# Conflicts and Accommodations in the Organisation of the 6th Bienal de São Paulo: The Museum of Modern Art in New York and the United States Information Agency

**Dária Jaremtchuk**

**Abstract**

Based on the analysis of archival materials, this article addresses the United States representation at the 6th Bienal de São Paulo (1961), the last exhibition organised by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It begins by analysing the motivations that led MoMA to accept representing the United States at the 1st Bienal de São Paulo (1951) and to continue to do so until 1961. It discusses how, in the 1960s, the geopolitical context in Latin America led the New York museum to stop organising the exhibitions at the biennials and how the United States Information Agency (USIA) assumed responsibility for the USA exhibitions at the biennials from 1963 to 1967. It also analyses the reception of the exhibitions of Robert Motherwell, Reuben Nakian, and Leonardo Baskin, artists who represented the USA in the Brazilian artistic milieu.

**Keywords**

The United States representation at the 6th Bienal de São Paulo, MoMA at the 6th Bienal de São Paulo, MoMA and the USIA at Brazilian biennials.

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# Conflicts and Accommodations in the Organisation of the 6th Bienal de São Paulo: The Museum of Modern Art in New York and the United States Information Agency[1]

**Dária Jaremtchuk**

Between 1951 and 1961, the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) was responsible for the United States representations at the Bienal de São Paulo. The institution directly organised four exhibitions. For the 1955 and 1959 iterations, it invited the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, respectively.[2] Despite the autonomy that these institutions enjoyed, the realities of the Cold War meant that when organising international exhibitions, they had to consider larger ideological, political, and economic realities, which at times could be fiercely contested. In one way or another, these clashes also resonated in the national representations sent to the Venice and São Paulo biennials.[3] Although MoMA cited financial reasons for withdrawing from organising the Bienal de São Paulo, it seems that ideologies played a role. This paper will show that even though MoMA willingly agreed to represent the USA in São Paulo beginning in 1951, the geopolitical context by 1961 became too volatile. Thus, they sought to uncouple themselves from the increasing nationalism tied to international exhibitions, such as in the Bienal de São Paulo. As such, the United States Information Agency (USIA) fully stepped in. A short historical retrospective provides a framework for a better analysis.

The Bienal de São Paulo was created as an activity of the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo (MAM SP) in 1951. Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, better known as Ciccillo Matarazzo, who was the director of the Brazilian institution, sent an invitation for MoMA to organise the USA representation. To better understand the invitation addressed to a private institution, it is important to recall that both

1
Translated from the Portuguese by Marco Alexandre de Oliveira.

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Officially, the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) was responsible for the 1st Bienal de São Paulo (1951). At the 2nd Bienal (1953-1954), it was MoMA's International Art Program. At the 4th Bienal (1957) and the 6th Bienal (1961), it was the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art. Participation by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and The Minneapolis Institute of Arts counted on the financial support of MoMA's International Art Program.

3
Even though countless guidelines and procedures were the same for the USA representations at the Venice and São Paulo biennials, the reflection undertaken here is restricted to the Brazilian event.

entrepreneurs, Nelson Rockefeller and Ciccillo Matarazzo, had already made contact on account of their common interests. The United States had already approached Latin America in the first half of the 20th century, before the creation of the 1st Bienal de São Paulo. Attempting to contain the influence of Germany and the growth of sympathy for Nazism on the continent, the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration created the Good Neighbor Policy, in force between 1933 and 1945, which sought to establish a more diplomatic and less coercive foreign policy by avoiding sanctions or more direct interference in the sovereignty of countries. In reality, what was at stake was a guarantee of raw materials for USA production and a consumer market for its products. In this process, the arts became a screen that favoured political, economic, and ideological approaches. Within the framework of the Good Neighbor Policy, President Roosevelt established the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA)[4] and appointed Nelson Rockefeller coordinator of the agency, which was tasked with promoting artistic exchanges between Latin America and the United States as well as exhibitions that would circulate across the continent.[5] In this process, the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) collaborated with OCIAA projects by organising countless circulating exhibitions and also made room for Latin American exhibitions in its schedule and in its collection. Thus, when one wants to analyse the effects of the Cold War on the Brazilian cultural scene, particularly with respect to the São Paulo biennials, it becomes necessary to recover this network formed between institutions and cultural and financial elites established during the Good Neighbor Policy.

It was, therefore, this structure established before World War II that made it easier for MoMA to represent the USA at the 1st Bienal de São Paulo. The institution's permanence in this role until 1961 can be better understood when connected to the cultural diplomacy practiced during the Cold War. Not by chance, MoMA created The International Program, in 1952, with financial support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund to exhibit visual arts from the USA abroad.[6] In the history of the institution, the project was presented as a continuation of the Department of Circulating Exhibitions, a sector created in 1933, which had been organising exhibitions to tour cities around the country. The programme would have expanded because of invitations that pressured the institution to also send exhibitions abroad. In this sense, *Three Centuries of Art in the United States*, which was exhibited at the Jeu de Paume Museum in Paris in 1938, became a historical milestone for the beginning of international traveling exhibitions. Nonetheless, due to World War II, the flow of exhibitions to Europe was reduced at the same time that the demands of the OCIAA grew, which kept the museum involved in the organisation of international circulating exhibitions. When the war ended, the flow of circulation abroad became discontinuous with the programme of the New York museum. Another historical moment, that of the Cold War, led Nelson Rockefeller himself, with the support of René d'Harnoncourt, who was then director of MoMA, and Porter McCray, who was the director of the Department of Circulating Exhibitions, to resort to the same expedient for promoting American art abroad. Not by chance, it was these same

4
The Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA), with the approval and direct support of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt himself, outlined effective plans to improve its commercial performance and even combat the Anti-Americanism in Latin America during World War II. See Antonio Pedro Tota, *Imperialismo Sedutor. A americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2016).

5
On the support of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA) for circulating exhibitions, see Fabiana Serviddio, "Relatos nacionales y regionales en la creación de la colección latinoamericana del MoMA", *A Contracorriente. Revista de historia social y literatura en América Latina* 16, no. 3 (2019): 375-402.

6
In 1953, a group of patrons linked to MoMA launched The International Council, which in addition to contributing financially to the International Art Program, would accompany and approve its schedule. It sought to attract members and raise funds so that international circulating exhibitions would not depend on the financial contribution of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, which had donated a substantial amount towards the first five years of activities of the International Art Program. The International Council quickly consolidated itself and raised substantial sums that enabled the continuity of the project for years. See *The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art: The First Forty Years* (New York, MoMA, 1993).

three characters who were involved in the artistic activities of the OCIAA during the Good Neighbor Policy and who created and managed this new project in the 1950s. It was surely hoped that the effectiveness of the artistic activities developed in the Good Neighbor Policy would be repeated. Thus, it was with the financial support of the International Art Program that the United States participated in the São Paulo Biennials between 1952 and 1961, and also in the Venice Biennials until 1961. Particularly after World War II, there were strong debates in the United States about the state model of support for the arts, which was to a great extent rejected due to fears that works could become official propaganda, as had happened in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Faced with this context, when analysing official United States support for cultural and artistic activities during the Cold War period, one sees that financial contributions were occasional and, for the most part, indirect or disguised.[7] In this process, an appropriate format was found: museums became convenient agents for organising and sending official exhibitions to biennials and international fairs. Presented as institutions with unquestionable professional competence and depositaries of 'good art', they were hardly recognised as aligned with political prerogatives. This perception, however, obscured the intricacies of the organisation process, and as will be seen here, the invited artistic institutions were not exempt from interference by government agents, as the case of the USA representation at the 6th Bienal de São Paulo reveals.

As for the first São Paulo biennials, the close relationship between MoMA and MAM SP was constantly emphasised, perhaps to legitimise the role assumed by the institution to represent the country in Brazil. There was a formal mutual cooperation agreement between both museums, signed on October 19, 1950, which provided for the realisation of a cultural exchange between the two countries in the field of the arts. According to the text:

> the two museums believe in the essential significance of the arts as a means of enriching the life of the community and as an important factor in the development of mutual respect and understanding between nations. In a world which is increasingly becoming aware of the extent to which the material welfare of the people depends on cooperation in the sphere of economics and politics, it is most important that these efforts be accompanied by an exchange in the cultural endeavors.[8]

To accomplish this exchange, strategies were explained for holding contemporary art exhibitions and screening artistic and educational films. In addition, MoMA also offered MAM SP a list of exhibitions that could be borrowed, as long as the respective costs were paid. Provisions were also made for discounts on publications and reproductions from MoMA to MAM SP and support in the membership programme, which both museums were committed to encouraging. In several circumstances, this agreement was cited and MoMA recalled its ties with Brazil, as can be read in a small report prepared in 1957:

7
See David Caute, *The Dancer Defects. The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford: University Press, 2008); Taylor Littleton, *Advancing American Art: painting, politics, and cultural confrontation at mid-century* (Tuscaloosa AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2005, second edition); Margaret Lynne Ausfeld, "Circus Girl Arrested. A History of the Advancing American Art Collection, 1946-1948", in *Advancing American Art* (January 7 – December 9, 1984), exh. cat. (Montgomery: Museum of Fine Arts, 1984); Serge Guilbaut. "Pinceles, palos, manchas: algunas cuestiones culturales en Nueva York y Paris tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial", in *Bajo la Bomba. El jazz de la Guerra Fria de imágenes transatlântica. 1946-1956* (October 4 – January 7, 2008) exh. cat. (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani, 2007.

