

Abstract

In the past few years, due to the remarkable development of art biennials around the globe and their public popularity, different research projects have drawn attention to their history and how they have impacted on the production and reception of artworks in various local and regional scenes. Focusing on two texts, written within one year of each other, by Mário Pedrosa and Pierre Restany, important cultural agents of the time, I shall address the impact of some of these shows in the 1960s, especially the Venice and the São Paulo Biennials. Moreover, I intend to assess their hierarchical position on the international art scene at the time, asking one main question: since its inception, the São Paulo Biennial has adopted the Venice model, but at what costs? ●

Resumo

Nos últimos anos, devido à notável expansão e popularidade das bienais de arte em todo o mundo, diferentes projetos de investigação têm vindo a debruçar-se sobre a sua história e impacto na produção e recepção de obras de arte, em contextos locais e regionais. Tendo como base dois textos escritos com um ano de diferença, um da autoria de Mário Pedrosa e outro de Pierre Restany, dois dos mais importantes agentes culturais da década de 1960, será analisado o impacto das bienais neste período, especialmente das de Veneza e de São Paulo. Para além disso, este artigo analisa a posição hierárquica destes dois certames, a partir de uma pergunta central: desde a sua criação, a Bienal de São Paulo adotou o modelo de Veneza – mas a que preço? ●

Peer Review

Giulia Lamoni

Instituto de História da Arte, Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas,
Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal

Sarah Catenacci

Independent art historian, Rome, Italy

keywords

ART BIENNIALS

1960S

MÁRIO PEDROSA

PIERRE RESTANY

palavras-chave

BIENAS ARTÍSTICAS

DÉCADA DE 1960

MÁRIO PEDROSA

PIERRE RESTANY

Date of Submission

Dec. 2018

Date of Approval

Mar. 2019

BIENNIALS, THERE AND HERE

THINKING ABOUT THE SÃO PAULO BIENNIAL AND THE “VENETIAN FORMULA” IN THE 1960S THROUGH THE EYES OF MÁRIO PEDROSA AND PIERRE RESTANY

MARIA DE FÁTIMA MORETHY COUTO
University of Campinas (UNICAMP), Brazil
fmorethy@uol.com.br
mfmcouto@g.unicamp.br

Introduction

The Brazilian Mário Pedrosa (1900-1981) and the French Pierre Restany (1930-2003) were prominent art critics and cultural agents engaged in the defence of modern and contemporary art and have crossed paths on several occasions, in South America and in Europe. Both participated actively in the international biennial circuit of the 1960s, organizing or promoting some of these events or participating in its juries.

In recent years, their legacy has been the focus of growing interest and attention of numerous researchers from various origins. In 2006, an international conference, *Le demi-siècle de Pierre Restany*, which resulted in an expansive publication, paid homage to Restany in Paris and discussed several aspects of his activity, including his ability to form networks and act as an international cultural agent (Lee-man 2009). In 2015, the Museum of Modern Art of New York published the first anthology in English of Mário Pedrosa's writings, in the collection *MoMA's Primary Documents*, which hopefully will magnify his ideas. Two years later, in 2017, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía held a large exhibition about Pedrosa's work, which also originated a catalogue with some of Pedrosa's writings translated to Spanish and expert texts.

In Brazil, there have been several studies about Mário Pedrosa, about the importance of his role as an art critic both at home and abroad, with particular attention given to the organisation and publication of his writings on art, by Aracy Amaral (1980s) and by Otília Arantes (1990s). Pierre Restany's trips to and from Brazil and Argentina and the controversies caused by his ideas have also been the subject of several researches. However, there have been very few studies that collate their actions.¹

This article intends not only to highlight the importance of the role they played in a broad scenario, but also to reflect on the significance of the art biennials as venues of cultural, political and commercial competition among nations in the 1960s. My interest in the theme is related to the project I am conducting with the support of the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), which discusses the effects of the circulation of foreign artists and art critics in South America, as well as the participation of South American artists and art critics in major international art events of the 1950s-1970s.²

The modernity of Mário Pedrosa

In 1970 the Brazilian art critic Mário Pedrosa writes a long text about the São Paulo Biennials, in which he discusses Brazilian art of the last fifty years and assesses the show, then in its tenth edition.³ Pedrosa had been an early advocate of the biennial, considering that it could curb the cultural isolation in which Brazil lived and, simultaneously, give prominence to the country abroad.

Soon after the opening of the São Paulo Biennial in 1951, he published an article in a Brazilian newspaper in which he highlighted three points that, in his opinion, justified the importance of holding a show of such scale in Brazil: an opportunity to update the domestic art scene; raising the country's profile abroad and embolden the São Paulo event in relation to its Venice counterpart (Pedrosa 1951a) (Fig. 1). As we shall see, he would return to these topics in several other texts.

Mário Pedrosa was a key witness and active agent in the cultural transformations that occurred in Brazil from the 1930s to the 1970s, having worked on different fronts throughout his career, which is remarkably unique. He experienced a cosmopolitan education and international travel like few South American critics were able to enjoy back then, and attained a level of professional recognition unusual for Brazil's art scene, comparable perhaps to his Argentinean contemporaries Jorge Romero Brest and Marta Traba (settled in Colombia) and fellow Brazilian Sérgio Milliet.

From a wealthy and influential family (his father was a Senator for the state of Paraíba and minister of the Federal Budget Oversight Board), from the age of 13 to 15 Pedrosa studied in Switzerland and then graduated in law in Brazil in 1923, however never practiced the profession. He began to work as a literary critic in the 1920s

¹ Schroeder (2015) discusses both men's contribution to the boycott of the 1969 São Paulo Biennial, and also comments, albeit briefly, on the stance they each took in relation to the art of the time.

