active since the 1960s.

The collection of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (Pesp) has the greatest chronological coverage, and includes everything from academic art to contemporary art. A preliminary analysis of the names in

[7] Data obtained by Ana Paula C. Simioni by means of listings sent by the Museu de Arte Contemporânea and by the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, research in the Mário de Andrade-IEB/USP collection and via the website of the Inhotim.

[8] In the case of the MAC, the conceptual art works in the collection were not included in the calculations, since there would be cases of duplication. Also calculated as a single work were cases where female artists appear sometimes as the creators of collective works, sometimes of individual works.

[9] The research was carried out between 2011 and 2014 and was supported by the Research Fund in the Humanities and Social Sciences offered by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), as well as the Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Culture and Outreach at the Universidade de São Paulo USP.

[10] Bueno, 2012.

the database indicates that the largest contingent of female artists collected relates to those active from the 1950s onwards, followed by the modernists (active between 1910 and 1960) and then by the academic artists (active between 1870 and 1930). In other words, this percentage of 20% tends to be unequally representative, depending on the school and the generation to which an artist belongs.

The collection of the Inhotim Institute, although privately owned, has a notable influence on the contemporary Brazilian art scene. Despite not differing from the others as regards the presence of women in its collection (22%), it plays an obvious role in the consecration of artists who today enjoy economic value and prestige, such as Adriana Varejão.

The research thus appears to indicate that the female presence increases if there is a prevalence of work belonging to more recent artistic generations and schools, in other words, it tends to be very small in collections of academic art, slightly larger in modernist collections, and most evident in collections focusing on contemporary art. This may be indicative of an evolutionary process whereby female artists have gained greater acceptance and recognition in the field over the course of the 20th century.

Although numerically speaking Brazilian women artists are less represented in the collections than men, failing to reach the same levels, in qualitative terms (such as the visibility of their works in exhibition venues) these statistics require re-thinking. To give an example, we should note the importance of the works *Anegra* (*The Black Woman*), by Tarsila do Amaral at the MAC/USP and the pavilion by Adriana Varejão at Inhotim, both considered to be the high points of the collections in question. It would thus be interesting to research not only the number of artists collected, but also the place (both concrete and symbolic) occupied by these works in the museums' exhibition spaces.¹¹

If quantitatively the presence of female artists still proves to be less than that of their male counterparts in museum collections, in qualitative terms the distance between them appears to be of different proportions. If we accept, on the one hand, the strong presence of some women artists in the international market, as illustrated above, on the other hand we should bear in mind the perception of those concerned that, in Brazil, gender may not be a significant variable for the construction of an artist's reputation. This seems to stem, among other factors, from the fact that the art system in Brazil has developed, since its inception, within a context of great gender equality (or less gender inequality?) and that women have played a fundamental role both in artistic production and the promotion of institutions since the birth of Modernism.

At first sight this observation seems to contradict a large part of the literature on gender that we conventionally work with, but curiously

[11] Ana Letícia Fialho has taken this into consideration with regard to Latin American art in international museums. See Fialho, 2006.

it is confirmed by Brazilian female artists themselves, as can be seen in excerpts from interviews given by Tomie Ohtake¹² about being a female artist (and a foreign one, to a lesser extent):

P: How did your career as a visual artist begin? Did you encounter many difficulties in establishing yourself as an artist, being a woman?

R: Brazil is in a privileged position with regard to women, the best artists: Tarsila [do Amaral], Anita Malfatti, Maria Martins, Maria Leontina, Fayga Ostrower, Lygia Clark and other greats, so in this country it is much easier for a woman to survive in the art scene than in other spheres.¹³

You could argue that here we are dealing with a female artist who has a solid standing within the Brazilian market, the one who has in fact created the most public works in recent decades, and that therefore her presence is “exceptional”, and cannot be seen as the general rule. However, Tomie’s statement is not far removed from the perceptions of other contemporary female artists; Vera Chaves Barcellos, from the Southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, for example, voices a similar assessment:

P: Reading about gender and feminism, you note a constant criticism of the absence of women in art history, but, also, in large exhibitions and institutions of international renown, although there have been some very recent improvements in this respect. How do you see the evolution of this state of affairs, given that you have followed this scenario for a few decades now?

