

Aesthetic Artefacts or Documents? Museums of Art and History in Late Nineteenth-Century Buenos Aires

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Argentina's National Museum of History and the National Museum of Fine Arts were created almost at the same time in Buenos Aires, towards the end of the nineteenth century. Many of the artefacts collected in both museums are of the same kind: oil paintings, drawings, engravings, and sculptures, depicting battles, portraits, landscapes, and *costumbrista* scenes. However, the artefacts in each institution were understood differently: those in the Museum of Fine Arts were considered as 'art', while those in the other museum were seen as historical documents. This differentiation between the material of art history and that of history deserves critical examination. The creation of each museum may explain this distinction, as well as offering a point of departure for further reflections about the way in which those artefacts have been exhibited, studied, and preserved.

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Oil paintings and watercolours, drawings, prints, sculptures in bronze, stone, or plaster; in the main, portraits, but also battle scenes, rural and urban landscapes, traditional scenes, and representations of historic and nation-founding events constitute the collections at both the Argentine National History Museum (MHN) and National Fine Arts Museum (MNBA). This is a characteristic held in common with history and art museums of the so-called 'western world' (i.e. with European cultural roots). However, scholarly studies of these two types of museums have generally followed separate paths and they have rarely been considered to be related. What are (or were) the criteria by which some paintings and sculptures have been considered, preserved, and exhibited as works of art and others as historical evidence? At first, attempting to answer this question seems to be too ambitious. Each institution has a story linked to the vicissitudes of its unique foundation and history. However, I would like to take this as a departure point for the following

reflections, which I hope might be useful for reconsidering these visual artefacts, their functions within the museums, and the stories that give them meaning. Furthermore, I draw attention to the different ways these works were preserved and restored, depending on which of the museums housed them. My point of departure was a reflection on the tensions produced between art and history in Argentina on the occasion of the Centenary of the May Revolution in 1910, due to the interference of the National History Museum's director in aesthetic affairs in the years leading up to that celebration.¹

A recent critical bibliography exists regarding the history and formation of the MHN and MNBA collections in which, however, very little attention has been focused on the apparently 'natural' distribution of the visual artefacts between the two institutions.² Concerning this art/history equation, Donald Preziosi proposes that in all works considered art there is a predominant interest in the information which the work provides regarding its authorship or its aesthetic sources.³ To this we could add that in the works preserved in history museums what predominates is the interest in the information provided concerning what they represent, that is, the story that appears in the image. The implicit criteria of *the truth* in works allotted to each institution also varies; a work preserved in an art museum is considered authentic when its authorship is in one way or another verified, while in the history museum the faithfulness of the image in relation to other sources of the depicted event (written or verbal) comes to the fore. It is the same for portraits; in art museums more importance is attached to the painting's aesthetic qualities or the painter's name than the subject of the painting, whereas in the history museum the portrait whose subject posed for the painter is considered authentic, even when the latter's identity is unknown.

However, I propose here to pin down these general reflections in the Buenos Aires' history and art museums' almost simultaneous processes of selection and organization. The first question in this investigation concerns artistic genres. Throughout the nineteenth century, the most common subject taught in the European academies was the painting of historical subjects, typically celebrated historical moments or portraits of major individuals intended to celebrate and commemorate the virtues of the monarchy, military heroes, and founding events of the modern nations. The salons' greatest prizes were for these types of historical works. They once occupied, and often continue to occupy, an important place in European museums of art and those of the American nations with relatively early Academies: i.e. México and Brazil. The great battle scenes by Pedro Americo, like the *Batalja do Avaí* (1872–1877) in Museum of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro are a good example. Similarly, in the nineteenth century, the commissioning and completion of a commemorative monument for a sculptor without doubt marked his or her arrival. This is the case of the monument to Cuauhtemoc (1887) by Francisco M. Jiménez and Miguel Noreña in Mexico city.