² The objective of this research, entitled *O trauma do moderno: trânsitos entre arte e crítica de arte na América do sul (1950-1970)* [*The trauma of the modern: flow between art and art criticism in South America (1950-1970)*], is to analyse the different strategies of internationalization and cultural affirmation adopted in that period and, more specifically, to reflect on the role of certain institutions and agents on the diffusion of certain artists and trends.

³ The text "*A Bienal de cá para lá*" [The Bienal from here to there] was first published three years later, in 1973, in the collection published by Ferreira Gullar, *Arte Brasileira hoje: situação e perspectivas*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, which included texts by different historians and art critics, as well as contributions by Brazilian contemporary artists.



Fig. 1 – Opening of the 1st São Paulo Biennial, 1951. © Cav. Giov. Strazza. São Paulo Biennial Foundation Archives.

and as an art critic in 1933, with a paper about the German engraver Kathe Kollwitz, who was exhibiting in São Paulo. He then went on to write regularly about art for newspapers and magazines in Brazil and, more sporadically, in foreign periodicals. Parallel to his work as an art critic and also as a secondary school teacher, Pedrosa took on various tasks and positions in the field of culture and cultural management: he sat on the juries of important national and international competitions (Biennale de Paris, Tokyo Biennale, New Delhi Triennial, among others); he was president of the Brazilian Association of Art Critics (ABCA) and vice-president of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) on two separate occasions; he organised the International Congress of Art Critics held in Brasília, São Paulo and

Rio de Janeiro in 1959; he directed the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art from 1961 to 1963; he curated the 6th São Paulo Biennial (1961) and coordinated the creation of the Museum of Solidarity, in Chile, during the presidency of Salvador Allende. A prominent political Trotskyist activist, Pedrosa was arrested and forced to live clandestinely or in exile from Brazil at different times in the country's history, having resided in Berlin (1927-1929), in France (1938 and 1973-1977), in the United States (1939-1945) and in Chile (1970-1973). He also spent time in Japan in 1958, as a UNESCO fellow. He had close relations with the surrealists in Paris in the late 1920s (his sister-in-law Elsie Houston was married to Benjamin Péret) and he was friends with several artists, including the sculptor Alexandre Calder, whom he met in the United States.

Despite his declared affiliation to Marxism, having been a member of both the Communist Party and the Socialist Party in Brazil, Pedrosa, upon his return from exile in the United States and due to his admiration for Calder's art, engaged in championing abstract art, openly contesting the relevance of a figurative painting of nationalist character (such as, for example, socialist realism). He even declared, in 1957, that "the so-called abstract painters are the most aware artists of the historical period in which we are living, for they know that the documentary role of painting is over. Its function is now another: to expand the field of human language in pure perception"⁴ (Pedrosa 1957, 8).

In fact, Pedrosa was the first critic in Brazil to systematically defend abstract art (of a constructive tendency) since the 1940s, considering it one of the most powerful instruments for creating a new society. Together with the poet and critic Ferreira Gullar, he was also one of the early advocates of the neoconcrete movement, created in Rio de Janeiro in 1959 to oppose the rationalism of the Brazilian abstract avant-garde, practiced in São Paulo by the members of *Grupo Ruptura* [Rupture Group] from 1952 onwards, but without relinquishing their relationship with constructivist ideas. He acted as a mentor for the neoconcrete artists, who regularly gathered in his Rio de Janeiro apartment, and as an ambassador for the group, in Brazil and abroad, promoting their works, projects and ideas in articles, conferences and meetings.

It should be mentioned that abstraction was regarded with reservation and resistance in Brazil right up to the end of World War II, both by politicized artists and members of the modernist generation, for it was believed that only figurative art could have a legitimate social purpose and be accessible to all. Pedrosa was a pioneer in arguing against this train of thought, seeking to associate social revolution and avant-garde art, including here what he referred to as "virgin art" – the art "of the children, of madmen and primitives". He was equally one of the great heralds of modern Brazilian architecture, whose greatest achievement came about (not without contradiction) with the construction of the country's new capital city, Brasília, inaugurated in 1960. However, he would vehemently reject informal art, considering it mere cathartic projection, bound to the artist's individuality.

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine.

⁵ In 1970, Pedrosa was accused by the military dictatorship in power since 1964 of defaming Brazil's image abroad by reporting incidents of torture in the country to the international press. Foreseeing his own conviction under the National Security Act, he decided to leave Brazil for Chile.

⁶ It should be noted that the São Paulo Biennials were initially organised by the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art. In 1963 Ciccillo Matarazzo created the São Paulo Biennial Foundation, a private entity that took on the responsibility for the documents and production of the biennials.

⁷ The fourth centenary of the foundation of city of São Paulo was a celebration that mobilised São Paulo society and gave rise to urban interventions of various kinds, including the completion of the Ibirapuera Park, where the São Paulo Biennial Foundation building can be found today, which houses the show.

⁸ The European delegations brought for its special rooms works by some of the leading names of the historic avant-gardes, such as Kokoschka, Mondrian, Klee, Ensor and Munch, while the United States was represented by works by Calder, de Kooning and Motherwell, among others. Italy and France organised special rooms dedicated to the masters of futurism and cubism in the post-war world. Also of note is the room dedicated to Walter Gropius, one of the founders of Bauhaus, and who came to Brazil to receive the International Architecture Prize for his body of work. But certainly one of the main highlights of the show was the Picasso room, with fifty works of the Catalan artist, including the canvas *Guernica*.