8
Agreement between The Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo and The Museum of Modern Art of New York, October 19, 1950. To give an example, for a period of two months, a Picasso exhibition organised by Gjon Mili would cost USD 150,00 or a group of ten photographers at the price of USD 30,00 for each "one-man exhibition", IC/IP, IV.A.7. MoMA Archives, New York.

> As the data below indicate, The Museum of Modern Art has a long record of cultural exchange of various sorts with Brazil, going back at least as far as 1940. The most significant evidence of this cooperation in recent years was the signing of a reciprocal agreement in 1950 by this museum and the Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo, in which the two institutions agreed to collaborate in the exchange of contemporary art exhibitions, films, publications and reproductions and in obtaining membership for their respective institutions. This was the first such agreement outside the US undertaken by MoMA.[9]

The history of proximity between the institutions appears in the catalogues of the biennials, as in the text of the 1957 exhibition, which reads: "pursuant to an agreement for collaboration in cultural exchange signed between The Museum of Modern Art and Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo in 1950, the New York museum has been closely associated with the Bienal since their inauguration".[10] Thus, the continuous collaborations seem to justify the role assumed by MoMA to represent the USA, a position maintained until the 6th Biennial (1961).

As can be seen in the table below, after MoMA left, the task came to be assumed by the United States Information Agency (USIA) in two iterations of the biennial. The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis was then invited to prepare the delegation for the 7th Biennial (1963) and the Pasadena Art Museum for the 8th Biennial (1965). In 1967, another change occurred and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington (DC) took charge of the task, with William C. Seitz the curator responsible for the USA representation at the 9th Bienal de São Paulo. For a period, the Smithsonian Institution continued to be the institution responsible for the United States's delegations and invited art professionals and institutions to organise official representations. Currently, this role is the responsibility of the State Department, which recommends and supports the art institutions that organise the country's representation at several international biennials. In the case of the Bienal de São Paulo, the United States participated in almost all of its iterations, with the exception of the 1969 and 1971 exhibitions.

table 1
USA representation at the Bienal de São Paulo (1951-1967)

| *Bienal de São Paulo* | *Year* | *Institution* |
|---|---|---|
| 1st Bienal | 1951 | The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA New York) |
| 2nd Bienal | 1953-54 | The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA New York) (sponsored by the International Program) |
| 3rd Bienal | 1955 | San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) |
| 4th Bienal | 1957 | The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA New York) (sponsored by the International Council) |
| 5th Bienal | 1959 | The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (invited by the International Council of the MoMA New York) |
| 6th Bienal | 1961 | The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA New York) (sponsored by the International Council) |
| 7th Bienal | 1963 | The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (requested by the USIA) |
| 8th Bienal | 1965 | The Pasadena Art Museum (requested by the USIA) |
| 9th Bienal | 1967 | The Smithsonian Institution, Washington (DC) |

9
Agreement between The Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo and The Museum of Modern Art of New York, October, 19, 1950. IC/IP, IV.A.7. MoMA Archives, New York.

10
United States representation at the Forthcoming International Art Exhibition in São Paulo organised by the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art, in *The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art*, Thursday, July 25, 1957, no. 1. MoMA Library. File 4th Bienal de São Paulo (1957).

Since this article is limited to a specific period, it is important to emphasise that the transfer of responsibilities between the institutions representing the USA at the biennials was highly complex. In this sense, it is necessary to emphasise that it was in 1967, when the role was delegated to the National Collection of Fine Arts (NCFA), an institution linked to the Smithsonian Institution, that the International Art Program (IAP) was created. This sector organised international circulating exhibitions of American art, including the Venice and São Paulo biennials.[11] The samples of work sent to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, for clear political reasons, remained under the direct responsibility of the USIA.

The connections and contiguities between the USIA and the IAP are clear, beginning with the transfer of its employees, Lois A. Bingham, Margaret P. Cogswell, and William M. Dunn, who in July 1966 joined the IAP. Throughout the history of this programme, Bingham remained as head of the section and was responsible for organising the exhibitions and selecting professionals and art institutions that would represent the USA. In 1970, for example, the roles attributed to each institution were described as follows: the IAP was responsible for the technical, aesthetic, and logistical aspects of the projects, while the USIA had "primary responsibility for a project's relationship to area program objectives, programming in the field, and collections of evaluation reports".[12] Since the USIA and the IAP met annually to plan the schedule for international activities, it can be inferred that aesthetic choices were not the only guidelines for organising international exhibitions.

The aforementioned connections were not explicit, however, since the creation of the IAP within an art institution, the National Collection of Fine Arts (NCFA), gave the body a professional profile that was uncoupled from government agencies. In reality, the IAP was an institution with a small number of employees and which implemented its projects with the work of local agents of the United States Information Service (USIS). It is worth recalling here that USIA posts abroad were called USIS. It was also their employees who, in addition to ensuring the execution of the schedule designed by the IAP, in common agreement with the USIA, diagnosed the efficiency of the events. This procedure appears explicitly in exchanges of correspondence, as in the case in which one reads: "the Agency will also furnish recommendations on USIS post suggestions concerning fine arts exhibits. The Smithsonian and the Agency will maintain continuing liaison for this purpose in accordance with the President's letter to the Director".[13] In the case of exhibitions, for example, these agents made suggestions either in the programme or in its content to ensure that their expected outcomes materialised in the exhibitions. After all, it was the USIS agents who, because they lived abroad, knew the local scenes where the programmes were implemented and more accurately evaluated the reception of these events. The interference of certain government agencies in the artistic choices for foreign circulation is better known from archival materials.

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11
"Since 1953 the Exhibits Division of ICS has been responsible for the preparation and foreign circulation of Agency exhibitions of American art. No other branch of the US Government has been staffed or authorized to provide appropriate fine arts exhibitions which would meet the specific needs of the US Government's cultural program abroad". Communiqué titled "A Suggestion: The transfer of responsibility for Art Exhibitions from the Agency to the Smithsonian Institution". (I – Mr. Wilson. ICS/E Mr. Sivard and ICS – Mr. Harris. Lois A. Bingham), (January 5, 1965), 4. Located at the Smithsonian RU 321 Box 7, Folder Relations with USIA (folder 2 of 2), 1.

12
Communiqué titled "United States Government Memorandum". To: Smithsonian/IAP. From: USIA/IAN. Subject: Memorandum of understanding on Smithsonian/IAP – USIA/IAN Projects. March 17, 1970. RU 321, Box 28, Folder USIA Miscellaneous. Material located at the Smithsonian Archives.

13
"The Department of State and the US Information Agency will provide policy guidance to Smithsonian on international relations and psychological factors, respectively, which would influence the program. The Agency will also furnish recommendations on USIS post suggestions concerning fine arts exhibits. The Smithsonian and the Agency will maintain continuing liaison for this purpose in accordance with the President's letter to the Director. US Information Agency dated August 11, 1961. The Smithsonian will be responsible for the selection of works and general artistic quality of exhibits". Document titled "Memorandum of Understanding between the United States information Agency and the Smithsonian Institution relative of the International Exchange of Fine Arts". The document was signed by Joseph C. Wheeler (Acting Assistant Director – Administration – US Information Agency) and James Bradley (Assistant Secretary – Administration- Smithsonian Institution), (November 12-16, 1965), 3. The quote is taken from page 2 of the material located at the Smithsonian Archives.