In Argentina there was neither an art nor a history museum until the last decade of the nineteenth century. They were founded within a few years of each other (the MHN was inaugurated as a city museum in 1889 and nationalized the following year and the MNBA was created in 1895 and inaugurated in 1896). Neither was there a national art academy until the twentieth century, when the academy

founded in 1878 by a group of artists (the *Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes*) was given official status in 1905. This situation led to a dearth in the production of historical paintings in the country and at the same time a need for such paintings. Thus the interaction between the two museums' directors and with the artists was direct and intense during both institutions' formative period.⁴

The comparison of the birth of these two museums, as well as their mutual relations, offers an opportunity to test some thoughts on the equation of artistic value with documentary value in visual artefacts at the end of the nineteenth century. Both museums were founded in the period of the consolidation of the state, the 'invention of traditions' and of an impulse for the active construction of collective national feeling, and at the time when, in the port of Buenos Aires, Argentina began to receive millions of European immigrants, bearers of languages, traditions and different national identities. Both museums were involved in this nationalist impulse from opposite sides: one of them attempted to consolidate the idea of nation while the other attempted to place it in a cosmopolitan network. They staged two different and complementary *rituals of civilization*.⁵ This role of museums, proposed by Carol Duncan in relation with the major European museums of art, acquired a particular bias in nations like Argentina, still in the process of political consolidation and at the same time becoming immensely wealthy: *civilization* was seen by the ruling elites as an urgent need and both museums were, in this sense, strategic weapons.

The National History Museum

The History Museum founded in 1889 had a clear pedagogical function. It was to form a harmonious 'national tradition' organized around the lives of the 'great men' of the May 1810 Revolution and the wars of emancipation, which were to serve as examples and guides for future generations. The transmission of national values and sentiments were, without doubt, the museum's main function, as proved by the establishment of special school visiting days practically from the moment of its foundation.⁶ The portraits, weapons, uniforms, and other relics of the leaders' feats were intended to excite the children's imagination, thereby planting in them patriotic feelings. Along the same lines, the museum also functioned as an active organizer of commemorations, the repatriation of remains of Independence warriors who died in exile, parades, subscriptions to erect monuments, as well as numerous publications which diffused reproductions of its heritage assets as they expanded with a flood of donations.⁷ This didactic function was organized around the almost sacred character of its heritage assets. The MHN was above all a venerable collection, a reliquary, a temple to the homeland and especially to its army.⁸ Such museum activity was part of a wider debate about national identity and patriotism; in 1889 concern also arose about unifying and settling the national symbols; what emblem and flag would be raised on holidays, in schools, and on public buildings? In the same year as the MHN's founding, the teaching and singing of the national anthem became compulsory in schools in Buenos Aires Province.

Closely connected to the symbolic importance of those portraits and relics, the museum was conceived as the nation's 'layman's sanctuary',⁹ and, although the donations signalled a turning point in which the majority of those relics passed from the private sphere to a public one, one can perceive a continuity in that movement. Those families who venerated their ancestors' memory in their private residences would be able henceforth to share it with their fellow citizens in the environment of a museum.¹⁰ Moreover, it was not unusual that the progeny of the heroes of independence, or the knowledgeable collectors who made donations, were in turn involved in the museum's formation and in some cases in the writing of historical accounts as well. Accordingly, Bartolomé Mitre, President of Argentina between 1862 and 1868, was also a military figure and author of historical accounts which shaped the historiographical design of the MHN like no other. At the same time he brought together the commission entrusted with its organization and was in turn one of the first donors of a significant collection.¹¹ It seems the MHN undoubtedly turned out to be almost a natural continuation of the history books which Mitre had published, and to some extent settled a historiographical controversy he started at the beginning of the 1880s in favour of the importance and value of preserving documents and relics in a public space.¹²

The virtual presence of independence heroes in the museum was established by its possession of their authentic relics: battle uniforms, medals, weapons, and personal belongings. Yet, undoubtedly this *presence effect* would not have worked if the visitors were not able to see these 'great men's' faces. It was crucial to have images of those men, mainly portraits, which became in effect the faces of the nation itself. This phenomenon led to the first Museum director's insistence, when requesting donations from families, on original, authentic and 'good portraits' of their illustrious ancestors. It might be said that the intention was to display to the public the material remains, images and objects which not only 'illustrated', but, above all, also 'demonstrated' the founding events of Argentina's national history by means of the relics' value. The MHN was not only a collection located in a building, it was also an institution with enough authority to establish — and disseminate through thousands of publications — depictions of national heroes and significant events.

