Curatorial Rhetorics of Contemporary Latin American Art

by

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A Thesis
presented to
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of
Master of Art
in
Art History and Visual Culture

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

CURATORIAL RHETORICS OF CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN ART

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University of Guelph, 2019

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Curatorial Rhetorics of Contemporary Latin American Art explores the formative roles of curatorial acts in the development, framing, and dissemination of contemporary Latin American art within national and global visual cultures. Introducing the investigation in a wider historical, social, and political context, this thesis first begins by tracing a brief background of Latin American art in order to situate recent exhibitions of contemporary Latin American art on both global and national platforms. The three case studies examined—the São Paulo Bienal, Affective Affinities; the Art Gallery of Ontario, Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art; and the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Arts of Resistance: Politics and Change in Latin America—employed various curatorial frameworks in order to elicit particular perspectives of Latin American art. While international contemporary exhibitions help to expand the roles and responsibilities of the curator, these case studies also acknowledge curatorial acts as part of complex social and intellectual interactions and settings.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Amanda Boetzkes for her continued support and guidance in the developments of my thesis. Your patience and enthusiasm helped to strengthen my research interests and grow as a researcher and professional. I am grateful for the opportunities you have offered me that have helped to further build my skills. I would like to acknowledge my committee members Dr. Christina Smylitopoulos and Dr. Karen Racine for not only contributing ideas but for also offering guidance and support throughout my degree.

I would like to thank Dr. Laura Osorio Sunnucks for taking the time to meet with me at the Museum of Anthropology to discuss her curatorial work and the agency of exhibitions. Thank you to Marilyn Nazar at the AGO Library and Archives for allowing me to dig through the boxes of archives for my research on multiple occasions. Thank you to the College of Arts for supporting my research trips to Vancouver, British Columbia, and São Paulo, Brazil.

I would like to thank my husband, James whose unwavering support and love has helped push me through all of the bumps and roadblocks along the way. You have grounded me and been the voice of reason when I find myself unsure of next steps.

The help and support of my colleagues has been integral to my success. Carolyn, Desiree, and Peter, your friendship, humour, advice (and a shoulder to cry on) has been invaluable throughout this program.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to my family and friends. Your emotional support, encouragement, and patience made this journey possible. Thank you: Dad, Mom, Sabrina, Kaylie, Rachel, Nina, Dawn, Kim, Alyssa, and Katie for always believing in me.
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This thesis will demonstrate the formative roles of curatorial acts in the development, framing, and dissemination of contemporary Latin American art within national and global visual cultures. I consider curatorial acts to encompass curatorial rhetoric, acts of meaning-production, exhibition development, as well as the formation of visual and literary languages. My analysis of three case studies: Brazil’s 33rd São Paulo Bienal (1951- ) Affective Affinities (7 September -9 December, 2018), the Art Gallery of Ontario’s (AGO) exhibition Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art held between 31 January and 28 April, 2002, curated by Elizabeth Armstrong and Victor Zamudio Taylor, and the University of British Columbia’s Museum of Anthropology’s (MOA) show Arts of Resistance: Politics and Change in Latin America (17 May –30 September, 2018) curated by Laura Osorio Sunnucks, offers an investigation and comparative analysis between national and global curatorial acts. Drawing from the multifaceted discourse of contemporary Latin American art, I will examine the intersections of globalization, identity politics, and museology as part of the basis of the curatorial rhetorics used in the exhibitions. By creating a curatorial scaffold to compare the three exhibitions I will argue that the curatorial acts engaged at the São Paulo Bienal elicited the global presence of Latin American art, and through this global form the viewer is able to see the diversity of it.

The very discussion of what is considered to be and encompass contemporary Latin American art—and further, what and who defines it—bears complexities that the following literature review will explore in further depth. Within the Western canon, commonly constructed rhetorics for Latin American art have largely considered it as exotic, primitive, and derivative of
their European contemporaries. Consequently, these rhetorics have situated Latin American art within the margins, framing the use of a Eurocentric perspective while considering its histories. The representation of Latin American art in North America, especially in the United States since the 1930s, has commonly been demonstrated through geography-based survey exhibitions which perpetuate a narrowed and simplified, even homogenous version of Latin American cultural identities. For example, the exhibition *Art of the Fantastic: Latin America 1920-1987* (1987), which was held at the Indianapolis Museum of Art was heavily criticized by art historians and critics for promoting stereotypical concepts of Latin America. Its curators, Holliday T. Day and Hollister Sturges, were challenged by art historians and Latin Americanists for constructing a framework based on cultural aesthetic biases. Drawing from curator Brian Wallis’ work in museology, cultural representations can be used to produce certain views of a nation’s history and identity, and in the case of Latin America, strengthen the common notion that it is in fact a nation. As such, it is important to ask how Latin American culture is constructed, whose version of national culture is shown, what is not shown, and why. Wallis states: “The naming of a country as a work of art is a bold sleight of hand in that it alludes at once to the invented nature of nationality and to the role of culture in defining the nation to natives and foreigners alike.”

This is particularly interesting in discerning what constitutes Latin American art—considering the geographic region of Latin America encompasses over twenty countries, disparate cultures,
religions, and languages, what are the consequences of using the term Latin American art as a totality?  

I will investigate the functions of curatorial practice on both the national and global stage as a formative practice in constructing a representation of Latin American art. In the context of the exhibitions I examine, I use “national” to refer to the national museum. Both the AGO and MOA are Canadian provincial institutions with major collections that are nationally acclaimed and draw larger audiences. Historian Stephanie Anderson states that “national museums have typically been entrusted to construct and communicate a national vision through the expression of a common historical experience,” and as sites of pedagogy strategically define parameters of their collective nations. Underrepresented within the art historical landscape of Canada, I will investigate these two national institutions to determine how Latin American art has been constructed and compare those curatorial rhetorics to the São Paulo Bienal—the first biennial format to emerge outside of the Western art centres and the second longest running biennial in history.

In the chapter that follows, I will explore the role of the curator, particularly how it has unfolded into a central role of meaning production. It is through the use of narratives and

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4 For the purposes of this thesis I consciously use the term “Latin American art” as an operative construct that serves to identify the characteristics of a broad network of artists, agents, and supporters whose culture shares commonalities including legacies of religion, language, and a history of colonialism. Part of my thesis aims to reveal the complexities, contradictions, differences, and similarities that both join and separate “Latin American art” with the rest of the world.


framing devices, that the curator assigns value and meaning to exhibitions and artworks. Consequently, Paul O’Neill contends that the narratives left out from history reveals just as much about culture as what is recorded and circulated.⁷

As we will see in this thesis project, the many histories and narratives of Latin America have been homogenized into one sweeping history, which has narrowed the ways in which exhibitions represent contemporary Latin American art. Thus, by charting three notable exhibitions, I will argue for how the biennial Affective Affinities performed as a powerful exhibition that left behind the persistent stereotypes within the discourse. Since the late 1980s, evident progressions in contemporary curatorial practice, occurring on an international scale have been the models of the “local” and the “global” in constant dialogue with one another.⁸ Considered as temporary spaces for mediation, the biennial is presented as interfaces between art and larger publics—publics which are at both local and global, resident and nomadic, non-specialist and art-worldly.⁹ Although there exists various contradictory positions surrounding the burgeoning, biennial phenomenon, the concept of the biennial format as traditional white cube requires closer study. Though considered as a site for critical experimentation in exhibition-making, which offers artists, curators, and visitors an alternative space to museums and similar institutions, the structure of the biennial continues to mirror the white cube through an architecture which speaks to the constructs of Western modernism. The biennial format continues to develop and reinvent itself through using experimental curatorial devices, such as inviting artists to take on the role of curator, and pushing the boundaries of traditional curatorial

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⁸ O’Neill, The Curatorial Turn, 16.
⁹ O’Neill, The Curatorial Turn, 16.
models. Recently, it has been argued that the biennial has evolved and become one of the most vital sites for production, distribution, and generation of the discourse of contemporary art.\(^\text{10}\) Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø suggest that if museum and gallery exhibitions have largely been considered the medium to interpret and understand art, it is the biennial exhibition that has since proved to have become the medium to interpret and understand contemporary art.\(^\text{11}\)

My research therefore investigates how contemporary Latin American art has been, and continues to be, framed and disseminated to different public audiences. In their research, Mieke Bal, Boris Buden, Timothy Michell, Mari Carmen Ramírez, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, have reiterated that the role of the curator, its primary act, is to influence visitors. This is done through the exhibition space, which takes into account selected artists and their works, placement of works, overarching thematics, and use of visual and literary languages. Along this vein, I am suggesting that, because of the influence the curator exerts, Latin American art has been situated within the stereotypical frameworks that characterized it as exotic, but more recently has made earnest contributions in breaking away from these frameworks, revealing contemporary ways of understanding Latin American art.\(^\text{12}\)

Taking the form of case studies, my thesis project will examine key exhibitions on both a global and national scale. On the national stage, those are exhibitions presented at the Art Gallery of Ontario and Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia; while on


\(^{11}\) Fillipovic, Van Hal, Øvstebø, *Biennialogy*, 15.

\(^{12}\) This will be further explored in my thesis through case studies of major exhibitions. See *Curatorial Acts, Towards the Heterosphere: Curator as Translator, Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order, Brokering Identities: Art curators and the politics of cultural representation, and Curating, Exhibitions and the Gesamtkunstwerk*. 

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the global stage I will examine the São Paulo Bienal. I will compare how contemporary Latin American art has been characterized and represented in these forums through the examination of three dimensions: spatial practices of exhibition, the contextual siting of artworks, and the curatorial rhetoric that mediates them. The exhibitions I will analyze each take up their own chapters respectively. The AGO and MOA exhibitions integrate Latin American artists onto the landscape of Canadian art, introducing artists from Latin America who are not generally represented within Canada, and demonstrate how contemporary Latin American art and culture has been, and continues to be, presented in museums and galleries. The global São Paulo Bienal proposed a shift in curatorial practices by inviting seven artists to take on the role of curator and question power relations which exist in the art world. Examining each exhibition against the three dimensions stated previously allows for me to compare and contrast each case in order to identify and discuss concepts of global and national exhibitions, curatorial consciousness and self-consciousness, and how these come together and impact the representation of contemporary Latin American art.

In order to investigate these case studies and curatorial acts, a discussion around the exhibition space is necessary. Art historian Carol Duncan’s paper, “Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship” (1990) is concerned with the museum space as a “ceremonial structure” and investigates what art institutions have to say about culture, specifically, how they produce political subtext. Performing as part of a ceremonial structure, Duncan writes, “museumgoers today, like visitors to these other sites [such as temples, cathedrals, or shrines], bring with them the willingness and ability to shift into a certain state of receptivity.”13 How then can curators use that shift towards a receptive capacity to help frame an exhibition, produce an identity, or a

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hegemonic lens by which to interpret a culture? For cultural theorist Mieke Bal, curatorial practice is a performative device that is both collective and dialectic in its impact as techniques to influence, enrich, and to guide visitor experiences. As such, drawing from her work in “Curatorial Acts” (2012), curating is a discourse of “framing objects” and the curator must be clear on what it is they bring, in terms of content, position, and thematic framework, into the conversation of the artworks exhibited. Similarly, art historian and curator Mari Carmen Ramírez analyzes the discourse of the representation of Latin American art in the United States, suggesting a shift has begun in the role of the curator, from arbiter of art to the central player within the broader stage of global cultural politics. From this curatorial shift within the broader stage of global cultural politics has emerged the notion that identity is a negotiated construct. This thesis will examine how exhibitions engage in this negotiation and represent social, cultural, or political complexities.

I suggest that curators are accountable for framing the identity of Latin American art in public institutions. Consequently, my thesis considers the ways in which the role of the curator has made important shifts from essentialist, Eurocentric practices to global, heterogeneous methods. Examining the factors that have come to construct the ways in which public audiences receive and perceive contemporary Latin American art enables me to open a discussion in the discursive currents that exist within exhibition development, which include: performativity, affect, and self-representation. To situate my research, the chapters in this thesis are broken down into four sections. My literature review in Chapter One is organized into four areas of focus: curatorial acts, the biennial, the national (museology) exhibition, and the discourse of

contemporary Latin American art. Curatorial acts—which I also refer to as “the curatorial”—examines the idea and use of language as contextual frames in the formation and dissemination of contemporary exhibitions. More specifically, taking into consideration curatorial rhetoric, such as the performative agency of the curator, I will build upon discussions of spatial experience and how meaning is accessed from exhibitions—such as through the use of narrative and affect. I will consider the arguments of Mieke Bal, Paul O’Neill, and Bruce W. Ferguson in a discussion about curatorial acts in order to build my argument around the curator as an agent of framing and curating as a total environment.16 Following this, I will develop the history of the biennial, as well as the formation of the São Paulo Bienal, alongside contemporary discourses of globalization and identity politics. I will build off from major contributions to the study of biennials such as those made by Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, Sabine B. Vogel, and Solveig Øvstebø.17

I will also discuss in Chapter One the national stage and museological concepts, taking for my departure point seminal contributions from Anthony Shelton, Donald Preziosi, and Mari Carmen Ramírez.18 I investigate the exhibition platform through discussions around architecture,


design, experience, and the language of museum space. I seek to investigate how the national institution continues to construct exhibitions and how these curatorial environments shift when compared to the model of the global biennial. Finally, the fourth area investigates the discourse of Latin American art, with particular focus on the contemporary. This focus explores the influences and factors that have come to characterize how we perceive the idea of Latin American art such as through globalization theory and postcolonialism. I will build from the scholarship of George F. Flaherty, Andrea Giunta, and Gerardo Mosquera in continuing the discussion of defining Latin American art in order to have an informed understanding before investigating each case study. This discussion will outline the challenges of representation and identity politics that are present in the canon.19

Chapters Two through Four take the form of case studies, which will chart curatorial rhetoric and its constitutive role in framing contemporary Latin American art to museum- and biennial-goers. Chapter Two considers my first case study of the exhibition, *Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art* (2002), presented at the AGO. It examines the exhibition’s use of hybridity in visual culture and the ways in which the baroque has attempted to respond to key shifts on both cultural and societal levels. Chapter Three examines the MOA exhibition, *Arts of Resistance: Politics and the Past in Latin America* (2018), focusing on globalization theory.

Both chapters will introduce the discussion of the integration of Latin American artists onto the landscape of Canadian art, speech acts, and reader-response theory. This will enable me to explain how rhetorics of Latin American art have been presented. Chapter Four considers global visual cultures and the biennial phenomenon. I will then examine the São Paulo Bienal, *Affective Affinities* (2018), for which the curator, Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, invited seven artists to take on the role of curator to question the power relations that exist in the art world and represents a shift in traditional curatorial practices and instead, reflects critically on the notion of artistic and cultural influence. In addition to this, Chapter Four interrogates the efficacy of biennials as an exhibition model and considers the artist-curatorial as a rupture within traditional curatorial practice. Examining each case study with particular focus on the spatial, the contextual, and curatorial rhetoric allows me to compare and contrast each in order to identify and discuss concepts of global and national exhibitions, curatorial consciousness and self-consciousness, and how that impacts the representation of contemporary Latin American art.

Drawing from art historians, cultural theorists, and anthropologists such as: Nestor Garcia Canclini, Elena Filipovic, Walter D. Mignolo, Mari Carmen Ramírez, Anthony Shelton, and Brian Wallis, these case studies are situated as the central groundwork of my research. They are woven together through the applications of visual analysis and analytical investigations and explore, in depth, the notion that art fundamentally changes—art as art, object as index of culture, installation as culture, installation as aesthetic sense—through three very different lenses (cultural framework, national representation, and global representation).
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Discourse of Latin American Art: A Short History

As an underrepresented discourse within art history, there lacks literature on Latin American art published in English. Currently art historians and Latin Americanists work to fill this gap, for example, since 2001 Mari Carmen Ramírez has been building a rigorous database of primary sources on an online database for the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA). Its mission to both pioneer research of the artistic production of Latin American and Latino artists and to educate audiences about the field highlights the importance of intercultural exchange. As this thesis will reveal, Latin American art has faced a history of being marginalized, consigned to the margins of art history, and represented in exhibitions as fantastic or exotic. For the purposes of my research I will chart a short history of Latin American art and highlight a few significant exhibitions which were instrumental in shaping perspectives of Latin American art from a Eurocentric lens. This will provide a foundation for the case studies in Chapters Two through Four which will explore three unique presentations of contemporary Latin American art.

In their paper, “Latin American Art History: An Historiographic Turn” (2017), art historians Andrea Giunta and George F. Flaherty critique the dominant narrative of modernism for relegating Latin American art to the margins of art history. Using a comparative perspective, they analyze the history of Latin American art with particular focus on global exchange, and the impact of political and economic change. Giunta and Flaherty state that over the last “twenty years, the history of Latin American art ceased to be a discipline of connoisseurship and
reconstituted itself as a social science.” However, the impact of cultural studies, interdisciplinary research, and an expansion of the field, all in the wake of democratic re-establishments in Latin America since the 1980s, has made this radical shift towards art history possible. Giunta and Flaherty challenge traditional historiographic approaches and raise questions around the neutrality and stability of comparative analysis, which tends to identify and discuss works by: school, movement, and style. In their research, they plot a critical map that charts the trends and imbalances in how Latin American art has been defined over time in order to better formulate a more inclusive art history moving forward.

Echoing a number of points discussed in their investigation, Claire Farago’s essay, Whose History? Why? When? Who Benefits and Who Doesn’t? (2017), offers a comprehensive overview of the main theoretical and methodological points that are relevant to the field of art history today, especially within the study of Latin American art. Farago writes: “Edward Said and many others since have urged scholars to examine the history of our inherited nineteenth-century European categories as part of our studies by taking the subaltern position of the culturally dispossessed subject.” If art history’s global turn is to successfully include the views and material culture of many different constituencies, “it needs to take into account cultural productions that have been historically sorted into the separate disciplinary and sub-disciplinary practices of art history, archaeology, and anthropology.” A practical problem arises because anything created by humans inevitably becomes a legitimate object of study. For example, by

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21 Giunta and Flaherty, Latin American Art, 125-126.
22 Giunta and Flaherty, Latin American Art, 127.
24 Farago, Who’s History, 289.
treatig first contact with Europeans as the originating event of Latin American cultural history, a chronology centred on European events continues to be reproduced.\textsuperscript{25} Farago, Giunta, and Flaherty’s work takes a close look at how the methodologies in which art historians and professionals across various disciplines traditionally develop and capture the study of Latin American art. Their papers express concerns around the neutrality of framing the study of Latin America through a Eurocentric lens. The exhibition platform, specifically, has played a pioneering role in capturing and writing the histories and narratives of Latin American art. In North America, this process can be observed starting in the 1930s in the United States, where “Latin American Art” as a field was first developed by curators, who employed essentialist and Eurocentric models in their practice.\textsuperscript{26} Ultimately, these models have incorrectly characterized all Latin American art as “magical realism.” In the chapters that follow I will demonstrate the subtle shifts which curators have manifested in attempts to redefine Latin American art.