Thus, in the 1950s, Pedrosa publicly defended an “adventure” like the São Paulo Biennial, since, in his eyes, it would potentially break away from the provincial mentality that still dominated in Brazil in the field of arts. A few months after the opening of the show, Pedrosa would go back to expressing his enthusiasm about the real possibility of updating Brazilian art scene, asserting that the contest “had shown by comparison against what is being done abroad how our artistic movement finds itself in a primary stage” (Pedrosa 1951b, 7).

Pedrosa and the São Paulo Biennial: reviewing the show and its impact on the local scene

Twenty years after the first São Paulo Biennial, Mário Pedrosa's vision of the show becomes more critical and less optimistic. In the text under analysis here, “A Biennial de cá para lá”, written while he was preparing to go into exile again⁵, Pedrosa discusses the conditions that enabled the creation of the Biennial in Brazil – the growth of São Paulo city, its intense industrial activity, the establishment of post-war European entrepreneurs in Brazil and their competition for symbolic capital and cultural status, the alliance between businessmen and governors – and asks himself “what effects, what repercussions did the series of Biennials that followed the first had brought for the expansion of modern art in Brazil?” (Pedrosa 1973, 6). In his opinion, the first biennial “was pure improvisation” by its creator, the industrialist Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho (known as Ciccillo Matarazzo), who also founded the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (1948).⁶ And chance circumstances guaranteed its continuation: invited to preside over the commemorations of the fourth centenary of the city of São Paulo, which would be in January 1954, Ciccillo Matarazzo introduced the idea of a second edition of the Biennial in the list of commemorative projects⁷. The success of that edition, which brought Picasso's *Guernica* to the country, was key to the show's continuity in Brazil.⁸ For Pedrosa and several other Brazilian intellectuals, it was the greatest modern art exhibition held in the world for a decade (Fig.2).

In Pedrosa's recapitulation of the history of the show (Pedrosa 1973), he states that it was evident that the São Paulo Biennial had definitely broken up the closed circle within which artistic activities were developed in Brazil, “transforming São Paulo into a living centre of contact and exchange of impressions and ideas among critics and artists from around the world, but above all from Latin America” (Pedrosa 1973, 10).

Although never disputing the adoption of the Venice Biennale model in São Paulo, Pedrosa observes that “not all progress is made without counter-movements, without steps backwards and without risks” (...): by “withdrawing Brazil from its



Fig. 2 – Opening of the 9th São Paulo Biennial, 1967. Mário Pedrosa (on the left) and Ciccillo Matarazzo (on the right), with an unidentified person (in the center) in front of a painting by Robert Rauschenberg. © Unidentified author. São Paulo Biennial Foundation Archives.

>

Fig. 3 – “Non a la Biennale de São Paulo: dossier”, 1969. Julio Le Parc Archive, Paris

sweet and placid isolationism, the Biennial launched the country into the arena of international fashion, of the spurious personal and even national arrangements regarding prizes, prestige politics among national delegations, and wheeler-dealer politics among individuals” (Pedrosa 1973, 10). In his opinion, “the São Paulo biennials quickly became a migratory gate for successive international movements that came and went,” leaving local critics with their “tongues out” and harming “efforts towards our own development in the creative field”, which were not duly appreciated by the hegemonic circuit⁹ (Pedrosa 1973, 60).

The art show had thus become an art fair; its prizes lost their meaning due to the absence of any objective criteria for their award and holding it no longer brought any prestige to Brazil. Pedrosa is categorical in his appraisal: “doing the biennials again like those that were staged before is a provincial waste of money, energy and goodwill. And the prestige that it would bring Brazil, that’s all over, it’s no longer an option” (Pedrosa 1973, 55).

It should be highlighted that Pedrosa thought the crisis was broader and was affecting not only the Venice Biennale, which had undergone reforms following the wave of protests in 1968, but also the great collective art manifestations around the world. But Venice, he stated, was “an organization of Italian tourism, and (...) its lawful operation is perfectly guaranteed”¹⁰ (Pedrosa 1973, 55).

⁹ According to Pedrosa, “new trends were not imposed once and for all. But rather drop by drop, as critics, artists, amateurs who struggled so hard to learn, to assimilate this or that school, movement, in general had no taste or appetite the following year to accept, swallow another dose of novelty, another very latest trend contrary to the preceding principles and ideas” (Pedrosa 1973, 50-51).

¹⁰ The 1968 Venice Biennale was marked by a series of contestations, which had begun at the Milan Triennial, on the conveyor belt of student and worker protests in France, which spread through Europe. The awards ceremony was postponed, in fear of further protests, and then abolished for the immediately subsequent biennials.



¹¹ The names selected to form the Brazilian delegation for the 6th Biennale de Paris included Antônio Manuel, Humberto Espíndola, Carlos Vergara and Evandro Teixeira. Some of the artworks dealt with current themes and had clearly political content.

¹² However, although extensive and widely supported, the boycott was not complete and the 10th São Paulo Biennial took place on the scheduled date, with several absentees and last-minute participants.

¹³ Restany was the author/organiser of several books about contemporary art, in which he expressed his personal views, and regularly contributed to leading art and architecture magazines of the time, such as *Combat*, *Cimaise*, *Domus* and *Planète*. On his globetrotting activities, I reproduce here the account given by Maria Grazia Mazzocchi (2003), who worked alongside Restany at *Domus*: “Nobody could keep up with Pierre on his travels around the world of art. At the Venice Biennale, he couldn’t take two steps without being waylaid by countless admirers or beleaguered by supplicants who would accost him with requests for advice, information, a good word here or there. Only on board a plane could he have a bit of peace. Pierre spent much of his life flying from one continent to another, taking his lucid criticism and inexhaustible enthusiasm to every corner of the planet.”

