

EXHIBITING IDENTITY: LATIN AMERICA BETWEEN THE IMAGINARY AND THE REAL

By Fabiana Serviddio

Julie E. Payró Art History and Theory Institute

The place where art is exhibited affects the perception of an artwork as it implicitly speaks about who selects and supports the display. The exhibition space can legitimize or discredit the artifacts it is exhibiting; it can establish or deny their artistic value. In this sense, it is a constitutive part of the artistic process itself.

Today it is still common to associate the exhibition of Latin American art in the U.S. with political intrigue. What has been lost, however, is the ways in which this perception is bound to how Latin American art was introduced in the United States, and the politics of place – imaginary and institutional – that introduction involved. Latin American art appeared in the U.S. in the twentieth century in universities and museums, but when various political organizations – the Office of the Coordinator of Inter American Affairs (OCIAA); the Organization of American States (OAS); and, especially, the Center for Inter-American Relations (CIAR) – made use of it for political aims, they ended up discrediting its aesthetic value. These organizations did so primarily in relying upon and promoting a fixed imaginary place of the region rooted in a pre-Columbian past. Throughout the twentieth century, and particularly in the 1960s and '70s, this vision clashed with the changing reality: the growing political, economic, and social struggles in the region, between the U.S. and Latin America, and within the U.S. as immigration from Latin America increased. A mythical place promoted by the exhibition of lyrical abstraction most often resulted in a frozen image, one unable to encompass and speak to the changing developments of the region. Institutions such as CIAR promoted a visual art that created an imagined Latin America detached from its artists, regional and international politics, and the Latin American community in the U.S.

Mexican artworks were the first objects from Latin America that received attention in the U.S. In the mid 1920s, reviews in American art magazines such as *The Art News* and *The Art Digest* reported that in Mexico a new School of Painting had been born along with the National Revolution. Leading American art institutions stimulated that interest through continual exhibitions. MoMA, in particular, played a large role in promoting Mexican art because of the personal interests of the Rockefeller family. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, founder of the museum along with two friends, donated an extensive collection of paintings, drawings and prints by Diego Rivera. In 1931, MoMA offered Rivera a solo exhibition, the first for a Latin American artist (and only the second solo exhibit in the history of the museum), which started a long-lasting, if contentious, relationship between the artist and the Rockefeller family.

Most of the artworks shown in the U.S. pictured the history of Mexico, the political vindications of the Mexican Revolution, along with the harsh rural life of

their inhabitants. Some artists, like Rivera, incorporated characteristic features of popular crafts into their paintings—like plain colors and simple design—in order to favor better communication with large audiences and to modernize the style. These features gave the paintings a distinct visual configuration: they were inextricably linked to the typical life and customs of Mexico. These pictures became the first artworks in the U.S. to be understood as truly authentic representatives of a Latin American nation. Along with the stories and descriptions brought by the first American travelers regarding the backwardness of life in the region,¹ they created an imaginary place, untouched by modern progress, only inhabited by indigenous people that based their sustenance on traditional agricultural activities: an image that has been pervasive throughout the 20th century.

Murals became the most notorious medium of Mexican art. Many Mexican modernists chose this technique as the best one to reach more people because of a mural's public location. But, after 1927, the ideological shifts of the Mexican revolutionary process spurred the government to discontinue its sponsorship of major mural programs. Muralists looked northward; they took advantage of improved relations with the U.S. and accepted commissions there. José Clemente Orozco, for example, remained in the U.S. from 1927 until 1934 to paint murals at Pomona College and Dartmouth College.

The presence of Mexican muralists in the U.S. at the beginning of the 1930s prompted great attention in art periodicals and had a decisive impact on American artists. The injustice of the 1930s' economic depression, and the Mexican example of an avant-garde at the service of social concern, provided a model for American social realism. Many American artists visited or studied with Diego Rivera, José Orozco, and David Siqueiros while the Mexicans were working on U.S. commissions. In 1930, Jackson Pollock and Philip Guston visited Orozco at Pomona College, where he was working on the *Prometheus* mural. Pollock also witnessed the experiments Siqueiros conducted in his Experimental Art Workshop from April 1936 to early 1937 in New York, where he used a spray gun filled with different colors. And many New Deal muralists accompanied and watched Rivera while he was working on the Rockefeller Center mural in 1933.

The artistic rapprochement between the two countries, however, was short-lived. Misunderstandings began because, along with the private sponsorship that stimulated the exhibition of Mexican art, the U.S. government also started to promote Mexican art to accomplish diplomatic aims. Doubt then arose as to whether the art was being promoted for circumstantial diplomatic reasons, or because of its own merit. Even if these options were not mutually exclusive, they started to be perceived in this way.

The recurrent disputes between the U.S. and Mexican governments rode to the edge of war during the presidency of Plutarco Elias Calles who tried to nationalize the exploitation of Mexican oil resources. President Calvin Coolidge managed to solve the dispute through the newly appointed ambassador in Mexico, Dwight Morrow. Nominated in 1927, Morrow successfully won the Calles government over to the U.S. position, and helped negotiate an agreement between the government and the oil companies. Mexico's oil concessions were returned to their owners, the foreign debt was renegotiated, and the interests of overseas capital were guaranteed.