According to art critic Marta Traba in \textit{Art of Latin America: 1900-1980} (1994), as it relates to archival material of Latin American art history, there ceases to be a body of research, especially in English, dedicated to understanding as a whole, the cultural production of more than a handful of countries, representing a variety of cultures, traditions, and language areas.\textsuperscript{27} Consequently, this obstacle in the writing about modern Latin American art has justified the exclusion of placing it within the landscape of the twentieth century. Traba writes: “[Latin American art] should not be viewed as a mere appendage of such firmly established cultures as those of Europe and the United States, but as an autonomous creative effort, mirroring a

\textsuperscript{25} Farago, \textit{Who’s History}, 299.
community that has been struggling since the late 1800s to assert and define a culture of its own.” Building from the work of Farago, Giunta, and Flaherty, Traba’s research examines the historiographic methods of recording Latin American art. Reviewing existing material, she examines monographs of individual artists, which do not fall within the typical framework of modern systems of analysis and evaluation but rather, include biographical details and histories of modern art dedicated to individual countries within Latin America. What she found was that studies which were more extensive contained analyses of “pre-Hispanic traditions and influences received from abroad, and studies in which countries are grouped by geographical areas.” Nonetheless, the underlying problem to these methods resulted from a lack of uniform guidelines as it relates to the value of judgment. Traba assumes that the current unequal methods of criticism are, in part, due to the notion that the study of Latin American art is a relatively new profession in Latin America.

In the exhibition catalogue, *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970* (1988), Felix Angel further supports Traba’s claims that art history is a relatively new discipline in Latin America, stating that criticism has often been confused with objective interpretation by general publics. The criteria for analyses has almost exclusively arrived from European standards. Angel criticizes this method of analysis stating:

> [It is] as if art in Latin America were the product of that tradition [of European standards of analysis] alone, uninfluenced by other human and spiritual forces. While Latin American art is indeed a part of the West, this acknowledgment should not consign it to a secondary role in the developments of twentieth-century art.

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As a result, literature on the history of Latin American art can be difficult to find. Giunta and Flaherty express that archives of Latin American art are considered in some ways characteristic of the field’s recent shift: “Public and private, incomplete or disappeared, difficult to access and freely available on the web.”\(^{32}\) It is with that characteristic that disparities in scholarship lending to the formative importance of further building the discourse comprehensively comes to light.

In his book, *Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century* (1996), Edward J. Sullivan provides a concise timeline of the presence of Latin American art in the United States. Of particular importance, Sullivan begins by highlighting the concerns and complexities which come with candidly using the term “Latin America” and correspondingly “Latin American art.” Often misused to denote a common cultural heritage, Sullivan states that “Latin America” was invented in France around 1860 and has continued throughout the twentieth century into the present. Latin American art, he continues, played a role in the cultural consciousness of both, the United States and Europe.\(^{33}\) For example, in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s, Latin American art peaked particular interest as a result of government-sponsored programs. However, by the late 1940s, the interest in Latin American art diminished at a time where attention and interest was refocused to younger artists working within the Abstract Expressionist movement. Twenty years later, the Cold War in the 1960s offered a period of larger US government support for cultural projects concerned with Latin America. This translated to government agencies promoting exhibitions of Latin American art in major cities across the United States, as well as sending exhibitions of American artists to the capitals of Latin America.\(^{34}\) Today, Sullivan

\(^{32}\) Giunta and Flaherty, *Latin American Art*, 133.


\(^{34}\) Sullivan, *Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century*, 11-12. Branching off from this stream, which warrants more research, are the considerations of the effects of patronage and tourism on
writes: “A prejudice against Latin American art still exists within the ‘academy,’ where it has long been considered, within the Eurocentric framework of art history, as ‘exotic,’ or ‘derivative’ of European or North American art.” With regards to the visual arts, Sullivan asserts that the worst examples of stereotypes and clichés have emerged from European and North American audiences. For example, Sullivan states that one of the most widespread and vexatious of clichés discerning 20th-century Latin American art is characterizing it as an embodiment of surrealistic personality, accompanied by an exuberant use of colour. The disenchantment of Latin American art has become an international phenomenon. However, as Angel pointedly states: “Latin America is more than tango, carnivals, and drugs, just as the United States is more than hamburgers and the Ku Klux Klansmen.”

In 1989, a large-scale exhibition titled, Art of the Fantastic, curated by Holliday T. Day and Hollister Sturges, was severely criticized for its promotion of stereotypical concepts of Latin American art. Silvia Montes alludes to this in a section of her paper, “Beyond Multiculturalism: A Comparison of Latin American Art in Britain and the USA.” With the assistance of the Rockefeller family from 1929-1930, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) planned to acquire the best of modern art. This objective was furthered by the private acquisitions of art from Latin America, from Nelson Rockefeller’s frequent trips to the region. After the war, a focus shifted to promoting art from the United States. As a result, Rockefeller’s Latin American art collection—which was eventually donated to the MoMA—was not integrated into the collection, and instead was relegated to the basement of the museum. Here it was left, neglected, as the only part of the museum’s collection organized on a geographical basis. “Trustees wanting to exclude art from Latin America and reserve the US market mainly for New York galleries used Rockefeller’s alleged political motives in acquiring it to denigrate its aesthetic value and resist all later attempts at integration.” Therefore, the influences of patronage and tourism look to have an impact on the reception and representation of Latin American art in the US. (Silvia Montes, Beyond Multiculturalism: A Comparison of Latin American Art in Britain and the USA, Bulletin of Spanish Studies, 2007: 579. In Miriam Basilio, ‘Reflecting on a History of Collecting and Exhibiting Work by Artists from Latin America’, in Latin American & Caribbean Art: MoMA at El Museo, ed. Miriam Basilio (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 2004), 52-68.).

35 Sullivan, Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century, 14.
36 Sullivan, Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century, 9.
American art, and for constructing a framework for it according to cultural and aesthetic biases. On the exhibition, Ramírez challenged the show stating:

Art of the Fantastic best exemplifies the tendency toward reductionism and homogenization that underlines the representations of Latin American identity. In defining the criteria for the show, its curators left aside the multiple viewpoints provided by the works themselves in order to zero in on their own concept of the ‘fantastic.’

Interestingly, the exhibition was organized to coincide with the Pan American Games and is reminiscent of world fairs as captured by Brian Wallis in the paper, “Selling Nations: International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy” (1994).

In this paper, Wallis investigates the concepts of international exhibitions as a way of manufacturing national identities and the extent to which that identity is constructed through cultural representations. In realizing these, visual representations are an essential element in symbolizing and sustaining national communal ties. Wallis underscores that these representations are not just reactive, but also purposefully creative. Through the planned overproduction of certain types of images or the censorship or suppression of others, and through controlling the ways images are viewed by determining which are preserved, cultural representation can also be used to produce a certain view of a nation’s history. Wallis argues that cultural festivals or world fairs are among the means by which a national identity is constructed for foreign audiences and are designed to “sell” the nation’s image to the West. Influenced by Edward Said’s seminal book, Orientalism (1978), Wallis underscores a central paradox commonly present within national exhibitions and world fairs: “In order to establish

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40 Wallis, Selling Nations, 265-266.
41 Wallis, Selling Nations, 266.
their status with the international community, individual nations are compelled to dramatize conventionalized versions of their national images, asserting past glories and amplifying stereotypical differences.”

He coins this as a product of a “self-Orientalizing” mode. Countries that have been subjected to the characterizations of Orientalism have now adopted this mode of “self-Orientalization.” Rather than an “outside oppressor” imposing stereotypical perspectives, nations themselves have begun to remake national images of their selves to align with Western, and specifically American, frameworks. In the end, Wallis argues, rather than expanding our understanding, world fairs and national exhibitions narrow our view of a country to that of a benign, exotic, fairy tale. Art historian Silvia Montes continues that art will only be supported when it represents the “cultural identity” of a cultural group, and only by manifesting difference will a minority group be entitled to support. As a result, the “boom” in Latin American art and literature during the 1970s in the United States was not simply due to “a fundamental re-evaluation of its status in relation to the mainstream and to an end in its marginalization,” but rather due to the popularisation of the exoticized “other.”

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42 Here, Wallis makes the connection with Orientalism as a political fiction, that it is a deformed representation only sustained through the misappropriation of signs of foreignness, which often entails suppression and exclusion. (Wallis, Selling Nations, 271.)


44 Wallis, Selling Nations, 281.


46 Montes, Beyond Multiculturalism, 581.
In his paper “Good-bye Identity, Welcome Difference” (2001), art historian and curator Gerardo Mosquera states that culture in Latin America has suffered a neurosis of identity that is not yet completely cured, and has become an obsession linked to the aftermath of colonialism. He insists that “the self-consciousness of belonging to a historical-cultural entity misnamed Latin America is maintained, but problematized,” and suggests that Latin American art is unstable because of a wavering idea of itself, which in turn has led to the interpretation of Latin American art as cliché. Mosquera suggests that another “trap” in the reception of Latin American art is the assumption that it is entirely derivative of Western traditions. Consequently, and as part of recent fascinations with globalization, artworks that explicitly address difference or satisfy expectations of exoticism are constituted while the rest are left along the peripheries of the landscape of twentieth-century art history. As a result, Mosquera states that many artists are inclined towards “othering” themselves, in turn becoming a paradox of “self-exoticism,” or as Wallis calls it, self-Orientalism. Here, Mosquera questions Latin American art and identity: “To what extent are the artists contributing to the transformation of the hegemonic and restrictive status quo in favour of true diversification, instead of being managed by it?”

In Chapter Four, I discuss the São Paulo Bienal and the curatorial decision made by curator Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro who chose to invert the typical “curator-theme-artist” relationship and situate artists at the centre of the Bienal. He invited seven artists, or artist-curators, to have autonomy in the curatorial structure of the exhibition. Rather than being managed by hegemonic structures, the artist-curators actively

48 Mosquera, Good-Bye Identity, 25.
49 Mosquera, Good-Bye Identity, 26.
50 Mosquera, Good-Bye Identity, 26.
51 Mosquera, Good-Bye Identity, 27.
contributed to diversifying a truly global exhibition presenting artists from across the world alongside one another.

Cultural theorist, Stuart Hall, in his chapter, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990), investigates subjects including cultural identity and representation as it relates to marginalized groups. He begins by laying out the problem with the authority and authenticity of using “cultural identity” to identify identity as a static fact rather than something that is continuously in process and evolving. Hall highlights an important concept which is further explored in my discussions of the curatorial: “The ‘I’ who writes here must also be thought of as, itself, ‘enunciated.’ We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and culture which is specific,” and therefore how and what we say is always written or shared in some kind of contextualized frame. According to Hall, there are two main ways of thinking about and examining cultural identity. The first defines it in terms of one—one shared culture, one people—where numerous other identities and shared histories are in a sense, hidden or homogenized. Hall explains that hidden stories have had a critical role in the emergence of some of the most important social movements throughout history and include: feminism, anti-colonialism, and anti-racism. The second recognizes the differences that define “what we really are” or “who we have become.” Thus, Hall suggests that cultural identity is both a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being.” Insofar as it is present both in the past and in the future, rather than transcending place, time, history, and culture, it is subject to the power of history and culture. Edward Said’s discourse on Orientalism highlights that the West has constructed the

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53 Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, 222.
54 Hall, *Culture Identity and Diaspora*, 223-225.
55 Hall, *Culture Identity and Diaspora*, 225.
perception of the Other as different, and that it is because of Western perspectives that the Other sees and experiences themselves as the Other. Montes weighs in on discussions on identity in her research, concluding that the key to enabling Latin American art to transcend its context as art is to separate Latin American art from the concept of Latin American identity. This is particularly important to my study, especially as it relates to the São Paulo Bienal which presented artists and artworks from across the world in one location, only divided by the seven thematic frameworks of the artist-curators. One of the most successful aspects of the Bienal is that the Latin American artists who were exhibited were not characterized or pigeon-holed under a curatorial thematic that was founded in identity. Rather, the artworks were able to speak for themselves and interact with other artworks by other international artists.

Echoing Sullivan’s analysis, semiotician Walter D. Mignolo writes in his manifesto *The Idea of Latin America* (2005), that the “America” we recognize was an invention developed in the process of European colonial history and the expansion of Western world views and institutions. In understanding the formation of Latin America, Mignolo maintains two paradigms: “discovery” and “invention,” stating that the line which delineates between the two represents a shift in the geopolitics of knowledge, which changes both the terms and content of the conversation. “Discovery” supposes the European imperial perspective on world history that was described as modernity; while the “invention” reflects on the critical perspectives of “those who have been placed behind, who are expected to follow the ascending progress of a history to which they have the feeling of not belonging.” Reflecting on criticisms from Farago, Mignolo’s discovery paradigm is located within traditional Eurocentric perspectives, whereas the invented

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56 Hall, *Culture Identity and Diaspora*, 225.
57 Montes, *Beyond Multiculturalism*, 582.
paradigm includes the perspectives and realities of the colonized. The dichotomy between discovery and invention performs as a constant re-framing of the identity of Latin America within a Eurocentric perspective, and as a result, racial and cultural heterogeneity remains at stake.

Mignolo argues that the idea of Latin America is based on a modern European invention which has been limited to how Europeans view the world and their own history. Within that view and history, coloniality has been, and continues to be ignored or concealed as a necessary injustice in the name of justice.\(^{60}\) He argues that the “colonization and the justification for the appropriation of land and the exploitation of labour in the process of the invention of America required the simultaneous ideological construction of racism.”\(^{61}\) Discussing the emergence of racism within the context of the modern/colonial, Mignolo underscores the formative issue when members of a specific cultural group are privileged with classifying other people and power in the words and concepts of the given group.\(^{62}\) He further articulates that this kind of suppression—of choosing how and who to classify, and conversely, how and who to neglect—would evolve to become conceptualized as “modernity,” suggesting modernity was a necessary historical force with the right to negate and suppress everything that did not fit “an essential historical process.”\(^{63}\) This “modernity” expressed through suppression positioned the West at the

\(^{60}\) Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, 59. Mignolo addresses the concept of coloniality through four domains of human experience: the economic, the political, the civic, and the epistemic/ the subjective or personal. The economic deals with the appropriation of land, the exploitation of labour, and the control of finance; the political controls authority; the civic controls gender and sexuality; and the epistemic controls knowledge and subjectivity. With this in mind, the idea of Latin America then, is a mass of land with a wealth of natural resources and labour, of which the exploitation of labour from the Americas can be traced from the Industrial Revolution to the movement of factories from the US into developing countries in order to reduce costs.


centre, enabling it to categorize the rest of the world in an hierarchical framework. Consequently, this allowed for Western Europe to become not only the centre of economic and political organizations, it also functioned as a model for the ideal social life—an example of human achievement. Mignolo writes: “The West was, and still is, the only geo-historical location that is both part of the classification of the world and the only perspective that has the privilege of possessing dominant categories of thought from which and where the rest of the world can be described, classified, understood, and ‘improved.’”64 This history of racial and geographic categorization traces the idea of Latin America back to the “invention” of the Americas as a colonial European perspective that excludes the voices of the people already living on the land, of which the consequences and violence of colonialism still surface today. Mignolo’s analysis of Latin America and its colonial roots emerges in earlier exhibitions of Latin American art, such as Art of the Fantastic which presented artworks within a rhetoric that maintained European classifications and perspectives. For example, although the printed exhibition catalogue did include literature from Latin American historians, it was separated from the literature of Western perspectives and relegated to a sub-section titled “Another View.”

With the inception of “Latinidad” during the nineteenth century came an ideology for the colonization of being, which situated Latin Americans as second-class Europeans, while characterizing Latino/as in the US as second-class Americans.65 Charting how Latin America and being Latin American has come to represent and assimilate one identity, Mignolo criticizes the Creole elites of the newly independent and emerging countries for emulating European intellectuals, instead of devoting themselves to the critical analysis of colonialism.66 The idea of

64 Mignolo, The Idea of Latin America, 36.
65 Mignolo, The Idea of Latin America, 64.
Latin America evolved to become a new racial category, and this category rather than defined by blood or skin colour, Mignolo states, is defined by marginal status (such as geographical location and language). As a result, the “colonial wound” is a direct consequence of racial discourse. Mignolo raises important questions that ask us, what is at stake with the idea of Latin America, who is affected, who continues to be affected, who benefits, and how can it evolve? The history of Latin America has deep roots entrenched in colonialism, politics, and Eurocentric perspectives, which continue to affect the framework of understanding Latin America and Latin American art today. I attempt to answer Mignolo’s question, “how can it evolve?” in the chapters that follow by charting the curatorial decisions which led to the materialization of three exhibitions which have built a momentum in framing Latin American art.

Recalling Farago’s research, it has been key to consider and become aware of the methods which art historians have traditionally used to develop and present Other histories. Taking a closer look at the development of the historiography of Latin American art is imperative to understanding the construction of the landscape and relationships of socio-cultural and political events that have informed a Western framework of how public audiences perceive Latin American art. Silvia Montes claims that “the exclusion of art from Latin America from major public collections is in turn responsible for its exclusion from art history, which is based on the authority of museums.” These arguments are important to highlight in this literature review as part of a short history of Latin American art because it is a way to demonstrate the complexities which exist and the long history of colonialism that has shaped how we see and understand Latin American art today. In order to partake in the discourse of Latin American art it

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67 This is especially interesting when thinking about what is Latin American art and how it is perceived through a Eurocentric lens as primitive or less than.
68 Montes, Beyond Multiculturalism, 579.
is necessary to recall who and how it was shaped so that we can inform how to shift the
discourse moving forward to be globally inclusive. The way in which Latin American art history
has been written persists today in the treatment of contemporary art. For example, the history of
exhibitions of Latin American art in Canada is nominal with only one public gallery dedicated to
the presentation of Latin American art (Sur Gallery), which is located on the main floor of a
Toronto condominium. I argue that in order to break this cycle of exclusion curatorial activities
must embrace the global model exemplified by the Bienal.