He expressed similar discontent in relation to contemporary art in general, for, in his opinion, it was showing itself to be increasingly subordinate to capitalist market laws. In several texts published in those years, Pedrosa would criticise the overwhelming power of the market and the publicity industry, asserting that the mass consumer society was not a favourable platform for the arts. In 1966, Pedrosa had even – in a ground-breaking manner – declared the end of the modern artistic experience: “we are not within the parameters which we called modern art,” he stated. “Call this post-modern art, to indicate the distinction” (Pedrosa 1966, 10). In the 1970s, the Brazilian situation had become particularly edgy for the country had been under dictatorial rule since 1964 and the effects of censorship and systemic repression were being felt in the field of arts. In May 1969, the military regime cancelled the show of the artists who would represent the country at the 6th Biennale de Paris, ordering its disassembly hours before its official opening.¹¹ This repressive act, which was imposed after the seizure of some artworks during the 2nd Bienal de Bahia (held in Salvador) and the 3rd Salão de Ouro Preto, stirred up reactions in Brazilian artistic circles, especially of the Brazilian Association of Art Critics (ABCA), which was then presided by Pedrosa. It triggered an international movement which would result in several countries boycotting the 10th São Paulo Biennial, scheduled for the end of 1969, and in artists of various nationalities subscribing to the *Non à La Biennale* manifesto, which circulated in Europe and in the United States¹² (Fig. 3).

Pierre Restany between Brazil and Argentina

One of the key players in the international boycott of the 1969 São Paulo Biennial was the French critic Pierre Restany, a prominent figure on the European art circuit, especially between Paris and Milan, as the promoter of *Nouveau Réalisme*, who also made his presence felt on the South American circuit of the time.¹³ Although he had never been a jury member or commissioner of the French delegation to the São Paulo Biennials, Restany would regularly visit Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s to follow some editions of the show, about which he published long articles in the international press and art journals.¹⁴ In fact, his first visit to Brazil came about through an invitation from Mário Pedrosa to the 1961 São Paulo Biennial, of which, as we have mentioned, Pedrosa was curator. The two men would meet again on several occasions in South America and Europe. In 1967, Restany was invited by Ciccillo Matarazzo to organise the Art and Technology room for the 1969 São Paulo Biennial, which he was set to do together with Belgian artist Pol Bury, but ended up cancelling his participation due to his involvement in the boycott. Nonetheless, as we shall see, he still travelled to Brazil that year.

Restany visited Argentina for the first time in 1964, as part of the jury for the Instituto Torcuato di Tella Prize, alongside Clement Greenberg, and began to take a special interest in the cultural life of Buenos Aires, following the work of several Argentinean artists. At the time, his favourite for the prize, the sculptor Arman, ended up losing out to the painter Kenneth Noland, who had been supported by the North American critic. The following year, in 1965, Restany published an enthusiastic article about the Argentinean art scene in *Planète* magazine, comparing it positively to the New York scene, and placing it at a level above that of Brazil.

Furthermore, he was never overly keen on 1950s/60s Brazilian constructive art, despite declaring in some articles published in the 1960s his appreciation of the work of some Brazilian sculptors and engravers of the time and, later on, of Hélio Oiticica's work (whom he knew through Pedrosa) and his concept of marginality. Nor was his view of the construction of Brasília a positive one; although acknowledging its symbolic role for Brazilian society, Restany considered it a dead, lifeless city, as its population would occur in an entirely artificial manner.¹⁵

In 1965, during another visit to Brazil, Restany gave an interview to the newspaper *Correio da Manhã* in which he criticised the 8th São Paulo Biennial, deeming it weak in relation to the 1964 Venice Biennale, and suggested changes for the show; specifically, that national representations should be abolished in favour of a thematically structured show and that the jury should be formed exclusively by experts. He also argued that, as had been the case in Venice since 1960, the São Paulo Biennial should forbid from the jury commissioners from exhibiting countries. Restany picks up this issue again in 1969, when, after leading the international boycott, he comes to Brazil to meet Ciccillo Matarazzo and presents him with a restructuring plan for the São Paulo Biennial, retrieving several of his previous ideas. On this occasion, he reasserted the importance of the São Paulo Biennial in the international context, declaring that “the São Paulo Biennial could and should be questioned but it is too important to be sacrificed. The questioning this year gave it a universal measure, as for a long time the cultural world has been waiting for restructuring of similar shows, and Venice and São Paulo are the most important biennials” (Maurício 1969, 3).

It is worth pointing out that many of his general ideas and remarks about Brazil and its art scene stoked criticism and negative reactions among intellectuals in Brazil. Pedrosa, for example, translated Restany's *Manifesto for Total Art* in his column in the *Correio de Manhã* on 17 March 1968, but still contested the optimism of his French colleague regarding technological development and the promise of a total art for the 21st century.

Ten years later, the *Rio Negro Manifesto* or *Integral Naturalism Manifesto* published by Restany in Europe in 1979, after a trip to the Amazon with artist Franz Krajcberg and advertising executive Sepp Baendereck the year before, caused much stronger and more incisive controversy, with accusations from Brazilian critics and intellectuals that it was a new attempt at cultural colonisation¹⁶ (Fig. 4).

¹⁴ Letters kept at the Archives de la Critique d'Art, in Rennes, reveal that Restany wrote to different publishers of international magazines to propose texts about the exhibitions and places he visited in South America.