Building on these economic measures, Ambassador Morrow carried out a series of cultural initiatives with the intention of demonstrating U.S. admiration

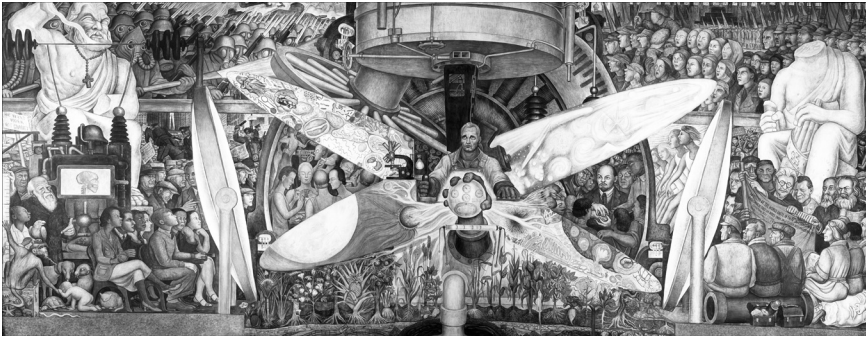
for Mexican culture. This was the beginning of a new diplomatic strategy the U.S. implemented towards Latin America, a strategy that privileged cultural diplomacy over military interventions: the *Good Neighbor Policy*. Morrow's policy officially inaugurated the use of Latin American art to accomplish political goals. One of the first decisions the new ambassador took was to invite renowned Mexican muralist Diego Rivera to decorate his weekend residence in Cuernavaca, the Palace of Cortés, where Rivera painted the mural *The Conquest*. The residence also became the place where Morrow exhibited his collection of Mexican crafts.

At the same time, the Mexican government began sponsoring travelling exhibitions in the U.S. Due to his friendship with the Morrrows, folk art specialist René d'Harnoncourt was asked by the Mexican Ministry of Education in 1929 to put together 48 collections of Mexican folk art – one for each of the states – which were sent to schools to show children's lives in Mexico. The following year, d'Harnoncourt organized a larger and more comprehensive exhibition of Mexican art, with the financial help of the National Museum of Mexico and the Carnegie Corporation. After a year spent collecting art objects from various parts of Mexico, he started the tour on October 1930 at the Metropolitan Museum in New York; the exhibit visited eleven more cities until the end of 1931.

Instead of smoothing U.S.-Mexican disputes, the presence of Mexican artists in the U.S. during the 1920s and early 1930s increased controversies and deepened disagreements both in and beyond the art world. Mexican artists' work became known by the general public when debates erupted in places where the most famous artists painted murals: Rivera in San Francisco, Detroit and New York (1930-1933); Siqueiros in Los Angeles (1932); and Orozco in Hanover, New Hampshire (1933). Many Americans reacted with anger to the fact that foreigners were given commissions to paint murals in the U.S., and that many of those murals overtly criticized the American way of life and traditions. At Dartmouth College, for example, Orozco painted the mural *The Epic of American Civilization*, an obvious satire of the Anglo-Saxon spiritual and educational traditions. Most famously, in 1933, Rivera began to work on a mural entitled *Man at the Crossroads* for Rockefeller Center, commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller. Similar to the murals in San Francisco and Detroit, this one celebrated the advances of technology and science, and idealized the worker, placed at the controls of a machine. Rivera's inclusion of a portrait of Lenin as a symbol of the future enraged the Rockefellers who demanded that it be erased from the panel. Rivera refused so the mural was covered and then destroyed.² (Fig. 1) The intrinsic critical character of Mexican Muralism's paintings, with their particular rejection of colonialisms of all sorts, made these artworks unable to meet diplomatic aims.

Whereas the presence of Mexican art in the U.S. was overwhelming during the 1930s, in the following decade, private commissions almost disappeared. The political controversies discredited Mexican art in the eyes of many organizations. In turn, the U.S. government began sponsoring Latin American art of a different tenor. In 1940, president Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Office of the Coordinator of Inter American Affairs (OCIAA), under the leadership of Nelson Rockefeller, as a diplomatic weapon to counterattack Nazi propaganda in the hemisphere. The Art Section of the Office, headed by René d'Harnoncourt, intended to introduce Latin American nations' artistic achievements in the U.S. by circulating exhibitions of Latin American art.³ MoMA served as one of the key institutions that carried out a complex structure of exhibitions' programs

Figure 1



Diego Rivera, *Man at the Crossroads*, Mural (1934) © Instituto Nacional de Belles Artes, National Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City

for OCIAA. Because art was useful as a vehicle of cultural interchange between regions, these initiatives favored interpretations that sought to embed Latin American society and its visual culture into a fixed and pre-established identity pattern. These images kept presenting the region as a place untouched by modern progress, whose people lived in rural settings and according to traditional economies.

The modern Latin American art exhibitions circulated by OCIAA and MoMA during the war years focused mainly on indigenous art, but with no political implications against the U.S. – in direct contrast to muralists' notable political scandals of the 1930s. Artists from the region participated in the OCIAA programs as part of the international outcry against the Nazi regime. Brazilian artist Cândido Portinari, one of the many artists affiliated with the Communist party who exhibited in OCIAA's shows, painted the lives of the poor workers and peasants as his main subject matter but did not overtly protest capitalism or the rich. This shift in meaning was of great importance, as Latin American art left its critical strength against U.S. imperialism behind. In 1940, Portinari was given a solo exhibition at MoMA; in 1941, he was invited to paint a series of murals for the Hispanic Foundation of the Library of Congress, commissioned jointly by Brazil and the United States. Funded by the Rockefeller Foundation as a goodwill gesture, the four murals, *Discovery of the Land*, *Entry into the Forest*, *Teaching of the Indians* (Fig.2), and *Mining of Gold*, addressed the past 500-year experience of inter-cultural contact in the Americas in an overtly friendly manner.

His style was linked to expressionism, with a strong emphasis on the racial features of the characters, and the picturesque forest-like landscapes of the Brazilian coast. From a cultural point of view, Portinari's art was an ideal representative of the distinctive image of Latin America already created: an uncivilized world, where ancient traditions prevailed and people lived according to them.