**Contending with Curatorial Acts**

In considering curating as a discourse of cultural agency, international curator Hans Ulrich
Obrist traces its origins in *Ways of Curating* (2014). Breaking down the word itself, its Latin
root, *curare*, translates to “to take care of.” Tracing this concept back to ancient Rome, the
history of the curator was first associated with civil servants, known as curators, who took care
of and oversaw the functions of the aqueducts, bathhouses, and sewer systems. During the
Medieval period, the curator, now recognized as the *curatus*, operated in the role of priest, taking
care of the souls of their parishioners. By the eighteenth century the role of the curator evolved
into that of a caretaker, looking after the collections of museums. And from here, the
contemporary curator has remained closely attached to its original root as *curare*—a caretaker of
sorts.\(^{69}\) According to Obrist, the role of the curator is considered to be a fairly new profession in
art history, and for the time being, the conceptual practice of curating has become more closely
associated with the modern ritual known as the exhibition.\(^{70}\)

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\(^{69}\) Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Curating, Exhibitions and the Gesamtkunstwerk,” in *Ways of Curating*

Beginning in the late Middle Ages, the history of exhibitions was rooted in the work and special display of artisanal craftsmen during annual and seasonal festivals. Apprentices would show their best objects at such fairs and festivals to be judged by the master craftsmen. Upon passing inspections by the master craftsman, artisanal craftsmen would be awarded the higher status of maker. As we can begin to see, the early phases of the exhibition were established as a ritualistic presentation for professional certification. Obrist states that during the course of the twentieth century:

Exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known. Not only have the number and range of exhibitions increased dramatically in recent years, but museums and galleries...now display their permanent collection as a series of temporary exhibitions. Exhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained, and occasionally deconstructed.

Within the discourse of the exhibition, the term “demystification” first began to surface during the late 1960s and was first introduced by American art dealer Seth Siegelaub, who used it in reference to a shift in the production of exhibitions. The curator had begun to make visible the mediating components within the development, creation, and dissemination of exhibitions. Siegelaub suggests:

I think in our generation we thought that we could demystify the role of the museum, the role of the collector, and the production of the artwork; for example, how the size of a gallery affects the production of art, etc. In that sense, we tried to demystify the hidden structures of the art world.

It was during this time that the primary discourse around the presentation and representation of artworks in exhibitions began to shift away from criticizing artworks as autonomous objects of study towards curatorial criticisms where the exhibition space took critical precedence over the...
work of art. The discourse of curatorial criticism not only incorporates critical discussions about artists and the object of art, it also looks beyond to include the curatorial as a subject—considering the role of the curator in shaping exhibitions.

Following the “turn towards curating,” the 1990s saw the emergence of curatorial publications, symposia, and conferences as the beginnings of better defining what the curatorial encompasses—such as the various approaches, practices, and strategies that curators use in their work. In *The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse* (2007), curator and artist Paul O’Neill suggests that exhibitions, in whichever form they take, are always ideological—as hierarchical structures that produce both particular and general forms of communication. As a primary site for curatorial experimentation, he argues that the group exhibition has enabled a new discursive space around artistic practice. Countering the canonical model of the solo exhibition, the presentation of multiple artists and artworks in one exhibition creates a space for defining various ways of engaging with contrasting or disparate interests, often within a more cross-cultural context. As cultural agents, both artists and curators contribute to the production of value because exhibitions are intrinsic parts of what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer termed the “culture industries”—which they associated with: entertainment, mass culture, communications, and as parts of the consciousness industry. As such, O’Neill stipulates that as contemporary forms of rhetoric, exhibitions are complex expressions of persuasion that carry strategies that aim to construct prescribed sets of values and social relations for audiences. As a subjective tool, exhibitions are considered as a model which not only upholds identities—artistic, national, cultural, regional, and global, to name a few, but also a model that challenges identities.

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76 O’Neill, *The Curatorial Turn*, 16.
Since the late 1980s, the turn towards curating included the shift away from administrative, stewardship, and mediating processes towards what Ramírez characterizes as the transformation of curatorial practice from arbiter of art, to a central player in the broader stage of global cultural politics.\footnote{Mari Carmen Ramírez, “Brokering Identities: Art curators and the politics of cultural representation,” in \textit{Thinking About Exhibitions} (New York: Routledge, 1996), 16.} In her chapter, \textit{Brokering Identities: Art curators and the politics of cultural representation} (1996), Ramírez reiterates the role of the curator as, above all, institutionally recognized experts of the art world who establish both meaning and status of contemporary art, not only through exhibitions, but also through acquisition and interpretation.\footnote{Ramírez, \textit{Brokering Identities}, 15.} Underscoring this shift in the role of the curator, of which Ramírez terms as “broker” she argues that curators who perform as cultural brokers are not limited to discriminating artistic excellence. Instead, their function is to reveal how artistic practices of traditionally marginalized or peripheral groups convey ideas of identity.\footnote{Ramírez, \textit{Brokering Identities}, 16. In her paper, Ramírez considers how the dynamics of identity politics on the global and local stages have impacted the curatorial as it relates to the United States. Her discussions on curatorial agency are explored further throughout the case studies in the chapters that follow.}

Questioning what is at the core of the curator’s practice, Dorothea von Hantelmann argues it is the act of selection. In her paper, “Affluence and Choice: The Social Significance of the Curatorial” (2012) she brings the idea of narrative to the forefront of curatorial scope. The exhibition space performs specific narratives organized by the curator’s choices—choices that are designed for the visitor to respond to in their own particular selection of artworks to engage with, to spend time on, etc.\footnote{Dorothea von Hantelmann, “Affluence and Choice: The Social Significance of the Curatorial,” in \textit{Cultures of the Curatorial}. Eds. Beatrice von Bismarck, Jorn Schafaff, Thomas Weski, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 44.} Consequently, this suggests that exhibitions can be seen as sites where acts of comparison, selection, and differentiation are practiced and cultivated. Along with
the evolution of the curator as cultural agent, the “art of choosing” has become a cultural practice tethered to the discourse. Von Hantelmann suggests that the role of the contemporary curator has evolved as a profession to hold the act of selection at its core: the selection of artists, artworks, aesthetics and discursive positions, all of which the curator situates into new contexts and themes of meaning.\textsuperscript{81} The evolution of the curator has ascended from being someone primarily in service of something—such as a facility, institution, artist—to becoming a producer of meaning, and as such curating as a total environment.

In her paper “Curatorial Acts” (2012), cultural theorist Mieke Bal suggests that curating is a discourse of “framing objects,” and that the curator must be clear on what it is they want to bring to the conversation with respect to the works of art presented. She examines framing, specifically as it relates to curatorial practice, as a performative device that is both collective and dialectic in its impact on influencing, enriching, and guiding the thought of museum- and gallery-goers alike.\textsuperscript{82} The curatorial, as Obrist suggests, is considered through the lens of the German term, “Gesamtkunstwerk” meaning the “tendency towards the total work of art.”\textsuperscript{83} As this relates to the curator he states: “The danger with a large group exhibition is that it can be seen as the exhibition-maker’s own Gesamtkunstwerk.”\textsuperscript{84} As such, exhibitions risk being seen through the frame of the curator’s own devices, where the curator risks being considered as using artworks as a tool to frame their own theory or interpretation. Echoing Hall’s concept of the “I” and the “enunciated,” as well as Bal, the primary act of the curatorial—which she considers to be the exhibition—is specific in its impact on the visitor. The curatorial, then, becomes a combination of framing objects and speaking through those framed objects to a public audience.

\textsuperscript{81} von Hantelmann, Affluence and Choice, 44.
\textsuperscript{82} Bal, Curatorial Acts, 181.
\textsuperscript{83} Obrist, Curating, Exhibitions and the Gesamtkunstwerk, 30.
\textsuperscript{84} Obrist, Curating, Exhibitions and the Gesamtkunstwerk, 32.
Bal suggests that the act of framing produces an event, an activity, which is performed by an agent—here being the curator—who is responsible for their acts. I consider the event to encompass the exhibition proper, where the curator is the agent of framing and produces a narrative for visitors to see. Because they are responsible for their own acts, the agent of framing is in turn framed. In this way, the attempt to account for one’s own act(s) of framing is doubled to include both making clear what it is the curatorial agent brings to bear on the artwork, such as the reason for selecting an artwork, placing it, etc., and to be accountable for one’s own position as an object of framing.

Building off of Bal’s model of the frame is the act of reading that happens within the context of the framework, which she suggests may be considered as part of speech-act theory. Bal states that reading images based on speech-act theory rests on the correlation between seeing and speaking. “Reading is an act of reception, of assigning meaning. The viewer reframes the work…according to contingent circumstances.” Further, Bal states that each act of looking is always a reading. Without signs an image cannot yield any meaning.

**The National Institution: Museology**

According to anthropologist and curator, Anthony Shelton, the notion of museums as colossal state-sponsored, narrow disciplinary institutions has been replaced by new operational strategies that have transformed many into open-minded institutions. Across Europe and the Americas, museums were first developed in order to hold and care for ethnographic collections. The

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86 Bal, *Reading Art?*, 298.
establishment of museums saw two waves—the first dated between 1849 and 1884, and the second followed shortly after from 1890 to 1931. Two earlier systems of classification and display were developed before the first wave of museums began to spread during the 1830s and 1840s by the French geographer Edmé François Jomard and the Prussian physician Ph. F. von Siebold. Jomard’s comparative approach to presenting objects according to their function was challenged by von Siebold, who argued that objects should be classified and presented according to geographical origin first, and by function only as a secondary option. Presently, the discourse around museum display and systems of classification continue to carry disparate positions. As we have come to see in the presentation of Latin American art, one of the major polemics is the classification of collections by geographical origin, separating out works from main collections—as was the case at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Echoing Shelton, Donald Preziosi maintains that the museum, nation-state, and the modern notion of culture arose together. The function of the museum was to provide a space within its nation or community to function as a model for the projected unity of the nation. At the same time, the museum provided its visitors or “citizen-subjects” a juxtaposition of subjects through the presentation of exemplary objects or “object-lessons” of aesthetic, ethical, political, and historical worth. It is at this juncture that museum-goers begin to consider the museum object—that none are silent, and each takes up space within cultural and historical discourses. As a result, Preziosi states that “museums render what is visible legible.”

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89 Shelton, Museums and Anthropologies, 66.
90 See footnote 25.
In “Museum Practice and Mediation: An Afterword” (2015), Shelton identifies the current landscape of museum culture. He establishes that museums, as an institution, have faced numerous circumstances in which they have been challenged by intellectual critique and weakened by both political and market conditions. As a result of major social transformations, cultural institutions have become destabilized and are compelled to be re-evaluated in relation to the “new” knowledge and creative economy. This, Shelton suggests, is what has fostered the museum’s redefinition. Today museums straddle intellectually, aesthetically, and ethically complex landscapes peppered by institutions that are increasingly divergent.92 Conversely, nowhere can differences between museums be more clearly visible than in their exhibition programs. He states, over the last decade “museums have lost their semantic monopoly over a subject position, that of the curator or keeper, which in both professional and public understanding, provided one of the most powerful tropes through which they were imagined.”93

In his chapter, Exhibition Rhetorics: Material Speech and Utter Sense (1996) Bruce W. Ferguson underscores the narrow scope exhibitions presented on the national stage face, due in part to the fact that they are “publicly sanctioned representations of identity, principally, but not exclusively, of the institutions which present them.”94 As presented in discussions of the curatorial, exhibitions function as narratives that employ artworks to narrate particular frameworks—of which Ferguson states museums use as elements in institutionalized stories that are promoted to the public. As such, the museum is one of the most discernable of the institutions whose roles are under inquiry. As is the role of the curator, the public museum is

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92 Shelton, Museum Practice and Mediation, 613.
93 Shelton, Museum Practice and Mediation, 616.
shifting in response to new systems of representation that situate art and its capacities within a larger semiotic environment. The public museum, like Althusser’s “ideological state apparatuses,” which include the university and the church, find themselves under contestation over who precisely controls its agenda, and what are its fundamental purposes.  

Bal examines the discourse of “new” museology stating that a consequence or reaction of the discourse is that most literature places focus first on the ethnographic, and second by the historical museum, leaving the art museum less deeply addressed. The ethnographic and historical museums both face immediate problems around cultural property and collective ownership, which Bal contests in *The Discourse of the Museum* (1996). She challenges colonial ethnographic collections, questioning whether former colonists should be entitled to continue to hold onto objects and works that were taken by their ancestors, or should these pieces be returned to their original owners. Generally, while the ethnographic museum conserves and exhibits “artifacts,” the art museum does the same with works of art. Introducing the concept of narrative, Bal discusses the very terminology used to discuss what is meant by stating: “It seems obvious what we mean by these terms; yet how they refer to differ, and where that difference lies semiotically, which interests it serves ideologically, are not clear.”

Examining the term “artifact” suggests a cultural object that was hand-made, and has the potential to offer those “reading” it information and insight about the society or culture from which it originated from. Mutually, the term “artwork” can hold the same meaning as artifact does. Using painting as an example, it could offer the “reader” information about the culture in which it was created, and

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95 Ferguson, *Thinking About Exhibitions*, 127.
offer insight about a larger cultural situation, such as particular world views.\textsuperscript{98} All this is to say, deconstructing the narratives that frame both historical objects and art works is important in considering systems of classification and how that might shift the narrative around the object.

The notion of language and narrative in material culture within the museum, like globalization, represents a contested terrain. How the curatorial and the museum translate culture into a local context is fundamental in the process of mediating exhibitions. Curator and critic Hou Hanru states that:

\begin{quote}
The question of the global versus the local is now the central issue in artistic and cultural debates. However, the global and the local are not separate entities positioned to fight against each other. Instead, they are two sides of the same coin.\textsuperscript{99}
\end{quote}

Exhibitions reveal an interaction and re-contextualization of the global within the local. Using curatorial thematics they reflect on the nature of what globalization means, keeping cognizant of the homogenizing forces of global capital.\textsuperscript{100}

\textbf{The Biennial Phenomenon: Towards a Global Art}

With the creation of biennials worldwide, the 1980s saw “global art” making its first appearance, and with that for the first time, the West was no longer able to claim the sole right to arts and cultural institutions. As defined by Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic, the biennial phenomenon represents large-scale international exhibitions that reflect the cultural diversity of global artistic practices and call into question the paralysis of public art institutions that are

\textsuperscript{98} Bal, \textit{The Discourse of the Museum}, 148.
\textsuperscript{100} Rectanus, \textit{Globalization}, 383.
reluctant or too slow to respond to the developments of contemporary art. The biennial is a site for critical experimentation in exhibition-making that offers artists, curators, and visitors an alternative space to museums and similar institutions.

Filipovic, Van Hal, and Øvstebø state: “If it can be said that for more than a century museum and gallery exhibitions have largely been the medium through which art becomes known, then it is the biennial exhibition that has arguably since proved to be the medium through which most contemporary art comes to be known.”

Rafal Niemojewski’s paper, Venice or Havana: A Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial (2010) underscores that the contemporary biennial can be identified by a focused importance to forming infrastructures for contemporary art and the public sphere, as well as the will to negotiate conditions of the peripheral. Pre-dating the contemporary biennial, Niemojewski explains that earlier biennial models are directly connected to the nineteenth-century salon and highlights that the four main biennials—the Venice Biennale, São Paulo Bienal, the Carnegie International, and Documenta—should be regarded as the most important evolutions of the Venetian model.

Today, more than a hundred biennials, triennials, and other perennial exhibitions exist worldwide, and it is São Paulo’s biennial that is considered to be the second one to successfully come into existence. Not only is it the first international biennial to succeed using the Venice Biennale as a model, but it is also the first to be realized in a geopolitical location outside of the Northern hemisphere. In 1951, the conception of the Bienal Internacional de São Paulo was

101 O’Neill, The Curatorial Turn, 16.
102 Filipovic, van Hal, Øvstebø, Biennialogy, 15.
founded by Francisco “Ciccillo” Matarazzo Sobrinho, an Italian-Brazilian industrialist who, only a few years before, in 1948, founded the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP). The São Paulo Bienal moved into its present-day permanent location, the Oscar Niemeyer-designed Ciccillo Matarazzo pavilion (originally named the Palace of Industries) in 1957. As the world’s second longest running biennial, Isobel Whitelegg states:

"[It] has been one of invention and re-invention, from solid Modernist museological roots to phases of experimentation and risk, moving through different configurations in terms of governance, funding, artistic direction, and reach, and taking place in a public park within a densely populated city whose economic and political divides are never entirely invisible to the event itself." 

The biennial’s evolution invites critical reflection on the past and present—of which the 33rd edition, *Affective Affinities*, pushes experimentation further by encouraging individual appreciation and perception by circumventing the inclusion of an overarching curatorial theme for the exhibition.

Caroline Jones states that: “The founding of a biennial pledges to renew knowledge perpetually, stakes a claim for the cosmopolitan urban centre to rejoin a wider international community, and makes a pedagogical promise to visitors to bring them the world.” The biennial serves as a forum to question cultural identity and enable a pluralism of values to emerge, instead of a space which constructs realities or narratives—like national exhibitions might do. Global art critic, Sabine B. Vogel conveys that biennials continue to serve public audiences as a mirror of the current worldview, which is something that makes the platform so interesting and constantly moving. She states: “Unlike gallery exhibitions, biennials do not serve

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105 Whitelegg, *The Bienal*, 381.
to create or strengthen the career of individual artists. Biennials help raise awareness."\textsuperscript{108} As a platform for global art, biennials offer the opportunity to use experimental curatorial practice and test the limits of the exhibition and its attendees.

Bringing together aspects of the curatorial, the national (museology), the biennial, and the discourse of Latin American art in this literature review, demonstrates the formative roles that curatorial acts play in the development, framing, and dissemination of contemporary Latin American art within national and global visual cultures. In addition, it allows for the chapters that follow to investigate, in detail, three formative case studies. Through a comparative analysis, the exhibitions—\textit{Affective Affinities}, (São Paulo Bienal); \textit{Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art}, (AGO); and \textit{Arts of Resistance: Politics and the Past in Latin America}, (MOA)—are considered against three dimensions: spatial practices of exhibiting, the contextual siting of artworks, and the curatorial rhetoric that mediates them. These case studies also question how curatorial acts frame particular views of marginalized communities, specifically, Latin American art and culture. As we have come to see within the Western canon, commonly constructed narratives for Latin American art have largely been considered from a Eurocentric perspective, applying an exoticized or primitive lens in developing context and meaning. As such, it has become vital, now more than ever, in the political climate that we face, to question what is Latin American art—and further, what and who defines it. If such questions are not asked and pushed further, there is the risk of becoming stagnant, of not evolving and moving towards heterogeneity. By examining the factors which have come to construct the way in which public audiences receive and perceive contemporary Latin American art allows for further discussions in the undercurrents that exist within exhibition development and curatorial practice.

CHAPTER 2:
COUNTERING THE “FANTASTIC” PARADIGM, ULTRABAROQUE: ASPECTS OF
POST LATIN AMERICAN ART

Introduction
The exhibition platform has and continues to play an essential, pioneering role in capturing and writing the histories and memories of Latin American art. As I have argued in Chapter One, in North America the formative role of exhibitions began in the 1930s in the United States where “Latin American art” as a field was developed by curators in American museums.\(^{109}\) Exhibitions focused on presenting Latin American art, developed gradually from broad surveys first initiated by non-specialized museum staff based on formal affinity or geographic proximity (oftentimes sponsored by government agencies or multinational corporations) to specialized and thematic exhibitions organized by “curator-scholars.” Exhibitions actively contribute to shaping national, regional, and post-identity models through curatorial thematics that can provoke scandals, form archives, or exclude particular artists in order to fulfill predetermined frames of perception. As a result, more recently, curators, artists, and, what Mari Carmen Ramírez calls, “cultural brokers” situated in the Americas have sought to expand, counter, and supplement the framework of the exhibition platform.