Even though the USA government's attempt to censor and control exhibitions shown abroad is not the central theme of this article, observing certain exemplary cases where control was exercised makes it possible to understand the participation of government agents in the choices of traveling exhibitions and official representations at biennials. Art historian Lois A. Bingham, who was hired by Richard Brecker to work at the USIA in 1955, provides important data on the structure of government institutions in relation to overseas activities. According to her, there was a list of artists compiled by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC),[14] which indicated names that could not be sent abroad. According to her, for the international circulating exhibitions, all participants underwent a background check on their ties with the left, and those with any such affiliations, regardless of whether they publicly sympathised with communism or not, had their names put on the list. Any official representation financed by the government was subject to this scrutiny. Bingham also explains that the expedient of direct censorship was avoided, and indirect procedures were adopted, such as the organisation of group exhibitions in which artists were selected by a jury of three or four people. This setup allowed for the best works or artists for a particular exhibition to be suggested to the members of the committee. Thus, this veiled method by the USIA proved to be more effective than practicing the veto, a procedure that could cause public demonstrations against government agencies. It should also be understood that this was the profile of countless international exhibitions organised by the IAP, such as *The New Vein* (1968) and *Variations on the Camera's Eye* (1975). On the other hand, Bingham also recognised that, during the 1950s, MoMA often dared to send more 'modern' and liberal exhibitions abroad, but with the proviso that they were smaller and sent to less prominent places.[15]

Even though they are difficult to verify, it seems that transits and connections between MoMA employees and government agencies were frequent. For example, Porter McCray, director of MoMA's International Program, was on the USIA's Advisory Committee on Cultural Information as of December 1958. Furthermore, in the 1950s, he had already worked for the USA government in Europe, a period in which MoMA granted him a leave of absence for this role. Observing the positions assumed by him, one sees that he circulated through spaces proper to cultural diplomacy and participated in discussions about strategies for building the artistic image of the United States abroad. Among the examples directly related to Brazil and Latin America, McCray was notified in December 1960 by the United States Advisory Commission on Information that the agency's cultural programme would be discussed at the "Rio Petrópolis" conference in January 1961, an occasion on which special attention would be given to Latin America.[16] Also in 1961, Frank O'Hara, a MoMA employee, reported to Waldo Rasmussen that Lois Bingham had telephoned informing him that the exhibition organised by MoMA to tour around Europe did not present any problems. In his words: "Lois Bingham called this morning to tell us that she had received a letter from USIS Bonn requesting that they receive advance news of shows we plan to circulate in Europe [...] Miss Bingham also called yesterday to say that there was no conflict with their exhibition of American art in Belgrade [...] and that we should go ahead and offer Modern American Drawings as we wished".[17]

In other words, countless cases indicate that the USIA or the IAP closely accompanied the organisation and shipment of exhibitions sent abroad and that approvals and suggestions reached their organisers. Since indirect means are always

14
The House Un-American Activities Committee, a committee of the US House of Representatives, between 1938 and 1975, investigated communist activity in the United States.

15
Lois Bingham talking to Buck Pennington (April 16, 1981), 19. In *Archives of America Art*. Available at https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-lois-bingham-11724, accessed October 2020.

16
Letter from Schafer, Vivian L. Executive Secretary. Advisory Committee on Cultural Information. To Porter McCray. December 28, 1960. IC/IP, IV.A. 88. MoMA Archives, New York.

17
Letter/Memorandum from Frank O'Hara to Waldo Rasmussen. New York, August 25, 1961. NY, IC/IP, I.A. 1110. MoMA Archives, New York.

subtle and seek to corroborate a supposed artistic autonomy, which the institutions evidently wanted to safeguard, analysing the official representations sent by MoMA to São Paulo based on archival materials requires pursuing small clues and investigating apparently insignificant data about what went on behind-the-scenes of these exhibitions, an approach that will now be applied to the 6th Bienal de São Paulo.

### The 6th Bienal de São Paulo (1961): MoMA Exits the Scene

As early as August 1960, uncertainties regarding MoMA's participation in the Bienal de São Paulo were discussed among USIA officials:

> What is the relative priority USIS attaches to American participation in the three sections of the Bienal – art, theater, architecture? If, as in the past, the Museum of Modern Art in New York can undertake the responsibility of providing American participation in the art section, the Agency will undertake the provision of an exhibit for either the theater or the architecture section, depending on USIS's recommendations. [...] If MOMA's decision has to be negative, there is little likelihood that any other museum could be persuaded to organize and finance American participation. That could mean no art exhibit representing the US except through this Agency.[18]

According to the USIA, there would be no institution in the USA capable of replacing MoMA in the role of organising the visual arts exhibition for the Bienal de São Paulo, either from the point of view of professional competence or from that of financial capacity. For their part, the architecture and theatre exhibitions, which took place in parallel and were linked to the art biennial, had already been prepared by the USIS a few times.[19] Since they were exhibitions that demanded a smaller logistical and financial structure, they were not the core of the problem for the agency.

Countless times, MoMA had signaled that it would no longer represent the country at the biennials. Specifically, in 1961, Porter A. McCray wrote to Edward R. Murrow, then Director of the USIA, requesting a meeting to discuss the issue. The then director of MoMA's International Program recalled that, for the sixth consecutive time, they would be organising the official representation and that, once again, it would assume the total or partial costs of sending it to Brazil. In the letter, he characterised this activity in political terms, since he recalled that several countries would be represented at the event in São Paulo:

> once again the leading governments of the world including Russia have responded to Brazil's invitation and once again this Museum's participation is demanding an outlay of our limited private resources which jeopardises our possible participation in other projects to which the character of our institution is more specifically suited.[20]

He seemed to imply that it was not the role of MoMA to artistically represent the USA alongside its biggest political and ideological opponent, but rather that of official agencies of the country. Even though Porter did not make it clear in his communiqué, it is worth recalling that, until 1961, the USA was the only country not

18
USIA Information Agency. August 24, 1960. Sent to: USIS Rio de Janeiro. RPtd info: USIS São Paulo. Subject: 6th Bienal de São Paulo. Reference: Disp 7- July 21. RU 321 Box 69 C24/06/06 - C25/06/04. Folder 61-022 6th Bienal de São Paulo (USIA) (1 of 2). Material located at the Smithsonian Archives, Washington (DC), USA.

19
In addition to the Bienal de São Paulo holding a visual arts exhibition, in parallel were held the Architecture Biennial, the Theater Biennial, and the Book and Graphic Arts Biennial.

20
Letter from Porter McCray to Edward R. Murrow. New York, March 27, 1961. NY, IC/IP, I.A. 1110. MoMA Archives, New York.

financed by its government at the São Paulo biennials, which granted an exceptional character to its representation. In addition, the exhibitions sent to Brazil consumed a substantial part of the International Program's resources, a fact which compromised its own agenda. Along with the letter, McCray attached a list of international exhibitions organised by the museum over the previous nine years, with their respective expenses, which seemed to confirm the museum's patriotic commitment to promoting American art abroad.[21] The list seemed to be a way to attest that MoMA had performed 'good deeds' for the country and also to signal that, from then on, the institution would dedicate its resources to its own circulating exhibitions, which might not necessarily coincide with the political interests of the government.

Undoubtedly, MoMA's refusal to continue organising the representations for the biennials was not solely due to financial issues. Since the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Latin America had once again become an area of interest for USA foreign policy, and official agencies needed to create specific interventions on the continent. It was in art spaces that the ties between the financial and cultural elites and the political class were strengthened, given that the USA government, and specifically the USIA, utilised international exhibitions as soft diplomacy, part of the task of confronting the perceived growing advance of communism. As part of the task of confronting their political and economic opponents, the biennials took on a more directly nationalist significance and should have been under the responsibility of official government agencies. MoMA seemed to want to focus on activities less associated with ideological interests, despite remaining committed to promoting the excellence of USA artistic production in the international arena.

In 1961, the Soviet Union debuted at the 6th Bienal de São Paulo and gained a certain prominence in the pages of the press. Mário Pedrosa, the director in charge of the biennial at the time, planned to exhibit a group of Russian avant-garde artists and traveled to the USSR to select the works. He confirmed the invitation for the country to be represented at the Brazilian exhibition, proposing as well that a critic from the country form part of the jury. Upon returning from his trip, he declared that the constructivist works were in storage and had not been seen in that country in over thirty years. He was hopeful of being able to exhibit something of this production, despite recognising the difficulty in removing works that had been stored in the basements of museums for so long.[22] Colleagues from the art world tried to collaborate with Pedrosa's project to exhibit the Russian avant-garde in Brazil. For example, Porter A. McCray offered to lend five works by Naum Gabo from the MoMA collection, without success.

Pedrosa praised the Soviet art with which he had contact, since he perceived that a previous rigidity had now dissipated. There was "a more lyrical, tonal, landscape painting that was less restricted to historical themes, which represents an escape from the liberal and formal content prevailing until then. One notes here and there, the beginning of an expressive deformation".[23] Despite the critic acknowledging changes in the pictorial production of the USSR and recognising a new phase, none of this later work seems to have been exhibited in the inaugural presentation of the country in Brazil.

