

Redes Intelectuales: Arte y Política en America Latina

Presentation of the project by Maria Clara Bernal

This project departs from the conviction that the concept of Latin America cannot be undertaken unless it is thought of as the network relationships established between intellectuals from the different countries. It is really from these intellectual exchanges that the geopolitical, epistemic and aesthetic idea of Latin America can be established, and thus the project is specially concerned with the subject of the relation between the arts and politics in the region.

Historically most of art history and criticism in Latin America was done by political and literary figures, there has been ample debate within the literary criticism about this subject and many of the sources we propose have been cited in these debates, however there has been scarce work on the subject of how these discussions affected and molded the art of the continent. The idea of intellectual networks, exchange of ideas and collaboration between counties is a subject that still has to be looked at more in depth from the perspective of the History of Art. We found it was necessary to pay more attention to the way in which the aesthetic became a common ground of discussion amongst strong diverting political and ideological positions.

We chose to review initially but not exclusively the decades of 1920 and 1970 because they represent in Latin America times where the ideas of avant-garde and conceptualism affected the intellectual and artistic production of our countries.

The decade of 1920 is of particular significance in the international context of post World War I. The subject of migrations becomes central to new developments; the movement of people between Europe and Latin America not only made us aware of new ideas but also made us better known to the rest of the world. As intellectuals travelled from one place to another they started developing working links and both our world and theirs became greater and more interesting. In Latin America especially there is a strong influence of the Russian Revolution, the Mexican Revolution and the expansion of the leftist ideology in the continent. Some examples of Latin American artists that went to Europe (especially Italy, Spain and France) in the decades of the 1920's and 1930's are: Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Joaquín Torres García, Emilio Petorruti, Vicente do Rego Monteiro, Tarsila do Amaral, Anita Malfatti, Rafael Barradas, Emiliano di Cavalcanti and Juan del Prete. Some examples of intellectuals that arrived to Latin America from Europe and established working relations are: Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Jorge Manach, Waldo Frank, Blaise Cendrars and Marinetti.

In the 1970 this trend of thought gains new life with the Cuban Revolution, the repercussions of May 1968 and Tlatelolco in Mexico. All these also fired up by the Vietnam War and Kennedy's Alliance for Progress program. These events were turning points for artists and art critics working at the time like Adelaida de Juan in Cuba, Marta Traba in Colombia or Ángel Rama (1926-1983) in Uruguay.

To conduct our survey we organized the subject of discussion in three modules that I will describe briefly and my colleagues will talk more about it in a minute:

Reviews

This module deals with publications that encouraged the conversation between different countries in Latin America by inviting the participation of its different intellectuals and that had somehow a way of circulating if not by direct distribution by the travels of its editors.

Platforms of representation

This module deals with meetings that had great impact in the building of what we consider Latin American art today. Events like La Habana 1971, Bienal de Artes Gráficas de Cali, Bienal de Sao Paulo, Bienal de Puerto Rico, Bienales de Medellin are just some examples of events that raised important questions about the need to build scholarship and intellectual networks from within the continent.

Groups

El techo de la ballena, *Taller cuatro rojo*, *Movimiento Surrealista Internacional* are some examples of groups conformed by artists and critics in different countries of Latin America to encourage intellectual reflection about the context and what it meant to produce art in Latin America. They often invited scholars from other countries to participate in their discussions

In general terms through these research topics we aim to detect and study specific links between the different intellectuals across the continent. The network is not only the subject of our study but also our methodology. The project has given us the rare opportunity to share and work as a team on documents and information that otherwise had been looked at by individuals as isolated cases; it has allowed us to revisit the primary sources and make public other kind of reflections and analysis of them based on the exchange of

ideas between people and thus take further the state of the field.

Mechanism of discussion:

In person meetings (Bogotá, Los Angeles, Buenos Aires)

Virtual meetings (Skype)

Virtual tools (Wiki and data base) Designed and implemented by William Lopez and Andrés Burbano.

Expected outcomes

The products of this project will be first of all the building of a new scholarly network that will continue working after this first stage of the project finishes. There will be an international conference in May 2013 at Universidad Trés de Febrero in Buenos Aires, a bilingual publication of the outcome of the different meetings and seminars and an exhibition with documents and works that are important to the subject of research.

Reviews

SELECTION CRITERIA

Jorge Ramírez

Cultural magazines published during the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century in various cultural regions of the Latin American continent, contain reflections that intellectuals of the time considered essential.

In that sense, all the magazines agglomerated in its pages the arguments that outlined particularities of social, political and cultural aspects of the time that were expressed through the continent's intellectual production.