Other Latin American artists invited to circulate their artworks in the U.S. under the auspices of the Office of the Coordinator, such as Oswaldo Calero Guayasamín from Ecuador and Enrique Camino Brent from Peru, were also recognized for spreading the characteristics of rural life in their countries through their indigenous paintings. Artists whose work featured an abstract style that did not indicate a regional provenance, such as Argentine Emilio Pettoruti, were

Figure 2



Cándido Portinari, *Teaching of the Indians*, Mural (1941), vestibule wall of the Hispanic Reading Room, Library of Congress, Washington DC (Courtesy: Projeto Portinari)

rejected as not authentic and denied placement in shows at the main exhibition spaces like MoMA.⁴

The preference for artists with no viciousness against American imperialism was evident in shows like *20 Centuries of Mexican Art*, which was jointly organized in 1940 by the Museum of Modern Art and the Mexican government.⁵ For the occasion, MoMA commissioned a new mural, this time from Orozco, whose art produced a more universal critique of present times. The result was a six panels' interchangeable painting, *Dive Bomber and Tank*, on which Orozco worked the first days after the opening in front of the visitors. This six-panel fresco (intended to be arranged in any order) depicted abstracted elements of mechanical warfare, including the tail and wings of a bomber, tank treads, and chains—as well as a pair of upturned human legs. Orozco insisted it had no political significance. He stated: “I simply paint the life that is going on at the present—what we are and what the world is at this moment. That is what modern art is.”

After the war, the political interest in fostering knowledge on Latin American art diminished considerably. The Office of the Coordinator was shut down, and even though MoMA, under the new director René d'Harnoncourt, established a department dedicated to promote artistic exchanges with other countries, these exhibits were drastically reduced. The fact that MoMA, the most authoritative voice on modern art, took wide interest in Latin American art only during the war years — when it was associated with OCIAA — and then abruptly abandoned those programs, was a lethal stroke to the credibility of the aesthetic values of Latin American art.

From this point on, Latin American art was gradually segregated from the main exhibition spaces in the U.S. and circumscribed to specific institutions.

The Organization of American States, begun in 1946 under the auspices of the U.S. government, formed to ensure territorial integrity in the event of extra-continental aggression. The OAS established a new Visual Arts Department specifically created to showcase the artworks of Latin American artists in the U.S. The department's director, Cuban art critic José Gomez Sicre, had been involved in MoMA's Latin American exhibition programs during the war, mostly helping the institution gather the artworks needed for display. He was well aware of the particular vision of Latin America that was common in the U.S., and therefore he organized shows intended to modify the indigenous perspective on Latin American art that OCIAA's programs had reinforced. He wanted to prove the internationalism of the region's artists.⁶

This internationalism was not new, of course. The modernization of visual languages reached Latin America in the 1920s, when many Latin American artists traveled to Europe and became interested in the abstract experiments of the *avant-gardes*. After WWII, personal travel or specialized magazines kept artists abreast of these trends. At this point, their aesthetics were completely integrated within international currents. Many of them received their first solo exhibition in the U.S. thanks to OAS exhibition program of Latin American art in Washington DC.⁷ In the midst of the Cold War era, Gomez Sicre profited from the non-figurative style of these artworks in that they contributed to the growing praise of artistic freedom supposedly removed from ideological ties. His exhibitions' policy criticized Mexican Muralism's direct involvement with political issues and gave implicit support to the American anticommunist diatribe.

But the isolation of the Latin American artwork from the main exhibition venues had a negative impact on its spread. The fact that it was again a government organization that sponsored Latin American art did not favor its reception on the part of the U.S. audience. Art historian Eva Cocroft has pointed out that the establishment of the OAS's exhibition program marked the beginning of the "ghettoization" of Latin American art in the U.S. because of its exclusion from the main exhibition venues, no matter the internationalist style they displayed.⁸ Of the many artists that arrived in the U.S. during the 1950s and 1960s, the most successful ones became those who found their way there independent of these organizations. They addressed subjects of universal concern: mainly, the fear of a new atomic incident between the U.S. and Russia, and fresh memories of Second World War atrocities.⁹ Artists such as José Luis Cuevas, Antonio Frasconi and Mauricio Lasansky were praised for the neo-humanist qualities of their works, and not as members of a Latin American school. In private galleries, these artists appeared shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the international artistic community.

The Pre-Hispanic Tradition

Many artists, though, remained indebted to organizations that promoted their work. At the end of the 1960s, another institution emerged to improve the damaged hemispheric relations: the Center for Inter-American Relations (today, the Americas Society). A new Rockefeller family enterprise, CIAR sought to increase interest and knowledge in Latin America through the sponsoring of cultural and public affairs programs. The Center's first curator, Stanton Catlin, was a long time expert in the field of Latin American art since his affiliation with

MoMA and OCIAA in the 1940s, and he had been involved in the influential exhibition *Art of Latin America Since Independence* at Yale University in 1966. He carefully planned an exhibitions' program targeted to a privileged American audience.

Each year the Center organized and displayed in its ground floor gallery four or five exhibits of visual arts from South and Central America, Canada, and the Caribbean. Painting, sculpture, graphics, photography, video and folk art were included in the program. Members of museum staff in the hemisphere were invited to act as guest curators and to write scholarly essays for catalogues. The program provided opportunities for exchanges between dealers or gallery owners and contemporary artists, so that these artists would be able to find new venues to exhibit their work in the U.S.

Exhibitions sponsored by the Mexican government sent abroad in the 1930s and 1940s had displayed popular crafts from the colonial and contemporary period alongside the work of modern Mexican artists. Since the 1940s, this pattern had incorporated the art of the pre-Columbian period, as in the exhibit *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* at MoMA. Catlin organized CIAR's exhibition program according to this scheme: the selection of the Pre-Columbian, colonial and popular artistic traditions guaranteed that the exotic image of Latin America would be clearly represented.

