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MOTION: TRANSFORMATION

35th Congress of the International Committee
of the History of Arts
Florence, 1-6 September 2019

Congress Proceedings

- Part 1 -

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edited by Marzia Faietti and Gerhard Wolf

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“Engaged in an Undertaking of the Highest Artistic Culture”: Two Projects for a South American Academy in Rome* (1897-1911)

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This paper revolves around two projects that involved artistic and diplomatic relationships between Italy (Rome in particular) and South America (especially Argentina) at the turn of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. On the one hand, I seek to contribute to the discussion about Rome as cultural capital: as confirmed by recent studies, it never really lost its attraction, neither as a place to visit nor as a place of artistic education.¹ On the other hand, I propose an additional perspective about the Argentinian system of art consolidation process. Buenos Aires did not have a national academy of fine arts until 1905, but in 1897 the Government constituted the National Commission of Fine Arts with the aim of regulating the flow of young artists who left annually to Europe (they were taken under control by the national Patronage of pensionnaires only in 1909).²

Although the presence of South American artists in Europe has been recorded since the first half of the 19th century, their number increased considerably during the last decade of the century. In my research, I was able to record a considerable concentration of South American artists in the Eternal City between 1890 and 1914 (fig. 1).³

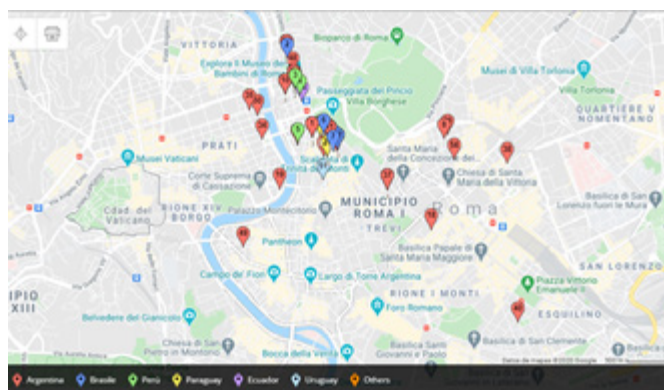


Fig. 1. South American artists' studios (Rome, 1890-1914). Map elaborated by Batchgeo software, based on *Guida Monaci* (Guidebook of Rome founded by Tito Monaci in 1871) and archive documents from Argentina and Uruguay.

The relationship networks established between artists and other compatriots gave rise to community dynamics which I believe should be linked to the first idea of creating an Argentinian academy of Fine Arts in Rome.

Until 1909, the plenipotentiary minister was the only institutional figure Argentinian artists depended on. From 1896 to 1906, the plenipotentiary minister in Italy was Enrique B. Moreno (1846-1923), who participated in the South American sociability of the city (fig. 2).⁴ He arrived in Rome after a long diplomatic career and here he created a network of relationships that involved many artistic personalities, from both Argentina and Italy, among which the name of Ettore Ximenes (1855-1926) stands out.

The creation of an Argentinian Academy in Rome was an initiative of Moreno but involved Ximenes from the initial drafts. Not only was the Sicilian sculptor a sort of advisor of the diplomat, but also a mediator between Italy and Argentina in the late 19th century. In 1896, he won an international competition to erect a mausoleum for General Manuel Belgrano (creator of the Argentinian flag) in Argentina. The sculptor travelled to Buenos Aires three times between 1896 and 1903; besides working on the construction of the monument, he set up an atelier on Corrientes Avenue, in the city center, received commissions from the local elite families and established relationships within the Italian community.⁵

The First Project: an Argentinian Academy

The first mention of the project for the creation of the Argentinian Academy in Rome may be found in the correspondence between Ximenes and Moreno, in a long letter that the sculptor wrote on September 12, 1897 in Rome, shortly before embarking for the second time to join the country on the River Plate.⁶ He presented a concrete proposal (including a budget) for the establishment



Fig. 2. E.B. Moreno (third person from the left, in the foreground) with Argentinian artists at the banquet in honor of José Ingenieros, Rome, 1906. Collection of Pio Collivadino Museum, Photo Album, inv. 2.8.2/500-99997-1657.