Constructed as a model that sought to push the boundaries of the exhibition platform, this chapter examines Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art, exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), and how it forged curatorial approaches and historical accounts of

contemporary art from Latin America. As Bruce Ferguson has stated, exhibitions are rhetorical. They aim to persuade while admitting to its own necessary contradictions and multiplicities.\textsuperscript{110} This chapter argues that the exhibition’s curators, using the national institution as a platform, aimed to shift traditional, essentialist curatorial approaches towards Latin American art by reframing the conditions of the exhibition by convening a group of advisors and focusing on keeping the exhibition as an open proposal that did not strictly adhere to a finite plan.

Several years before Ultrabaroque was presented at the AGO, a shift in the field of Latin American art was set into motion. Led by curator Gerardo Mosquera, several Latin American scholars and curators began working to critique and challenge the field’s legacy of essentialism—recognized as the assignment and characterization of essential or a priori features to the artistic and cultural production of a community or region.\textsuperscript{111} Typically, the essentialist model characterized Latin American art as “magical realism”—an artistic style that depicts realistic views of the world while also adding unrealistic elements—and linked it to the Latin American literary “boom” of the 1960s, which constructed a canon defined by artists whose works emphasized fantasy, figuration, and narrative, such as Fernando Botero, Frida Kahlo, and Diego Rivera. This characterization defined the infamous 1987 exhibition Art of the Fantastic: Latin America, 1920-1987, from the Indianapolis Museum of Art, and allowed for other curators to tack together vastly different periods such as Latin American modernism alongside precolonial works of art. The emphasis on the essentialist approach garnered much attention and appeared in large-scale exhibitions of global art, such as the universally acclaimed, Magiciens de la Terre (1989). A formative issue associated with the essentialist approach is its close proximity

\textsuperscript{110} Giunta and Flaherty, “Exhibitions as fields of comparison,” 103.

to exotification and neo-primitivism—the association with certain artistic choices based on identity rather than any other factor. Additionally, as Latin Americanist Daniel Quiles highlights, another issue with essentialism “arose from the fact that it does not hold up for many movements in twentieth-century Latin American art, most conspicuously abstraction and conceptualism in their various guises from the 1940s to the present day.”112 As a result, we began to see curators expand and develop curatorial models that shifted towards an approach that reflects the cultural diversities of global artists and call into question institutions that are too slow or reluctant to respond to the developments of contemporary art.

Sprawling across the Eaton, Elliot, Gelber, Odette, and Braudo galleries at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the exhibition Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art, ran from 31 January through to 28 April, 2002 (fig. 2.1). A traveling exhibition that originated from the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, it aimed to sustain a diverse discourse of the baroque, through offering a critical reading of its facets in Latin America. Featuring artists across six countries in Latin America, the exhibition reflected on Latin American baroque art and visual cultures and investigated recurring themes, terms, and motifs. Ultrabaroque played on popular concepts of the baroque while acknowledging the extensive influence of its origins in the spirit of art and architecture during the colonial period. Through the concept of the “baroque,” the show included instances of nineteenth- and twentieth-century acts of resistance to colonialism and economic repression, especially as it relates to Indigenous communities. The exhibition took on the task of defining the baroque through a lens of contemporary art from Latin America, and had two aims: to investigate the relationship of specific strands of contemporary artistic practices throughout Latin America, and to explore the idea of the baroque as a sensibility resonating

112 Quiles, *Exhibition as Network*, 66.
in the work of many current artists born or living in Latin America. The exhibition strategically used the baroque as a label to generate cross-cultural exchange and bring attention to contemporary Latin American art. The exhibition featured approximately seventy-five works by fifteen artists and was co-curated by Elizabeth Armstrong and Victor Zamudio Taylor (1956-2013).
According to Hugh Davies, former director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, the exhibition and accompanying publication “elucidate the rich cultural history grounded in the integration and assimilation of the European baroque, which has, as a result, created a
fertile climate for recent art.” Typically characterized as absurd or grotesque, stylistic and material features of the baroque express strong representations of mystical feelings which include emotion, grief, ecstasy, and faith, as well as the use of contorted lines used to express the originality of the artist.

At the same time, the exhibition also described the junction of global and regional cultural characteristics that form the unique aesthetic that Armstrong and Zamudio Taylor describe as “post Latin American.” The ultimate objectives of Ultrabaroque were to cultivate a space that underscored the important “north/south” dialogue while at the same time offer a greater understanding of Latin American art.

Conscious that the baroque has been considered a Eurocentric cliché in references to twentieth-century Latin American art and culture, the exhibition was imagined as an open proposal that examined the validity of the baroque as a means of examining globalizing impulses, particularly within visual culture. From a curatorial point of view, Armstrong and Zamudio Taylor presented the Baroque as a model to understand and analyze the processes of transculturation and hybridity that have been highlighted and set into motion by globalization. Central to these concerns was the relationship between Latin America’s transcultural character and globalization. Significantly, it was within this context that the curators employed the term “post Latin American”—as a way of emphasizing their interest in Latin American art that is characterized by a postmodern approach to cultural production, instead of conventional approaches that determine Latin American art by its geographical borders and identity politics.

114 Armstrong and Zamudio Taylor, “Foreword and Acknowledgments,” XVII.
The Baroque in Latin American Art: Globalization and Transculturation

In a period of globalization, questions around the process that has come to shape our contemporary expressions arise in the midst of discourses which deal with multiculturalism, identity, and hybridity. The contemporary presence of the baroque has been furnished by the seminal role it played over the past three centuries in the history of civilizations. Whilst the baroque thrived across Western and Central Europe, the expansion of Iberian colonialism during the seventeenth century set into motion the dissemination of its artistic expressions, ideas, and cultural practices. Latin Americanist and historian Serge Gruzinski explored in his book, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization* (1999), that the process of mestizaje (which translates to mestizo)—relating to ethnicity, the term refers to a person with combined Spanish and Indigenous descent—as a global phenomenon originated in the bourgeoning Latin American nations of the second half of the sixteenth century and was influenced by the legacy of Iberian colonialism. Further, the wide circulation of ideas and culture of the baroque were translated, transformed, and exchanged between European capitals and Latin American nations, and have since fashioned the broader cultural and political outlooks of our contemporary society.

The baroque in the Americas emphasized its aesthetics as an expression of resistance to colonial power structures and as such has vitally fashioned cultural identities through the use of poetic language and imagery. It was writer Jorge Luis Borges who, in his 1954 preface to the *Universal History of Infamy*, called attention to the baroque’s transhistorical and transcultural characteristics stating: “I should define as baroque that style which deliberately exhausts (or tries

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to exhaust) all its possibilities and which borders on its own parody.”\textsuperscript{117} Thus, rather than representing a process of adjustment to new vehicles of understanding and conceiving art, the contemporary baroque is dynamically informed by the processes of social evolution. Furthermore, through the capacity to encompass new terminology, mentalities, and artistic currents, the contemporary baroque addresses current concerns as it relates to both life and art.

The term “transculturation,” coined by the interdisciplinary scholar Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) is defined as a concept that analyzes constitutive movements in the history of colonialism and post-colonialism, and is featured in the works of two artists highlighted in Ultrabaroque: Rubén Ortiz Torres and Jose Antonio Hernandez-Diez. Exploring aspects of hybridity and collage in a postcolonial context, Ortis Torres’ work deals with processes around transculturation. His video installation, Frontierland/Fronterilandia (1995) investigates issues surrounding the borderlands. Emphasizing the engagement and amalgamation of symbols, histories, and complex language expressions pointing to webs of meaning, Ortiz Torres’ video installations juxtapose genres such as documentary, music video, history, immigration, and archaeology through displaying splices of nuns, vatos locos, wrestlers, immigration agents, and historians to name a few. His works raise issues around elitism and notions of “high” and “low” culture.

Within the process of globalization, Hernandez-Diez’s works deal with hybridity with a focus on urban youth cultures. Concerned with the specificity of how contemporary global expressions are appropriated, translated, and transformed, he employs provocative materials including washing machines, dead dogs, and pork rinds to socially construct works that resonate through parody. The installation, La Hermandad (The Brotherhood; 1995), refers to

consumerism and the uselessness of a common leisurely activity such as skateboarding within the troubled socio-political contexts in Venezuela. Consisting of makeshift skateboards created by attaching wheels to pieces of fried pork, the skateboards hang in varying states of decomposition. Three monitors screen the life cycle of the skateboards from its beginnings in a frying pan, to its use wheeling through urban streets, and finally to its end where it is chewed and eaten by stray dogs.

Similar to transculturation, mestizaje has permeated the continent of South America. Both transculturation and mestizaje attest to the legacy of the baroque in continuing to nurture themes and perspectives by a dialogue between the European baroque and its versions in the “New Worlds.” Particularly in Latin America, given its hybrid character, Zamudio Taylor stated that the baroque “also had the potential to serve as a model, if not a platform, for the expression of resistance to the power structures that its aesthetic program sought to reinforce.”118 To underscore curatorial interests in Ultrabaroque, underscoring the term “post Latin American” created a space for both artists and visitors to explore cultural differences and the impact of globalization. What is particularly interesting about the exhibition is that, although it did not follow the traditional model of large-scale survey exhibitions often seen in the presentation of Latin American art, Ultrabaroque did share parallels of the essentialist exhibition model—casting a wide net in presenting predetermined thematics of styles and time frames for artists and works of art to fit into. As we know, essentialist survey exhibitions inevitably over-simplify and homogenize artworks and curatorial themes. In the case of Ultrabaroque, the exhibition focused on coloniality, presenting artists from only six countries who exemplified Otherness in their works. This is especially problematic when addressing multiple cultures, histories, and

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perspectives under a singular-themed exhibition. Curator and critic, Juan Jose Santos suggests that what might be best for the representation of Latin American art is the temporary exhibition model in exchange of museum permanent collections and outdated institutional policies.119

Responding to the “Fantastic”: Representing Latin American Art

In questioning the relationship between the past and present, as well as representation, theorist Mieke Bal questions what and who illuminates and helps us to understand for example, an artwork, an exhibition, or a curatorial framework.120 For example, in terms of an artwork, is it imperative to always compare artists and their works against the old masters, and consider them as having “foundational influence on everything that follows its wake, to be source, as the traditional view would have it? The problem with this view is that we only see what we know, or think we know.”121 This is interesting to consider in the context of framing Latin American identities through curatorial acts. Traditionally, the role of the curator—which has been developed in the literature review and will continue to be explored further in the following chapters—has translated to taking care of, to being the custodian of a permanent collection. As Ramírez iterates in her work, the curator has evolved to play a central role within the broader stage, establishing the meaning and status of contemporary art not only through exhibitions, but also through its acquisition and interpretation.122 Recalling Bal’s question, in the context of

121 Bal, Preposterous History, 3.
exhibitions, it is the curator who we rely on to illuminate, to help the museumgoer to understand. Traditionally, especially in relation to Latin American representation, curators situate the old European masters as the foundational source to present and interpret how an artist and artwork fare against their European contemporary. Curator and critic Maria Lind argues that it is the curator who has the agency to select and allow certain artworks to be exhibited, while at the same time, preventing others from showing, which as a result, devalues them. She continues that the function of the curator “is not exclusively defined by connecting, bridging, or reconciling differences; rather, it also implies the opposite—separating, splitting, dividing, excluding, dismissing, etc. One should never forget: a filter also has a discriminatory function.”

In an attempt to separate itself from the long history of survey exhibitions—popularized in the United States and of which have historically marginalized Latin American art, molding it as exotic, romanticized, and primitive Ultrabaroque was conceived as a platform for artists to explore cultural differences and the impact of globalization. As a result, and as we have seen with works by Torres and Hernandez Diez, most of the works of art in the exhibition referenced colonialism, employing hybridity as a method of resistance as well as a direct response to colonization, oppression of cultures, and miscegenation. This is further exemplified with Miguel Calderón’s Evolution of Man, 1995 (fig. 2.2), Bastard Son, 1992 by Adriana Varejão (fig. 2.3), and Untitled Turkey series by Meyer Vaisman (fig. 2.4).

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Fig. 2.2: Miguel Calderón’s *Evolution of Man*, 1995

Fig. 2.3: Adriana Varejão, *Bastard Son*, 1992
As the subject of his own work and presented as a polyptych, Calderón both questions and mocks historical development. Adopting a simulated persona understood as a stylized *vato loco* (“homeboy”), his work recalls the development from *Homo erectus* to *Homo sapiens*, which here presents the progression towards assuming the persona of *vato loco*. The weapons—club,
knives, and guns—represent the *vato loco’s* attributes of “civilization,” which underscores Calderón’s interest in challenging cultural systems of display.\textsuperscript{124}

With respect to the context of *Bastard Son*, Varejão offers imagery referencing nineteenth-century Brazilian genre painting evoking the long history of violence and miscegenation left behind as a result of colonialism and missionary activity and as well as in the re-telling of official histories. The disturbing imagery illustrates five figures, three of whom are European colonizers—one religious character and two army officials—who focus on two women, who are imprisoned by the male figures. To the left, a religious character who looks to be a priest, bearing a large cross, rapes one woman who is pinned against the base of a tree. To the right, the second woman, who is tied up by her arms to a separate tree, and who is nude with a swollen belly, looks resigned and vacant as two army officials rest their weapons on their shoulders, gawking at her. Varejão’s work explores the relationship between colonialism and socio-political dynamics, which is made clear here with the centre of the painting, which tears through one of the army officials. From the three-dimensional, flesh-like opening oozes a red substance, eliciting a wound or bodily damage; this central tear suggests a tear or a rift pulling apart and dissecting Latin America’s history of colonialism and making its viewers aware of a history that has been silenced. The painting calls for reflection on the relationship of order to disorder, of culture to nature, the colonizer to the colonized, as well as a reflection on how colonization perturbed Latin America, creating disorder.


presents a collection of five turkeys dressed in a variety of guises that employ the European baroque and its legacy. The works engage with both irony and visual puns, consisting of five taxidermy turkeys humorously dressed in order to raise key issues around the meanings of cultural fetishes. Throughout history, in both American and European cultures the turkey has played a symbolic role in ritual, dance, culinary arts, social events, class status, and national narratives. Most importantly, the turkey stands as a symbol for colonialism and cultural exchange. Following the quincentenary of Christopher Columbus, Vaisman’s *Untitled Turkey* series, which began in 1992, is considered along the same vein as the tradition of representation.\(^{125}\)

*Untitled Turkey XVII* is dressed in a larger than life blonde wig, recalling the upper-class, bourgeois Baroque European. The turkey faces forward, while three butterflies dance on its wig, echoing the traditional dress of Columbus and his European contemporaries.\(^{126}\) Juxtaposed against this is *Untitled Turkey XXII*, who is almost invisible upon first glance. Instead, what we see is a jungle-like bush of leafy greens with ripe bananas. At the top and in the centre of the greenery is the head of the turkey, poking out, revealing itself from within the jungle-like bush. Recalling stereotypical perspectives of Latin America, and subsequently Latin American art, Vaisman employs irony in the material used—plastic leaves—suggesting the fake leaves echo the pastiches of exotic, romantic, and primitive visions of Latin America. Finally, the plinth that *Untitled Turkey XVII* stands on are finished slabs of wood, where *Untitled Turkey XXII* sits on an unfinished piece of particle board, reiterating again, the difference between Europe as the centre, and Latin America as the Other sitting within the margins, refined versus primitive.

\(^{125}\) Armstrong and Zamudio Taylor, *Catalogue*, 22.  
\(^{126}\) Armstrong and Zamudio Taylor, *Catalogue*, 22.
The exhibition employed a framework allowing the humour in the artist’s work to speak for itself. This not only provided a light, breezy environment for visitors to engage with some of the works, it also created a space that tackled uncomfortable conditions and realities which still exist, such as post-colonial aftermath, social inequality, and violence. The curators stated that the grounding framework for the exhibition was to offer a critical re-reading of the legacies of the baroque, while at the same time present the discussions which were set into motion by the disparate Euro-American and Latin American versions of both the baroque and postmodernism. Separating itself from the essentialist model, the exhibition aimed to show that contemporary art from Latin America forms an intrinsic part of the global stage.¹²⁷ *Ultrabaroque* strives to separate itself from essentialist exhibitions, and function as an ideal model for framing representation. In *Preposterous History*, Bal acknowledges the natural progression of the representation, recognition, and absorption of art throughout history. She recognizes that art is engaged with what came before it. Therefore, the history is, of course, a lens in itself that specifies what and how our gaze sees. However, Bal contends that the newer images of art, that through natural progression inevitably engaged with the history, actually obliterate and replace the old images in a reworking that allows for a new form of engagement. According to Bal, it is through this process of engagement that we conceive culture in both the past and the present. The curatorial framework of the exhibition *Ultrabaroque* exemplifies Bal’s argument on not only the progression of cultural representation but how we engage with both the past and the present.¹²⁸

In terms of contemporary Latin American art, engagement with past histories has made important strides in how its cultures can be reconsidered, framed, and contextualized. The writing of art history from Latin America tends to begin following “discovery,” and as such,

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artworks are, more often than not, discussed in relation to European artists. Additionally, in terms of Ultrabaroque, the spatial siting of artworks and exhibition design framed by the curator also conceives newer versions of old images and perceptions of culture. This creates an interesting dichotomy between the artist, who creates a specific intervention of contemporary Latin American art, and the curator who conceives a framework for it as well. This can go one of two ways: the curator can work with the artist in further realizing the artistic vision, or the artist can re-frame the work in order to make it fit in the curator’s own vision. For example, in the exhibition Art of the Fantastic Tarsila do Amaral’s painting, Antropofagio, 1929 was framed by its curators as a Brazilian approach to Latin American art instead of highlighting the fact that she is considered to be a leading modernist artist with great influence.