Lilia Ana Bertoni has drawn attention to the complex web of factors which gave shape to the expansion of nationalism in the last two decades of the nineteenth century during which the History Museum was founded.¹³ In Argentina a pantheon of national heroes was consolidated with a strong pedagogical and commemorative impetus oriented towards nationalizing new immigrants' children. The political urgency of using commemorative material in this fashion signalled the form which historical interpretations would acquire. In contrast to loyalties to European nations, which were present in the increasingly important immigrant communities (especially the Italian), Argentina's nationalist initiatives took different forms in the public spaces of the capital (parades, celebrations, and statues) and above all inclined towards children's integration and education. The unification of languages and flags in the new generation's education, the strengthening and expansion of public education, the transmission of national belonging, the veneration of its hero cult were tackled at the very time Argentina was receiving the largest

contingents of European immigrants, and while the formation and consolidation of the nation was still unfinished.¹⁴ The founding of the History Museum offers a key to understand this development. The foundation was driven by contributions from influential individuals who had taken part by collecting, conserving, and writing about 'relics'. Thus the museum contributed to the formation of a sense of nation and of the affectionate memory of its heroes by making their images and relics available to new generations.

The decree which gave birth to the Museum of History was signed by Mayor Francisco Seeber on 24 May 1889, the day before 'junior battalions' of uniformed and armed schoolchildren, trained for a marching display by army officers, paraded in the 25 May celebrations. From their creation in 1887, these children's parades had been the main popular attraction of the May festivities. 'The boy soldiers', said Bertoni, 'became the emotional bridge between a heroic past, in which the homeland had been born and which the army wished to embody, and the promising future those boys would experience.'¹⁵ The example of Paris, which sparked that year with France's revolutionary celebrations, was present in the design of the children's parades, which were mentioned in press commentaries on the festivities. Nonetheless, there were protests by the teachers against the militarization of these marches as a growing atmosphere of discontent and 'civic protest' against the national government was brewing. As far as the MHN is concerned, it seems that the pomp and brilliance of military uniforms, weapons, and medals proved without doubt to be more efficient at cultivating collective feelings of belonging to the nation than the frock coats and inkwells with which the 'civil exploits' were conducted. Military objects had a prominent place not only among the first objects collected but in the display of the exhibitions as well. The first photographs of the display rooms show this military predominance and the first publications reflected this character.

In the framework of the political tensions, which later led to the revolution of July 1890, the mayor of Buenos Aires founded the capital's History Museum with a May 1889 decree summoning an assembly of public figures, including two former Argentine presidents and generals, Bartolomé Mitre and Julio A. Roca, as well as doctors Andrés Lamas and Ramón J. Cárcano, and leading military figures Estanislao Zeballos, Manuel Mantilla, and Ignacio Garmendia. Almost all of them had been members of the commission which, under Andrés Lamas' control, had arranged a 'History Exhibition' for the important Continental Exhibition organized by the Industrial Club in Buenos Aires in 1882. The assembly formed in 1889 could be regarded as 'being under a pledge' to the ruling liberal elite. However, as Irina Podgorny has already pointed out, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century it is not possible to attribute either the formation of the first public collections, or the management of Argentina's first museums to the will of a monolithic state or a coherently organized and maintained 'official policy'. In fact, this exhibitionary impulse is largely due to strong characters such as the naturalists and men of science who founded the two major Museums of Science and Natural History in Argentina: Germán Burmeister and Francisco P. Moreno (in her case studies).¹⁶ Adolfo P. Carranza, the historian who founded and directed the Museum of History, was no exception. He gave shape to the institution with his personal

vision, even though the MHN was particularly important for a sizeable portion of that ruling elite.

No sooner had Adolfo P. Carranza¹⁷ been appointed director of the MHN in February 1890 than he sent two almost identical circulars requesting donations for the recently created museum. The first was directed to all those illustrious personages, their descendants, relatives, and heirs who had preserved ‘trophies and souvenirs’ of national importance:

Honoured by the directorship of the MHN, I believe that my first step should be to approach your important circle in whose possession I suppose some treasured items of our revolutionary saga lie carefully preserved as family heirlooms.¹⁸

This letter was copied and sent to 143 recipients, among whom were some living veterans and other notables such as José de San Martín’s granddaughter; in sum, nearly all the families of the Buenos Aires’ patricians. Carranza appealed to a very wide network of people and in a few years achieved a substantial growth in the collections. Beginning in 1890 he regularly published museum catalogues, which were distributed free of charge to visitors, that reported the growth in the number of objects and their distribution throughout the MHN.¹⁹

Carranza’s second circular was addressed to antique dealers, collectors, and historians. Many of them had been members of the museum’s founding commission, possessed important collections, and in some way had previously promised their assistance:

Honoured by this directorship [of the MHN], I believe that my first step should be to approach your important circle, which for many years out of love of our country has devoted itself to gathering so many trophies and souvenirs of our revolutionary saga, thereby protecting them from the destruction of time.²⁰

The recipients of this second letter were Generals Bartolomé Mitre and Clemente Zárraga, Doctors Vicente F. López, Andrés Lamas, Angel Justiniano Carranza (uncle of the Director), Estanislao S. Zeballos, Manuel J. Mantilla, Benjamín Victorica, Ramón J. Cárcano, and Colonels José Ignacio Garmendia, Don Manuel Ricardo Trelles, and Don Miguel Navarro Viola. All of them replied with enthusiasm and became donors to the Museum.

Some donations were the target of lengthy negotiations and correspondence between the MHN’s director and notables’ descendants, as was the case of General Las Heras’ granddaughters, who wrote over a long period asking for help to obtain pensions from the Chilean government before donating their relics,²¹ or Sister Louise, director of the ‘Asilo del Pino’ home, to whom Mariano Necochea’s sister had donated his portrait. Sister Louise demanded in return a photograph which took a long time to be sent to her and which was not to her satisfaction.²² There were several other instances in which, at first, the families agreed to lend a painting for a while and then decided to donate it (sometimes in exchange for a copy), or in the beginning offered to send a copy in order to keep the original.²³ However, according to the MHN ledger, the director wanted originals at all cost and invested a great deal of correspondence, time, and effort to achieve that, even when he never mentions the artists of the works either in this correspondence or in his

publication of the portraits. His criterion of value was 'authenticity'. What did this mean? It signified that the personage had posed for the artist, that he had been accurately depicted, and that the work in question was not a copy. Also, in all the cases where daguerreotypes and photographs existed, it was obvious that Carranza preferred them to drawings, engravings, or paintings due to the guarantee of veracity that the mechanical device offered.²⁴

The volume of Carranza's publications (books, pamphlets, magazines, loose sheets, etc.) leads us to suppose that his idea of a museum greatly exceeded the collection gathered under one roof, even when he devoted most of his efforts to collecting 'objects'. The objects turned out to be fairly ineffective in evoking the people they were attempting to glorify. It became indispensable to put a face to the heroes and from this stems his insistence on portraits. Moreover, in addition to the Museum's exhibition of those works, it is likely that other aspects of the MHN's work made a greater contribution to diffusing Argentina's heroes' portraits and thereby nurturing the patriotic feelings of successive generations of citizens and especially schoolchildren. The MHN also undertook the reproduction of these portraits as prints, the publication of pamphlets and illustrated books, advisory services for school principals, provincial museums, and sculptors and painters who produced copies. Adolfo P. Carranza and the succeeding MHN directors can therefore be seen as understanding the value of circulating such images among its heritage assets. Undoubtedly, that multiplication of images was informed not only by criteria of 'authenticity in the portraits of the heroes' (the subject should actually have posed for them; or, when they existed, daguerreotypes and photographs), but also by the historical significance of their subjects, which is never made explicit, but without doubt was ever present. The decisions to exhibit and reproduce particular portraits make this clear. One example is the depiction of General José de San Martín, the main character in the historiographical construction of Argentina.²⁵ The MHN's collection of portraits and historic scenes was 'completed' by its director who ordered works and copies from several artists according to his personal criteria,²⁶ as is revealed, for example, by the contract signed in 1903 with the painter José Bouchet for the execution of a painting of a historical event which was crucial as a symbol of peace within the new order in the region: the embrace of San Martín and the Chilean national hero Bernardo O'Higgins.²⁷

As Podgorny demonstrated in the cases of the science and archaeology museums, nineteenth-century Argentine museum directors attempted to build these institutions in keeping with similar movements in other major cities around the world and with which they were familiar. In the case of the MHN, Carranza was not widely travelled (he never visited Europe), but he was advised by a cosmopolitan traveller: Ernesto Quesada.²⁸ Quesada had visited similar museums in France, the United States, Russia, Germany, and Holland and made a critical analysis of them. In his 1901 text Quesada carried out a critical and comparative analysis of the Palace of Versailles, the Carnavalet and Cluny museums in France, the National Museum of Bavaria in Munich, the Monbijou castle in Berlin, the National German History Museum in Nuremberg, the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg, the historical section of the Museum of The Hague in Holland, Faneuil Hall in Boston, Independence Hall in Philadelphia, and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC in the

United States. He also analysed the *Exposição de Historia do Brazil*, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1881 as a 'model' for Latin America. In a lengthy footnote he quoted Henry Houssaye's prologue to a retrospective exhibition of the French army organized that same year by the *Société de la Sabretache*.²⁹ Quesada apparently drew on his knowledge of an international array of museums to provide advice on many MHN decisions taken in the first years of its existence. He also provided a link to fine arts museums during that same period.