The complexity inherent in an exhibition of pre-Columbian art came from the difficulty of locating a valuable collection, obtaining permission for its transfer, the handling of delicate or extremely heavy artworks, and paying insurance and transfer costs. Nonetheless, and regardless of the financial instabilities CIAR went through at the beginning, it was clearly of the utmost importance for all CIAR's Visual Arts' directors to display a significant pre-Columbian or Colonial show at least once a year. Most of the pre-Columbian exhibitions became blockbusters, which was the case with the exhibit *Pre-Inca Paintings*, shown at CIAR's gallery for two months from September to November 1973. Assembled from museums in Latin America and the collection of Reinaldo Luza of Lima, the exhibit featured Peruvian paintings made with plant and animal dyes on cotton textiles dated 800 B.C. to 1700 A.D.¹⁰

Another successful exhibit was *El Dorado: The Gold of Ancient Colombia*, a show of pre-Hispanic gold pieces from El Museo del Oro in Bogotá that remained at CIAR for two months during May and June of 1974, and then circulated through ten museums in the U.S., Canada, and Latin America. An ambitious program at the Center related to pre-Columbian art was the creation of the Mayan Hieroglyphic Inscription Study Group.¹¹ CIAR's program researched a complete corpus of Mayan Inscriptions known at the time and, in 1976, published two volumes and mounted an exhibition. Because pre-Columbian and Colonial exhibits put on display ancient objects that bore exotic esthetic qualities, these shows were of much more mass appeal than the exhibits of contemporary art. They had record-breaking attendance—the *El Dorado* alone was seen by some 500,000 people before its return to Colombia—and received critical acclaim.¹² *New York Times* art critic Hilton Kramer observed that “in the presence of the masterworks of the anonymous artists and craftsmen of the ancient American civilizations, ethical considerations vanish as our sensibilities are ravished by the accomplishments of some of the most exquisite artistic minds the world has ever known.”¹³

Meant to display the magnificence accomplished by this civilization in the past, these artifacts were also perceived, both by the general public and the critics, as representative of the distinctiveness of Latin American culture. In this aspect, the exhibitions reinforced the imaginary ideas of Latin America created at the beginning of the twentieth century, as a place radically different from the U.S., the place of the pre-modern, but also—as a new shift in meaning—the place of the extraordinary, the magical, a place outside real time. About *The Cuzco Circle*, for example, an exhibit of Colonial era art that depicted Christian imagery, Kramer noted that “what we find in this work is a fusion—and collision—of two cultures, the European and the Indian, and the result is a magical primitivization of the classic themes and conventions of Western painting.” The result for the visitor: “a slight case of cultural vertigo.”¹⁴

Nonetheless, for practical reasons—primarily cost and availability—most of CIAR’s shows focused on contemporary art. Its programs exhibited a large variety of styles, but whenever was possible the Visual program encouraged the exhibition of artworks that promoted a clear connection to visual markers of Latin America identity, now usually a picture of a mythical and exotic place, an imaginary *pastoral* outside time. There was a consistent representation of the pre-Hispanic tradition of Latin American art at CIAR not only through the specific pre-Columbian exhibitions, but also through its Contemporary shows, even if elaborated through the personal artist’s vocabulary.

Figure 3



Joaquín Torres-García, *Catedral constructiva*, oil on canvas (1931), National Museum of Fine Arts, Buenos Aires, © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VEGAP, Madrid

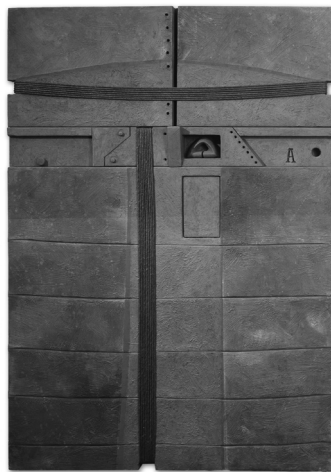
The dominant abstract styles blurred the cultural context from which the artwork came, creating doubts about its cultural identity and provenance. Some artists, such as Uruguayan Joaquín Torres-García, though, succeeded in sustaining

their cultural *liason* with Latin America by a plastic fusion of Constructivism's experiments with symbols of the Pre-Columbian tradition (Fig. 3). These artists received the most attention from CIAR.

They were no longer concerned with criticizing contemporary reality through a historical recovery of that past, the main aim of the Mexican Muralists. The culturally specific images in the new abstract art referenced a mythical world, arcane and outside time, one that could be reached only after deep introspection. They referred to an archetypal world, subconsciously present in contemporary time. A cultural heir of Torres Garcia's workshop in Montevideo, Uruguayan Julio Alpuy exemplified the use of abstraction in painting and sculpture that incorporated pre-modern symbology. Alpuy benefited from the exposure he was given at CIAR at a solo exhibition of sculptures and reliefs in 1972. The critic Ronald Christ saw in the show Alpuy's ability to provide a bridge to this mythic world: "To see in Alpuy's work the individual equivalent of a cultural primitivism would not be wrong, so long as you remember that this is a primary and distinctly personal vision discovered by Alpuy, neither borrowed from others nor granted by his own ethnic background."¹⁵ These paintings did not bring back the Pre-Hispanic past through specific descriptions of historical events; instead, depictions of timeless symbols linked an abstract language to the visual features of a Latin American cultural tradition.

The style allowed viewers to disconnect the painting from its historical context and make it universal, find subtle allusions to the pre-Columbian past, or identify references to contemporary reality. As with Alpuy, Argentine Marcelo Bonevardi did not acknowledge an explicit intention to evoke Pre-Hispanic culture in his artwork; on the contrary, he linked his work to the recent developments of other contemporary artists such as Joseph Cornell. Latin American critics took Bonevardi's work as a symbol of Latin American identity, but the U.S. art critic Dore Ashton made a slight reference to the pre-Columbian tradition in some of Bonevardi's artworks (Fig. 4). Primarily, she presented them under a much more general interpretation that set them in an international perspective.¹⁶ Most U.S.

Figure 4



Marcelo Bonevardi, *Column*, mixed media (1964) Private Collection. Photo: Courtesy Eric Pollitzer, Gustavo Bonevardi

critics pointed to the capacity of these images to produce a formal configuration that could at the same time refer to a cultural identity and to universal meanings. These artworks gathered the advantages of displaying a rather distinctive visuality, a modern expression, and little political criticism.