of the academy that was welcomed by Moreno. In the official report of the Argentinian Legation for the year 1897, the minister announced a series of points which summarized the main characteristics that the institution should have had.⁷ Their eagerness to compare Argentina with European countries and with the United States transpired from their words: on the one hand, arguing that art could bring to completion the process of national civilization; on the other hand, taking the academies that France, Spain and the United States had already founded in Rome as an example.⁸

Although Moreno referred to some Argentinian institutions, to carry out this project he did not involve any figure linked to Argentina's world of art. He had been advised almost exclusively by Ximenes. In the cited letter, in addition to showing all his support for Moreno, he offered him an extensive promotional activity, even in Argentina: evidently, he already had solid social circuits in which he had accessed during his first stay in Buenos Aires. However, it was only during the third trip – which corresponded to the installation of the monument – that the sculptor was able to officially become the spokesman of the project to found the Argentinian Academy in Rome. At the end of 1902, at the Dante Alighieri Society in Buenos Aires, Ximenes gave a lecture on art in the Rio de la Plata and on the need to create an academy in Italy.⁹

The year 1905 represented a point of arrival for the project: an agreement was announced between the Italian plenipotentiary minister in Buenos Aires and the Argentinian minister of educa-

tion for the creation of the school in Rome, precisely in correspondence with the nationalization of the Argentinian academy. The news generated heated debates, which were echoed by the press. While some newspapers applauded the initiative because it would have tightened the bond between the two countries, others accused the government of carrying out demented projects and condemned the choice of a city such as Rome.¹⁰ Being the academy already an antiquated institution, founding it in the city that symbolizes tradition would have been the worst decision to make. However, a few months later the project vanished without any specific reasons.

The Second Project: a South American Academy

In 1906, the plenipotentiary minister Moreno left Italy for Belgium and was replaced by Roque Sáenz Peña (1851-1914) who remained there until 1910, when he was elected President of the Argentine Republic. Despite the few years in Rome, he promoted various initiatives to facilitate the relations between Italy and Argentina. Sáenz Peña is known above all for his pacifist ideas and for being one of the major supporters of an inter-American alliance that could limit the advance of the interference of the US, especially in South American countries. He was a supporter of the so-called A.B.C., a pact between Argentina, Brazil and Chile officially signed in 1914.¹¹

This regional tendency might explain the interest that the project proposed by Santiago Aldunate (the Chilean plenipotentiary minister in Rome) aroused, that was the idea of ‘using’ art to unite peoples. The Brazilian minister Alberto Fialho joined too, and Sáenz Peña officially became the spokesperson of the initiative for the Argentinian government. On May 7, 1909 he wrote that the plenipotentiary ministers of Argentina, Chile and Brazil had agreed on “the convenience and opportunity of founding in Rome [...] an academy of fine arts that brings together and binds Latin American pensionnaires, today dispersed in various centers of Europe”.¹² An initiative that allowed the three countries to “unite fraternally for the first time”, showing harmony in their ‘civilizing aims’. This idea of *hermandad* among South American countries already existed in the first project: Moreno had thought about the possibility of allowing the citizens of other South American republics to attend the Argentinian Academy,

stating that in this way, “the solidarity of the continent [...] would have its first field of action in the field of artistic study”.¹³

On a public occasion, while promoting the initiative, Sáenz Peña said that the three countries “after having fought for freedom [...] have to work for notoriety, and this commitment, today national, could be continental tomorrow, associating us [...] to increase [...] our gravitation in the universal movement”.¹⁴ Therefore, art was a tool to enter an international framework.

Indeed, the project was supposed to be carried out in correspondence with the International Exhibition of the fiftieth anniversary of the Italian unification in 1911. The three South American countries were supposed to participate to the exhibition in Rome, and the municipality would have offered them the land for the pavilion, in Valle Giulia area, where the headquarters of the Academy would have been built afterwards. This was part of a policy supported by Mayor Ernesto Nathan, maybe the last episode of the ‘cultural mission’ that Rome, as capital of Italy, had started in 1883 with the first International Art Exposition.¹⁵ However, the results of this second initiative became blurred. A short telegram from Rio de Janeiro, published in the newspapers of Buenos Aires at the end of April 1910, is the only indication of the failure of the project. It announced that the Brazilian government, on the advice of the director of the national academy, wished to decline the idea of accompanying Chile and Argentina in the project of the South American Academy in Rome.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the failure of both projects must be read as a political and artistic success. The different actors unified their intentions for the common objective of having an international acknowledgement of the art system that had been consolidating in their own country. The first project highlighted the need for a greater state protection of the arts and was filed when the Academy of Buenos Aires was nationalized. The second project arose simultaneously with the establishment of a national Patronage of pensionnaires (based in Paris): though it possibly represented one of the causes of the defeat for the project – at least in the Argentinian context, – it surely reinforced the bond among the three most ‘powerful’ countries in South America: Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, constituting the first real step towards the ABC pact.