R: I don’t think that Brazilian art suffers from this malady, because since the beginnings of Modernism in Brazil there have been great female artists, such as Anita Malfatti or Tarsila do Amaral, just as there have been leading women artists and painters in subsequent decades and in the present day. But, if you look at art in the United States, the major names are almost always men. There are a few women, but they are kind of hemmed in by a sea of men. I think there is more machismo there.¹⁴

We are thus presented with a scenario that challenges the international bibliography. From the perspective of the most concrete data about the market and institutional presence, the category of gender does not appear to constitute, in the perception of those actually involved in the system, a significant variable. From the symbolic perspective — in a field in which the symbolic is absolutely central — gender is not seen as an obstacle to professional success. If we consider that in other countries these mechanisms of inclusion and validation have functioned in a very different way, how can we explain the Brazilian phenomenon?

Due to the lack of relevant data and as it is still being an emerging research area in Brazil, we believe that it is appropriate here, rather

[12] The interview is part of a book of clippings that was kindly loaned to me by the Tomie Ohtake Institute when I was writing a book about the artists, and was published by the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper in 2013.

[13] Interview given by Tomie Ohtake to Beth Andalaft, 2008. See Andalaft, 2008.

[14] Interview given by Vera Chaves Barcellos to Isabel Waquil, 2014. See Maus, 2014.

than to seek conclusive explanations, to pose questions, formulate hypotheses and tentatively put forward some partial explanations that aim to open up rather than bring to a conclusion lines of research.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Gender and the Art Scene in Brazil: Historical Interconnections

It is interesting to observe how the reference to the historical role played by female artists, like the Modernists and the first Abstract artists, is constantly used by those in the field to explain a supposed equivalence in terms of gender relations in the Brazilian art scene. One of the hypotheses that we would like to put forward here to explain this perception concerns a correlation between the historical genesis of the contemporary art scene in Brazil, in terms of a structure that involves the consolidation of the art market and of institutions, both museums (that emerged in the 1950s) and art schools (particularly art courses at university level), which were established from the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, and the construction of a hegemonic narrative about the history of Brazilian art that tends to point to two women, Anita Malfatti and Tarsila do Amaral, as the protagonists of modern art in Brazil.

The 1960s and 1970s were the backdrop to the emergence and consolidation of an initial art market in Brazil, benefitting from the indirect financial backing of the then authoritarian state's so-called "economic miracle". It was then that an interesting phenomenon occurred, when a number of art dealers popped up on the national scene, like Jean Boghici, Giuseppe Baccaro and P. M. Bardi, the latter also director of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (Masp), who were responsible for both the economic and symbolic valorisation of works by Brazilian artists, notably the Modernists.

Running in parallel to this process, the first monographs on such artists began to surface, contributing to a more widespread knowledge of their work and a resultant increase in its value. These included *Portinari, pintor social* [*Portinari, Social Painter*] a book based on Annateresa Fabris's Masters dissertation, published in 1975; *Tarsila, sua obra e seu tempo* [*Tarsila, her Work and her Time*], a book based on Aracy Amaral PhD thesis, published in 1976, and in 1980, *Anita Malfatti e o início da arte moderna no Brasil* [*Anita Malfatti and the Beginnings of Modern Art in Brazil*], based on Marta Rossetti Batista's MA dissertation.¹⁵

To this list of factors, already studied in depth by José Carlos Durand¹⁶ and Maria Lucia Bueno,¹⁷ we would like to add another significant one, which concerns an official policy on the part of public authorities to acquire private collections, collections that particularly featured Modernist works. In 1968 the Universidade de São Paulo

[15] For a complete list see Durand, 1989, pp. 253-254.

[16] Durand, 1989.

[17] Bueno, 2005.

(USP) acquired the collection of Mário de Andrade, today housed at the university's Institute of Brazilian Studies; in 1969 the São Paulo state government acquired the library and the collection of Guilherme de Almeida, kept at the writer's house until today.¹⁸ Finally, from 1971 onwards, the São Paulo state government led a systematic campaign to acquire art works, which placed particular emphasis on Modernist artists and works from the colonial period.¹⁹

What we have here is a complex process that results in the creation of a national canon, and involves the construction of historiographical narratives that identify two women as those who first introduced a Modernist artistic language to Brazil. Tarsila do Amaral was chosen as the emblem of the anthropophagic process of creation, by means of the selective incorporation of international languages, of a modern, national art. The canon that emerged was also marked by the acquisition of her works by public collections and, finally, by the economic value that her works would go on to obtain in the marketplace from then on. Brazilian contemporary art would develop concurrently, and in opposition to this scenario in which modernism was solidified, in which the origin myths of a national art were established, myths in which female figures occupied a role that they had not enjoyed since the 1920s. The female artists who emerged at that time, and in subsequent decades, acknowledged, for better or for worse, that powerful myth of origin, which bestows upon Anita Malfatti and Tarsila do Amaral the role of protagonists in the “scenes of our foundation”.