The Politics of Place

The 1960s had been a time of fluid interchanges between artistic institutions of the U.S. and Latin America. Important U.S. critics had harshly criticized many Latin American artists because of their apparently unconditional acceptance of international currents in modern art, seeing the art as a continuance of colonial domination.¹⁷ Similar to decades before, works that retained identifiable visual marks were regarded as most successfully representing a cultural identity, and were widely accepted and praised by the U.S. community. They recalled the Latin America imagined at the beginning of the twentieth century, a mythical world suspended in pre-modern times, with no ideological criticism of the U.S. government or political allusions to inter-American frictions — all set in a international visual language.

The political circumstances in which the Center for Inter-American Relations was born, however, were radically different from the ones that brought OCIAA to life. During war times, Latin American intellectuals had lined up behind the objectives of the international community in favor of freedom and equality of races. This was the central topic in Portinari's panels at the Hispanic Foundation, for instance. When the Cuban Revolution of 1959 broke out, many intellectuals and artists felt politically committed to its ideals. The revelation that the U.S. government was intervening through cultural and scientific programs in regional events increased sentiments of a common identity within the Latin American community, and stimulated resentment against institutions that represented U.S. imperialism.¹⁸

The modernizing processes that came about through U.S. economic and cultural influence caused anxiety about a cultural legacy at risk in Latin America. It was also a time of social upheaval of ethnic minorities in the U.S. that, by the 1960s, demanded broad inclusion in economic, social and cultural policies. New York, the capital of modern art, had considerably changed its demographics: there was a significant increase of Hispanic people living there, and among them, a new Latin American artistic community.

In this era of escalating mutual distrust, CIAR mounted a multi-faceted cultural and public affairs program aimed at several audiences: businessmen, public officials, academics, but also the general public. Conceived in 1965, a "small group of private citizens in New York," most of them prominent members of the largest U.S. corporations, initiated a study to determine what kind of organization might be useful to increase interest in and knowledge of Latin America. CIAR opened in 1966 and had among its first objectives "to provide U.S. citizens with greater understanding and awareness of the other nations of the hemisphere, with the hope of achieving more harmonious relations among the nations of the Americas."¹⁹

CIAR organized its activities through four departments: Public Affairs, Literature, Performing Arts and Visual Arts. The Public Affairs department encouraged direct exchanges through formal and informal meetings, conferences,

luncheons and dinners to discuss economic and political issues. Presidents, foreign ministers, leading public and private-sector individuals, and intellectuals participated, giving their views on relevant inter-American matters. In practice, it mainly worked as a place for American businessmen to gather and discuss economic and political matters that involved interchanges between the U.S. and Latin America. In private correspondence with William Moody of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Roger Stone, president of the Center for Inter American Relations since 1976, was frank in defining the Center's role:

So, at the broadest level, our constituency is the *American people*. [...] Our *Public Affairs* program is basically beamed at a leadership group in government, business and academia. [...] We will *not*: (1) get dragged into developing programs for Latin America; (2) become a social club for Latin Americans in New York; (3) involve ourselves in special projects that do not relate to the criteria outlined above.²⁰

The Center kept a busy cultural agenda that promoted informal encounters. The three cultural departments stimulated knowledge of hemispheric art by exhibits, publications, and performances. The Literature department sponsored the translation of successful Latin American writers and published the journal *Review* three times a year. CIAR also piloted a small educational program for New York public schools. These programs remained peripheral, however; CIAR had begun as a private institution, with politics and economics as its main activities, and had chosen a more general and non-Latin American public as its main target.

These aims took on material form in the organization's headquarters. Margaret Strong (Marquise de Cuevas), a Rockefeller family member, donated one of her properties, the Percy Pyne House, a Georgian-style building, located in the core of the Upper East Side of Manhattan.²¹ The Center was housed on the first and second floors, while the Council of the Americas, an organization that represented U.S. businesses in Latin America, rented the top floor. The proximity of CIAR with this economic policy organization did not go unnoticed by the Latin American artistic community as well as by the general public, which often perceived it as an "establishment-élite" Rockefeller institution. Because of its close relationship with the Council of the Americas, many people viewed it as an extension of the operations of U.S. multinational corporations. The number of people who served on both boards and the physical location of the two organizations encouraged this view.²² David Rockefeller's constant financial rescues of the Center's annual deficits also confirmed this perception.²³ Another suspicion was about a possible covert relation between the Center and CIA – a fear that stemmed from the actual connections among some cultural organizations funded by the U.S. government and the CIA in the mid 1960s – and it made CIAR's directors avoid any efforts to obtain resources through federal funding.²⁴ The only governmental agencies approached to support the Center's cultural programs were the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Council for the Arts.

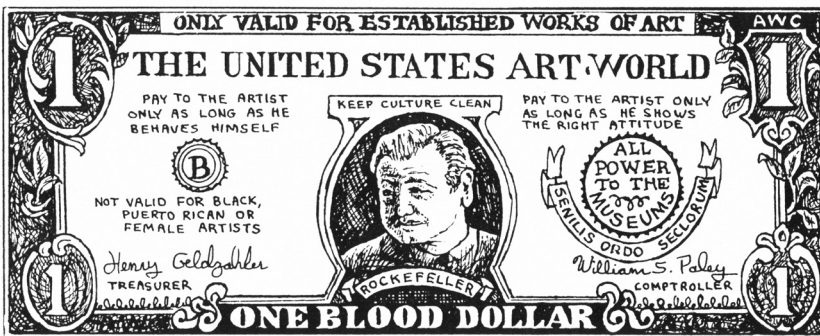
CIAR's creation followed the tradition of cultural diplomacy inaugurated by OCIAA's programs: to strengthen and secure political ties between the U.S. and Latin American countries. As with OCIAA and OAS programs, the sponsorship of Latin American culture by this kind of institution affected the