Therefore, Rome represented the place where South American encounters became projects. Decentering the analysis perspective and positioning it in Argentina,¹⁷ I can read the actions that Rome promoted as a way to strengthen its role as cultural capital.¹⁸ Although it is only briefly mentioned here, the 1911 Valle Giulia exhibition was an important moment of international affirmation. In July 1911, with the exhibition already open, the Argentinian vice-consul Atilio Parazzoli wrote to the patron of pensionnaires Ernesto de la Cárcova that a plan by the municipality was still in vogue to grant the land used for the exhibition for free so as to build an international district dedicated to the arts.¹⁹ The Eternal City thus re-proposed itself as a central place of diplomatic, political, and artistic representation.

Notes

* It is part of my doctoral research. After the presentation of this case study at CIHA Florence 2019, I explored the subject in depth in a paper: G. Murace “Arte, política y diplomacia: dos proyectos de academias sudamericanas en Roma (1897-1911)”, *MODOS. Revista de História da Arte*. Campinas 4, no. 2 (May 2020): pp. 39-53. <https://doi.org/10.24978/mod.v4i2.4581>. I would like to thank Christina Strunck and Giovanna Capitelli for accepting my proposal, they were kind and professional chairs and made my participation at the congress very pleasant.

¹ On this topic: G. Capitelli, S. Cracolici, eds., *Roma en México/México en Roma. Las academias de arte entre Europa y el Nuevo Mundo 1843-1867* (Roma: Campisano, 2018); G. Capitelli, M.P. Donato, M. Lanfranconi, “Rome capitale des arts au XIXe siècle. Pour une nouvelle périodisation de l’histoire européenne des capitales culturelles”, in C. Charle, ed., *Le temps des capitales culturelles. XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Seysssel: Champs Vallon, 2009), pp. 65-99; C. Dazzi, “Pensionistas da Escola Nacional de Belas Artes na Itália (1890-1900).

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² A private academy had existed from 1878, founded by Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes. About the construction of a system of art in Buenos Aires: L. Malosetti Costa, *Los primeros modernos. Arte y sociedad en Buenos Aires a fines del siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001); Id., *Collivadino* (Buenos Aires: El Ateneo, 2006); M.I. Baldasarre, *Los dueños del arte. Coleccionismo y consumo cultural en*

Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2006); Id., “Between Buenos Aires and Europe Cosmopolitanism, Pensionnaires, and Arts Education in Late 19th Century Argentina”, in O.E. Vázquez, ed., *Academies and Schools of Art in Latin America* (New York: Taylor and Francis/Routledge, 2020), pp. 17-32.

³ The River Plate community in Rome is the subject of my PhD thesis (in progress): *Rome from River Plate: Argentinian and Uruguayan artists on trip (1890-1914)*, National University of San Martín, Buenos Aires.

⁴ In 1909, the Patronato de Becados was founded, a national institution to control the Argentinian pensionnaires in Europe. Cf. M.I. Baldassarre, “La educación de los artistas”, in L. Malosetti Costa, ed., *Cárcova* (Buenos Aires: Asociación Amigos del MNBA, 2016), pp. 51-62.

⁵ The competition spread through the diplomatic channel, so Ximenes probably met Moreno on this occasion. About Ximenes as a bridge between Italy and South America, see: M.C.S. Monteiro, “O Mausoléu a Belgrano, de Ettore Ximenes, e a presença artística italiana na Argentina”, *Caiana. Revista de Historia del Arte y Cultura Visual del Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte (CAIA)* 8 (2016): pp. 1-16. http://caiana.caia.org.ar/template/caiana.php?pag=articles/article_2.php&obj=223&vol=8.