Curators deploy speech acts to mediate representations of Latin American identities, as the exhibition shows through its use of language, both visual and literary. Language extends the engagement of an exhibition and can create a particular lens for recognizing thematic curatorial frameworks or to cast distinctive judgments. For example, looking back to the exhibition Art of the Fantastic, the exhibition catalogue was rife with stereotypes. Curators Day and Sturges wrote:

In Northern writing, interpretation depends on the organization of factual information about the art and artist. If we can demonstrate that an artist’s ideas derive from the experience of another work of art, we do so. The Latin American critic, on the other hand, puts value on his or her feelings while viewing the work and on the imagination and poetry that the artist is able to inspire in the viewer.¹²⁹

In this vein, the curators continued to perpetuate views of Latin America suggesting that North American critics base their work on concrete information, in contradistinction to South American

critics who rely on feeling in their work. This was included in a section titled “Another View,” in the exhibition catalogue, dedicated to scholarship from “the Southern viewpoint.” This separation between North and South American contributions manifests in how North American audiences understand Latin American art—as the Other. Important to underscore here is that this system of framing is not unique to Latin American art alone and is prevalent in didactic practices of framing other marginalized communities. This system of Othering can be exemplified in Carmen Robertson’s discussion of Norval Morrisseau who has been commonly referred as the “Picasso of the North.” This suggests that Morrisseau’s exposure to Picasso was one of his main artistic influences.130 Robertson addressed how the Canadian media perpetuated a specific identity of Morrisseau through visual and literary language, and as such situated his identity within a colonial narrative. Writer Bill Brown in his Weekend Magazine article made the connection of Morrisseau to Picasso stating: “Picasso quality is apparent in Thunderbird’s idea of how an Indian will look and dress in Heaven.”131 This language, more specifically the analogies used, performs as an example of how the tradition of Eurocentric perspectives is deeply rooted within the framing of marginalized communities. It has been established by numerous scholars, including cultural theorist Stuart Hall, that language is directly related to creating particular perceptions and meanings of culture. In his scholarship, Hall breaks down the connections between representation, language, and culture, stating that representation uses language as a tool to say something consequential, or to represent the world to other people. When colonial and Eurocentric analogies are employed in the language used to talk about and represent other cultures, the system of Othering continues to isolate instead of to globalize.

131 Robertson, Mythmaking and Primitivism, 45.
Essential to the process of meaning-making, representation involves the use of language, signs, and images to characterize and delineate ideas.\textsuperscript{132}

The exhibition as a legitimizing, representational space is echoed in art historian Fabiana Serviddio’s work in museum studies. The exhibition space, more specifically the contextual siting of artworks, affects the perception of an artwork in that it implicitly speaks about who selects and supports the display. As such, the exhibition space regulates, by crediting or discrediting, the works it presents.\textsuperscript{133} Building off of Ramírez’s notion of Latin American art as manifestations of the exotic, Serviddio argues that similar to decades before, Latin American art that uses a visual language which recalls the Latin America that was imagined in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century—mythical and exotic—is regarded and accepted as most successfully representing Latin America as one cultural identity.\textsuperscript{134} This long history demonstrates the capacity both art and curatorial frameworks have in constructing specific imaginaries of place and to affect the perception of Latin America as a geopolitical region. Although contemporary artists have broken this coherent vision to offer more controversial and realistic views of Latin America, the history of exhibitions of Latin American art, primarily in the United States, illuminates the power that representation, through the use of language, signs, and images, has in constructing the idea of Latin American art.\textsuperscript{135}

Inherently, \textit{Ultrabaroque} focused on coloniality as part of its curatorial framework, presenting artworks and artists that have been marginalized or Othered. This echoes Mosquera’s argument that Latin American artists need to continue to perpetuate Otherness or to Other

\textsuperscript{134} Serviddio, “Exhibiting Identity,” 490.
\textsuperscript{135} Serviddio, “Exhibiting Identity,” 490.
themselves, in what he calls the paradox of self-exoticism, to be legitimated in order to partake in exhibitions. In contradistinction, as we will see in Chapter Three, cases of global exhibitions on the international circuit present contemporary Latin American artists alongside other global artists without underscoring geography as the main focus in their curatorial scope.

**Curator as Modulator of Affect**

The paradox of self-exoticism circumscribes art to predetermined fields of circulation, consumption, and publication. The curatorial decisions which play into advancing, either consciously or subconsciously, alterity and characteristics of being international culminate in observing the role of the curator as a cultural broker and mediator; something Ramírez has echoed and theorized in previous scholarship. In her research, she attributes the curator with a central role in arbitrating difference and exposing ideological interventions, which in turn ascribes her or him with a powerful role that reconstructs narratives anew. Building from Ramírez’s scholarship, I consider the curator as a modulator of affect. The editors of *The Affect Theory Reader*, Greg Seigworth and Melissa Gregg suggest that affect is produced in a moment of encounter between varying intensities. They suggest that affect is both this momentary social relation as well as the passage of those intensities. Seigworth and Gregg further explain that production of affect can spread from one body to another, stating: “affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the

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very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves.” Distinctive from emotion, affect cannot be anticipated nor is it something that you can see; it is the sensation of the unfamiliar, a matter of movement. Canadian philosopher and cultural theorist Brian Massumi states: “Affect is most often used loosely as a synonym for emotion. But one of the clearest lessons of this is that emotion and affect—if affect is intensity—follow different logics and pertain to different orders.”

In treating the curator as a modulator of affect, I consider affect synaesthetically, which implies a participation of senses in each other: the ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into another is the measure of a person’s potential interactions. Massumi states that: “Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is.” This is important for the curator who considers the wayfinding and contextual siting of artworks in an exhibition. In order to construct galleries with particular intentions to elicit affectively charged environments, the curator needs to transform each space of the exhibition to be able to provoke sensorial interactions.

Emphasizing again that affect is difficult to pinpoint as it cannot be particularly named, author Derek Attridge encapsulates its definition as a “complex of feelings.” His research questions the relationship between the feelings evoked by representational works of art, and the feelings that are directly experienced in response to events and objects in our lives. In Ultrabaroque, Armstrong and Zamudio Taylor incite momentary, affectively charged events

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139 Massumi, The Autonomy of Affect, 96.
throughout the galleries of the exhibition in order to present not only a globalized perspective of contemporary Latin American art, but also within the context of colonial history.

Though not a new concept, Attridge underscores that the work of art should not be considered an object, but rather as an event which comes into existence differently, each time the viewer, reader, or listener experiences the arrangement. However, he continues, in the discourse of art, language is frequently used to imply that the artwork, as an object, remains unchanged between visitors who engage with it and respond to it. As a result, what is lost in engaging with works of art is the complex of feelings evoked through affect. Discerning between what kind of event is a work of art, Attridge suggests that it is one which brings in the experiences of its viewer, reader, or listener, one which brings the other into the field. He continues:

A responsible reading of a work is one that is open to this otherness, and that is willing to put settled modes of thinking and feeling at risk in engaging with it. One element in such a response therefore, however minimal, is a feeling of strangeness, surprise, or wonder—even when we encounter a work for the fifth or twenty-fifth time. The work that is completely familiar, that slots comfortably into, and confirms, pre-existing habits and expectations, is one that has lost, or has never had, the singular power of art.

As we have come to understand through the scholarship of Serviddio, with respect to the presentation of Latin American art, works generally accepted and displayed in exhibitions fit into the pre-existing expectations for what Latin American art is. In terms of Attridge’s analysis, this system of selection thus renders Latin American art as familiar and it then loses the power of art. On the other hand, can this power shift if the curatorial framework of the exhibition is not one which frames a specific preconception of Latin American art? For example, works by Jose Clemente Orozco are typically analyzed and characterized within the context of Mexican

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142 Attridge, “Once more with feeling: art, affect, and performance,” 332.
muralism though he was one of the key figures of Abstract Expressionism.143 If the curatorial framework shifts, then the artworks, too, shift in their reading and re-reading.

In terms of reading artworks, Attridge states that all artworks involve emotional responses to the people, events, or objects that are represented. Further, he suggests that, although difficult to put into words, painting, sculpture, music, and film all function by suggesting an affective attitude to what is depicted.144 For example, Einar and Jamex de la Torre’s life-sized sculpture *Serpientes y escaleras* (Snakes and Ladders), 1998 (fig. 2.5) symbolizes a large wooden cross with the banished Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl, a feathered serpent, in place of Christ. At the base of the cross lay empty tequila bottles which referred to drunken Roman guards.

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143 Gerardo Mosquera argues that because of the characteristics of colonialism critical discourses have displaced the focus that recognizes how Latin American art and artists have enriched the framework of ‘international’ art. See: Gerardo Mosquera, “Good-Bye Identity, Welcome Difference: From Latin American Art to Art from Latin America,” in *Third Text* 56, 2001: 28.

144 Attridge, *Once more with feeling*, 339.
Attridge echoes that the Otherness that the work of art characterizes needs to have a particular relation to both the culture into which it is being introduced as well as to the culture within which it is being received. In this sense, the artwork is other not merely in the sense of being different, but also because the dominant culture within which it might be produced or received depends on its exclusion. Although he asserts that it is the artist who has the ability to discern what is occluded, silenced, or marginalized, I believe that on a secondary level the curator, likewise has the ability to determine what is occluded, silenced, and marginalized through prevailing ways of thinking and feeling, and calling attention to tensions and coherences,
as we have seen in *Art of the Fantastic*. The museum visitor, as the “reader” in an exhibition has the capacity to “read” beyond the prescribed framework constructed by its curator. Consequently, this experience to see beyond the parameters of what the exhibition allows is immensely important, sometimes uncomfortable, for the “reader” who is now able to question the narratives presented.145 The curatorial decisions in *Ultrabaroque*, although not as heavy-handed as we will see with the *Arts of Resistance* exhibition at the Museum of Anthropology in Chapter Three, creates strategic affectual surges between the interactions of artworks installed within close proximity of one another, as well as the interactions between artwork and the viewer’s body—subsequently, reinforcing the curators as modulators of affect.

**Conclusion**

The works in *Ultrabaroque* depicted idealized cultural and regional traditions. This is particularly true for the artworks by Miguel Calderón and Meyer Vaisman as they deal with colonialism and identity. At the same time, the works underline the resistance of the Latin American community to be included and disarmed within reductive assertions comprising the labeling of this community based on ethnicity and mainstream criteria of Eurocentric narratives of art. More importantly, the curatorial strategy, although bold in its attempt to expand North American art history, considers ethnicity as a quality aspect of art, and bases this in scholarly engagement and the exhibition catalogue. This curatorial approach falls short of the promises it states, as the artists remain isolated within a confined ethnic scope, rather than providing a critical response to history and established narratives. While the selected artworks contribute to an ephemeral and immediate way of experiencing Latin American art, it is the curators’

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145 Attridge, *Once more with feeling*, 339.
framework—the installation of works, catalogue, etc.—which supersede and influence how Latin American art history is reviewed and rewritten. As such shifting curatorial strategies for Latin American art is imperative in order to be successful in reframing how it is understood. This thesis considers curating as a space, a curatorial space, and practice which offers the possibility to re-visit and re-write the field.
CHAPTER 3
CONTENDING PUBLIC SPACES: THE MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY, VANCOUVER

Introduction
In Chapter Two I charted the exhibition Ultrabaroque which aimed to present a platform to counter the “fantastic” by creating a platform which explored cultural differences, cross-cultural exchange, and the impact of globalization. This chapter presents a second case study which will examine how contemporary Latin American art was framed at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (MOA) and how curatorial acts were used as tools to bring together artists who are typically labelled as Other to the centre. As I discussed in the literature review of this thesis, we should no consider Latin America as one coherent whole because there does not exist a unified idea that encompasses or defines what Latin America, and further, what Latin American art is. Through its representation in public exhibitions it becomes a global presence. Furthermore, it is through this global presence that its diversity emerges. This chapter is concerned with investigating how curatorial acts frame a specific understanding of Latin American art, at times from a tokenistic, Eurocentric lens, and at others more dialogic and engaging. Specifically, by unpacking the exhibition Arts of Resistance: Politics and the Past in Latin America presented at MOA from 17 May to 30 September, 2018, I discuss how the show was contradictory in its curatorial aims which resulted in a homogenized version of Latin American art. For example, the construction of the exhibition space itself incited a simulacral environment recalling a traditional idea of what Latin America looks like while in some areas the exhibition paralleled characteristics of the white cube.
Critic and curator Edward Lucie-Smith has suggested that exemplary Latin American art is divided among conflicting genres. On the one hand, it has been designated as part of the Mexican tradition, while on the other it has been regarded as the Latin American version of European tendencies akin to Neo-Expressionism and Post-Modernism.146 This chapter considers how the framing of Latin American art is able to shift and to be re-framed, to abandon Eurocentric perspectives, and break down a tokenistic identity through performative acts of curation.

The history of Latin American art, especially in the United States, has demonstrated reductive and homogenous representations which perpetuate Latin American art as having a singular identity. As a result, a major challenge within the discourse of exhibition practice and Latin American art continues to circle around identity. Brian Wallis has suggested that exhibitions, especially those on a national and international scale, are used as a way of manufacturing national identities proposing that visual representations of cultures are key functions in embodying national communal bonds.147 Through the deliberate overproduction of specific types of imagery (such as in the perspectives of Latin America as the exotic Other) or by the censorship of others (such as Latin American self-representation), and through controlling the way images are viewed (such as through curatorial acts), cultural representation can also be used to construct a certain view of a nation’s identity and history.148 As a result, rather than expanding the public perception of Latin America, major survey exhibitions have, instead, narrowed the public view of Latin America to something that is most commonly recognized as


exotic and fantastic. Art critic and curator Maria Lind states that the curator has the agency to select and allow certain works to enter, while blocking, and as a result, devaluing them, stating that the function of the curator “is not exclusively defined by connecting, bridging, or reconciling differences; rather, it also implies the opposite—separating, splitting, dividing, excluding, dismissing, etc. One should never forget: a filter also has a discriminatory function.”149 This system of representation has been exemplified in a number of exhibitions, including the 1987-exhibition *Art of the Fantastic: Latin America 1920-1987* curated by Holliday T. Day and Hollister Sturges at the Indianapolis Museum of Art and *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century* curated in 1992 by Waldo Rasmussen at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. These were considered to be two of the most controversial exhibitions of Latin American art in the history of the United States. For example, *Art of the Fantastic* was criticized for its promotion of stereotypical concepts of Latin American art, and for constructing a framework for it according to cultural aesthetic biases. Latin Americanist and art historian, Mari Carmen Ramírez wrote of the exhibition that, “in defining the criteria for the show, its curators left aside the multiple viewpoints provided by the works themselves in order to zero in on their own concept of the ‘fantastic.”150

Reiterating Mieke Bal, the primary act of curating is specific in its impact on visitors. As such, the curatorial is a combination of framing objects and speaking through those framed objects to an audience. “Stories of art” as constructed by the curator, include the processes of selection, interpretation, and juxtaposition, which not only affects what an audience will see, but also how they will see it. Furthermore, an exhibition’s catalogue, along with any other published

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material, enables curatorial devices to be further disseminated beyond the institution’s local community, reaching a broader audience.\textsuperscript{151} Thus, the curatorial role in framing exhibitions has played a constitutive part in the construction of how we understand art, especially, contemporary Latin American art. In constructing the schema for Latin American art, the subject of representation and identity, respectively, addresses the question how do exhibitions and in turn, curatorial practices represent the complexities of periphery groups without encouraging Western or Eurocentric stereotypes? Drawing from scholarship by Ramírez, the representation of Latin American art in mainstream exhibitions has had a history of being presented through the perspectives of geopolitics and Euro-American frameworks. What Ramírez calls a “melted identity” which is based on the legacy of colonialism, displacement, race, and marginalization.

The 1989 exhibition, \textit{Magiciens de la terre}, held at the Pompidou Centre and the Grande Halle de La Villette in Paris was applauded as a “global exhibition” of contemporary art and stood as a catalyst for future projects. It was considered to be one of the first major attempts in museum history to produce a large-scale, postcolonial exhibition that removed any sense of hierarchy between Western and non-Western participating artists.\textsuperscript{152} Different to the much-criticized exhibition “\textit{Primitivism}” in Twentieth-Century Art, presented at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1984—which favoured Western artistic practice over the “primitive” objects it displayed alongside such “great artists” like Picasso and Matisse—\textit{Magiciens de la terre} sought to present multiple works by Western and non-Western artists together in a non-hierarchical way. Instead of imposing Western aesthetic criteria onto works of art, the exhibition attempted cross-cultural dialogue through the careful juxtaposition of works from different cultures, allowing

\textsuperscript{151} Claire Robbins, “Engaging with Curating,” \textit{JADE} 24, no. 2 (2005): 150.
each culture to speak for itself. As a way to open up inclusivity within the Euro-US art world, *Magiciens de la terre* attempted to offer equal aesthetic experiences of contemporary artworks made globally and argued for the universality of the creative impulse. Ultimately, the exhibition bid to challenge and shift a traditionally Eurocentric view of art by situating global discourses as its central focus. In doing so, it became the established precursor of all global exhibitions of contemporary art.\(^{153}\) Almost thirty years later, museology continues to build and evolve to challenge and overcome traditional forms of exhibition rhetoric.

**Fabricating an Affect for Latin American Art**

Presented from 17 May through to 30 September, 2018, *Arts of Resistance: Politics and the Past in Latin America* was mounted at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. Located in the Audain gallery, reserved for large-scale travelling and temporary exhibitions that focus on different cultures, narratives, and “world arts,” the exhibition illustrated how communities in Latin America worked with both, historical and traditional art forms as a tool to express contemporary political realities. With special focus on marginalized communities, *Arts of Resistance* explored the role of creativity during times of political turmoil through the presentation of works by artists in Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, El Salvador, Ecuador, and Chile. Offering a unique opportunity for museum visitors to learn about the layers of politics which exist in Latin America through a contemporary lens, the exhibition integrated Latin American artists onto the landscape of Canadian art and demonstrated how contemporary Latin American art and culture has been and continues to be presented in museums and galleries. The exhibition’s curator Laura Osorio Sunnucks stated that the exhibition exclusively included works

\(^{153}\) Reilly, *Tackling White Privilege*, 111.
by artists who have largely been excluded from mainstream national culture and society, and through this exhibition, are placed at the centre—reminiscent of the curatorial goals of *Magiciens de la terre*. Mostly presenting contemporary ethnographic art, the exhibition suggests that the installation of the show has the potential to influence the ways in which Latin American art and culture are currently disseminated through museums and galleries, and offers to tell contemporary stories in a fresh way.\(^\text{154}\)

Divided into five sections, and organized with a series of sub-galleries with specific themes, the architecture of the exhibition space was built through the installation of thin, translucent, gauze-like drapes which functioned as both a tool for moving visitors through the galleries in a specific way and the production of a simulacral space, which in turn, charged the environment affectively. All plinths and temporary walls in the exhibition were covered in stucco-like material and painted in bright colours such as salmon, sky blue, and burnt ochre. Layered with the recording of conversations spoken in Spanish transmitted from one of the sub-gallery’s and echoed throughout the exhibition spaces, the environment simulated the feeling of being in a faraway, exotic place (fig. 3.1). With a prescribed route to move through the space, as directed by the gauzy curtains, the visitor first sees the title wall which is presented in a stencil typeface in both English and Spanish (fig. 3.2). A thick yellow stripe was painted across the temporary wall and carried out throughout every didactic panel in the exhibition. Sunnucks stated that the decision to use a stencil typeface, along with the yellow printed stripe on all text-based panels, was done in order to elicit the sense that the viewer is reading something in haste, perhaps from a newspaper. These curatorial decisions were made in order to serve the overall thematic framework of the exhibition and emphasized the effect of the typeface as a political

newspaper, immediately setting the tone for the rest of the exhibition—addressing political and social issues.