In this heterogeneous and complex territory, the insularity of its geographical location, differences in population density, the process of defining social and political processes and links to the intellectual flow of the world in the early decades of the twentieth century, occurred through mediums characterized by questioning, conflicts and tensions. The artistic and intellectual scenarios were diverse as well as the point of view, inside and outside, which scrutinized the actions of the Latin American intellectual community.

Contemporaneity and proximity of the facts and continental problems did not imply a homogenization of the community's points of view.

The density in the controversy gives information about the links – some continuous, others dispersed- of the frames that took place. In practical terms, the selection of some texts from magazines like, the University magazine, Sunday Readings, Revista de Indias, Amauta Clarté, among others analysed in our research began with the identification of four basic premises:

- The particular dimension of the racial issue and its defence towards "Indianism" as the axis around which the discussion of local intellectuals revolved in.
- The relationship of social and political problems identified and shared by the countries of the various Latin American regions.
- The development of a local aesthetic, which could be applied in defining the commitments of Latin American art.

- The introduction of ideological arguments of the left to the political, cultural and social discussions.

The issue of race in the context of the Andean countries during the 20s and 30s acquired particular dimensions. The close coexistence of native groups, Europeans, Africans, and the growing phenomenon of racial mixing, generated a dense and contrasting ethnic landscape. The issue of race - in this context - was a social construction that made sense beyond the obvious specificities of the genetic order. The spatial concentrated areas, socially defined, established in practice routines with segregated activities. It was in this environment where they tried to specify the coordinates of various local cultures. An example of this was the discussion about the article by Guillermo de la Torre "Madrid meridiano intelectual de Hispanoamérica" (04.15.1927). The reaction towards this in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Lima, Havana and Bogota, among other urban centres produced a dynamic network of demonstrations, protests and comments, which emphasize the relationship between spatial location and achieved autonomy in the expression of local cultures. Within this debate different positions can be distinguished in their contextual reference:

In the "Cono sur", the validity of the language and local color are argued; meanwhile, both the Andean and Mesoamerican areas sought the recovery of archetypal places of ritual and the room as a synthesis of cultural expression of the natives. The mythical Indian was understood here as a cultural protagonist who could be recovered intellectually by history.

In the Mesoamerican and Andean context, the topic of "Indian" acquired specific guidelines. Everyday life, rooted tradition and the

increase of racial mixing overshadowed the physical presence of the native population. This condition caused there to be a recovery of "another Indian," based on blurred images of ancient cultures inexorably tied to the fascination that is brought by the mythical world. As a result, Indian representations were far from the appearance and the daily life of people with native features. The "Mexicanismo" frequently mentioned in the texts of the time, was the axis around the condensed ideals of revolution and the new sense of Latin American nationalism. José Vasconcelos, induced various local interpretations in the promotion of the Mexican transformation.

The inter-American network of relationships initiated by Vasconcelos was complemented by the work of intellectuals such as Carlos Pellicer. The two-way link acquired at the time that politicians, local artists and intellectuals began to travel, directly approaching the Mexican reality. Ignacio Gomez Jaramillo, Jorge Zalamea, Alfonso Lopez, Romulo Roza, among many Colombians, who through their cultural transit met the task of strengthening ties with cultural post-revolutionary Mexican fields. The ideological shift, of different speed, showed the approach towards leftist thoughts. In the Andean area, Marxist ideas of Mariátegui were reflected through Amauta. The controversy made the pages of *Clarté* - in its various Latin American versions - which generated disturbances in the traditional conservative views of the Andean area in Latin America. Even though there were not any important avant-garde proposals, there were open gaps where various proposals for change were infiltrated. The aesthetic proposal of the period, as expressed by authors like Carlos Merida, was based on issues like *race* and *color* with arguments sufficient enough to achieve autonomy. In the issue of race, the inquiries of local color lead to a very diverse range of

reflections. In the different regions of the continent, the experience of watching the local with sensitive eyes to popular color contrasts, free from affectation of conventional academic canon, allowed the plastic representation of the immediate cultural realities. Local art is understood as an integral component of the complex expression of the cultural field that is inhabited. Social problems are its subjects. Its expressions are the elements that bring together the experiences, which are true to its own culture.

Before concluding this presentation, it is interesting to note the solidary participation of cultural magazines of the period. The similarity of approaches led obvious links. Among them were allowed to reproduce articles, citing sources. They also found inserted promotional information about circulation, frequency and other forms of acquisition of continental cultural publications. The spatial, temporal, and intellectual density of the plot, in which these issues are found, allows us to follow up by reading the magazine articles of the period presented in this section of the exhibition.