⁶ Ettore Ximenes to Enrique B. Moreno [Letter], Rome, September 12th, 1897, General Archive of the Nation (Argentina), Fondo E.B. Moreno, Leg. 1885, f. 425-429.

⁷ E.B. Moreno, “Italia. Memoria de la legación. Roma 1 de marzo de 1897”, *Memorias del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto* (Buenos Aires, 1897): pp. 211-216.

⁸ The French Academy in Rome, founded in 1666, was the model for the other foreign academies in the city, whose number increased since 1870 (when Rome was the capital of United Italy): i.e., Spain Real Academy (1874), American schools of architecture and classical studies (1894) that converged to American Academy in 1905. Cf. J. García Sánchez “Roma y las academias internacionales”, *Repensar la Escuela del CSIC en Roma. Cien años de memoria* (Madrid: CSIC, 2010), pp. 77-108.

⁹ E. Ximenes, “El Arte en la República Argentina”, *Revista de Derecho, Historia y Letras* V, t. XIV (1902-1903): pp. 397-409 and V, t. XV (1903): pp. 66-76. The sculptor showed it was informed about the artistic debates in Argentina on the need to create a National Academy. About the nationalization of the fine arts’ academy, see: M. Zarlenga “La nacionalización

de la Academia de Bellas Artes de Buenos Aires (1905-1907)”, *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 76, no. 3 (July-September 2014): pp. 383-341.

¹⁰ Cf. “El error de ayer – Megalomanía suicida – matando la Academia de Bellas Artes – una solución inconsciente – ¿Escuela en Roma? – el arte nacional triunfando – los resultados más tarde”, *El Tiempo* (Jan. 27, 1905); “La escuela de Roma”, *El Tiempo* (Jan. 30, 1905).

¹¹ Cf. B. Solveira, “El ABC como entidad política: un intento de aproximación entre la Argentina, Brasil y Chile a principios de siglo”, *Ciclos* año 2, no. 2 (primer semestre 1992): pp. 157-183; E. Boone, “The 1910 Centenary Exhibition in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. Manufacturing fine art and cultural diplomacy in South America”, in D. Raizman, E. Robey, eds., *Expanding Nationalisms at World’s Fairs Identity, Diversity, and Exchange, 1851-1915* (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 196-213.

¹² R. Sáenz Peña, “Nota proyectando una academia de bellas artes, en Roma”, in Id., *Escritos y Discursos 1888-1910* (Buenos Aires: Casa Peuser, 1914), I, pp. 266-274.

¹³ E.B. Moreno, “Italia. Memoria de la legación. Roma 21 de marzo de 1899”, *Memorias del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto* (Buenos Aires, 1899), pp. 278-279.

¹⁴ “Discurso del dr. Sáenz Peña”, *La Nación* (August 8, 1909). In this article, Sáenz Peña wrote that the three countries were “engaged in an undertaking of the highest artistic culture” (“empeñados en una empresa de elevadísima cultura artística”).

¹⁵ Cf. G. Piantoni, ed., *Roma 1911* (Roma: De Luca, 1980).

¹⁶ “Brasil”, *El Diario* (April 5, 1910).

¹⁷ About the descentered perspective see N. Zemon Davis, “Descentering history: local stories and cultural crossings in a global world”, *History and Theory* 50 (May 2011): pp. 188-202.

¹⁸ On the definition of cultural capital, see: C. Charle, “El tiempo de las capitales culturales europeas”, *Debats. Revista de cultura, poder y sociedad* 132, no. 2 (2018): pp. 103-117. <http://doi.org/10.28939/iam.debats.132-2.10>. About the cultural position of Italy in Europe at the turn of the 19th century cf. G. Piantoni, A. Pingéot, eds., *1880-1910. Arte alla prova della modernità* (Torino: Allemandi, 2000).

¹⁹ A. Parazzoli to E. De la Cárcova [Letter] Roma, July 15, 1911, Archive of Argentinian Foreign Minister, “Embajada en París y Consulados en Francia”, AH/0019, “Patronato de los becados argentinos a Europa”. For Parazzoli, it was an opportunity for the artistic future of the young Republic.