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The Padiglione dell'America Latina: A Fascist Project of Cultural Diplomacy at the Venice Biennale, 1929-1932

Laura Moure Cecchini

Abstract

Several nations from Latin America are currently represented at the Venice Biennale, either with pavilions in the Giardini, temporary showcases in the Arsenale, or by leasing spaces throughout the city. Yet the Latin American participation during the institution's formative years was marked by considerable difficulties. This paper examines the unsuccessful attempt to create a "Padiglione dell'America Latina", a cultural diplomacy initiative that originated in 1932 under Antonio Maraini's Secretariat. This visionary project could have provided Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil with a stable representation in what was then the leading exhibition of contemporary art. Despite significant support from the Biennale administrations, this initiative did not succeed. The failure to realise the "Padiglione dell'America Latina" — a situation tied to the global geopolitical issues that arose after the 1929 Wall Street Crash, rather than disinterest from the Biennale or Latin American nations — had profound and lasting implications. Yet the notion of "Latin America" is inherently artificial, burdened with colonial and imperialist associations, and it does not have widespread acceptance in the region. The arbitrary inclusion of the aforementioned countries under this label may have jeopardised the project from the very beginning.

Keywords

Global modernism, Argentine modernism, Latin American art, Venice Biennale, Cultural diplomacy

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The Padiglione dell'America Latina: A Fascist Project of Cultural Diplomacy at the Venice Biennale, 1929-1932[1]

Laura Moure Cecchini

Since its founding in 1895, the Venice Biennale has been a key player in the internationalisation of the art world. It is still one of the most important places where art is staged as cultural diplomacy, where geopolitical conflicts are played out in the supposedly neutral field of aesthetics.[2] In the first decades of the institution, this was most evident during the early years of Antonio Maraini's administration, before Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. At that time, the Biennale briefly presented itself as the "Geneva of the Arts".[3]

Among the various diplomatic initiatives of the Maraini administration, the project to establish a permanent Padiglione dell'America Latina (Latin American Pavilion) at the Giardini deserves special attention, and it is the subject of the following pages. This far-sighted project would have given Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil, as early as 1932, a permanent foothold in what was then the most prestigious international exhibition of contemporary art. At the same time the artificiality of the concept of "Latin America" – a term laden with colonial and imperialist overtones, coined by a French intellectual in the 1830s and still not widely accepted by much of the Mexican and Brazilian *intelligentsia* – and the arbitrary inclusion of the aforementioned five countries under such a label may have doomed the project from the outset.

1
My thanks go to Miriam Basilio, Giovanni Bianchi, Francesca Castellani, Ana Gonçalves Magalhães, Anita Orzes, Vittorio Pajusco, and Stefania Portinari, with whom on various occasions I have shared parts of this research and who have set me onto new paths and prevented mistakes; to Clarissa Ricci and Camilla Salvaneschi for their tireless work to get this issue to light; and to the two anonymous readers for their very helpful suggestions.

2
For the notion of "cultural diplomacy" see (among others) Frederick C. Barghoorn, *The Soviet Cultural Offensive: The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960); Max Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War", *Artforum* 11, no. 9 (1973): 43; Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War", *Artforum* 12, no. 10 (1974): 39; Michael Auwers, "The Gift of Rubens: Rethinking the Concept of Gift-Giving in Early Modern Diplomacy", *European History Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 421-441; Patricia M. Goff, "Cultural Diplomacy", in Andrew Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1-19; David Clarke, *"Cultural Diplomacy", Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies,* November 19, 2020, https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-543, accessed June 2024.

3
Antonio Maraini to Guido Beer, May 12, 1932, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri 1934-1936, b.14.1.283.

In the preceding years, two exhibitions in Paris had already brought together artists from the American continent under the label of "Latin America", attempting to overcome divisions. For example, in 1924 the *Exposition d'Art Latino-Americaine* opened at the Musée Galliéra with works by Argentine, Brazilian and Uruguayan artists, while in 1930 Uruguayan painter Joaquín Torres-García presented the *Première Exposition du Groupe Latino-Américain de Paris* at the Galérie Zak, with artists from Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Cuba, Guatemala, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, and Colombia. In 1940, at the Riverside Museum, a Latin American *Exhibition of Fine Arts* of Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, and Venezuela opened in conjunction with the New York World's Fair. Yet it was not until 1943 that the Museum of Modern Art in New York organised its first retrospective of so-called "Latin American art".[4] The "Pavilion of Latin America" at the Venice Biennale, then, was quite visionary in imagining a common exhibition space for countries with such different histories.

The first years of Maraini's secretariat (1928-1942) were a challenging time for international relations. In Latin America, the Wall Street Crash of 1929 had both political and economic consequences. The decline in industrial production in Europe and the US shook the economies of Chile, Peru, and Bolivia, which were based on mining exports. Countries such as Uruguay and Argentina, whose main exports were staples such as cereals and meat, recovered relatively quickly from the crisis, while those that exported luxury goods such as coffee, tropical fruits or sugar struggled. In general, however, Latin American economies were heavily dependent on foreign credit and trade, and the crisis hit both hard.