The National Museum of Fine Arts

The founding of the National Museum of Fine Arts was deliberated at length by a group of artists and intellectuals, who founded the *Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes* (Society for the Promotion of Fine Arts) in 1876, and supported by an even larger and more influential group of writers, artists and men of science which founded *El Ateneo* (The Athenaeum) in 1892.³⁰ However, the main figure in the foundation of the Museum of Fine Arts was Eduardo Schiaffino: painter, writer, and critic son of Italian immigrants, who carried out the project and was its first director. As in the case of the MHN, Schiaffino appealed to private collectors to build up its collections and the donation of several important private collections to the state was a decisive step in accomplishing this. In contrast to the director of the MHN, however, he travelled widely from his youth and was familiar with the main European museums. As far as possible he wished to model Argentina's national art museum on them. From 1883 he published his ideas concerning the need to develop Argentina's art, his interpretation and periodization of the history of Argentine art in the Buenos Aires press. After his first European journey in 1884, he published his impressions regarding universal art and the different efforts to encourage, preserve, and disseminate art gathered during his tour through European salons and museums.³¹

However, the objective of Argentina's fine arts museum was not so far from that of the MHN. Its function was thought to be basically didactic in pursuit of educating public taste and developing a modern national school of art with its own character in line with the great movements in 'world' art. Both for Schiaffino and the positivist intellectuals who supported his project, art was indispensable for the progress of the nation and the advancement of 'civilization'.³² One of those who expressed these ideas with the greatest clarity was, again, Ernesto Quesada. He was part of the *Ateneo's* founding core and it was at his initiative that plastic artists (painters and sculptors) were included among its members.³³ In 1893, when the *Ateneo's* first fine art salon was held, Quesada, who was at that time its librarian, published a lengthy article in *La Prensa* newspaper in which he offered a detailed analysis of Buenos Aires society, classifying it as 'excessively mercantile'. He welcomed the fact that the 'Phoenician city' had achieved sufficient maturity to beget a group like *Ateneo* and its exhibition which were based on spiritual, not commercial, values. The mockery and criticism which the *Ateneo* exhibition had received were no more than healthy symptoms of an evolution towards a more modern and civilized society, which was taking shape thanks to this artistic activity.³⁴

Although the MNBA's heritage assets grew almost exclusively from donations, at least until 1906, Eduardo Schiaffino maintained aesthetic control of the collection by asking for specific works, accepting or refusing donations, and advising some of those same collectors who would later donate their works, such as Aristóbulo Del Valle.³⁵ His expert gaze was widely recognized not only by his colleagues but also by the authorities, who granted him a wide scope to accept all kinds of donations until he was forced to give up his post after the Centenary exhibition in 1910. His aesthetic decisions must be judged as those of a fin-de-siècle modernist engaged in the education of his city's public taste, attempting to gather representative works of all periods and styles of art history, even if a majority comprised works of contemporary art.³⁶

As opposed to the works in the MHN, the artists' names and signatures were the decisive data for their inclusion in the Museum's collections. In the case of the MNBA, the criterion of value or beauty was downplayed in order to create a comprehensive and representative collection that better served the Museum's didactic objectives. Both the photographs of the Bon Marché salons (MNBA's first premises) and the description published in Baedeker's guide to Buenos Aires in 1900 revealed that Schiaffino organized displays of the MNBA's works according to artistic genres (still lifes, nudes, landscapes, among others) and not in a chronological order or according to style, so as to endow his 'incomplete' collection with a degree of coherence. Schiaffino's idea of a museum was clearly educational: such an organization was not unusual in Europe and North America, particularly among collections closely allied with art schools.