¹⁵ In an article published in 1975, Restany presents a broader snapshot of Brazilian contemporary art, in which he discusses its diversity and wealth in a more positive light and asserts that he owes Mário Pedrosa for his knowledge of Brazilian art. In this text he also declares that “his judgment about Brasília had been hurried, for today it is a city of 800,000 inhabitants and with the administrative and diplomatic transfer practically complete” (Restany 1975, 20).

¹⁶ On this subject, see, for instance, Rosemary O'Neill. “Le naturalisme integral de Pierre Restany: la perception discipline et la dématérialisation de l'objet” and Stéphane Huchet. “Pierre Restany, quels échos brésiliens?” (Leeman 2009, 172-189 and 311-324). See also the master's dissertation of Carmen Palumbo (2018), an in-depth study about the theme.



Fig. 4 – “Rio Negro Manifesto” or “Integral Naturalism Manifesto” published by Pierre Restany at *Natura Integrale* magazine, issue 1, April/May 1979.

Restany and the art biennials: reflections on the success of the “Venetian formula”

In 1969, Restany publishes a text about the art biennials in a book he edited with Pierre Cabanne, dedicated to the avant-garde manifestations of the 20th century. In this text he discusses the success of the “Venetian formula” from an acutely French (or even Parisian) perspective, which advocates the need to recognise the relevance of the art of his country, while at the same time acknowledging (and mourning) the secondary position it occupied on the international art circuit at the time.

Furthermore, he outlines a series of parallels between the large shows of the period – such as the Venice and São Paulo Biennials, the Paris Biennale and documenta – in terms of impact and relevance to the time, which helps us understand the networks of interest in play in those years.

Restany recalls that the 1968 Venice Biennale opened in a “heavy atmosphere, dominated by the international gusts of student epopee, marked by the explosion of Parisian barricades and traumatized by the recent occupation of the Milan Triennial”. For him, it was “a lightweight biennial, based on a single keyword, ‘economy-restriction’, full of petty-minded machinations and laden with opportunism” (Restany 1969, 116).

Nevertheless, despite the criticisms of the 1968 edition, Restany thinks that the biennial model was still essential for the evaluation of contemporary art work and defends the supremacy of the Venice Biennale in relation to art shows of the same ilk, highlighting attributes such as: the solemn nature of the event, the awards system, frequency, broad confrontation of works, and creation of a specialist audience. Venice, stimulating a substantial flow of international exchanges, contributed to the development of cultural events of universal calling, but, in his opinion, the other more recent biennials (São Paulo, Tokyo, Ljubljana, Menton, Tehran and San Marino, among others) lacked the charm and pomp of the Italian city (Restany 1969, 111) (Fig. 5).

In his view, on a global scale only the São Paulo Biennial could also be considered “an important piece in the subtle mechanism of compensation and exchange” which ruled contemporary art and its institutions. But his observations about the Brazilian show are not all praiseworthy. He notes that the São Paulo Biennial was conceived in the image of Venice and therefore reflected the main guidelines used there, including as regards the awarding of prizes. Although the São Paulo Biennial had for several years confirmed “the superiority and prestige of the European schools”, he regretted that the tables had been turned: in 1963 the jury had made a mistake by awarding the grand prize to the “mediocre [Adolph] Gottlieb at the expense of [Pierre] Soulages”. Similarly, in 1967, São Paulo witnessed the “scandal of César’s failure, who everyone had expected to win the Grand Prize, given the importance and quality of his retrospective. (...) Awarded with a consolation prize,

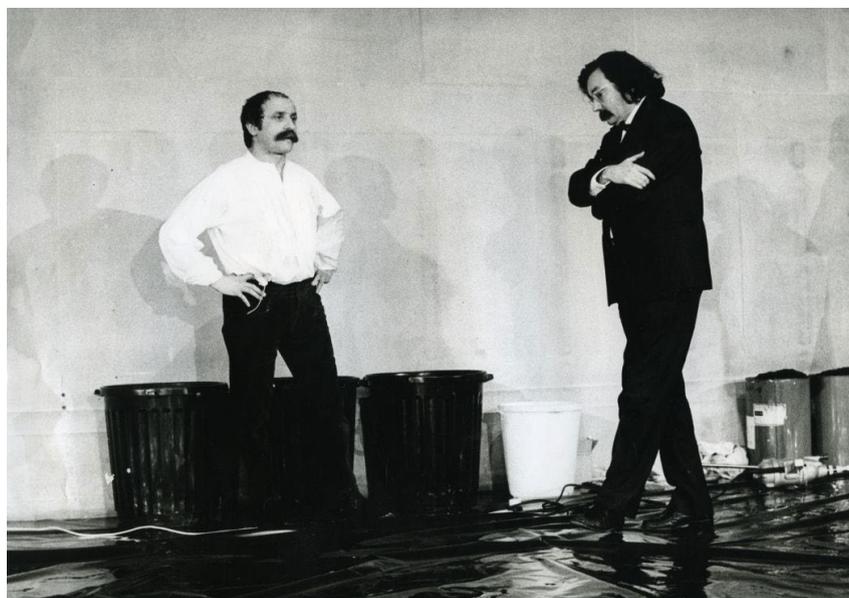


Fig. 5 – Pierre Restany (on the right) and César (on the left) at the Tate Gallery on the occasion of one of César's action-happenings, 1968. © Tate Archive Photographic Collection: César.