Fig. 3.1 Installation view of *Arts of Resistance: Politics and the Past in Latin America.*
Fig. 3.2 Title wall for *Arts of Resistance: Politics and the Past in Latin America.*
I suggest that this fabricated environment constructed by Osorio Sunnucks is affectively charged, and that the curator herself is a modulator of those affects. The exhibition’s architecture and installation of artworks evokes a tokenistic image of Latin America, one that perpetuates sameness and exoticism. For example, the fourth section of the exhibition, sub-titled *Sympathy for the Devil* (fig. 3.3) displayed a series of devil masks, clothing, and associated paraphernalia delicately placed over six plinths covered in stucco and painted in a salmon pink. The entire space glowed as the light bounced from shimmering surfaces on the colourfully-adorned masks and the brightly painted plinths producing a feeling of suspense, reeling with anticipation just as though something were about to happen. It is within the encounters in museums and galleries, between objects and the public, and objects and practices, that questions examine how such
interactions are modulated, amplified, mediated, and choreographed. The seminal work of Brian Massumi considers the implications of affect, explicitly with the idea of the “event” as it relates to the creation of new links and assemblages that allow for the production of stimulating something new, creative, changed, etc. In contradistinction to emotion, affect is the intensity that emerges and follows different logics and patterns in different orders than emotion does.

In *Arts of Resistance* the Latin America becomes an affective “event” that occurs in the spaces between the visitors, artworks, installation environment, and curatorial rhetoric. In this case, Osorio Sunnucks deploys the affective environment as part of her curatorial framework to incite momentary events and experiences that are charged with the sensations and cues to the cultural and political environments of Latin America throughout the exhibition’s spaces. Interestingly, this discourse also enacts a colonial history that has helped to shape specific frameworks and perceptions which manifested through employing methods in distancing, othering, projecting, and animating particular normative fantasies and desires. While I was there, I realized this environment was not only affectively charged, but unpredictably so. My own feelings and experiences of interacting with *Arts of Resistance* provoked sensations of the unfamiliar, which arose primarily because of the architecture of the galleries. Its design, encompassing gaps, traces, submerged, and displaced narratives facilitated my own personal histories to be felt and experienced.

157 Blackman, “Affect, Mediation and Subjectivity-as-Encounter,” 42.
As I defined in Chapter Two, affect emerges from the state of in-between-ness where it is found within the intensities that pass between bodies.\(^{158}\) Literary author Derek Attridge emphasizes that affect is a feeling that cannot be particularly named, because it cannot be seen, and suggests that the concept of a “complex of feelings” is an appropriate definition to label an affective experience.\(^{159}\) Attridge questions the relation between the feelings evoked by the representational work of art, and the feelings that are directly experienced in response to events and objects in our lives. He states that all representational works of art imply emotional responses to the people, events, or objects that are represented. Although it can be difficult to put into words, most visually and aurally mimetic works—which he considers to be painting, sculpture, music, and film—function by suggesting an affective attitude to what is depicted.\(^{160}\)

Upon seeing the title wall for *Arts of Resistance*, the visitor is guided through the exhibition by the gauze-like fabric draped to the floor. The first sub-gallery was titled *Soft Power* and presented a series of huipiles (blouses) installed as if they might be hanging on a line to dry after being washed, inciting, for me, the warmth of the sun on my skin whilst hanging wet laundry on a clothes line (fig. 3.4). Combined with the low echoes of an unfamiliar voice speaking in Spanish, and the brightly coloured huipiles installed atop blue-painted stucco plinths, the gallery visitor becomes transported into a simulacrum of what “traditional” Latin America might look like—a foreign, exotic place full of bright colours. The spatial siting of the huipiles guide the visitor along each work, following the clothing line around the corner and into *Alternative Histories*, the sub-gallery where the source of the recorded Spanish conversations


\(^{160}\) Attridge, “Once more with feeling,” 339.
originates. In this space, stucco-covered plinths are painted in earthy ochres, terra cottas, and deep reds, and the low lighting creates an intimate space for the visitor to explore—as if we have stepped inside from the backyard where the clothes are suspended into a living room. On the plinths hang various paintings and drawings and across the gallery stands *El Codice de Ayotzinapa*. The 2014 *El Codice de Ayotzinapa* (The Codex of Ayotzinapa) by Juan Manuel Sandoval Palacios and Diego Sandoval Avila is a contemporary pictorial manuscript which recounts the mass killing and disappearance of forty-three students from the Escuela Normal Rural Isidro Burgos in Ayotzinapa in September 2014. Using a representational style divided into fifteen panels of text and illustration, the codex mirrors traditional manuscripts that were typically used by people before and during colonial conquest in Mexico. Often used as petitions to colonial administration, Palacios and Avila used the framework of the codex to tell the story of the atrocities that occurred in Ayotzinapa. The work stands on a low-lying plinth that is covered in stucco and painted in a rich terra cotta. As the viewer explores the layers of narrative in the codex, overhead a speaker plays, on loop, conversations in Spanish between different families sharing personal stories of the struggles and social injustices they faced while living in Chile. Without a translation available, the conversations were indecipherable to visitors who do not understand Spanish. Those who did understand looked content, with a sense of familiarity and comfort, whilst those visitors who did not understand Spanish seemed perplexed at the lack of translation. What I found interesting in these moments was the sense of distancing or Othering that seemed to transmit from those visitors who could not connect with what the recording was saying. In contrast to Latin America typically framed as Other, it was the opposite in this gallery space where Latin America was positioned at the centre. By fabricating an affect for Latin America, the curator raised the question of how to design an exhibition such that its visitors
recognize and feel a sense of connection, while at the same time, do not explicitly recognize the choreography and mediation of the experience.

Fig. 3.4 Sub-gallery, *Soft Power* installation view of huipiles (blouses).

**Curating as Total Environment**

*Arts of Resistance* showed how curators construct environments of meaning making—curating here has become a matter of the total environment. And in order to begin, it is imperative that the curator has an understanding of how the curatorial environment relates to the institution. Curator Maura Reilly, underscores that while the idea that Western art historical canons are problematic is not new, the issue of identity and representation centres around the nature of institutional
structures— ‘on patriarchy, and on the white, masculine prerogative that is assumed as ‘natural.’”\(^{161}\) She continues: “If the canon of art history is a hegemony…then, in the words of Griselda Pollock, how can we ‘difference it’? Which counter-hegemonic strategies can we employ to ensure that more voices are included, rather than a chosen, elite few?”\(^{162}\)

Reilly proposes two approaches that allow for a shift in who and what can be included within the canon: a revisionist approach and a relational approach. In 1972, poet and essayist Adrienne Rich stated: “Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women far more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival.”\(^{163}\) Adopting the revisionist approach, then, enables rediscoveries of what the art historical canon conceals and censors; it interrogates the capacity of accepted conceptual structures, and looks for the “sins and errors of the past.”\(^{164}\) A revisionist strategy enables the curator to present an inclusive and integrated selection of artworks and artists as it relates to a particular subject. Although the revisionist approach is an important curatorial strategy, it nevertheless assumes the white, Western canon as central and accepts its hierarchy. On the other hand, curators who practice a relational approach underline cultural differences by presenting a collection of voices that, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty suggests: “Tell alternate stories of difference, culture, power, and agency.”\(^{165}\) Thus, in using a model of relational analysis, the curator can place different works of art in dialogic relation to one another as a way to both underscore significant similarities as well as the localized differences between artists across cultures.

\(^{162}\) Reilly, “What is Curatorial Activism?,” 22.
\(^{163}\) Reilly, “What is Curatorial Activism?,” 23.
\(^{164}\) Reilly, “What is Curatorial Activism?,” 23
\(^{165}\) Reilly, “What is Curatorial Activism?,” 31.
Looking to the case study, *Arts of Resistance*, Sunnucks adopted aspects of both revisionist and relational approaches, respectively. As part of the revisionist approach, her thematic framework of the exhibition integrated a selection of artists and works in relation to marginalized communities and political turmoil. In addition, Sunnucks followed the general concept of the relational approach in the selection of works, with its collection of diverse voices in both physical and dialogic relation to one another. Outwardly, the exhibition met the mark in terms of shifting away from the traditional exhibition models that were at play in *Arts of the Fantastic* and “*Primitivism*” in Twentieth-Century Art. However, the spatial siting of the works in some instances complied to stereotypical representations of Latin American art. For example, in the sub-gallery *Alternate Histories* only a few of the artworks received formal attention in the form of didactic labels or larger text panels providing visitors with more information, while others did not include any information at all. For me, the pieces without a label discerning its maker, material, or date discounted those works and suggested a hierarchy had been created, guiding the visitor to look at specific works while ignoring others. The *El Codice de Ayotzinapa* by Juan Manuel Sandoval Palacios and Diego Sandoval Avila was the main focus of this space. None of the other works had as much attention, with only a handful of other works highlighted with labels or extended information. As a result, the gallery constructed positions of importance and was not successful in connecting with or creating meaningful engagements between works, which as a result, created a fragmented space. In addition, the sub-gallery has a sweeping overall thematic concept in presenting political and social turmoil as experienced by people from disparate countries, which suggested that all of Latin American countries share political histories, which as a result threatens to replicate the same historical stereotypes of Latin America.
Addressing how a curator can design an exhibition so that it provides a sense of connection, curator and critic Bruce Ferguson suggests to consider both the general and specific forms of communication that an exhibition produces. Communication lies at the heart of exhibitions, where the communicative medium is not neutral in conveying information but contributes to positioning and controlling the museum visitor in a space of display. He suggests that as textual interventions that have intentions towards a public, the exhibition forms part of the political economy of cultural production. As a result, temporary exhibitions have evolved to become the medium of disseminating and framing art, and is therefore, “the principal agency in the debates and criticism around any aspect of the visual arts.” As such, Ferguson continues by stating: “Exhibitions can be understood as the medium of contemporary art in the sense of being its main agency of communication—the body and voice from which an authoritative character emerges.” Further, it is the exhibition which is the central speaking subject in the telling of stories of art, where institutions and curators tell the stories to themselves and to the public audiences that visit.

What emerges from understanding the exhibition as central to communicating the meanings and histories of art is to whom the exhibition is communicating. That is to say, the curatorial includes an understanding of reader-response theory. It engages with questions such as, who is the intended audience, and ideal reader; in what ways might meaning be read or explored; and, how does a text invite a response from the reader? Although reader-response theory is largely focused around literary work, some of its core ideas can be applied in “reading”

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an exhibition. For example, Louise Rosenblatt, a pioneer in developing reader-response theory, stated: “A text, once it leaves its author’s hands, is simply paper and ink until a reader evokes from it a literary work—sometimes, even, a literary work of art.” Focusing on the reader, in this case, the museum visitor, Rosenblatt suggests that meaning does not exist until the reader engages with it. As such, each person might have a different response or different understanding based on personal experiences. If we continue with Roesnblatt’s idea that meaning does not exist until it (an artwork) has been engaged with by the reader, then writer and curator Simon Sheikh’s question pushes this idea further by asking: “What does it mean to shift attention from objects to exhibitions? We have to ask ourselves not only what a history of exhibitions will tell us about history, how it is written and read, rewritten and reread.”

Looking back to Arts of Resistance we can see that each section of the exhibition focused on aspects of socio-political turmoil from different geographic locations within Latin America. The ways in which the text panels and didactic labels were written communicate to its viewers a specific way to read and talk about these histories. In addition, the selection of works and their organization in the exhibition tell us how these histories have been interpreted and shared. Applying Rosenblatt’s notion that meaning does not exist until the reader engages with it creates a process of “reading” before it arrives to the museum visitor to “read.” For example, once the artist has finished their work, the curator engages with it and thus, a new meaning is created. After the curator selects the artwork and installs it within their curatorial framework, likely with another layer of meaning added, it reaches the museum visitor who sees the work for the first time and thus, an additional new meaning is created. The link that connected all the artworks in

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*Arts of Resistance* were various interpretations and reflections on colonialism; in which meaning was further pulled from and developed through Sunnucks’ curatorial design that unfortunately in some instances presented the works through a marginalized lens, while in others presented the works in a way that encouraged viewers to think about the effects of colonialism and the vibrant visual cultures which exist in Latin America.

Discussing the representation of marginalized artists in exhibitions, Reilly argues that for the most part, mainstream exhibitions only find the inclusion of post-colonial Otherness interesting so long as those artists speak to their Otherness, when in fact, exhibitions should instead focus on constructing a discourse that is inclusive for art in an age of globalization—“one that confronts the limits of occidental power and thereby departs from hegemonic, Euro-US cultural perspectives and their exhibition projects.” Building from this, Mosquera states: “Third World artists are constantly asked to display their identity…to look like no one else or to look like Frida [Kahlo].” He argues, in a sense, non-Western artists do not have a choice since it is those in the Euro-US art world who selects, legitimates, promotes, and purchases works. Consequently, Non-Western artists are compelled to maintain the preferences of the “curating culture,” to satisfy their preferences and follow the paradigms legitimated by these centres. *Arts of Resistance* parallels many mainstream exhibitions interested in works which speak to a sense and reality of Otherness.

Challenging these exhibitionary intentions, Reilly confronts dominant perspectives of non-Western artists and asks:

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by bringing artists and marginal centers of art to the purview of the West, are mainstream curators simply constructing the conditions for a new appropriation of the Other by the West, in a manner similar to European Modernism’s appropriation of African and other “non-Western” arts at the beginning of the 20th century? Is the implication that the non-Western work is derivative or lesser than? And what of the localized context specific to the non-Western work?\(^{173}\)

Equally problematic is the fact that most cross-cultural exhibitions are financed and organized by institutions located in privileged centres (such as at MOA which is located at the University of British Columbia campus). This environment provides the guise of a multi-layer structure of cultural dialogue that can flow from all directions. In reality, this is not the case—curators see themselves in positions of uncovering the newest discovery, furthering and perpetuating the ideas of postcolonial explorers. In order to work against the stereotype of “curator-as-explorer,” curators should set their sights on creating a “global” exhibition by seeing themselves as, to use Mosquera’s phrase, “mediators of cultural exchange” rather than explorers. Thus, curators need to turn to specialists outside their areas of expertise, acknowledge the limits of their expertise, and account for their own position in the framing of an exhibition.

We can see evidence of an attempt at creating a “global” exhibition in the presentation of the collective, Lapiztola. A hybrid word of two Spanish terms, “lapiz” which translates to pencil, and “pistola” meaning pistol, the collective emerged as a response to Mexico’s political revolution in 2006. Located in the sub-gallery *The Defense of Maize*, Lapiztola created *La defensa del maiz* (The Defense of Maize), a light and stencil-work installation which embodied the Indigenous uprising from 2006 (fig. 3.5). Upon entering the gallery space, the visitor first walks through a series of stencils hanging by wire from the ceiling, all of which are backlit by an eerie green candescent light. The rough qualities of the spray-painted stencils are directly

\(^{173}\) Reilly, “Tackling White Privilege and Western-Centrism,” 105.
juxtaposed with the sterility of the white gallery wall and sharp green light which immediately evokes a sensation of being in a laboratory.

Fig. 3.5 Lapiztola, installation view of *La defensa del maiz*, 2018. Image courtesy of Museum of Anthropology.
The stencils are made visible because Lapiztola wanted to share the process of the project and present the stencils in the order in which they were used. The result is an installation of staggered panels which depict the final work in fragmented pieces. Following the long line of panels to the end, the visitor reaches the end product depicting the landscape that each hanging stencil contributed to (fig. 3.6). The imagery in *The Defense of Maize* depicts a woman wearing traditional Indigenous Mexican dress pointing a rifle at four scientists who are dressed in hazardous materials suits and injecting a substance into a cob of corn. The hazmat suits and glowing green light build to elicit a sense of danger and risk. Two interesting ideas emerge from this installation. First, the stencils serve as a guide that ushers museum visitors through the space.
and into the process of how Lapiztola organized and created the work—in essence asserting artistic agency over the curator and performing as artist-curator. The visitor is able to see the multiple panels layered against one another and is able to imagine the work coming together. Second, the work addresses Indigenous empowerment and defense of ancestral knowledge and cultures against new liberal policies that disturb and modify the corn economy of rural Mesoamerica. *The Defense of Maize* addresses the morality of genetically modifying corn, an important source of food that carries cultural importance in Indigenous Mexican communities.

Different from most of the galleries within *Arts of Resistance*, this gallery and the final gallery, titled *The Ancestors*, mirrors some of the qualities of the white cube. Here the gallery walls are used as part of the realization of the artwork, their size emphasized with the larger-than-life stencils accentuated by the glowing green light. In addition, *The Defense of Maize* and *The Ancestors* galleries are sparse in comparison to the rest of galleries in the exhibition, again drawing parallels to the white cube, allowing for space to breath between works. With less artworks crowding the space, the visitor is compelled to see, in their entirety, the installations without getting distracted by fabricated environments of the exotic. In these spaces, they are able to see the works on their own without the fringes of heavy-handed exhibition design getting in the way.

Central to *The Ancestors* gallery is a site-specific mural painted by Olinda Silvano (Reshijabe) and Silvia Ricopa (Runin Kaysi), who express intricate kené design, an art form traditional to the indigenous Shipibo-Konibo peoples located in Peru (fig. 3.7). Divided into two sections the wall is filled with bright kaleidoscope-like forms. Kené are based on the Shipibo-Konibo peoples’ creation story and embodies various forms of ancestral knowledge. The first half of the mural (left) embodies the interconnectedness of the Amazon in an imagined map of
the Ucayali region. Thick black lines outlining the patterns represent the forest, while the blue curving lines depict the rivers and water sources. The brightly covered geometric shapes of red, blue, green, yellow, and pink mark animals and wildlife of the Amazon. The second half (right) portrays an all-powerful, vibrational force called Rumi, depicted with geometric lines and forms painted in bright magenta and turquoise.

In addition to the kené mural and Lapiztola’s installation, the artists collaborated together on a secondary mural project which was created on Granville Island (fig. 3.8). While the work by Silvano and Ricopa at MOA no longer exists—it was destroyed as part of the intention of its creation—the mural on Granville Island continues to exist and engage with the public outside of the museum setting, extending Arts of Resistance beyond MOA and eliciting cultural experiences to a wider audience.