As a result of this simultaneity in the formation of their collections and the effort of both directors to 'complete' and give greater coherence to the holdings of their respective museums, the museums frequently exchanged objects. I end this article with an instance in which once again Ernesto Quesada appears. His interest in the ordering, valuation, and classification of the MHN's assets stems from his gradualist stance regarding the homogenization of Argentine society, its modern cosmopolitan culture and his own historiographical work.³⁷ In a pamphlet published in 1897 prompted by the MHN's move to Parque Lezama, Quesada analysed its collections, finding it deplorable that the museum considered itself obliged to accept all kinds of donations owing to a budget shortage. This led to general confusion in its displays, and a de-hierarchization of the accumulated objects, especially among the depictions of 'heroes' about some of whom there were doubts. There were, he asserted, too many relics from Bolívar, Sucre, Paez, and other foreigners, including the presidents Montt and Giró of Chile and Uruguay respectively. Quesada proposed not to exhibit them alongside Argentines, since the museum was 'national and not American'.³⁸

This cosmopolitan nationalist's desire to introduce a clear difference between Argentina and the rest of the Latin American nations within the scheme he believed the MHN should pursue is obvious. However, his article also made many comparisons with other European museums, revealing his aim of having the MHN measure up to the standards of European museums.

As an alternative to the depictions of 'foreigners', Quesada proposed that paintings which would fully depict the national iconography should be commissioned

‘from a select group of Argentine painters’ (those of El Ateneo) and he suggested a series of exchanges of paintings between the MNBA and MHN:

We permit ourselves to insinuate the convenience of conveying to the history museum certain canvasses of that kind, currently preserved in the fine arts museum, such as the *Review of Rancagua*, by the painter Blanes, or Álzaga’s last moments, whose historical value eclipses the artistic, while this museum [MHN] could give in exchange paintings such as *Lower Belgrano* attributed to the brush of the Argentine Prilidiano Pueyrredón, then similar canvasses would be apt for the other museum [MNBA] as they would help to reconstitute the national history of art.³⁹

Quesada also subtly assessed the aesthetic value of the MHN’s paintings by suggesting that to contemplate some of them, one had to ‘silence any feeling of artistic criticism’ because they were ‘horrendous’. He also demanded better preservation of miniatures and daguerreotypes, citing the examples of European museums where he had seen such works protected from the sun with dark panels, and confined to restricted exhibition. His critical review ended with a demand to the Argentine Congress for more funds to maintain the MHN, a clear message to the authorities, its director, and the minister.⁴⁰

The following year, the directors of the museums of history and art agreed to exchange works from their respective museums, among which were the paintings suggested by Quesada in his pamphlet. The *Review at Rancagua* by Juan Manuel Blanes passed from the MNBA to the MHN along with the *Assassination of Florencio Varela* (also by Blanes) and the *Fire on the Steamship America* by Eduardo De Martino. In return, the MHN would relinquish to the MNBA *The Washerwomen in Lower Belgrano* by Prilidiano Pueyrredón and twenty-two painted Mexican panels embedded with mother-of-pearl, which illustrated episodes of the conquest.⁴¹ Not only was the question of aesthetic values versus historic significance settled in this way, but progress was also made towards restricting the history exhibited in the MHN to sovereign territory and the period which began with the Argentinian wars of independence.

To conclude, I would like to draw attention to another of Ernesto Quesada’s interventions regarding MHN’s collections: San Martín’s granddaughter’s donation of his bedchamber in 1899. On that occasion Quesada published a pamphlet in which he put forward a hypothesis concerning the documentary importance of objects and images.⁴² He maintained that this bedchamber would shed light on the years of the hero’s ostracism in Europe, a period in his life which was not treated in an important biographer’s account. Quesada proposed drawing San Martín closer to the ordinary viewer’s experience through a display of his personal effects. Quesada’s recommendation of a didactic use of the San Martín objects is in perfect accord with the spirit which fuelled the founding of the museum and advanced its nationalist mission. His ultimate goal was to emphasize San Martín’s domestic, pious, and austere virtues by contrasting them with the ‘ambitious’ and excessive Bolívar. To demonstrate this he compared San Martín’s bedchamber to Bolívar’s and Washington’s, which he knew from engravings, to show that San Martín was more virtuous, austere, and just than Bolívar.⁴³ In the bedchamber’s display was San Martín’s portrait draped in the Argentine flag, allegedly drawn

by his daughter's drawing master, which was to prevail from then on in all the MHN's reproductions and publications, in school textbooks, and other kinds of materials treating San Martín. It was an 'authentic' image that fitted the nationalist expectations of the period. The bedchamber and its display thus allowed the museum to fill a gap in San Martín's biography and elevate his place in Argentina's national identity.⁴⁴