aesthetic experience. Given the political and economic associations, doubt arose as to the worth and purpose of the art displayed. Some artists, worried about these connections, proposed to Stanton Catlin that the CIAR Art Gallery be a branch space of MoMA.²⁵ This option apparently gathered little interest from MoMA's trustees. The legitimized modern art field that MoMA had built since the 1920s relied on the exclusiveness of the artworks that managed to enter this space. In fact, most of Latin American artists living in and outside New York were eager to exhibit their work at MoMA, instead of at a place of dubious political intentions like CIAR; those who had accomplished that goal were very much praised in their home countries.²⁶ The mere existence of CIAR as a separate gallery segregated Latin American artists, as it set a perceived limit—and demarcated space—to their artistic capacities. Exhibiting artworks from Latin America at 680 Madison Avenue was interpreted as a symbol of U.S. political and economic power over the hemisphere, not as a recognition of its aesthetic value.

Given these assumptions, the relation between politically-committed Latin American artists in New York and CIAR was contentious from the beginning.²⁷ The first show held at the Center's gallery in September 1967, *Artists of the Western Hemisphere: Precursors of Modernism: 1860-1930*, presented a general overview of the art in the whole region. A group of New York-based Latin American artists vehemently objected to the exhibit on the grounds that it portrayed Latin American art as dependent and derivative of European modernism.²⁸

In January 1969, a group of well-known artists and critics, organized under the "Art Workers Coalition," protested against MoMA's board of trustees and policy discriminations. The group delivered a letter to the Museum of Modern Art's staff asking for a public audience to discuss a number of topics: the relation between the museum and artists; the inclusion of the Black and Hispanic communities; the lack of representation of Black and Hispanic art in MOMA's collection; artists' participation in the curatorial committee; free admission to the museum; the abandonment of its plan to build a skyscraper; and its expansion with flexible branch-museums all over the city that did not carry "the stigma of catering only to the wealthier sections of society."²⁹ These groups' protest against MoMA's policy (Fig. 5) eventually pushed the trustees to oust director Bates Lowry that year.

Figure 5



Art Workers Coalition, *One Blood Dollar*, pamphlet showered during demonstrations at MOMA, April 1970. Permission from the Rockefeller Archive Center, Projects Series, Nelson A. Rockefeller Personal Papers

Such protests continued. In March 1971, a group of artists decided to boycott a contemporary exhibition scheduled at CIAR for the end of April. The show, *Latin American Artists Living in New York*, featured works at fifteen to twenty local galleries, with a simultaneous group show at the Center that would last through June. The exhibit was suspended after twenty-five of the prospective artists, among them Arnold Belkin, Leonel Góngora and Rubens Gerchman, submitted a list of conditions for their participation in this show and in CIAR's future programs. One of the first conditions was a "drastic revision" of the Center's board of directors, with the removal of those "who symbolize United States imperialist activity in our hemisphere," such as representatives of oil multinationals and industries dedicated to minerals extraction, like Exxon, Standard Oil and Mobil.³⁰ Other conditions set by the artists specified that the Center would refrain from establishing relations with state or private organizations serving "as instruments of repression against social, political, economic and cultural liberation"³¹ of Latin American countries and that it would open to the public its *ad hoc* meetings and study groups where subjects concerning Inter-American political and economic issues had been discussed in the past. In the artists' opinion, CIAR was a club of powerful U.S. businessmen and politicians fundamentally dedicated to political and economic exchanges, while the activities developed by the cultural departments were merely there to entertain this public. "It's lamentable that it's the only organization to speak for us here. Culture for them is an afterthought, like brandy and cigars after dinner. They specialize in misrepresenting Latin America," painter Arnold Belkin observed.³²

As a matter of fact, the activities developed by the Public Affairs department were the leading ones at the Center from the beginning. These programs focused on the study of recent political and economic events in Latin America, in reaction to the radical turn Latin American governments took in the beginning of the 1970s. In 1970-71, for example, the Public Affairs department organized conferences, seminars, and informal encounters on topics such as the "Nationalization policy of the Chilean government," "Contemporary events in Brazil," "Comparative analysis of foreign and internal policy of Argentine, Peru and Brazil military governments," "Plank Document on United States policy towards Latin America," and "Relations between China and Latin America."³³ The protection of U.S. economic interests in Latin America appeared to artists as the main objective behind all these encounters. The significance of the activities organized by the Public Affairs programs and the secondary and dependent role played by the cultural ones made these artists refrain from participation in its exhibits programs. For many who were sympathetic with the social and political demands raised during these years, the place in which art was exhibited had become a crucial matter that framed its meaning and perceived validity. The location of CIAR in the midst of Upper East Side and the support given by powerful businessmen made a large portion of the artistic community distrust CIAR as a legitimate place to exhibit their works. For them, the place simply did not represent Latin America.

Instead, politically-committed artists worked on an alternative project: a Latin American Museum, which would function as a gathering place for the Latin American creative community. In this new institution, they planned to develop an artistic project of their own and disseminate "moral information" about censorship and repression of cultural activities.³⁴ The Latin American Museum

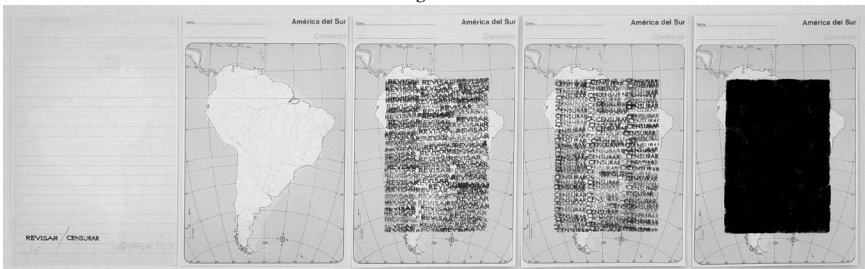
never came about, although the association among politically engaged artists and the local Hispanic community continued throughout the decade. El Museo del Barrio resulted from struggles in New York City over the control of educational and cultural resources and the transformation ensuing from the national civil rights movement. African American and Puerto Rican parents, teachers and community activists demanded that their children receive an education that reflected their diverse cultural heritage. The museum was created as a specific response to the demands of the Puerto Rican community, the majority of the population living in East Harlem, to have a cultural representation of their own history and culture. Funded by the Community Education Center, a city-funded agency, El Museo del Barrio began operations in a schoolroom at Public School 125, located at 425 West 123rd Street.