Fig. 3.7 Wall mural painted by Olinda Silvano (Reshijabe) and Silvia Ricopa (Runin Kaysi) in Arts of Resistance, 2018. Image courtesy of Museum of Anthropology.
Fig. 3.8 Collaborative mural painted by Lapiztola and Olinda Silvano (Reshijabe) and Silvia Ricopa (Runin Kaysi) on Granville Island, British Columbia. Photo: Brandy Colton.
Conclusion

Sunnucks proposed that the exhibition offered a unique opportunity for museum visitors to experience an exemplary show which integrated Latin American artists onto the landscape of Canadian art and demonstrated how contemporary Latin American art and culture can be presented in museums and galleries. Although the curatorial elements in *Arts of Resistance* straddled relational and revisionist strategies, there were instances throughout some of the exhibition where the visitor became immersed in an exotic simulacral space. As a result, the exhibition was fragmented and disjointed at times, and the viewer could find themselves overcome by an affective environment that fabricated a singular idea of Latin American art. As I discussed in *Alternate Histories* and *Sympathy for the Devil*, the sub-galleries presented overtly prescribed frameworks of reading the exhibition and drew on traditional, Eurocentric exhibition practices, orienting the viewer to see and think in a specific way. However, at other times, Sunnucks intentions created an exhibition space which offered to tell contemporary stories in a fresh way, most successfully in *Defense of Maize* and *The Ancestors*. Recalling *Magiciens de la terre*, I commend *Arts of Resistance* and Osorio Sunnucks for making great strides in presenting Latin American art and working towards an exhibition that is nonhierarchical. Charting the significant curatorial devices that were used in disseminating and framing the exhibition underscores the globality of Latin American art.
CHAPTER 4:
ENGAGING WITH THE GLOBAL BIENNIAL MODEL: THE CASE OF THE 2018 SÃO PAULO BIENAL

Introduction

Paul O’Neill suggests that the new “global curator” has set out from the notion of cultural pluralism to acknowledge the impossible feat of representing a total world view within a single exhibition. He states: “Curating in the context of biennials and large-scale international exhibitions have made a significant contribution to discussions on the dialectics of margin and centre, globalism and globalization, local and international, hybridity and fragmentation.”

Though the biennial phenomenon has functioned as recurrent sites for the validation of types of art and models of curatorial practice within the global cultural industry, they have also been successful in reflecting the inclusion and diversity of artistic practices. Transpiring at regular intervals, biennials mirror the art world in the need to keep up, by always working on reinventing the model. As manifestations of latest trends, biennials produce, disseminate, and reconstruct concepts of contemporary artistic practice through new commissions, with artworks often produced to align with their location or created especially for a curatorial framework—as we will see with the São Paulo Bienal. Thus, O’Neill suggests that biennials have some power to present a view of the world through the social subsystem of art.

As we have seen in the previous chapters of this thesis, the 1989 landmark exhibition, Les Magiciens de la Terre curated by Mark Francis and Jean-Hubert Martin paved the way for the

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175 O’Neill, Biennial Culture and the Emergence of a Globalized Discourse, 53.
176 O’Neill, Biennial Culture and the Emergence of a Globalized Discourse, 53.
emergence of a curatorial practice that went beyond previously established Western centres of art production (fig. 4.1). The exhibition is widely acknowledged for having raised awareness around the issue of the inclusion of contemporary artists from non-Western centres of creative production, such as Latin America. However, Les Magiciens de la Terre was also criticized for problematizing “the question of contemporary art coming from a Westernized geo-cultural perspective.”

Addressing the exhibition, curator and artist, Gavin Jantjes stated:

*Les Magiciens de la Terre* laid open the Western/Eurocentric consciousness like a surgeon dissecting his own body without an anesthetic. It revealed that the Eurocentric gaze has distinct and daunting problems when fixed upon the “cultural other,” its achievements and methodologies. To imply that quality in the cultural arena is signified to everyone exhibiting together is both illusionistic and historically unsound.

The exhibition created a space for articulating the relationship between works made by artists in the “West and non-West.” Within this, the issue that Jantjes raises suggest that *Les Magiciens de la Terre* was developed with the view of selecting which artists should be a part of the Other, echoing a colonial viewpoint. In contradistinction, I suggest that the 2018 São Paulo Bienal, besides the inclusion of contemporary art from both Western and non-Western centres, does not embody the same curatorial or cultural interests. Instead, what is presented is a heterogeneous, large-scale exhibition that clearly addresses the inclusion of contemporary artists from non-Western centres of production by presenting artists from across the world alongside one another without creating hierarchies based on Eurocentric perspectives, geopolitical locations, or practicing the traditional survey exhibition model.

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The Bienal

Sprawling more than 32,000 square feet, the Ciccillio Matarazzo pavilion located in Ibirapuera Park, São Paulo looks like a monolithic, modernist white cube. Many of the artworks hang on the pavilion’s white walls or rest on the polished cement floors, isolated from everything that might detract from itself. Here, it is the architectural space of the pavilion over the artworks that is noticed first, a product of what Brian O’Doherty would suggest is a transitional device of the white cube. Building off of this, Filipovic suggests that biennials overwhelmingly present artworks “in especially constructed settings that replicate the rigid geometrics of the modernist

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‘white cube’, with white walls, compartmentalized sections, and a lack of windows to the outside world.’ She states that these decisions “contribute to an articulation of the biennial as a particular physical space with its own parameters, through which relations between viewers and objects, between one object and others, and between objects, viewers, and their specific exhibition context are staged.”

In its 33rd edition running from 7 September through to 9 December, the 2018 São Paulo Bienal, Affective Affinities aims to disrupt the biennial structure—from centralized, discursive, and top-down, to a further focused and diversified visitor experience. Breaking away from the single-theme model, the Bienal features twelve individual projects and seven invited artists to comprise the curatorial team alongside chief curator, Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro. Each artist-curatoreAlejandro Cesarco (Uruguay, 1975), Antonio Ballester Moreno (Spain, 1977), Claudia Fontes (Argentina, 1964), Mamma Andersson (Sweden, 1962), Sofia Borges (Brazil, 1984), Waltercio Caldas (Brazil, 1946), and Wura-Natasha Ogunji (USA, 1970)—was invited to curate a stand-alone exhibition in which their own work was required to be included alongside the works of artists of their own selection. Pérez-Barreiro elected to employ this model in hopes of demonstrating how artists build their own lineages and systems to understand their artistic practice in relation to others. In addition, this model allows for themes and relationships to emerge organically from the process of exhibition-making, rather than starting with a set of predetermined issues. Featring 103 artists and approximately 600 artworks, the results were presented as multiple, separate exhibitions clustered within the larger Bienal exhibition proper.

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180 O’Neill, Biennial Culture and the Emergence of a Globalized Discourse, 71.
The Bienal’s title, *Affective Affinities* references Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s (1749-1832) novel *Elective Affinities* (1809) and Mário Pedrosa’s (1900-1981) dissertation “On the Affective Nature of Form” (1949). In his novel, through the story of a bourgeois couple forging new relationships beyond the social conventions of the time, Goethe draws parallels between elective affinities of the natural world, and the conflicting emotional and spiritual lives of the novel’s characters. He suggests that if our own tastes and affinities are governed by laws we do not fully understand, we are potentially faced with an organizing system that is not primarily moral, or cultural, or biological but some strange amalgamation of all three in which our affinity, conscious or unconscious, leads the way.\(^{182}\) Pedrosa’s thesis is based on an analysis of how artists work to find a formal language for self-expression, and how a viewer receives and perceives it. Using Gestalt theory, he discusses the ways in which the viewer is able to construct an understanding of an artwork. For Pedrosa, art is to be judged primarily in its ability to create a relationship between an artist’s intention and a viewer’s receptivity.\(^{183}\) Both Goethe’s and Pedrosa’s expressions bring together the guiding principles behind *Affective Affinities*.

How has Pérez-Barreiro’s decision to invite artist-curators influenced and shifted the politics of display and exhibition making? Recent criticisms of the Bienal have addressed his curatorial decisions suggesting that the Bienal resembles dissonant curatorial islands.\(^{184}\) In an interview, Tadeu Chiarelli, director of Museu de Arte Contemporânea, University of São Paulo (MAC USP), located across the street from the Bienal, stated:

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\(^{182}\) Pérez-Barreiro, *Affective Affinities*, 17.


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The problem was the artist-curators, as a whole, acted more as curators and less than the artists they really are. Another concern is the shows they curated did little to stimulate a dialogue with the other exhibitions within the Bienal and thus transformed the space [into] a series of islands closed within themselves.\textsuperscript{185}

The Bienal was developed to consider affect and affinity as means to engage with art beyond conceptual frames. Despite Pérez-Barreiro's attempt to avoid heavy-handed curatorial control, the seemingly lacking overarching curatorial theme led to a lack of dialogue among the various artist-curator interventions. Considering the artist-curator from an alternative perspective, Filipovic suggests that the artist who performs as a curator, temporarily shifts her/his attention from physically making works of art (using raw materials) to exhibition-making, often with the use of the work of other artists. The artist-curator undoubtedly brings their experience as a maker (the manipulator of materials to their own accord) to the process of curating an exhibition.\textsuperscript{186} As such, the artist-curator is able to break down the boundaries and parameters that the professional curator has to work within and instead highlights the peculiarities in a collection in order to incite a new situation for artwork and viewer.\textsuperscript{187} Filipovic argues that artist-curated exhibitions “may or may not be considered an artwork, or even an exhibition, but … ask us to fundamentally reconsider what an artwork or an exhibition are – or could be?”\textsuperscript{188} Pérez-Barreiro's invitation to engage artist-curators in Affective Affinities drew on the artist as a maker which resulted in


\textsuperscript{187} For example, artist Fred Wilson’s 1992-1993 exhibition Mining the Museum at the Maryland Historical Society recontextualized the museum’s collection by placing ornate tea cups and silverware alongside iron slave shackles and whipping posts. His intervention highlighted the collection along with the biases that often steer historical exhibitions. Mining the Museum also underscored how biases around collecting and exhibiting shape meaning to the works and exhibitions the viewer observes.

exhibitions that transformed over the course of the biennial, such as Sofia Borges’ exhibition *The Infinite History of Things or the End of the Tragedy of One* which this chapter will explore further.

While the term “artist-curatorial” correctly describes the artist who temporarily performs in a curatorial role, the term “curator-as-artist” inaccurately infers that the curator works within the same parameters as an artist would in the making of actual artworks. In this instance, the term “artist” is used not to describe a particular occupation, but a creative disposition, and we understand the role of the curator-as-artist, despite the fact that the curator does not function explicitly as such. Instead the role to define is that of the curator who functions more artistically, but who fundamentally still performs as a curator, what Filipovic calls, the curator as artist as curator.\(^{189}\) On the other hand, the artist acting as curator, although temporarily adopting a curatorial mode of practice, is fundamentally an artist. Whilst the work of the artist-curatorial is irrefutably curatorial, this kind of curatorial practice often exists in a territory of its own, a limbo-like space situated somewhere between curating and art. It is through the work of the artist who acts as curator that we begin to think of the exhibition as art, and see the autonomous curator functioning in some form of artistic capacity.

For example, artist-curatorial, Sofia Borges’ exhibition *The Infinite History of Things or the End of the Tragedy of One* (fig. 4.2 and 4.3), located on the first floor of the Bienal, breaks away from the white cube devices of the pavilion and is curated in a space that looks like a dimly lit labyrinth full of cement walls and thick velvet curtains of gold, blue, and violet. Without a decisive beginning or end, the installation of works within the exhibition resembles a collage of painting and sculpture by artists: Serafim Alvares, Arthur Amora, Sofia Borges, Antonio Malta

\(^{189}\) Filipovic, *When Exhibitions Become Form*, confirm pg. number.

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Campos, Rafael Carneiro, Sônia Catarina, Lea M. Afonso Resende Leda Catunda, José Alberto de Almeida, Bruno Dunley, Thomas Dupal, Adelina Gomes, Martin Gusínde, Tal Isaac Hadad, Carlos Ibraim, Sarah Lucas, Agostinho Nascimento, Ana Prata, Sara Ramo, Jennifer Tee, and Tunga. Without a formal narrative or curatorial thematic, the spatial makeup of the exhibition aims to imitate the transition between consciousness and unconsciousness through the contextual siting of artworks. Interrogating authorship, the participating artists worked together, using each other’s works as points of departure for their own projects. Consequently, the works echo one another with fragments of colour, line, and contour resurfacing in multiple pieces by different artists, creating a mirror effect within the exhibition. As a result, the viewer’s focus begins to shift, either consciously or unconsciously, noticing similar works over again as they meander through the disorienting maze of fabric and concrete. For example, the works by Ana Prata, Miss Natural and Sarah Lucas, Rabbit (fig. 4.4) share similar line and contour. Prata’s work depicts a female figure reclining while Lucas’ sculpture embodies characteristics of human limbs also in a reclined position. Operating in a state of flux throughout the duration of the Bienal, the artworks shift, regularly moving from different locations within the curtained and concrete walls with the goal of having everything, including the space, investigate and question its own state of representation. Without noticing, the viewer’s attention shifts from the works on display to the space and exhibition as a whole.
Fig. 4.2 Installation view of Sofia Borges’ exhibition *The Infinite History of Things or the End of the Tragedy of One.* © Pedro Ivo Trasferetti / Bienal de São Paulo Foundation.
Fig. 4.3 Installation view of Sofia Borges’ exhibition *The Infinite History of Things or the End of the Tragedy of One*. © Pedro Ivo Trasferetti / Bienal de São Paulo Foundation.
Affectively Charged Environments

Similar to Laura Osorio Sunnucks’ curatorial aims to include works by artists who have largely been excluded from mainstream exhibitions in *Arts of Resistance*, Pérez-Barreiro’s individual curatorial projects highlighted artists who have not received major attention in art history. Consequently, artist, Aníbal López (1964-2014) was included as one of 12 artists in Pérez-Barreiro’s individual curatorial projects. Located on the third floor of the pavilion, his works question belonging, identity, and politics through conceptual installations, video, photography, and sculpture. López signed many of his works with the numbers A-1 53167, his Guatemalan identification number, to represent the illusion that exists in relation to identity, underscoring the fact that, in certain systems, people are just a series of numbers. In addition to his ID number,
López also dated his works in a system he created which was based off of the “discovery” of the Americas (D.O. translates to Descubrimiento del Occidente—discovery of the Occident—which equates to the year 1492 in the Gregorian calendar). Dating his works in this way represented a mark of the colonizing process and of the violence and trauma that Guatemala has since faced. For example, the work Testimonio (Sicario) dated 520 D.O. translates to the year 2012. First presented at Documenta 13, Testimonio (Sicario) is screened on a 50-inch flat screen television, hung on the farthest wall within López’s exhibition (fig. 4.5). With a few chairs set-up for viewers to sit down and watch the 40-minute video, photos are strictly prohibited in the space.

Fig. 4.5 Installation view of Aníbal López, Testimonio (Sicario), 2012 on display at Affective Affinities.
Sitting behind a white screen to protect his identity, the silhouette of a man—a sicario or hitman—is interviewed by exhibition-goers in the audience. Switching between images of the sicario and the audience, the Bienal viewer listens to the conversations and questions as the sicario explains his profession—in gruesome detail—which pays for his studies in law at San Carlos University. As a hitman in Guatemala he is paid by the Guatemalan army based on each victim’s social class. He shares stories about his life, how he became a sicario, and the experiences of people he has killed, all in a matter-of-fact tone, asserting throughout the conversation that this is just a job for him and that he does not carry any feelings about it.

Watching the film in its entirety I noticed that as the conversation becomes more and more brutal in discussing murder and violence, many visitors of the Bienal quickly leave the space shaking their heads and looking out of sorts, while others turn around to face other visitors in the room in what looks like shock, surprise, and bewilderment. While witnessing people reacting and responding to one another during the video, I realized that López’s work produced an affective event. As I have established through the work of Melissa Gregg, Greg Seigworth, and Brian Massumi, affect occurs in the middle of “in-between-ness;” it is the force or intensity which can pass between bodies.

Affect transpires, in this instance, from the bodies of the visitors in the space of López’s exhibition, watching Testimonio (Sicario). From both, the intensities occurring from the video and the visitors in the space, an affectual surge formed in the room creating feelings of suspense, expectation, and tension. Different from emotion, affect cannot be named because it is something you cannot see, nor expect from anyone. As such, it becomes impossible to anticipate an affectual event because it is felt rather than recognized, and is precisely the sensation of the unfamiliar that forces us to think. López’s video work was not the only instance of an affectual
event occurring at the Bienal. Because it is more so a matter of movement than a static condition, affect tends to arise from situations of suspense. Brian Massumi states that it “occurs in the interval between perception and action, or between action and reaction, during which a change takes place that cannot be perceived by the human eye.”

Fig. 4.6 Performance of Recital Para um Massagista from September 5, 2018 at the São Paulo Bienal, Affective Affinities.

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Another example of an affectual event which occurred at the Bienal was Tal Isaac Hadad’s performance work, *Recital Para um Massagista*, as part of Sofia Borges’ exhibition (fig. 4.6 and 4.7). Employing local Brazilian singers and massage therapists, *Recital Para um Massagista* (Recital for Masseur) is centrally situated on the main floor of the pavilion, and able
to be seen from each floor. Within the small cluster of performers, one massage therapist engages with one singer, who is the soloist for the performance, and the remaining singers perform as the choir. As the massage therapist locates points of tension, the soloist reacts to each touch with her or his voice while the choir observes and softly echoes the voice of the soloist. With a microphone planted on the floor, what resulted were slow, reverberating sounds carrying all throughout the pavilion—similar to the Spanish-spoken conversations carried throughout *Arts of Resistance* in Chapter Three. As the area filled with more visitors, curious about where the sounds were emanating from, the space began to buzz with suspense and anticipation at the unpredictability of what might happen next during the performance. The suspense and flow between watching the massage therapist find points of tension on the soloist and the soloist reacting through sound, compiled with the movement of the performers in the space slowly intensifying, building off of the soloist’s voice, created an affectual surge.

As I glanced around the space I noticed some visitors’ eyes filling with tears, and myself feeling goose bumps run across my arms before feeling a smile form on my face, which was when I realized the pavilion became an affectively-charged environment. The affect that transpired while watching the performance was totally unpredictable, leaving viewers with a feeling of being in a state of in-between, of which Gregg and Seigworth state: “With affect, a body is as much outside of itself as in itself—webbed in its relations—until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter.”\(^{191}\) The affectual events that took place at the Bienal occurred as a global entity, whereas in *Arts of Resistance*, Osorio Sunnucks fabricated an affect for Latin American art that was not diverse. When the curator modulates affect, to intervene on the senses of the visitor in order to think a certain way, we get environments that are prescriptive and

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\(^{191}\) Gregg and Seigworth, *An Inventory of Shimmers*, 3.
tokenistic. When affect is set up as a global entity, as is the case with the Bienal, it invites engagement and attempts to mediate by constructing pathways where the diversity of Latin American art emerges as a global presence.

Curatorial Acts

The curatorial decision to have *Recital Para um Massagista* presented as the centerpiece—both literally and conceptually—of the Bienal connected a transitory highway between the seven separate artist-curators interventions and the twelve individual projects. Because the performance was located at the centre of the pavilion, visitors are able to physically see it from each floor and the stairs leading to each level. And, because the microphone amplified the sounds of the soloist and choir, the singing seemed to easily bounce off the concrete surfaces of the pavilion and reach almost everywhere in the building. So, even if a visitor was not close enough to the balcony edge of each floor, they likely would still be able to hear the sounds of the performance without seeing it. Thus, setting up affectual events while also creating pathways to connect the separate exhibitions together.