Conclusions

The formation of the collections, the selection of the visual artworks, as well as the criteria for conservation and exhibition policies, turn out to be very different in the national art and history museums founded in Buenos Aires at the end of the nineteenth century. Although both institutions were created and organized for mainly didactic purposes, the collected paintings, sculptures, sketches, engravings, etc. (even when created in many cases by the same artists) were valued by different criteria and preserved in different ways. The National Fine Arts Museum educated public taste by displaying the best works by the nation's best artists together with the best that Eduardo Schiaffino, its founder and first director, could gather from Buenos Aires' private collections and through foreign acquisitions. In this way, Argentina joined an international artistic mainstream at a moment when the local artistic scene began to be perceived with optimism. The National History Museum, on the other hand, aspired to cultivate public patriotism by exhibiting works which depicted heroes of the revolution, and the battles and founding events of Argentina's independence. While Schiaffino sought to 'complete' a panorama of world and Argentinian art, Adolfo Carranza attempted to 'complete' an account of the nation. For these reasons, original works of art and copies were valued differently in the two museums. In the art museum, the originality of the exhibited items was valued above all else, while in the history museum, not only were copies commissioned, but in some cases the museum authorized touch-ups and 'corrections' to items in its collection to make them suitable for their reproduction in magazines and school textbooks.

The classification and redistribution of artefacts described here mirrors a change that was taking place in museums in Europe and North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when existing and new institutions were drawing sharper distinctions between 'high' art and other manifestations of visual culture. In Argentina, however, the discussions that took place were closely related to politics in a wider sense. The nation itself was discussed in terms of collective identity within an international context. The fact that the two museums were created nearly simultaneously allows us to see the differential treatment of art and artefacts in particularly sharp relief.

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Notes

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- 2 M. I. Baldasarre, *Los dueños del arte* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2006); J. Andermann and B. González Stephan, eds, *Galerías del progreso* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo editora, 2006); M. E. Blasco, 'Comerciantes, coleccionistas e historiadores en el proceso de gestación y funcionamiento del Museo Histórico Nacional', *Entrepasados*, 36–37 (2011), 93–111; C. Carman, *Los orígenes del Museo Histórico Nacional* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2013).
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- 4 R. Amigo, *La armas de la pintura. La Nación en construcción (1852–1870)* (Buenos Aires: Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2008).
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- 6 Note of 1 September 1890 to the president of the National Education Council, Dr Benjamín Zorrilla, National History Museum Archive (NHMA), Libro de Notas I (LN I), ff. 38–39.
- 7 E. Quesada, *El Museo Histórico Nacional y su importancia — con motivo de la inauguración del nuevo local en el Parque Lezama* (Buenos Aires: Kraft, 1897), p. 6.
- 8 Quesada, *El Museo*, p. 22.
- 9 See José Rilla, 'Historias en segundo grado. Pierre Nora y los lugares de la memoria', *Pierre Nora en Les lieux de mémoire* (Montevideo: Trilce, 2008), pp. 5–9.
- 10 See I. Podgorny and M. M. Lopes, *El museo en un vitrina. Museos e Historia Natural en la Argentina* (México: Limusa, 2008). See also LN I and Libro de Recepción de Banderas y Objetos (NHMA), *passim*.
- 11 A. González Garaño and A. Apraiz, *Museo Histórico Nacional* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta de la Universidad, 1944), p. 15.
- 12 For an analysis of Mitres' texts and its meaning in the historiography of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and also for a comparative study of the successive editions of his *Historia de Belgrano*, first published in 1857, and of his *Historia de San Martín* (1st edn 1887), ed. by T. Halperín Donghi, 'La historiografía: treinta años en busca de un rumbo', in *La Argentina del ochenta al centenario*, ed. by G. Ferrari and E. Gallo (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1980), pp. 829–40. Mitre's controversy with Vicente Fidel Lopez on 1881 and 1882, including a 'scientific' history supported by documentary evidence and a 'philosophical' model, was analysed by Alejandro Eujanian in 'El surgimiento de la crítica', A. Cataruzza and A. Eujanian, *Políticas de la historia. Argentina 1860–1960* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 2003), pp. 17–41.
- 13 L. A. Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas. La construcción de la nacionalidad argentina a fines del siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001).
- 14 O. Terán, *Vida intelectual en el Buenos Aires fin-de-siglo (1880–1910). Derivas de la 'cultura científica'* (Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000).
- 15 Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas*, pp. 89–95.
- 16 Podgorny, *El desierto*, pp. 11–18.
- 17 Lawyer and historian, nephew of one of the leading scholars of historical objects collectors (Ángel Justiniano Carranza) and director since 1886 of the *Revista Nacional*.
- 18 LN I 1890 (NHMA), ff. 10–11.
- 19 The first two catalogues of the MHN were published in 1890. From then on until 1899 the Museum published annually a new catalogue of the collections. Those catalogues were small and of low cost, thousands of them were