Puerto Rican artists, educators and intellectuals made up the entire staff and board of the museum. Gradually, El Museo del Barrio obtained financial support from major public sources like the National Endowment for The Arts, and became part of the Cultural Institutions Group, the association of the most important New York museums.³⁵ In this case, the exhibition space, which finally ended up in the main floor of a city-owned property at 1230 Fifth Avenue (its present location), reflected a different voice, that of the Puerto Rican community that had conceived the idea of the museum from the beginning. The art exhibits were perceived and interpreted as communal representations of their own cultural identity, even if the process of curating exhibitions of Puerto Rican art was not very different from the ones developed at CIAR.

Conclusion

Artworks exhibited the complexity and impossibility of identity fixations and definitions about what was Latin America. By the 1970s, Latin American contemporary art had diversified and displayed multiple faces. Even when many artists wanted to refer to their own heritage, there were many ways to show those connections. Some made use of a lyrical abstraction of Pre-Hispanic reminiscences, as earlier artists had done, but most worked on the contemporary convulsive reality of the region and its violent events. Young artists like Luis Camnitzer, Cildo Meireles and Horacio Zabala made use of experimental and cosmopolitan practices that did not refer to a Latin American past tradition, although they did project a regional political concern (Fig. 6). Not surprisingly, many controversial artworks that protested recently-born dictatorships and the violation of human

Figure 6



Horacio Zabala, *Checking/Censuring*, 1974. Courtesy the artist

rights were almost entirely absent in CIAR's galleries. Some artists producing that kind of work refused to exhibit there, such as Luis Camnitzer, and others were not recognized enough for the gallery to invite them.³⁶ This condition gave CIAR a cooled-off atmosphere. A marginalized place, CIAR drained Latin American of the caustic character of the 1970s.

Since its founding, CIAR was concerned both with establishing its unique identity as an exhibition space of Latin American art, and serving its diplomatic aims of fostering unity among nations by cultural understanding. Its exhibition program tended to support a long-lasting representation of Latin America as the place of a pre-modern world, a mythical Arcadia, living outside the actual political and social events that consumed the region. This vision clashed with the political and economic issues debated during the meetings organized by the Public Affairs program. And these contradictions could not be concealed in the eyes of artists, critics and the New York-based Latin American community. A general commitment of artists to political matters produced a confrontation between the growing Latin American community and the traditional wealthy class for whom the organization was founded.

The history of Latin American art exhibitions' programs in the U.S. demonstrates art's capacity to build an imaginary place and to affect the perception of a region. In the Latin American case, a specific selection of artworks constructed a magical and extraordinary place outside real time, the location of the impossible, the primordial. Contemporary artists occasionally broke through the spell of this coherent vision to offer a more controversial and realistic view of Latin America. But the story of the exhibition of Latin American art in the U.S. primarily illuminates the power of locale in the judgment of aesthetic value, skewed by display in a place born to foster political and commercial relations. These problems of place reveal the constitution of the modern art field – its practice, critique, and history -- and sheds light on art histories beyond the borders of the U.S. that have only recently been integrated into the dominant narrative. The creation of the position of a Latin American curator at MoMA in 2006, along with a specific program to exhibit Latin American art, might be considered important moves towards the recognition of legitimacy of these artworks. These changes, nevertheless, were fostered by the Latin American community itself. The impact of CIAR and its successor, the Americas Society, on the Latin American art world is undeniable for its crucial exposure of artists of the region. But the extent to which these artworks reach a U.S. constituency — telling complicated tales of place — remains uncertain.

Buenos Aires, Argentina

ENDNOTES

1. Ricardo Salvatore, *Imágenes de un imperio: Estados Unidos y las formas de representación de América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2006).
2. Rivera repainted the mural *Man at the Crossroads* at the Palace of Fine Arts in Mexico City, the following year.
3. Donald W. Rowland, *History of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1947).