César rejected it" (Restany 1969, 117).¹⁷ As Isabel Plante pointed out, there was no French member at the São Paulo Biennial jury that year, and Restany feared the French delegation would return empty-handed¹⁸. In search of support, he wrote to some of his South America colleagues, like the Uruguayan Angel Kalenberg, that "it would be a shame if such a brilliant French selection were to pay the price of a diplomatic alliance between underdeveloped countries! A negative record in São Paulo would also be used in Paris by all the reactionary officials as proof of the aberration of such a current choice" (Plante 2009, 300).

From his point of view, documenta was still an "exhibition organized by the Germans for the Germans," which offered the displeasure of being held "in a remote corner of the German province, a few kilometres from the GDR (East Germany)". Although Restany noted changes in the direction of documenta 4 (1968), the last one organized under the aegis of its architect, Arnold Bode, he was still critical of the fact that its visitors "were walking away with the impression that youth and freshness, impetus and inventive force in contemporary art were now exclusively reserved for the United States" (Restany 1969, 118). The Kassel strategy of 1968 "could only serve to accelerate international artistic emigration to New York".¹⁹

Restany was also reticent about the Biennale de Paris, created in 1959 by Raymond Cogniat with the aim of bringing Paris back to the centre of the international art world, investing in the production of artists aged under 35 (the age limit for participation).²⁰ He highlights its experimental character, but believes that it was a rather modest step in this heated dispute for a hegemonic position in the panorama of arts. Nor were the Parisian Salons created in the immediate post-war period, like the *Salon Comparaisons* and the *Salon de Mai*, still able to compete with the great shows held abroad, "in the London style of the Tate Gallery or in the German fashion of documenta" (Restany 1969, 112).

¹⁷ Restany came to Brazil for the opening of the Biennial and then travelled to Rio de Janeiro with César, who did a performance – with one of his expansions – at the city's Modern Art Museum. Leonor Amarante, in her book about the São Paulo Biennial, comments on the controversy regarding the award for César: "By awarding the English painter Richard Smith, 36, the jury struck at the superstar reputation of the French sculptor César Baldaccini. Incensed by not winning the Grand Prize, just one of the ten regulatory ones, Baldaccini decided to refuse the \$2,200. "All this is ridiculous", he thundered. "Any one of my sculptures is worth \$10,000. If they want to award youngsters, then they should do so to my colleague Pierre Raynaud, who produces original and powerful sculpture" (Amarante 1989, 174).

¹⁸ The French delegation was selected by Michel Ragon and formed by César, Alain Jacquet, James Guitet and Jean-Pierre Raynaud.

¹⁹ It is important to note that Restany was not entirely wrong in his analysis about documenta. According to Walter Grasskamp (2017), the first documentas were not really international shows. "It was not even European, but rather a very German event indeed." And about the 1968 documenta, his analysis also corroborated Restany's observations: "What was most eye-catching in the fourth documenta was the presence of North American artists representing colour-field painting, hard-edge painting, and – most surprising of all – pop art and minimalist art. Corresponding to almost a third of all the artists invite, the American contribution led to the fourth documenta to be nicknamed the American documenta."

²⁰ The Paris Biennale had the support of André Malraux, then Culture Minister. It was a political project that was implemented following the failed French participation in the 1958 Venice Biennale, when the country did not win any of the main awards.

²¹ For critical globalism, she understands “an approach to art-making, a mode of reception for art-viewing, and a hermeneutic for curatorial practice (...), aesthetic response to economic, technological, and cultural processes of globalization” (Jones 2016, xiii).

Restany realised that Paris, previously considered a cradle of the art world, was becoming isolated against a radically evolving global backdrop: “Paris feels increasingly provincial. Its great aesthetic discussions submerged in parochial matters. It is gradually forgetting how to see big” (Restany 1969, 118).

Just like many of his contemporaries, he also believed that contemporary art, which he defended, lacked institutional support in France and he called for concrete changes: “new methods to revive the artistic life, in line with a worldwide outlook, should be employed. (...) It is time for Paris to have its true 20th century museum, if it wants to remain a permanent forum for artistic creation” (Restany 1969, 117-118).

Mário Pedrosa and Pierre Restany regarding the hegemonic artistic circuit

As Caroline Jones observed, the format of the art biennials derives directly from the great trade fairs and Universal Expositions held in the 19th century in Europe and these exhibitory forms shared structures and functions. In her opinion, “when we look beyond claims to futurity or assertions of contemporaneity, we can begin to see the historical connections linking biennials to world fairs, tourism, and spectacular urbanism, with implications for the efficacy and purpose of these exhibitions for the present” (Jones 2010, 68). Jones considers that the existing art world cannot live without the biennials, but also highlights that the biennials had to adapt to the artists demands of a critical globalism and grew to embrace art as experience, especially from the 1960s onwards.²¹

Bruce Altshuler, another author who examined the history of the great art exhibitions of the 19th and 20th centuries, considers that until the mid-1960s the primary purpose of large, recurring international art exhibitions was to report the state of contemporary art. “Beyond motivations connected with economic development and tourism, or with local and national pride, reporting the state of contemporary art remained a central rationale for these immense events. Toward the end of the 1960s, however, this would no longer seem sufficient justification” (Altshuler 2013, 13). The expansion of the contemporary art market and the increase in the number of commercial venues for contemporary art made the biennials re-evaluate their goals. The 1960s and 70s were also a period of intense transformations in the field of art exhibitions and curatorial strategies. In 1969 Harald Szeemann organized at the Kunsthalle in Bern *When attitudes become form*, an exhibition that would become famous for breaking away from traditional prescriptions of presentation and assembly and for projecting the figure of the independent curator. In 1972, Szeemann would be the curator of documenta 5 and leave his mark on the history of the German show.