Although MoMA was responsible for the participation of the United States at the 6th Biennial (1961), the direct channels that it maintained with the USIA are noteworthy. This direct communication reveals the interest of government agencies in accompanying the organisation of the United States representation at the Bienal de São Paulo and making sure that it would be appropriate and of good quality. Lois Bingham, at the time an agency employee, wrote to Porter McCray, making suggestions about what would be most appropriate to exhibit at the biennial. Such recommendations were based on reports sent by USIS officials in Brazil. In the

21
Letter from Porter McCray to Edward R. Murrow. New York, March 27, 1961.
22
Vera Martins, "Pedrosa chega e fala da viagem", *Jornal do Brasil* (May 12, 1961).
23
Martins, "Pedrosa chega e fala da viagem", n.p.

letter, Bingham makes it clear that MoMA would not be obligated to follow them. According to her:

> When our Cultural Affairs Officer for Brazil forwarded the copy of the letter of invitation, he added some comments and recommendations which may be of interest to you. With this in mind I proffer the following excerpts. Works of American artists selected for previous Biennials have been nearly all abstract in nature. While we realize that abstract painting and sculpture have an important place in modern art, both the mission post and USIS São Paulo urge that the American selections for the VI Bienal include works of artists following a representational approach as well as the abstract selections. This would be useful both in giving balance to the American contribution and in correcting a widespread local impression that America's contemporary artists are exclusively non-representational. [...] From the list of USIS recommendations I quote the following for your information without knowing how pertinent they may be for the portions of the Bienal that have come under your jurisdiction. [...] As you can see from the wording of these passages, the recommendations were prepared as Agency guide-lines and the procedures would not apply necessarily to your Bienal contributions. Nonetheless, I should appreciate your reactions.[24]

The requests for the exhibition to be balanced and for abstract art not to dominate the United States's delegation were present in several missives between USIS Brazil and the USIA in Washington (DC). In reality, in her letter to MoMA, Bingham softened the suggestions of USIS agents, employees responsible for evaluating the reception of USA exhibits in Brazil. In their reports, the agents were very direct, as in this case, for example: "the Agency appreciates USIS's concern that plans for American participation in the VI São Paulo Bienal be developed as soon as possible, and that the art section be broadly representative of contemporary American styles rather than be dominated by abstract works".[25]

Also in July 1960, the USIS in Rio de Janeiro let Washington know that the United States representation at the biennial was expected to be more balanced:

> Work of American artists selected for previous Biennials have been nearly all abstract in nature. While we realize that abstract painting and sculpture have an important place in modern art, both the mission post and USIS-São Paulo urge that the American selections for the Bienal include works of artists following a representational approach as well as abstract selections. This would be useful both in giving balance to the American contribution and in correcting a widespread local impression that America's contemporary artists are exclusively non-representational.[26]

24
Letter from Lois Bingham to Porter McCray Director International Program of MOMA. September 9, 1960, n.p. RU 321 Box 69 C24/06/06 - C25/06/04. Folder 61-022 6th São Paulo Biennial (USIA) (1 of 2).

25
USIA Information Agency. August 24, 1960. Sent to: USIS Rio De Janeiro. RPtd info: USIS São Paulo. Subject: 6th Bienal de São Paulo. Reference: Disp 7 - July 21. RU 321 Box 69 C24/06/06 - C25/06/04. Folder 61-022 VI São Paulo Bienal (USIA) (1 of 2). Material located at the Smithsonian Archives, Washington (DC), US.

26
Foreign service dispatch. From: USIS – Rio de Janeiro (Aldo D'Alessandro. Country Public Affairs Officer) To: USIA Washington. Ref: USIS Dispatch 55, July 21, 1960. "VI São Paulo Bienal" RU 321 Box 69 C24/06/06 - C25/06/04. Folder 61-022 6th Bienal de São Paulo (USIA) (1 of 2). Material located at the Smithsonian Archives, Washington (DC), US.

The USIS recommendations in Brazil seem to have been shaped in the selection made by MoMA for the 6th Biennial, which was composed of both figurative and abstract works. However, before analysing this set, it is important to note that the evaluation of USIS in Brazil was based on the moderate reception that the Brazilian public demonstrated before the American works exhibited at the 1957 and 1959 biennials. American art did not stand out as native and original, as one might expect, and furthermore it was directly associated with abstract poetics.

To understand the reception of the artistic production of the United States, it is necessary to observe, even if briefly, the 4th Biennial (1957), when MoMA sent the first retrospective exhibition of Jackson Pollock paintings, drawings, and watercolours. After the end of the Brazilian biennial, the exhibition went on to be shown in several cities in Europe, with Rome being the first to see the works in March 1958.[27] Nonetheless, despite the exceptionality that this solo exhibition by Pollock received in historical narratives, the reception from international critics and amongst Brazilian art circles at the 4th Biennial (1957) proved disproportionate to the project's efforts.

There was a more moderate reception given to informal abstract art by important Brazilian critics, such as Mário Pedrosa and Ferreira Gullar. In the 1950s, both became notable for defending geometric abstractionism, while informal abstractionism did not elicit the same support. This may help to explain the reception that both gave to Pollock's exhibition. Pedrosa thought that Pollock merely appeared to be a great creator of signs, but "in fact, the sign in him ended up being confused with a tangle that was the very pathetic description of his psychic-corporeal locomotion, his posture was no longer that of the seismograph or the calligrapher to be that of a participant in the general parade, and his sign was dissolved in the web of his own staggering movements around the modest enigma of his living space. Now, a maker of signs does not lose himself, but affirms himself, announces".[28]

Gullar, for his part, published a generous text in which he compared Pollock's production with French Tachisme. He considered the work of the American artist to convey the experience of a particular character, "authentic and positive", which tended towards construction and order, for the artist gave himself "unhurriedly to help the painting be born, thus seeking to recover that first contact with the world [...] which he called painting". The Europeans, for their part, considered Tachist painting as a rejection of figurative art, but the reference to it still remained. Gullar identified something new in Pollock's production, since he "went to look in other materials for that first experience of perception which is the only creative source of art".[29] Despite recognising the virtues in Pollock's creative genesis, then, the Brazilian critic's reflection did not elevate him to the podium of excellence and exclusivity.

For his part, the cultural journalist Jayme Maurício, in his column in the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper, considered Pollock's solo exhibition the high point of the 4th Bienal (1957). Despite pointing out the magnitude of the exhibition, Maurício did not fail to observe the general section of the United States's representation, which exhibited a set of paintings and sculptures by several artists, considered by him to be "new people" endowed with "great vitality and originality". His column did justice to the whole USA representation and was illustrated by the reproduction of a work by Franz Klein, whose caption asserts: "a great figure of the American delegation, after Pollock, and he constitutes one of the most positive revelations of this Biennial". Although Maurício recognised the qualities of the work exhibited in São Paulo, and emphasised the importance of Pollock, he still needed to beco-

27
The US representation at the 4th Bienal de São Paulo also included a group with five other painters: James Brooks (five works), Philip Guston (five works), Franz Kline (five works), Willem de Kooning (five works), Grace Hartigan (four works), and Larry Rivers (four works), with twenty-three paintings in total. In addition, the sculptors David Hare, Ibram Lassaw, and Seymour Lipton participated, each with five works, totaling fifteen sculptures.

28
Mário Pedrosa, "Signo e matéria", *Jornal do Brasil* (July 27, 1960), n.p.

29
Ferreira Gullar, "Notas sobre a Bienal. Pollock e o tachismo", *Jornal de Brasil* (1960), 6.

me more familiar with those productions and situate them in a more appropriate theoretical framework. At the same time that he called Pollock a "great Tachist", he characterised the heterogeneous set of artists as "the American Brushstroke Movement" ["manchismo"] while also using the term "abstract expressionism", which he considered opposed to Swiss-Germanic geometry.[30] Maurício's interpretative framework reveals the strong presence of European criticism and art in Brazilian art circles, a condition that changed throughout the 1960s, when the USA became more influential in the Brazilian art scene.[31]

In other words, the reception afforded to Pollock's works was not overwhelming or even analysed in an extensive and critical way within the Brazilian artistic milieu.[32] What must be taken into consideration is that the environment for informal abstract art was not particularly favourable at this time, despite the fact that the aesthetic tendency was not totally unfamiliar to the Brazilian public. Since biennials are a comparative arena, one expects uniqueness and novelty in the works. The constant presence of informal abstractionism at the biennials held in the 1950s hardly favoured Pollock's reception at the 4th Biennial, despite the monumentality of his exhibition. From another perspective, however, political 'diplomacy' allows representations to be permeable to local criticism, thus regulating, by default, the imposing eagerness of a certain poetics. One should recall that the role of the USIS was to report to the USIA in Washington on the public reception of American art exhibitions, as the letter from Bingham to MoMA demonstrated. It was surely expected that not only would American art exhibitions be well-received, but also that the artists would be awarded.