Mieke Bal argues that curating is a combination of acts of framing and of being framed, which differs from one context to the next. In terms of context, she writes, it is self-evident and is a situation by which to interpret the meaning of artifacts. Bal further suggests that the curator, so long as the difference between *explaining* and *interpreting* is not confused, is able to pursue something more stimulating: “Proposing an interpretation that avoids paraphrase, projection and paradigmatic confinement, and opening up a practice of looking at objects that endorses its
function as cultural mediation.”192 As a result, the curator’s first concern becomes the viewer instead of the artist.

Although the Bienal has been criticized for both lacking dialogue and for operating as a biennial full of dissonant curatorial islands, *Recital Para um Massagista* performs as a central artery that connects the individual projects and artist-curatorial interventions by using the architecture of the pavilion’s space. The nature of the Bienal, with its goal to free the viewer from predetermined or prescribed curatorial thematics, was worked into curatorial decisions of the space, seating, and movement of sound within the pavilion. As such, the architecture of the building is positioned as an overarching frame for the entire Bienal and of the success of the reverberating sounds of *Recital Para um Massagista*. In using the pavilion’s architecture as a curatorial tool, Hadad’s performance is successful in connecting the disparate curatorial islands into a series of landscapes, which in turn is able to shift the viewer into drawing attention to a main perspective. This perspective, however, is disconnected in that each project is a uniquely separate microcosm within the Bienal, though on another level, it is connected through the exhibition space, which is performative. In terms of the Bienal, I echo what Bal contended in “Curatorial Acts,” that the act of framing here is actually an act of de-framing, “a loosening of habitual constraints, both through cinematic duration and exhibition itinerary.”193 The meanings of the Bienal are constructed by the experience of each visitor who is told they are free to circulate the space as they chose, there is no prescribed route to take, nor a prescribed length of time that each visitor should spend on any given work of art. Instead, what determines the experience of each visitor is their choices in the combinations of artworks seen and the spatial coordination of works and viewer’s behaviours. The Bienal is designed to allow for choice and

free movement between every floor and every project. However, whichever path is taken by a
visitor, shapes and changes the curatorial frame. Visitors who retraced their steps through the
pavilion in the opposite direction, or decided to skip projects along the way would achieve a
different experience their second or third time around, as a result of memory and recognition.

Independently, another curatorial frame was demarcated by several meeting spaces
located on the first and second floors of the pavilion (fig. 4.8). As part of the meeting place and
as a tool to counteract the natural dispersion that occurs in larger scale exhibitions, visitors are
welcomed to participate in a series of exercises which were created as a way to develop and
depthen experiences of the exhibitions and artworks in multiple ways. Using media as a tool for
emphasizing and practicing ways of looking and paying attention, the Bienal was able to extend
personal experiences of artistic projects and the biennial as a whole, beyond the walls of the
pavilion. To do this, three programs were developed: áudio 33bienal, musical playlists, and
artwork activation. The sounds and narratives presented in áudio 33bienal included
approximately fifty sound tracks provided by participating Bienal artists which were made
accessible through QR Codes throughout the pavilion and available online. The sound tracks,
available in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, and also transcribed, share personal accounts from
artists, poetry readings, and soundscapes of space, animals, and actions—such as the sanding
down of wood or walking through a public park. While exploring the vastness of the Bienal,
visitors have the opportunity to choose to engage with the different sounds of áudio 33bienal as
it relates to individual projects or group exhibitions. As seen in fig. 4.9, the Bienal’s guide map
illustrates where soundscapes are available for listening. For example, visitors can listen to the
soundscape for Nelson Felix’s individual exhibition, which plays a sound clip of the artist

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194 áudio 33bienal can be accessed using the following link: [www.audio33.bienal.org.br](http://www.audio33.bienal.org.br).
walking in Chartres, France. The clamor of church bells and the conversations of passersby echo alongside the sound of Felix’s footsteps pacing along the pavement. The artist visited Anchorage, Alaska and Ushuaia, Argentina, and contended with questions of space in the construction of his project which deals with the poetics of space, both physically and as a concept (fig. 4.10).
Fig. 4.8 Guide map of the 2018 São Paulo Bienal, *Affective Affinities* highlighting the locations of the meeting spaces.
Fig. 4.9 Guide map of the 2018 São Paulo Bienal, *Affective Affinities* highlighting the locations of the soundscapes.
Fig. 4.10 Installation photos of Nelson Felix’s individual exhibition. On display at the 2018 São Paulo Bienal, *Affective Affinities*. © Leo Eloy.
As a secondary layer of media, the musical playlists also found using the Bienal’s guide map, included a collection of seventeen playlists built by a selection of participating artists, curators, and mediators of the Bienal. The playlists contained sounds which influenced research and production, as well as carefully crafted tracks intended for the visitors of Affective Affinities to listen to as they move through the different spaces. Again, referring back to fig. 4.9, the guide map highlights where different musical playlists are available for listening, sometimes within the same space as the áudio 33bienal soundscapes. For example, Nelson Felix’s exhibition offers both, musical playlists and soundscapes. His playlist includes seventeen songs ranging from samba and jazz to songs by Jimi Hendrix and Bob Dylan.

Finally, the interactive artwork activity Invitation to Attention, made available at the meeting spaces or through the use of a mobile device, welcomes biennial visitors to consider
visual competencies in a four-step activity: finding an artwork, focusing attention, recording the experience, and sharing it. In either individual or group mode, the participant reads the first card which encourages them to select an artwork from anywhere in the Bienal. Upon selecting the work, a timer begins a five-minute countdown and the participant is encouraged to investigate the selected piece—to look over it, through it, and around it, to really develop a connection with it. Once the time is up, the next step aims to focus the viewer’s attention to reflection by asking, “If I were to ask you a question, what would it be?” and, “If you were to ask the artwork a question, what would it be?” For five more minutes, the participant is to reflect on these questions, or if participating in the group mode, to discuss the questions out loud. Once the time has run out, a final timer is set and the activity asks the participant to return their attention back to the selected artwork. Again, deeply investigating every aspect, seen and perhaps unseen. After five minutes of focusing on the work, the participant moves onto the next step of the activity, recording the experience. It is at this point that the viewer is asked to step away from the work and reflect, to take a few moments to pause and consider their thoughts and reactions. Following, on a sheet of paper, the participant exercises their reflections by drawing something, anything, based on their personal experience with the selected artwork. The final step invites participants to share their experiences by filling out their name, a description of the artwork they chose, and to upload a photo or written reflection about their experience. Anything uploaded is added to the ongoing list of participants on the Bienal’s WebApp and is freely available to access anytime.

Unravelling these media tools and looking at them through a lens of Bal’s curatorial acts, I would suggest that each activity presents itself as a tool in framing artworks and visitor

195 The activity, Invitation to Attention/Convite à Atenção can be explored online here: http://app33.bienal.org.br/#/conviteatencao/dedicar-atencao.
experience. The act of framing Felix’s exhibition with musical playlists or soundscapes, for example, produces an event that is variable from one individual to the next. Felix’s works are minimalistic—in that the amount of material, size, and design are few—and installed sparingly throughout his exhibition space. Rather than shifting down a long wall or hallway of hung paintings, like one might do in a museum or gallery, the visitor must choose which work to look at next and plan to walk towards it. As a result, depending on which works the visitor decides to look at, and in which order, they might be walking back and forth, and across the exhibition space. While listening to Felix’s soundscapes of walking through Chartres, while at the same time physically walking to and in-between his works, construct an exhibition space that is performative, facilitating and encouraging the visitor to move around. In this process, Bal states that the visitor “may become permeable for the subjectivity of others, and as a result may change their views or social behavior.”  

196 She continues to explain that: “Making and presenting art is just as subject to sociality, and confined by what others are willing to allow, absorb and understand, as the issues that form the content of any individual artwork.”  

197 These three activities (soundscapes, playlists, and activity), especially the soundscapes and music playlists, not only push to narrate and build a frame of encouraging and facilitating movement, of experiencing the exhibition as performative, it also has the potential to shift the views and behaviour of its visitors. In addition, the temporality of the biennial model, here, is given permanence as these components become archived in perpetuity on the Bienal’s online archive. With the support of these devices, as both artistic and curatorial tools, new meaning and perspective is able to emerge.

196 Bal, Curatorial Acts, 189.
Conclusion

The concept of the 2018 Bienal worked to disassemble simplistic rhetorics of Latin American identity at two levels. The artist-curator led interventions demonstrated how artists are able to provide a model for considering the relationship between artworks which develop from artistic relationships. As well, at another level, in presenting a diverse, but fragmented Bienal without any kind of overarching thematic framework, the viewer is permitted to freely build her or his own experience around the different exhibitions. Pérez-Barreiro writes: “If we can think of art and its exhibitions primarily as experiences and not as declarations, we may be able to imagine a biennial in which artists, curators, and viewers are treated as equals, all able to build their own affective affinities with art and with the world beyond.”

On paper, the Bienal sounds like a thoughtfully curated project that aims to focus its attention on the visitor’s experience, to enable unique interactions with the exhibitions. However, I contend here that these two parameters that the Bienal worked within are contradictory. It seems paradoxical to say that the two aims of the biennial are to demonstrate a model for considering relationships between artworks, while also stating that there are no curatorial thematic frameworks presented, enabling the visitor to be free to explore on their own accord. Can an exhibition ever be free of thematic frameworks? I argue no, because as Bal suggests, every decision that occurs within an exhibition is a curatorial act which creates a certain frame for the viewer to see from. Even if there is not an overarching curatorial theme, per se, curatorial decisions were made in selecting artists, artworks, placement of artworks, language used to discuss those works, the architectural space of the exhibition, and so on. It is impossible to put together an exhibition without making connections and drawing out points of comparison.

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198 Pérez-Barreiro, Affective Affinities, 20.
through artworks. For example, Borges’ exhibition enlisted artists to work from each other’s works, and as a result, traces of colour, line, and conceptual ideas re-surfaced throughout multiple artworks by multiple artists. The recurring imagery in the exhibition is a curatorial theme. Bal contends, “analyzing the way images are, and have been, framed helps to give them a history that is not terminated at a single point in time, but continues; a history that is linked by invisible threads to other images, the institutions that made their production possible, and the historical position of the viewers they address.”

Invisible threads exist and connect all the curatorial projects and the Bienal as a whole, and although there may not be a formal overarching theme, by formally stating that one does not exist, in essence becomes the theme.

Despite this contradictory thread, the Bienal as a curatorial model invites engagement and elicits the affinities of Latin American artists with artists from all across the globe, allowing meaning to occur and to be drawn out by the viewer. In contradistinction, as we saw in the previous chapters, affect and meaning was prescribed by the exhibition’s curator who performed as a modulator of affect. Through this international platform we can better see that Latin American art is global and it becomes a global presence at the Bienal. It is through this global form that we successfully see the diversity of it, without the unnecessary, defining labels of geopolitical status, identity, or Othering.

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CONCLUSION

STRATEGIES FOR CURATORIAL CHANGE:
TOWARDS AN ETHICS FOR CURATING

Throughout this thesis I have attempted to demonstrate the formative roles that curatorial acts play in the development, framing, and dissemination of contemporary Latin American art. The analysis of three case studies: Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art, Arts of Resistance: Politics and the Past in Latin America, and Affective Affinities, brought together an examination of curatorial acts on both the national and global stage. The case studies built on each other and addressed different aspects of my thesis, which emerged through each description and analysis. A comparative reading of Chapters Two through Four established that the curatorial becomes, through the public space of the exhibition, a part of complex social and intellectual interactions and settings.

Over the course of these chapters we have seen how curatorial acts are continuously shifting. For example, in contradistinction to Arts of Resistance, Ultrabaroque presented a platform for artists to explore cultural differences and the impact of globalization; although mirroring some aspects of the essentialist method, it separated itself from the long history of survey exhibitions which have historically marginalized Latin American art, presenting it as exotic, romantic, and primitive. As a result, much of the work in the exhibition referenced colonialism, employing hybridity as a method of resistance and direct response to colonization, the oppression of cultures, and miscegenation. Arts of Resistance, on the other hand, though much more recent in its presentation, recalled traditional curatorial practices through a survey exhibition drawing on methods of essentialism in its presentation.
As I have established, the exhibition as a platform plays an essential role in capturing the histories and narratives of Latin American art. Chapter Two, Countering the “Fantastic” Paradigm, investigated *Ultrabaroque*, an exhibition which sought to take the next step in pushing the boundaries of the exhibition platform while offering a site for multiple perspectives and voices to engage. Imagined as an open proposal that emphasized Latin American art characterized by cultural production rather than conventional curatorial practices that categorize it by geographical borders, the exhibition responds to ideas of the “fantastic.” By including artists whose works addressed colonialism, oppression, and miscegenation, *Ultrabaroque* offered a critical re-reading and discussion of Latin American art, situating it as a globally diverse entity.

In Chapter Three, Contending with Public Spaces, I considered the Museum of Anthropology and how the use of curatorial acts framed a specific understanding of Latin American art—one that was at times tokenistic and Euro-centred, while at others, dialogic and engaging. Although *Arts of Resistance* aimed to present artists who are typically marginalized to the centre of the exhibition’s focus, the outcome of the show recalled the traditional survey exhibitions which produced *Art of the Fantastic*, and illustrated a simplified version of Latin American art. Its curator, Laura Osorio Sunnucks, performed as a modulator of affect and oriented visitors to think in a homogenous way whilst exploring the exhibition. As a result, the show fabricated an affect for Latin American art that was not diverse, and created a simulacral environment which elicited the sensation of being in an exotic “Latin” place.

In Chapter Four, Engaging with the Global Biennial Model, I examined the idea of the global curator while looking at how the São Paulo Bienal reinvented traditional biennial models. Charting exhibitions which have manifested as models for curating sites which have been successful in reflecting the inclusion and diversity of artists; *Affective Affinities* embodied the
thoughtful presentation of global artists alongside one another without constructing hierarchies based on Eurocentrism or the traditional survey exhibition. The concept of the 2018 São Paulo Bienal effectively disassembled the over-simplified rhetorics of Latin American art by inviting artist-curators to develop separate exhibitions, and by the exclusion of an overarching curatorial thematic frame. Consequently, the absence of a singular curatorial theme enabled visitors to freely build their own experiences and connections between the artworks presented, rather than digesting a prescribed way of looking at and interpreting the works.

Tracing the rhetoric of curatorial acts has presented framing as a recurring thread responsible for both building up, and breaking down ways of thinking. The shift of the role of the curator from arbiter to a central figure within the broader stage of global cultural politics has conveyed the notion that identity is a negotiated construct which deals with how exhibitions represent social, cultural, or political complexities. I suggest that curators have been, and continue to be, accountable for framing the identity of contemporary Latin American art in public institutions. Its history of representation has long perpetuated Otherness and presented Latin American art as exotic and primitive. From here, the question of representation and identity, respectively, asks how do exhibitions and in turn, curatorial acts represent the complexities of periphery groups without encouraging Western or Eurocentric stereotypes? Reiterating the scholarship built by Ramírez, the representation of Latin American art in mainstream exhibitions has had a history of being presented through the perspectives of geopolitics and Euro-American frameworks. Stories of art as produced by the curator, include the processes of selection interpretation, and juxtaposition, which not only affect what an audience will see, but also how they will see it. In other words, the role of the curator in framing exhibitions performs an important part in the construction of how we understand Latin American
art. The case studies in this thesis explored affect, and further the idea of the curator who performs as a modulator of affect. The Bienal is the only exhibition in which the curator did not perform as an affect modulator, and as a result, they did not fabricate an affect for Latin America that was prescribed. Instead, the curators presented an exhibition that successfully showed Latin American artists alongside other global artists, facilitating the diversity of Latin American art to manifest.

The Bienal, on the global stage, allows for themes and relationships to emerge organically from the process of exhibition-making, rather than beginning with a set of predetermined issues, as was the case with the exhibitions held at the AGO and MOA. Consequently, it is the biennial model that continues to serve public audiences as a mirror of the current worldview—something that makes the platform so interesting. Global art critic Sabine Vogel conveys that, “unlike gallery exhibitions, biennials do not serve to create or strengthen the career of individual artists. Biennials help raise awareness.” This is particularly important when discussing the representation of Latin American art to public audiences. In its goals to help raise awareness, the biennial model has the capability to perform as a model for re-writing and including the histories of Latin American art within the canon of art history. In addition, the biennial phenomenon represents large-scale international exhibitions which reflect the cultural diversity of global artistic practices and call into question the paralysis of public art institutions that are reluctant or too slow to respond to the developments of contemporary art. It is in this context that we should consider the biennial as a model for curating exhibitions of Latin American art. In addition, curators need to turn to specialists outside their areas of expertise, acknowledge the limits of their expertise, and account for their own positioning in the framing of

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an exhibition. It is vital that curators always acknowledge who they are, and where they are positioned in relation to hierarchies, and to questions of authority and privilege.

Looking to strategies for curating Maura Reilly advocates for a curatorial practice rooted in ethics. As such, exhibitions would function as corrective acts to the exclusion and marginalization of artists who have been Othered from the narratives of art history. As part of these strategies, not only must exhibitions be curated without essentialist practices, but strategies must also be deployed to ensure that Latin American artists are acknowledge for the major contributions in the development of art history, alongside the “great artists” of art history. Reilly states: “Curators and other art-world professionals should be amenable to self-critique, and as cultural critic bell hooks attests, producing work “that oppresses structures of domination, that presents possibilities for a transformed future by willingly interrogating their own work on aesthetic or political grounds. This interrogation itself becomes an act of critical intervention, fundamentally fostering an attitude of vigilance rather than denial.”201 Thus, curators need to ask themselves what their biases include, who is being excluded in the selection of artists, and why. From these critical interventions Latin American art will continue to see shifts within curatorial practice and exhibition platforms. A shift that will depart from normative Eurocentric practices of curating, allowing the artist to speak for themselves, rather than speak for them—as we saw in the catalogue for Arts of the Fantastic—and by inviting experts in the field to work in the development of the exhibition. Expanding the line of curatorial practice to include collective knowledge and a practice informed by postcolonial methods shifts the role of the curator one step further—from arbiter to central player to a global consciousness. Looking forward at the notion of the exhibition space as a discursive practice for new, situated articulations calls for a

closer look into speech acts to investigate how curatorial tools such as: exhibition title, curatorial statement, didactic labels, catalogue material, and the position and engagement of the viewer build a narrative through language. This thesis not only contributes to an understanding of how the legacy of Latin American art has unfolded in North America, but also of how it can be perpetuated in the future.


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