In this context, the structure that governed Venice and São Paulo – of national representations and several awards – looked outdated, inadequate. While the Venice and São Paulo Biennials sought to reinvent themselves, abolishing, for example, their awards system, other biennial formats began to be implemented in different parts of the world. Several of the major exhibitions created outside of hegemonic centres from the mid-1950s to the 1980s have insisted on “critical regionalism as the means for realigning cultural networks across geopolitical divides”, thus adopting a critical stance to the established model of the Venice Biennial and engaging with artists, curators and places formerly excluded from the hegemonic circuit (Gardner and Green 2013, 4). Therefore, the texts analysed here gain even more relevance when we consider that they were published at a time when artistic and cultural values were being intensely revised and a “crisis” gripped several institutions of legitimization. From distinct perspectives and in view of different challenges (repression of freedom of expression in Brazil and a breakup of the hegemony of French art), their authors reflected on the exhaustion of the Venice Biennial model and the rules of the international art world (Fig. 6). Despite their cosmopolitan experience and their shrewdness, both authors reveal a deep connection to their place of origin and discuss general themes from a local perspective, thus assuming a clearly political stance. Mário Pedrosa obviously resented the fact that Brazil had failed to take on the leading role on the international cultural stage that he had so desired, despite the vitality and originality of its artistic production in the second half of the 20th century. Moreover, he noted with sorrow that the country’s modernization that began post-war had failed to promote any significant social transformation. The situation became more tragic as the political environment deteriorated in everyone’s eyes, with freedom of expression curtailed and opponents to the dictatorial regime installed in 1964 relentlessly persecuted. Unlike Restany, who defended the integration of art and technology, Pedrosa aimed his attention at the artwork of primitive cultures and peripheral groups, and longed for a time and a



Fig. 6 – Pierre Restany and Mário Pedrosa in the 1970s. © Unidentified author. Fonds Pierre Restany. Archives de la Critique d’Art.

place where Western values could coexist with alterity. He continued to believe in the creative and revolutionary power of developing societies or even of the less favoured classes of first world societies. In his opinion, “below the line of the hemisphere soaked in wealth, progress and culture, life was germinating” (Pedrosa 1976, 40).

Pierre Restany, meanwhile, remained steadfastly positioned as a French critic, for whom his cosmopolitan, and therefore privileged, viewpoint could support his opinion and suggestions regarding other art scenes. It is worth remembering that he was one of the rare European critics of the period who sought to actually interact with the cultural-artistic circles of Brazil and Argentina. However, he did not shirk from presenting himself as a privileged intermediary of these groups for the European public, thus taking a stance of a somewhat colonial slant.

As mentioned above, Restany carried out his analysis of the 1960s art biennials from a distinctly French perspective, debating the loss of France’s hegemonic position in the global cultural scene. His criticisms of the São Paulo Biennial, for example, become more stinging when the show begins to award its most important prizes to North American artists. It should be stressed that his general view of the symbolic fall of France is an accurate one, matching in several aspects the diagnosis presented by other agents. In the following years, the French government decisively supported the creation of a string of prominent cultural spaces, including the Musée National d’Art Moderne and the Centre George Pompidou, the FIAC (International Contemporary Art Fair) and the Contemporary Art Centres, seeking to engineer changes in this troubling state of affairs. In 1969, the situation was still murky, and political and cultural institutions were striving to assimilate the shock of the 1968 protests. Although France would fail to regain its previous hegemonic position, of a global centre and lighthouse for the arts, the country did not entirely lose its capacity to make an impact on the international scene.

In the field of the “history of exhibitions”, the São Paulo Biennial has been relatively conspicuous, since it was the first great international modern art contest held outside Europe, and in a peripheral capital. However, as we have seen, it was designed with the same format as the Venice Biennial and it did not dispute the “Venetian formula”; on the contrary, it made use of this formula in order to fight for a prominent position on the international art scene. It should be noted that its foundation was part of a broader modernization project of Brazilian society and was implemented with the support of the federal government, which intended to instil an image of Brazil as one of the future world powers, including in the fields of arts and architecture. At the time, the country was living a period of economic growth, leveraged by São Paulo, a city that contrasted with the rest of the country due to its intense industrial activities and its high population of foreign immigrants. In its more than fifty years of activities, the São Paulo Biennial has insisted on its internationalist vocation. Nevertheless, its most recent editions have reflected the desire to break away from a Eurocentric view of art.²²

Mário Pedrosa, as mentioned earlier, was one of the first to advocate for the São Paulo Biennial. In his initial view, the event would serve to bring Brazilian artists up

to date with the rest of the world, to broaden the country's artistic frontiers and to strengthen its international ties. In 1970, however, he assessed that this broadening had not been accompanied by international recognition of Brazilian artists and artworks, and that market interests, directed from outside to inside the country, controlled the show. Despite its various crises, of a political, conceptual and also financial nature, the São Paulo Biennial, in a constant state of reinvention, stands the test of time, but the debate raised by Pedrosa about the limits of local cultural affirmation strategies remains open. ●

²² One can highlight, in this process, the 24th edition, held in 1998, known as the "Anthropophagic Biennial" for using the concept coined by the modernist writer Oswald de Andrade in his 1928 Manifest to connect the entire show.