With respect to the 5th Biennial (1959), the photographer Alair Gomes was surprised by the predominance of abstract art, a tendency that he recognised as important in the art world. In this scenario, he said that he understood why the USA had attained its vanguard position since the previous biennials. After all, Pollock's influence was "evident in artists from several countries". However, despite this observation, he hardly developed the theme or identified paintings that resonated with the work of the American painter, for it was Rauschenberg's collages that caught his attention. Made with coarse materials, these works presented good effects, although the plastered "shirt sleeve and trouser legs" looked sensationalist.[33] Nor did Gomes analyse the set of twenty-three paintings and ten drawings by Philip Guston or even the twenty-five sculptures by David Smith exhibited at this biennial. The strong presence of abstract works in the 1957 and 1959 editions of the biennials does not seem to have given more visibility to the United States representations, as the USIS reports sent to Washington revealed. Thus, it is in this context that the USIS agents' suggestion that abstract art should not predominate the USA representation at the 6th Biennial can be better understood.

Also in 1961, when he returned from his trip to countries invited to participate in the 6th Biennial, Pedrosa recognised that a younger generation of artists reacted to "gesture painting and tachisme. What you see is the search for a new responsibility, on the one hand, and, on the other, for a new objectivity". At the same time that the Brazilian critic acknowledged a development in figuration with Dadaist and neo-Dadaist roots, he did not fail to notice the presence of the American hard edge and the tendency of the object, which was neither painting nor sculpture,

30
Jayme Maurício, "Brilhou a representação dos Estados Unidos", *Correio da Manhã* (September 27, 1957), n.p.

31
About USA hegemony in the Brazilian art scene, see Dária Jaremtchuk, *"Políticas de atração": relações artístico-culturais entre Estados Unidos e Brasil nas décadas de 1960 e 1970*( São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 2023).

32
In The Museum of Modern Art Archives there is a dossier with texts published in the Brazilian press about the USA presence at the 4th Bienal de São Paulo. All of them were translated, along with a diagnosis of the sources where they were published including reference to circulation and political affiliations, and with comments on the profile of each organisation. IC/IP, I.A. 596, MoMA Archives, New York.

33
Alair Gomes, "Impressões da V Bienal de São Paulo", *Jornal do Brasil* (November 10, 1957), n.p.

configuring itself in the art scene.[34] As such, there seemed to be an indication, in various areas and from different social actors, that abstraction had reached saturation point.

Since the 2nd Bienal de São Paulo (1953-54), MoMA repeated the same format of representation, which consisted of featuring a solo exhibition by an already established artist alongside a group exhibition with young artists who were emerging in the art scene.[35] This exhibition format favoured the idea that no particular style was being privileged and that the country's production was quite prolific. The solo plus group exhibition model lasted until the end of the 1960s, since in the following decade new exhibition displays were tested that were more appropriate to the type of artistic production that was being exhibited.

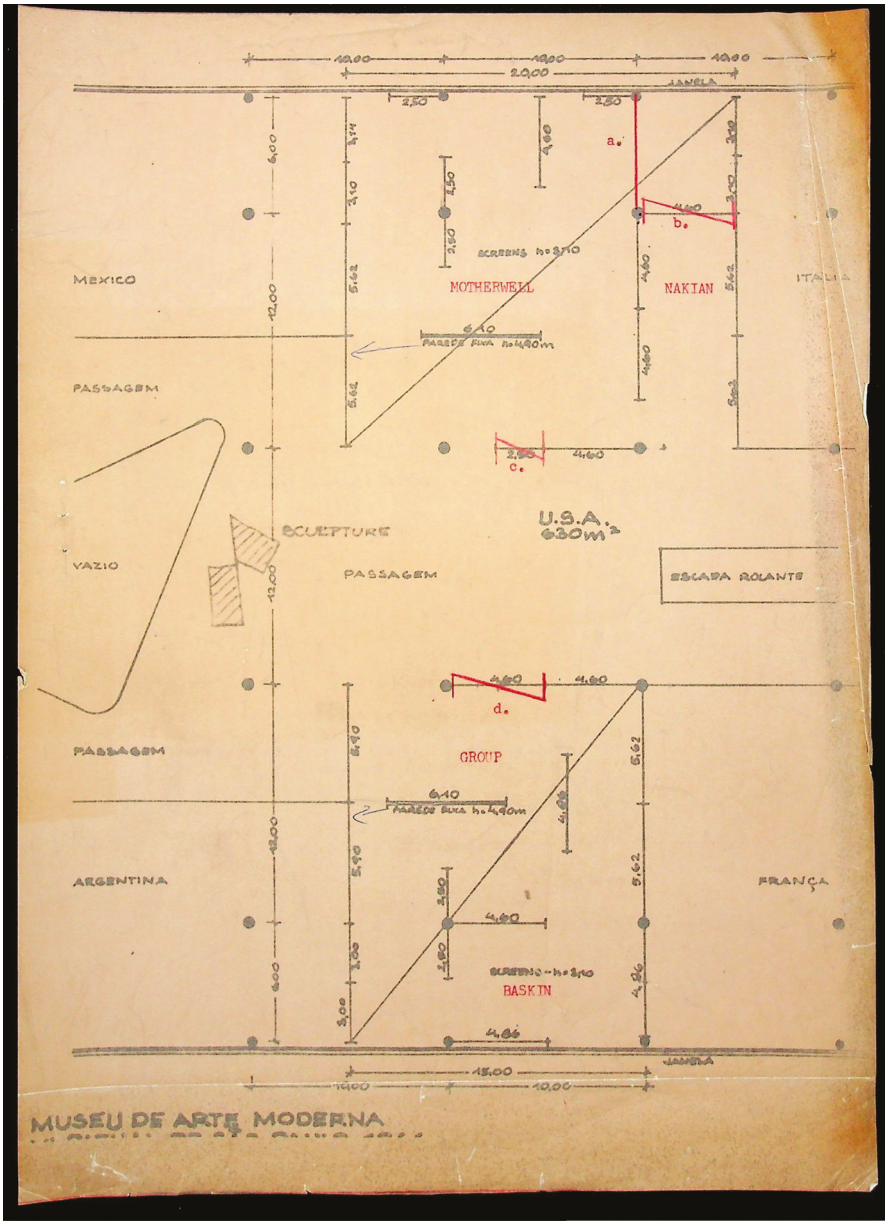


fig. 1
Blueprint of the USA Representation at the 6th Bienal de São Paulo. Wanda Svevo Historical Archive.

34
Martins, "Pedrosa chega e fala da viagem".

35
When one considers only the exhibitions prepared by MoMA, at the 2nd Bienal (1953-54), there was a solo of Alexander Calder; at the 4th Bienal (1957), Jackson Pollock; at the 6th Bienal (1961), Robert Motherwell and Reuben Nakian.

fig. 2
Installation view of the USA Representation, 6th Bienal de São Paulo, 1961. Wanda Svevo Historical Archive.

Returning to the 6th Bienal, Mário Pedrosa informed Porter McCray that a space of 540 m² was reserved for MoMA.[36] It is worth recalling that 1961 was the Bienal de São Paulo's ten-year anniversary and the size of the exhibition and the volume of works exhibited were considerable, a fact that contributes towards understanding the magnitude of MoMA's commitment to this biennial. Frank O'Hara selected twenty-seven paintings, seven drawings and ten metal sculptures by Robert Motherwell, along with seventeen terracottas and twenty-one drawings by Reuben Nakian. To participate in the engraving section, William S. Lieberman selected twelve woodcuts by Leonard Baskin. For his part, William C. Seitz organised the group of eleven artists: Burgoyne Diller, Ellsworth Kelly, Leon Golub, Richard Diebenkorn, Richard Pousette-Dart, Sonia Gechtoff, Stephen Greene, each with two paintings; and the sculptors John Chamberlain, Lee Bontecou, Robert Engman, with two sculptures apiece, and finally Richard Stankiewicz, with three.[37] Seitz characterised this heterogeneity as positive, since he understood that "these artists will make clear [...] how diverse and alive art is in the United States at the present moment".[38]

Although Frank O'Hara organised a Motherwell retrospective at MoMA only in 1965, with the exhibition of seventy works produced between 1940 and 1965, the artist had already been included in various group exhibitions of American art sent abroad. Motherwell had already emerged on the New York scene, since

36
The 6th Bienal (1961) was organised directly by The International Council, which was under the direction of Porter A. McCray and of Waldo Rasmussen (presented as the Department Assistant Director), with the actual MoMA director, René d'Harnoncourt, as exhibition commissioner.

37
An installation view of the USA representation at the 6th Biennial can be seen at https://dedalusfoundation.org/robert-motherwell/exhibitions/vi-bienal-de-sao-paulo/, accessed December 2023.