Universalisms and Particularisms of the Experiences of Gender

It is relevant to also call into question the universalism inherent in feminist analyses. The historiography of feminist art, which began with Linda Nochlin's famous text published in 1971 exploring the reasons for the notable absence of women in Western art history, has expanded significantly in the last forty years. Nevertheless, it is necessary to understand that this intellectual current has established methods, hypotheses and research agendas that are particularly concerned with a problem that gave rise to the field itself, namely the obstacles encountered by women, the difficulties they have faced in terms of artistic training and production, in being accepted, in exhibiting, in a word, in obtaining recognition in the art world.

To put this in another way, there is an underlying epistemological premise in these studies, which is fuelled by the very historical realities that they seek to explain: why have women been “excluded” from the artistic canon? This thesis of female exclusion is taken as a starting point, a paradigm, to be subsequently explained. But what about the existence of different realities? With regard to Brazil's female Modernist artists, for example, for whom consecration was historically pos-

[18] Today the Casa Guilherme de Almeida Museum.

[19] Simioni, 2013b; Coelho, 2012.

sible, or even contemporary female artists and their relationships with the market, is it possible to think of gender as an issue?

This question presents us with two distinct sets of circumstances, but which are of equal importance. On the one hand, there is the problematic universalism inherent in the theory itself. Feminist art historiography originated particularly in English-speaking countries, with the USA as its nerve centre. However, it is perhaps relevant to ask whether its considerations should be taken as globally valid, in other words, whether female exclusion is a priori revealing of a global female condition, shared, verifiable and virtually universally valid; or whether it should be nuanced in the light of local impositions, specific realities, and exceptional contexts.

It is strange how just saying this makes us feel we are betraying the feminist cause itself, which reveals the extent to which exclusion and inequality are powerful premises, perhaps beliefs that go beyond the very reality we seek to explain. This leads us onto the second point: would a more flexible interpretation of gender exclusion as a determining factor in the artistic field lead to a questioning of the validity of such analyses?

From this perspective, the presence of female gender as a quantitative indicator could be considered as feminism's ultimate aim. But to think in terms of gender means working with the meaning socially attributed to the feminine and the masculine, social/discursive/visual meanings, which run through bodies, institutions and social practices. One of the problems we face is believing that the mere quantitatively balanced presence of women in exhibitions, museums, private collections and the art market is the conclusion of a process of levelling out between the sexes, or to put it another way, the definitive symptom of a wider social, political and cultural equality. The presence of women in the cultural field does not necessarily entail an immediate valorisation of the social dimensions and places attributed to the "feminine".

In Brazil, however, this seems to occur in a different way to how it has occurred in the USA. The statements of both critics and female artists themselves reiterate the dominance of readings and interpretations of works in formally "pure" terms, based on the autonomy of language, on the link between works and space, works and matter. Such readings tend to discredit any kind of interpretation bound up with a particular given subject, socially and historically constructed including by means of his or her own body and gender.

In other words, the consecration of female artists ultimately serves to discourage feminist interpretations and concerns; to neutralize what we consider to be the centre of post-1990 feminist thought: its inherently critical dimension that destabilises the hetero normative practices and discourses that are still widely disseminated by society.

In fact, much is said about a supposed resistance towards feminism on the part of Brazilian female artists, who view it as a closed field, a trench that keeps them away from the consecration they aspire to.

Consequently, even works with clear “feminist poetics” in their themes or forms, tend to resist feminist interpretations.²⁰ This leads us to reflect on the difference that exists between the presence of the female gender and the debates about female gender within the realm of Brazilian art. This transcends by far a numerically equivalent participation by women in the field. After all, not all women are feminists. Feminism is a political practice, and not the result of a biological characteristic. The quantitative evidence concerning the involvement of women in the art market is indicative of significant changes in the hitherto clearly gendered mechanisms of selection, training and consecration in force in the art scene, but the statistical evidence does not translate, not could it, into the degree of penetration, acceptance and recognition enjoyed, particularly in the market, by works with a feminist content. Perhaps if we look through this prism, we will discover that the involvement of women does not necessarily entail a transformation of the dominant aesthetic and political discourses.

[20] See also Tvardovskas, 2013.

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