4. Fabiana Serviddio, "Intercambios culturales panamericanos durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial. El viaje de Pettoruti a los EE.UU.," in *Arte Argentino y Latinoamericano del Siglo XX: sus interrelaciones* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Telefónica de Argentina, 2004): 55-82.
5. The Museum of Modern Art and Instituto de Antropología e Historia de México, *20 Centuries of Mexican Art* (México DF, 1940).
6. Alejandro Anreus, "José Gomez Sicre and the 'Idea' of Latin American Art," *Art Journal* 64, 4 (2005): 83-84.
7. Anreus, "José Gomez Sicre", 84.
8. Eva Cocroft, "The United States and Socially Concerned Latin American Art," in *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970*, ed. Charles Miers (New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts and Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1988): 194.
9. Latin American artists established themselves in the U.S. art scene in several ways. Some of them traveled to the U.S. with their own resources or under the auspices of foundations and institutions for the promotion of the arts, including Pan-American cooperation societies. Others participated in museum exhibitions that were organized to create public awareness of artistic activity in Latin America. A third group got to the United States through private channels: they showed their artworks at commercial galleries. Félix Angel, "The Latin American Presence," in *The Latin American Spirit*: 229.
10. *Peruvian Paintings by Unknown Artists* was held at CIAR from September 12 to November 11 1973.
11. Graham was a specialist in Maya culture; he had been working in Mexico since 1958 on a project to save the fragile written records of the ancient Maya from destruction, and, in 1964, he was invited by Harvard University's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology to conduct a similar project in Guatemala.
12. Center for Inter-American Relations, *Report 1973* (New York, 1973): p. 12, Folder 3, Box 137, Sub-series Center for Inter-American Relations, Series 4, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (hereafter RAC). Also, Center for Inter American Relations, *Annual Report 1974-1975* (New York, 1975): p. 15.
13. Hilton Kramer, "Gold of Ancient Colombia. El Dorado' Objects Display Elegance and Finesse," *New York Times*, May 4, 1974, p. 35.
14. Hilton Kramer, "Inca Conquers Spaniard in Peru," *New York Times*, April 24, 1976, p. 17. This article was used as proof of the critical acclaim to the success of the Center's gallery in a private report to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. "Rationale for the Center," p. 6, Folder 4, Box 137, Sub-series Center for Inter-American Relations, Series 4, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.
15. Ronald Christ, *In the World and Workshop of Julio Alpuy* (New York: Center for Inter-American Relations, 1972): n.p.
16. Dore Ashton, *Bonevardi* (New York, 1980).
17. Sam Hunter, "The Cordoba Bienal," *Art in America* 2 (March/ April 1967): 84. Lawrence Alloway, "Latin America and International Art," *Art in America* 53, 3 (June 1965): 65-77. Analyzed in Carla Stellweg, "Magnet-New York: Conceptual, Performance, Environmental, and Installation Art by Latin American Artists in New York," in *The Latin American Spirit*: 284-287; also in Andrea Giunta, *Vanguardias, Internacionalismo y Política. Arte argentino en los años sesenta* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2001): 320, 329.

18. In 1965, Plan Camelot became public—a social sciences research conducted in Chile and financially supported by an organization dependant upon the U.S. army whose objectives were identifying social collapses' symptoms in Latin America and suggesting strategies to prevent them. In 1966, cultural magazines like prestigious *Marcha* spread *New York Times'* research about CIA financial support on the Congress for Cultural Freedom (founded in 1950 to gather international intellectuals against totalitarianism). This news contributed to the crisis of confidence of Latin American intellectuals and pushed them in favor of Cuban Revolution and its ideals. María Eugenia Mudrovic, *Mundo Nuevo. Cultura y Guerra Fría en la década del 60* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 1997).
19. Center for Inter American Relations, *Annual Report 1975-1976: the First Decade* (New York, 1976): 1. Folder 4, Box 137, Sub-series Center for Inter-American Relations, Series 4, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.
20. Stone to Moody, October 18, 1976, p. 3, Folder 4, Box 137, Sub-series Center for Inter-American Relations, Series 4, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC. Emphasis original.
21. Margaret Strong (1897-1985) was the daughter of Mrs. Bessie Rockefeller, oldest daughter of John D. Rockefeller.
22. Supplementary information on the Center for Inter-American Relations. Proposal from the Center for Inter American Relations to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, to request \$1 million for the capital fund drive of fiscal year 1977, p.4, Folder 4, Box 137, Sub-series Center for Inter-American Relations, Series 4, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.
23. "If Mr. [David] Rockefeller had not intervened with special contributions at several points of financial crisis, the Center could well have gone under." *Ibid.*, 3.
24. Regarding the covered involvement of the CIA in Latin American cultural magazines see Mudrovic, *Mundo Nuevo*; also Claudia Gilman, *Entre la pluma y el fusil. Debates y dilemas del escritor revolucionario en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2003).
25. Stanton Catlin, Oral History Interview by Francis V. O'Connor, July 1 – September 14, 1989, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.
26. MoMA's *Information* exhibit in 1970 included several Argentine artists, as Carlos Espartaco, Inés Gross, Mercedes Esteves and Adolfo Bronowski (Frontera Group), and the local press gave wide cover of the event. Carlos Espartaco, "Argentinos en el Museo de Arte Moderno de New York," *Artinf* 3 (November 1970): 2.
27. For a detailed account of the ethical and political resistance to CIAR of the Latin American local artists—mainly grouped under two associations: Museo Latinoamericano and MICLA- from its beginning to its dissolution, see Luis Camnitzer, "The Museo Latinoamericano and MICLA," in *A Principality of Its Own. 40 Years of Visual Arts at the Americas Society*, ed. José Luis Falconi and Gabriela Rangel (New York: The Americas Society and Harvard University Press, 2006): 216-229.
28. *Ibid.*, 217.
29. Among the artists and critics signing the letter were Carl Andre, Gregory Battcock, Hans Haacke, Joseph Kosuth, Lucy Lippard, Tom Lloyd. "The demands of the Art Workers Coalition," June, 1969, Folder 1214, Box 125, Projects Series, RG 4, Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller Personal Papers, Rockefeller Family Archives, RAC.
30. The directors specifically mentioned as "politico-financial personalities" were Lincoln Gordon; John White, director of the Standard Oil company (New Jersey); George Meany, president of the labor federation; and Sol M. Linowitz, former chairman of the Xerox Corporation, one-time United States Ambassador to the Organization of American States, and chairman of the National Urban coalition. Grace Glueck, "Show is Suspended as Artists Dissent," *The New York Times*, March 20 1971, p. 13. Folder 1, Box 137, Sub-series Center for Inter-American Relations, Series 4, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Center for Inter-American Relations, *Annual Report 1974-1975* (New York, 1975): 15, Folder 4, Box 137, Sub-series Center for Inter-American Relations, Series 4, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

34. Grace Glueck, "Show is Suspended as Artists Dissent"; Luis Camnitzer, "The Museo Latinoamericano and MICLA".

35. For a short history of El Museo del Barrio, see Yasmin Ramirez, "Timeline of El Museo del Barrio," in *Voices from our communities. Perspectives on a Decade of Collecting at El Museo del Barrio*, ed. Marshall Messer (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 2001): n.p.

36. Camnitzer, "The Museo Latinoamericano and MICLA." 222.