38
Willian C. Seitz, "Onze artistas dos Estados Unidos", in *Estados Unidos. VI Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo,* (São Paulo,1961) exh. cat. (São Paulo: Bienal de São Paulo, 1961), n.p.

his first solo exhibition took place at the Peggy Guggenheim Gallery,[39] in 1944, and at Sidney Janis, in 1955. It may be conjectured that the set of thirty-four works by Motherwell sent to the 6th Bienal de São Paulo was a kind of pilot project for his solo exhibition, held four years later at MoMA. Likewise, it appears uncoincidental that O'Hara organised a Nakian retrospective exhibited at MoMA in 1966. Similarly, in 1961, the institution organised an international touring exhibition of Baskin[40] to be shown in Rotterdam, Israel, and, later, in other European countries. Certainly, the names that represented the USA at the 6th Bienal (1961) continued to be promoted by MoMA, which ensured international transit for the works of the three artists, in addition to already having them represented in its own collection.

In his text accompanying the exhibition's opening, MoMA director René d'Harnoncourt appears to have contemplated Lois Bingham's suggestions, for he makes a point of emphasising how the USA delegation's contribution included both abstract and figurative works. Robert Motherwell, for example, was presented as an artist who, "often using the abstract-expressionist idiom he largely helped to originate, likewise gives to his subject matter a highly personal interpretation. Frequently his subject, like Nakian's, is love; in his long-sustained series of *Elegies*, however, it is death". For his part, d'Harnoncourt contrasted Nakian's formal innovations with Baskin's large-sized figurative woodcuts, since they "deal with the bitterest aspect of death and portray its horror, suffering and decay in essentially traditional style and technique disdaining abstraction".[41] Thus, the director of MoMA championed both abstract and figurative aspects in the set of works sent to the Bienal de São Paulo.

Meanwhile, in the general catalogue of the Bienal de São Paulo, which brought together all the participating countries, d'Harnoncourt states that in the United States, "artists are making an effort to produce varied, highly personal modes of expression [...] which escape attempts at critical classification into clearly distinct categories". Nevertheless, here the differences were more of an external nature, since the concerns among artists were the same with regard to "the same content concepts, fascinated [as they were] with certain themes that were always reconsidered". Nakian's sculptures, for example, were related to "great love themes of the past – *The Rape of Lucretia*, *The Abduction of Europa*, *Mars and Venus*, *The Duchess of Alba*". Motherwell, who is considered one of the creators of Abstract Expressionism, also dealt with love, "although death is the subject of his long series of *Elegies*". Baskin, for his part, presented the bitter side of death in a conventional manner, with "horror, suffering, and decomposition [...] disdaining abstraction". With respect to the set of works by the eleven artists in the group exhibition, any perceived polarisation between abstraction and representation remained hidden, since these covered "a wide spectrum of modalities in which the styles and forms were not conventional".[42] In other words, the director of MoMA chose not to emphasise formal or material aspects of the works, preferring to highlight issues more related to content.

For his part, Frank O'Hara, MoMA's assistant curator who selected Robert Motherwell's works, in the essay published in the USA catalogue, exacerbated the strength, the vitality, and the combination of sensibility and refinement in

39
It was at the solo exhibition at the Peggy Guggenheim Gallery, which was held in 1944, that MoMA acquired Robert Motherwell's first work, *Pancho Villa Dead and Alive*, 1943, cut-and-pasted printed and painted papers, wood veneer, gouache, oil, and ink on board, 71,7 x 91,1 cm, a work that was exhibited at the 6th Bienal de São Paulo.

40
MoMA organised the first Leonard Baskin exhibition sent abroad, which had been requested by the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, and which was exhibited from May 6 through July 6, 1961.

41
René d'Harnoncourt. *6th Biennial of the Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo*, 1961, n.p. United States representation organised by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, under the auspices of the International Council, 1961. For this biennial, 9,000 copies of the catalogue were printed to be distributed to the public for free.

42
René d'Harnoncourt, "Estados Unidos", *Catálogo VI Bienal* (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1961), 185-186.

the artist's works. He recovered the artist's connections with surrealism, particularly "in its early interest in automatism with its emphasis on the release of subconscious imagery". He also said that the collages were "the most important contribution by an American artist to that medium. Taken individually, they are the witty, literary, lyrical commentaries on the themes more somberly presented in the paintings".[43]

The highlight of the exhibition, nonetheless, was to be found in the series of *Elegies to the Spanish Republic*, which were begun in 1948 and, in 1961, were still in progress. These paintings, true "arenas in which the ceremony takes place", were "almost liturgical in their progression". Furthermore, "concerned exclusively with death, the elegies also present one of the first moves away from easel painting by a twentieth-century artist that was not based on monumental size, but on subject". It concerns the first series of

> American paintings to use black and white in a full symbolic sense: the white of purity, of light, of experience, which cuts into the dominating black forms of death briefly and is ultimately conquered, may be reversed in meaning because of the ritual sense of the event. The blacks are more vibrant, more living, in these paintings than the whites or earthy ochres, perhaps signifying that death with honor is indeed life-in-death.[44]

Ultimately, the curatorial text by O'Hara sought to connect the several periods of Motherwell's production exhibited at the biennial and also to relate these to a certain Spanish literary tradition, and particularly the work of the poet Garcia Lorca, which had motivated the painter to begin his *Elegies*.

fig. 3
Ruben Nakian. Mars and Venus, 1959-60. Welded steel, painted, overall/ 213,36 x 457,2 x 182,88 cm. USA Representation, 6th Bienal de São Paulo, 1961, São Paulo, Brazil. Wanda Svevo Historical Archive.

43
Frank O'Hara, "Robert Motherwell", in *Estados Unidos. VI Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo* (São Paulo: 1961), exh. cat. (São Paulo: Bienal de São Paulo, 1961), n.p.

44
O'Hara, "Robert Motherwell", n.p.

As for the sculptures by Reuben Nakian, Thomas B. Hess recalled that they had been received with "indifference" by the American public. The first retrospective exhibition of the artist was taking place in Brazil,

> in a country where skyscrapers border on magnificent jungles instead of his own Puritan Connecticut woods. But along with his sense of elegance, profundity, and modernity, Nakian has always looked for exuberance, for the sense of a big style, for enthusiastic mixture of the newest image with the oldest feeling. So the irony is apt.[45]

Hess also analysed the sculptures, contrasting abstract and representative aspects, since he considered the sculptor "an opposite to such artists as Clyfford Still or Jackson Pollock whose monolithic philosophies produce one giant image to batter at the future".[46] After the exhibition in São Paulo, Nakian's works were exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Also in 1963, the Gallery of Modern Art in Washington (DC) held a retrospective of the artist, as did MoMA in 1966, as previously mentioned.

fig. 4
Leonard Baskin, *Everyman*, 1960. Woodcut, 210,50 cm x 60,32 cm, 6th Bienal de São Paulo. Wanda Svevo Historical Archive.

For his part, William Lieberman affirmed that Baskin dealt with life and death, with hope and despair, "allegories of human consciousness at a time when man [...] cultivates his own destruction". A pioneer in large-scale engravings, the ten woodcuts by Baskin, each the size of a door, were made using traditional techniques and

45
Thomas B. Hess, "Reuben Nakian", in *Estados Unidos. VI Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo* (São Paulo: 1961), exh. cat. (São Paulo: Bienal de São Paulo, 1961), n.p.

46
Thomas B. Hess, "Reuben Nakian", in *Estados Unidos. VI Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo*, 1961.

white and black contrasts typical of wood engraving. The artist recognised that the medium served him for "social purposes or the promotion of points of view".[47] With work conventional in content and form, the artist won the engraving award at the 6th Biennial.

The United States's representation was not highlighted in reviews published by the Brazilian press, and the engraving award given to Leonard Baskin sparked controversy. This award failed to positively impact the exhibition reviews, with the exception of that by José Gómez-Sicre. In a text published in the journal *América*, the critic affirmed that the choice could not have been more deserved, because "his [Baskin's] high technical standards, the depth with which he handles his themes, make the work of this deeply humanistic, representationalist artist one of the high points in the present-day art of United States, whether in engraving – especially in wood carving – or in sculpture". Gómez-Sicre extended praise to the whole USA delegation, since Baskin, Motherwell, and the sculptor Reuben Nakian, as "genuine masters", would have been enough "to give an idea of the diverse trends in US art today". Comparatively,

> the other participants, many of them experimentalists who are trying to rejuvenate Dadaism, could have been omitted to give more space and attention to the three great figures who express themselves directly and normally, through traditional means, without resorting to the meaningless and superficial extravagancies of a John Chamberlain or a Richard Stankiewicz, who pretend to originality through the use of what is just plain junk.[48]

Although within the limits of this article one cannot analyse Gómez-Sicre's aesthetic preferences, his role in the context of the Cold War in Latin America, or his actions at the São Paulo biennials, it is worth noting that he had important connections with MoMA and was director of the Pan-American Union's Visual Arts Unit of Organization of American States (OAS) from 1948 to 1976. Ultimately, Gómez-Sicre has been understood as a defender of official American interests in the Latin American artistic context.[49] This data becomes relevant when one verifies the generous space for analysis of the USA representation and his assessment of the qualities of the American works exhibited at the Brazilian exhibition.