- distributed freely to the visitors. See D. Ruiz, 'Las publicaciones del Museo Histórico Nacional. Reseña y bibliografía analítica', *Museo Histórico Nacional*, 2ª época, año 7, n° 4 (2004), 190–91.
- 20 LN I (NHMA), f. 10.
- 21 Cf. Correspondence in Libro de Documentos de Donaciones II (LDD II) 1906–1908 (NHMA).
- 22 Cf. 'Recibo de Deposito' No 25 (LDD I), f. 13, and LN I, f. 34 (NMHA).
- 23 Fermina F. de Díaz (granddaughter of Hipólito Bouchard) wrote to Carranza: 'Everything that belonged to my grandfather exists in Peru. The only thing we keep in memory of him is the picture. If you want we can let you get a copy of it' ['Todo lo que perteneció a mi abuelo existe en el Perú. Lo único que como recuerdo de él conservamos es el retrato que si Ud. Quiere lo podemos ceder para que saquen una copia de él'], LDD I, f. 12 (NMHA).
- 24 L. Malosetti Costa, '¿Verdad o belleza? Pintura, fotografía, memoria, historia' *Crítica Cultural*, 4.2 (2009), 111–23.
- 25 L. Malosetti Costa, 'Los retratos de Gil de Castro como reliquias históricas', in José Gil de Castro. *Pintor de Libertadores*, ed. by N. Majluf (Lima: MALI, 2014), pp. 74–78.
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- 29 E. Quesada, *Las reliquias de San Martín. Estudios de las colecciones del Museo Histórico Nacional* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Europea de M. A. Rosas, 1901), pp. 14–24.
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- 31 A. M. Telesca and J. E. Burucúa, 'Schiaffino, corresponsal de *El Diario* en Europa (1884–1885). La lucha por la modernidad en la palabra y en la imagen', *Anales del Instituto de Arte Americano e Investigaciones Estéticas 'Mario Buschiazzo'*, 27–28 (Buenos Aires: FADU, UBA, 1989–1991).
- 32 Malosetti Costa, *Los Primeros Modernos*, pp. 39–57.
- 33 'Movimiento literario–Ateneo Argentino', *La Nación*, 24 July 1892, p. 1, col. 8.
- 34 E. Quesada, 'El primer "salon" argentino'. Immediately republished in a book later that year: *Reseñas y críticas* (Buenos Aires: Lajouane, 1893), pp. 373–406.
- 35 Baldasarre, *Los dueños del arte*.
- 36 P. Melgarejo, 'Eduardo Schiaffino curador: la exposición Adquisiciones de 1906', *Segundas Jornadas sobre exposiciones de arte argentino y latinoamericano. Curaduría, diseño y políticas culturales* (Córdoba, 2009).
- 37 O. Terán, *Vida intelectual en el Buenos Aires fin-de-siglo (1880–1910) Derivas de la 'cultura científica'* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), pp. 207–87.
- 38 Quesada, *El Museo*, pp. 24–25.
- 39 Quesada, *El Museo*, p. 24.
- 40 Quesada, *El Museo*, passim. The text released in the public sphere was also a guide for *amateurs*, for the new art public that had first appeared in 1893 in the Ateneo's salons, to which he was invited to give a critical assessment of the homeland's 'treasures', which were gathered in the MHN in appalling confusion.
- 41 Document dated 'at the beginning of November 1898' [a principios de noviembre de 1898], Archivo Carranza (NMHA).
- 42 Quesada, *Las reliquias*.
- 43 Quesada, *Las reliquias*, p. 102.
- 44 L. Malosetti Costa, 'La imagen de San Martín y los historiadores', José Gil de Castro. *Pintor de Libertadores*, ed. by N. Majluf (Lima: MALI, 2014), pp. 78–85.

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