REFERENCES

- Alambert, Francisco e Canhete, Polyana. 2004. *Bienais de São Paulo. Da era do museu à era dos curadores*. São Paulo: Boitempo.
- Alloway, Lawrence. 1968. *The Venice Biennale, 1895-1968: from salon to goldfish Bowl*. Greenwich/Connecticut: New York Graphic Society.
- Altshuler, Bruce. 2013. *Biennials and Beyond – Exhibitions that made art history. 1962-2002*. London & New York: Phaidon.
- Amaral, Aracy. 1982. *Arte e meio artístico: entre a feijoada e o x-burguer*. São Paulo: Nobel.
- Amaral, Aracy. 2006. *Textos do Trópico de Capricórnio*. Vol. 2. São Paulo: Ed. 34.
- Amarante, Leonor. 1989. *As Bienais de São Paulo/1951 a 1987*. São Paulo: Projeto.
- Arantes, Otilia B. F. 2004. *Mário Pedrosa: itinerário crítico*. São Paulo: CosacNaify.
- S.n. 1965. "Entrevista: Restany, Brasília, Bienal e Vanguarda". *Correio da Manhã*. Rio de Janeiro, September 25.
- Filipovic, Elena; van Hal, Marieke; and Ovstebo, Solveig (eds). 2010. *The Biennial Reader*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz.
- Gardner, Antony; Green, Charles. 2013. "Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global". *Third Text* 27 (4), London: 442-455.
- Gardner, Antony; Green, Charles. 2016. *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta. The exhibitions that created contemporary art*. England: Wiley Blackwell.
- Grasskamp, Walter. 2017. "Becoming Global: From Eurocentrism to North-Atlantic Feedback – documenta as an 'International Exhibition' (1955-1972)". *On curating* (33). Accessed June 10 2018, http://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/becoming-global-from-eurocentrism-to-north-atlantic-feedbackdocumenta-as-an-international-exhibition-1955-1972.html#.XN_X31JKJlU
- Greenberg, Reesa; Ferguson, Bruce W.; Nairne, Sandy (eds.). 1999. *Thinking about exhibitions*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Jones, Caroline A. 2010. "Biennial Culture: a longer history". In *The Biennial Reader*, edited by Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal and Solveig Ovstebo, 66-86. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz.
- Jones, Caroline A. 2016. *The global work of art. World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.

- Leeman, Richard. 2009. *Le demi-siècle de Pierre Restany*. Paris: Éditions de Cendre and INHA.
- Maurício, Jayme. 1969. "Restany: o Brasil e a Bienal". *Correio da Manhã*, 2º Caderno, Rio de Janeiro, December 20: 3.
- Mazzocchi, Maria Grazia. 2003. "Hommages à Pierre". *Domus*. Accessed May 30 2018, <https://www.domusweb.it/en/art/2003/07/08/pierre-restany.html>.
- Palumbo, Carmen. 2018. *A Amazônia como lugar de conflito: o caso do Naturalismo Integral*. Master dissertation, Universidade de São Paulo.
- Pedrosa, Mário. 1951a. "A Primeira Bienal I". *Tribuna da Imprensa*, Rio de Janeiro, October 27: 7. [Reprinted in Pedrosa 1981]
- Pedrosa, Mário. 1951b. "A representação brasileira". *Tribuna da Imprensa*, Rio de Janeiro, December 1: 7.
- Pedrosa, Mário. 1957. "Arte e revolução". *Jornal do Brasil*, 1º Caderno, Rio de Janeiro, April 16: 8. [Reprinted in Pedrosa 1986 and Pedrosa 1995].
- Pedrosa, Mário. 1966. "Crise do condicionamento artístico". *Correio da Manhã*, 4º Caderno, Rio de Janeiro, July 31: 10. [Reprinted in Pedrosa 1986].
- Pedrosa, Mário. 1973. "A bienal de câ para lâ". In *Arte Brasileira Hoje (Situações e Perspectivas)*, edited by Ferreira Gullar, 3-64. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra [Reprinted in Pedrosa 1986].
- Pedrosa, Mário. 1976. "Discurso aos Tupiniquins ou Nambás". *Versus* (4): 40. [Reprinted in Pedrosa 1995].
- Pedrosa, Mário. 1981. *Dos Murais de Portinari aos espaços de Brasília*. Compilation of texts organized by Aracy Amaral. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- Pedrosa, Mário. 1986. *Mundo, homem, arte em crise*. Compilation of texts organized by Aracy Amaral. São Paulo: Perspectiva.
- Pedrosa, Mário. 1995. *Política das artes*. Compilation of texts organized by Otília B. F. Arantes. São Paulo: Edusp.
- Pedrosa, Mário. 1998. *Acadêmicos e Modernos*. Compilation of texts organized by Otília B. F. Arantes. São Paulo: Edusp.
- Pedrosa, Mário. 2000. *A modernidade câ e lâ*. Compilation of texts organized by Otília B. F. Arantes. São Paulo: Edusp.
- Plante, Isabel. 2009. "Pierre Restany et l'Amérique Latine. Un détournement de l'axe Paris-New York". In *Le demi-siècle de Pierre Restany*, directed by Richard Leeman, 287-309. Paris: Éditions de Cendre and INHA.
- Restany, Pierre. 1969. "Biennales". In: Cabanne, Pierre; Restany, Pierre. *L'avant-garde au XXème siècle*, 110-119. Paris: André Balland.
- Restany, Pierre. 1975. "L'art brésilien dans les sables mouvants". *Domus* (544): 17-23.
- Schroeder, Caroline. 2015. "Pierre Restany e Mário Pedrosa: diante da crise". *Anais do II Colóquio de Teoria, História e Crítica*, Brasília: 93-101.
- Schroeder, Caroline. 2016. "A Bienal em xeque e o estopim do boicote: sobre algumas estratégias radicais". *Anais do 25º Encontro Nacional da Anpap*, Porto Alegre: 2270-2283.