In the Brazilian milieu, Baskin's engravings certainly recalled the regional figurative tradition of engraving with a strong social and humanist nature that was produced in the 1940s and 1950s. The Brazilian art critic Lourival Gomes Machado, for example, considered that the 6th Biennial left open the existence of figurative, or neo-figurative, art, and that the granting of the engraving award to Leonard Baskin, who participated with figurative engravings, had occurred because of American pressure on the jury, which ended up granting the award because it ceded to American demands, to what the critic called "the game of art 'powers'". He also argued that what "on the surface might seem like a kind tipping of the hat to the 'States' and a pious reverence for neo-figurativism, ended up becoming a serious and double mistake, in the exact measure in which the Americans (along with Nakian) were distinguished at their worst, in addition to Baskin not being, even by a tolerant

47
William S. Lieberman, "Leonard Baskin", in *Estados Unidos. VI Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo* (São Paulo: 1961), exh. cat. (São Paulo: Bienal de São Paulo, 1961), n.p.

48
José Gómez-Sicre, "Five miles of art. The sixth São Paulo Bienal", *Américas* 14, no. 1 (January 1962): 3-9.

49
On these topics see Alessandro Armato, "Una trama escondida: la OEA y las participaciones latinoamericanas en las primeras cinco Bienales de São Paulo", *Caiana. Revista de Historia del Arte y Cultura Visual del Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte*, no. 6 (Primer semestre, 2015): 33-43, http://caiana.caia.org.ar/template/caiana.php?pag=articles/article_2.php&obj=179&vol=6, accessed June 2023. Maria de Fátima Morethy Couto, "La cuestión latinoamericana en las Bienales realizadas en Brasil", *Caiana. Revista de Historia del Arte y Cultura Visual del Centro Argentino de Investigadores de Arte*, no. 10 (Primer semestre, 2017): 48-60, http://caiana.caia.org.ar/template/caiana.php?pag=articles/article_2.php&obj=258&vol=10), accessed June 2023.


fig. 5
Silva Neto, "Bienal cavalgada da arte moderna" [Biennial Ridden with Modern Art] *Revista Manchete* (October 14, 1961), 14-18. Brazilian Periodical Collection, Brazilian National Library.

hypothesis, a neo-figurative artist". According to the critic, the engraver did not participate with truly figurative works "because in his plates the figure does not result from formal conception, as can happen even with academicism, presenting itself, purely and simply, as an unconvincing substitute for form".[50] The combination of a large format and an excessive sentimentality, which made the exhibited works stand out, also contributed to the negative reception of Baskin's prints.

Pierre Restany, in an interview with the journalist Vera Martins, from the *Jornal do Brasil*, also considered the award to Baskin a mistake, since he was "an uninteresting artist: it is even embarrassing".[51] Evaluating the biennial as a whole, he considered it average, since the choices were made by "national commissioners". In this sense, the United States presented very positive characteristics, even though the two main artists were not very good, since Motherwell was an intellectual who disappointed him every time he saw several of his works exhibited together. Nakian's metallic structures did not please Restany either. Despite this, he considered that the group of eleven young artists offered a good overview of its current production: "Chamberlain, Stankiewicz, Bontecou, and Ellsworth Kelly [...] definitely strengthen the idea that a lot should be expected from the new American generation".[52]

In addition to recognising the quality of artistic production, generally speaking the awards granted exposure to the winning name and nationality in the press. Yet in this case, the award to the engraver from the United States did little to further public recognition of the quality of American work in Brazilian art circles. Although reviews of the USA representation published in the United States did not have an impact in Brazil, they offer a comparative perspective. For example, John Canaday, from *The New York Times*, considered the attributes of the works presented by the USA to be positive: "the section has been beautifully installed in a central position by Waldo Rasmussen of the Museum of Modern Art and Reuben Nakian, our major representative in sculpture, and by Larry Maccabe and Charles Egan, Nakian's associates. Mr. Nakian is a rumored contender for an award, but Leonard Baskin, in

50
Lourival Gomes Machado, "Bienal: quanto à figura", *O Estado de São Paulo* [Suplemento Literário], (September 30, 1961): n.p.

51
Vera Martins, "Pierre Restany faz o balanço da Bienal", *Jornal do Brasil* (September 21, 1961): n.p.

52
Martins, "Pierre Restany faz o balanço da Bienal".

fig. 6
Installation view of the USA Representation, 6th Bienal de São Paulo, 1961, São Paulo. Leonard Baskin (bottom left), Richard Pousette-Dart (middle), Sonia Gechtoff (bottom right). Wanda Svevo Historical Archive.

the print section, has an even stronger case".[53] Once the award was granted, Canaday observed a certain cleavage between abstraction and figuration in the scope of the 6th Biennial:

> for keepers of the abstract vs. figurative scoreboard, the prizes very nearly split evenly, with two completely abstract artists, two figurative ones and two abstract artists with references to figurative origins. One school of painting was doubly conspicuous in the Bienal. The extreme form of abstract expressionism derived from Jackson Pollock and widely publicized as the most important contribution of the United States to international art was conspicuous first by the number of followers in the displays of some fifty nations, and conspicuous second by its absence from the list of awards.[54]

John Canaday also considered that "Leonard Baskin with a series of nearly life size wood engravings of tormented figures, is far and away the great printmaker here".[55] For his part, Harold Rosenberg, referring to the artist, asserts that "in the prints of Leonard Baskin, which won first prize in the category, death's horrors are turned into decoration – I can think of no more unsavory exploitation of our political crisis".[56] In other words, the award that should have positively highlighted the artist's production ended up calling into question the award that he received. Evidently, any mention of pressure on the jury to award USA artists, as had been articulated by Lourival Gomes Machado, was absent from the American critical reception.

The presence of abstract and figurative works was also highlighted by the Art column of *Time* magazine: "Manhattan's Museum of Modern Art picked the US entries, which included thirty-four abstractions by Robert Motherwell, two figurative paintings by Richard Diebenkorn, a couple of Leon Golub monsters, engravin-

53
John Canaday, "Art: Politics Disrupts Brazil Display; 6th Bienal in São Paulo Beset by Difficulties But International Event May Open Thursday", *The New York Times* (September 9, 1961), n.p.

54
John Canaday, "Art: São Paulo Winners. Bienal's Top Prize Goes to Vieira da Silva – Leonard Baskin Is Best Engraver", *The New York Times* (September 12, 1961), n.p.

55
John Canaday, "Big Show, Even Bigger Question", *The New York Times* (September 10, 1961), n.p.

56
Harold Rosenberg, "Art in orbit", *ArtNews* (June 21, 1961), 23-25, 54-55.

gs by Leonard Baskin, constructions by Reuben Nakian and Richard Stankiewicz".[57] For *Time*, the diversity of the set did not seem to be a problem.

In the context of the Cold War, the presence of Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and the Soviet Union,[58] countries of the communist bloc, as well as the Ivory Coast and Nigeria, both countries that had recently gained independence, could not fail to attract the attention of the press. The importance of this contingent was reflected in the formation of the jury, with the participation of André Gouber, a conservator of the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, art critic, and specialist in Rembrandt. Considering that it was the beginning of the 1960s, such information was received with caution by institutions concerned with the "advance of communism" in Latin America.

José Gómez-Sicre reviewed the first participation of the Soviet Union negatively, on account of the prevalence of primary artistic elements in the set exhibited in Brazil, which even displeased those who were attracted to the country's political regime. According to him:

> Even those who are attracted to the political doctrines of Eastern Europe showed their displeasure by unconvincing excuses. Few times has São Paulo seen exhibits so poor, so feeble, speaking so clearly not of a nation with pretensions to the domination of the rest of humanity, but of an underdeveloped people. The painting was completely elementary representationalism. By this I mean that it could not be criticized in representational or academic terms, or as claiming to convey direct and simple messages, of the kind that are called ostentatiously 'of social import'. The Soviet painting sent to this Brazilian contest was in the realm of amateur, of the intuitive done without knowledge or daring. In any light, it was incongruent that a country that claims to use logic and discipline in technological matters should be so utterly lacking in both characteristics and produce a kind of painting that would shame second-year students in most countries that have never dreamed of being great powers.[59]

Gómez-Sicre was not dismissing the figurative art presented by the USSR, but rather the amateur way in which the paintings, "that would shame second-year students in most countries", had been made. Critiques with similar content were frequent in reviews of Eastern European artistic production, which was commonly considered primary and backward. Ultimately, it was understood that these works were out of step with the supposed 'artistic universalism' and the freedom of expression typical of what, at that time, was considered Western art. The hierarchical antagonism explicitly presented by the author towards Soviet art made him a typical spokesman for Cold War ideological maxims.

Indeed, there were countless criticisms of the socialist realism displayed by the Soviet Union at the biennal. Figurative work from the Soviet Union and Cuba was also dismissed in this commentary published by *Time*: "The Soviet Union sent its customary assortment of Lenin portraits and statues of muscled workers. Cuba followed suit with some bearded Fidelistas and a ten-foot woodcut showing Uncle Sam, abetted by imperialist lackeys from the Associated Press and the United Press, stamping on the "bleeding Cuban people".[60] The revolutionary movements in Cuba were surely too recent to be ignored and remain unassociated with that country's artistic representations.

57 "Bursting Bienal", *Time* (September 22, 1961), 103-105.

58 The Soviet Union exhibited fourteen sculptures produced in bronze, terracotta, ceramics, and porcelain, and 162 engravings, divided into woodcuts, linoleum, lithography, dry point, etching, and aquatint. See André Gouber, "URSS. Delegação organizada pelo Ministério da Cultura da URSS", in *6ª Bienal de São Paulo*, exh. cat. (São Paulo: Bienal de São Paulo, 1961), 363-372.

59 José Gómez-Sicre, "Five miles of art", 3-9.

60 "Bursting Bienal", *Time*, (September 22, 1961), n.p.

Harold Rosenberg, sent by *ArtNews* to review the biennial, joined the critics of art from the USSR. For him, the country exhibited "etchings, lithographs, color prints and a collection of small sculptures – things that could go into inexpensive apartments and be enthusiastically acquired by people who know nothing about art".[61] The characters in the works were pretty, healthy, but theatrical:

> Stalin next to Lenin addressing a meeting was unbelievably like a young movie star. Lenin, meditating alone in the moonlight, had his customary overcoat slung over his shoulders like the cape of Hamlet. Rosenberg even asked: Is it possible that the bureaucrats of the USSR are the only bureaucrats who like this art? [...] Why does the Soviet Union alone indulge itself with 'normal' art?[62]

In the eyes of Rosenberg, the low quality of the exhibition, more appropriate for decorating a common person's home, made it unsuitable for a biennial. In the works displayed, the forced representation of the country's political leaders, bereft of any sign of triumph or glory, did not arouse respect or reverence of an ethical or political order. The joking tone of Rosenberg's text transforms Soviet bureaucrats into the only audience for that embarrassing scenario.

Surely, considerations about the low quality of the artistic production from the Soviet Union were indirectly associated, even if not explicitly, with its political and economic regime, since the criterion of nationalist identity frequently guided reviews during the period.

The case of the 6th Biennial revealed that the USIA expected American art to be received favourably in Brazilian circles, and that the Agency encouraged MoMA to send a figurative artistic production. Even though it is not possible to clearly observe the impact of this request, the archival materials make it feasible to place in doubt the exclusively aesthetic analyses in the approach to USA representations at Brazilian exhibitions. After all, it was during the Cold War that national artistic representations became very important for USA cultural diplomacy.
The USIS in Brazil was constantly pressuring the USIA to know about the exhibition's planning, as can be seen in this telegram: "Post desires [to] know progress made organising American exhibit for V São Paulo Bienal. View Bienal's status as second most important art exhibition worldwide, urge maximum effort to assure US participation with finest quality exhibit. Bienal opening September requires decision US contribution soonest".[63] The statement sent by Major General John Kenton Hester to the USIA also offers a perspective on the importance of the biennials for other sectors of society. In Hester's words:

> The Biennale attracts participation of more than fifty countries, including many from the communist bloc. [...] because of the importance of the international exhibitions as part of the US cultural program, we should determine the type and/ or theme of the exhibition, select professionally qualified organizers and jury, maintain control over the final content, and select the accompanying curator-lecture.[64]

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Harold Rosenberg, "Art in orbit", *ArtNews* (June 21, 1961), 54.

62
Rosenberg, "Art in orbit", 54.

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[Telegram] USIS February 5, 1959. From: Rio de Janeiro To: USIA WIROM TOUSI 311, February 5Reference: USIS dispatch 46: USIA message October 10, 1958 RU 321 Box 69, Folder 61-022 6th Bienal de São Paulo.

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John K. Hester, "Participation in the São Paulo and Venice Biennials." Letter from Mayor General John K. Hester. Assistant Vice Chief of Staff, USAF; I Mr. Murrow. ICS – Mr. Ewing. ICS/E – Robert Sivard. July 10, 1962. Letter located at the Smithsonian Archives, Washington, DC. Even though the text refers to the Venice biennial, at that time, both biennials were organised according to the same planning and given the same degree of geopolitical importance.

Even though within the scope of this article one cannot analyse the impact of Hester's statement on the Brazilian exhibitions, it is worth noting that the 7th, 8th, and 9th Bienales were also under the responsibility of government agencies and that the amount of human and financial resources spent on these editions was remarkable. Also noteworthy was the wide dissemination of these exhibitions in the media, with the production and distribution of careful press releases, which were produced in English, Spanish, and Portuguese and accompanied by reproductions of works. Group interviews were held with American curators and artists and Brazilian critics and journalists. Whenever possible, meetings were organised between American artists who exhibited at the biennials and local artists. In other words, countless methods were explored for the United States to gain visibility in the press and Brazilian art circles. It is also worth recalling that, in 1963, a USA artist, Adolph Gottlieb, won the grand prize for the first time, a fact with a huge impact in both the Brazilian and American media. It is important to recall that, even though the parameters of the arts were undergoing a strong transformation, the São Paulo biennials still emphasised national artistic identities and the awards incited competition between countries.

It was also at the biennials under the jurisdiction of the USIA that the exhibit designs of the USA representations were particularly prominent and chronic problems with the lighting and the amplitude of the space in the biennial pavilion were resolved. As is well known, the building where the biennials took place was originally created for industrial and not art exhibitions, which necessitated modifications to the space for every artistic event. In 1967, for example, the space granted to the USA was resised by experts and special environments were created for the works of pop artists. Specifically, this curatorship and display granted exceptional visibility to the USA representation, which even exhibited a retrospective of Edward Hopper in a museum space created especially for the occasion. This effort to promote the arts was surely not an isolated fact and can be better understood when related to the country's geopolitical interests in South America, which sought to reduce the Cuban influence in the region and guarantee its hegemony in the political, economic, and consequently artistic spheres. This context makes it possible to understand how, in the 1960s, national representations at the São Paulo biennials were more directly linked to political-ideological concerns, as was typical during the Cold War in Latin America. These fraught political dynamics coupled with the cost to support them must surely have influenced MoMA to withdraw from their responsibility for the USA delegation and instead promote a schedule of circulating exhibitions with a less politically charged profile. After all, MoMA's supposed ideological-political impartiality in the organisation of USA representations at international exhibitions was becoming increasingly compromised, as the case of the 6th Bienal de São Paulo demonstrated.

For their part, the representations that had been under the responsibility of the USIA also marked the end of a cycle, since the country did not participate in the 1969 and 1971 Biennials. The first absence occurred because part of the group of American artists who would represent the country adhered to the international boycott of the Brazilian exhibition, a boycott occasioned by the censorship of the arts and by the increased violence perpetrated by the military dictatorship in Brazil.[65] The artists' attitude made it impossible to present the curatorial project of Gyorgy Kepes, who preferred to position himself in solidarity with them. In 1971, a myriad of factors related to domestic and foreign policy made the USA prefer, once again, not to participate in the Brazilian exhibition. The return took place in 1973, but by then the USIA no longer managed the exhibitions. Already in crisis, the model of national representations was shown to be exhausted and, throughout the biennials of the 1970s, new configurations were discussed. However, it was only in 1981 that the format based on analogies between languages radically transformed the structure of the São Paulo biennials. Since then, government agencies, cultural

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The military dictatorship in Brazil began in 1964 and lasted until 1985.

diplomacy, and national identities have seemed a part of the distant past. But they are still important elements for thinking about the genesis of these great international exhibitions, in which precisely the 'autonomous' role of the arts, even due to their supposedly exempt status, functioned (and may still function) as indirect expressions of unspeakable political discourses. And, in a subtle reversal, the tense relation of these discourses and works with their local contexts of reception show how aesthetic exemption can, when dislocated, generate other modes of apprehension, in spite of their inaugural and self-referential discourses.

**Author's Biography**

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