The social consequences of the Great Depression (rural depopulation, rising unemployment, and urban poverty) facilitated the emergence of dictatorial and populist regimes – many directly inspired by Italian fascism – throughout the region.[5] After 1929, Italy did indeed pursue a systematic geopolitical strategy towards Latin America, seeking new markets, raw materials, and international allies. While economic ties between Italy and Latin America remained weak (and could not compete with those established by the US, Germany, and England), cultural and ideological ties were strengthened in the 1930s – as fascism was seen by many Latin American intellectuals and politicians as an alternative model to face the economic crisis, as a counterpoint to US hegemony in the region, and as a valid response to the threat posed by communism.[6] This is therefore the context in which the project for the "Padiglione dell'America Latina" should be seen. The Great Depression had profound consequences for Latin American art markets, as it did for other art markets. With local art scenes still small, only countries with government-sponsored art programmes (such as Mexico) were able to provide work for artists. The circulation of works by Latin American artists was curtailed by the collapse of the global mar-

4 Lincoln Kirstein, *The Latin-American collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943). See also Álvaro Medina, "La fondation de l'art latino-américain, 1887-1930", in *Art d'Amérique Latine*, 1911-1968 (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 1992), 26-39; Michele Greet, "Occupying Paris: The First Survey Exhibition of Latin American Art", *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 3, no. 2–3 (June 2014): 212–236; Michele Greet, Transatlantic *Encounters: Latin American Artists in Paris Between the Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Miriam Basilio, "Evolving Taxonomies at The Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s and '40s and the Definitions of the 'Latin American Collection'", in Edward J. Sullivan (ed.), *The Americas Revealed: Collecting Colonial and Latin American Art in the United States* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 28-43. In the Italian universal exhibition of 1911 there was a pavilion devoted to "Latin America" (which did not include Argentina or Brazil, which had a separate pavilion, but rather Uruguay, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru and Chile), but it was devoted mostly to industrial crafts: *Guida ufficiale della Esposizione internazionale: Torino 1911* (Turin: Momo, 1911), 227.

5 Paulo Drinot and Alan Knight, *The Great Depression in Latin America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

6 For an Italian fascist take on Latin America, see Oreste Villa, *L'America Latina Problema Fascista* (Roma: Nuova Europa, 1933).

ket.[7] In addition, the economic crisis had made the traditional 'European tour' no longer viable for many artists, depriving them of the opportunity to show their work to international audiences and participate in networks with foreign artists. It would therefore have been in the interest of Latin American artists to be given a permanent space to exhibit their work at the Venice Biennale.

But despite the encouragement of the Biennale's administrators, the project failed: in part, no doubt, because of the international geopolitical and financial situation following the stock market crash of 1929, but perhaps also because of the Mexican, Argentinean, Uruguayan, Chilean, and Brazilian art worlds' confusion over both the idea of "Latin American art" and the political stakes of Italian fascism. The fiasco of the Padiglione dell'America Latina, then, had long-lasting consequences.[8] Until the opening of the Venezuelan pavilion (1954-56), no Latin American country had a permanent space at the Venice Biennale. Even today, only three Latin American countries (Brazil, Uruguay, and Venezuela) have a pavilion in what remains the Biennale's most prestigious space, the Giardini.

Latin American artists at the Biennale under Fradeletto and Pica's administrations

The Padiglione dell'America Latina was by no means the first time in which Latin American artists were invited to participate in the Venice Biennale. In fact, artists from many (but not all) of the region's countries were included in the Biennale from an early date in its history.[9] Already under the directorship of Antonio Fradeletto (1895-1914), some Latin American artists based in Europe were included in the Biennale. To my knowledge, the first Latin American artist in the Biennale was José Fiuza Guimarães, who participated in the 1899 iteration. Although the Biennial catalogue states that Fiuza was from Rio de Janeiro, other sources suggest he was born in Portugal but emigrated to Brazil as a teenager and worked there throughout his career – according to certain definitions of citizenship, he could therefore be considered a "Brazilian" artist.[10] Conversely, the first Latin American-born artist at the Biennale was the Argentine (but child of Italian emigrants) Pio Collivadino.[11] His diptych *Vita onesta* (Honest Life, 1901) was included in the 1901 Biennale and acquired by the Fondazione Artistica Marangoni in Udine, where it remains in the collection of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna-Casa Cavazzini. Collivadino, who lived in

7
I would like to thank an anonymous peer-reviewer for encouraging me to think about this issue. On Latin American art markets, among others, see: José Carlos García Durand, *Arte, privilégio e distinçao. Artes plásticas, arquitetura e clase dirigente no Brasil, 1855-1985* (São Paulo: Perspectiva/Edusp, 1989); Patricia M. Artundo, "La Galería Witcomb 1868-1971", *Memorias de una Galería de Arte* (Buenos Aires: Fondo Nacional de las Artes, 2000), 13-57; María Isabel Baldasarre, *Los dueños del arte. Coleccionismo y consumo cultural en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2006); Talía Bermejo, "La Asociación Amigos del Arte en Buenos Aires (1924-1942): estrategias de exhibición artística y promoción del coleccionismo", in María José Herrera (ed.), *Exposiciones de arte argentino y latinoamericano. Curaduría, diseño y políticas culturales* (Córdoba/Buenos Aires: Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes Dr. José Figueroa Alcorta, 2011), 41-50; María Isabel Baldasarre and Viviana Usubiaga, "El mercado del arte en América Latina.Valorización, circulación y consumo de obras durante los siglos XX y XXI", *H-ART. Revista de Historia, teoría y crítica de arte* 1, no. 4 (2019): 65-77.

8
For more about unrealised pavilions of countries from Latin America see Anita Orzes, "Latin America at the Venice Biennale: Histories of Unrealised National Pavilions", in this issue.

9
I have traced this history in Laura Moure Cecchini, "Tra entusiasmi, dubbi e fallimenti: arte latinoamericana alla Biennale di Venezia, 1899-1942", *Studi di Memofonte*, no. 31 (2024), 158-194.

10
Terza Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della città di Venezia 1899: catalogo illustrato (Venezia: Premiato Stabilimento di Carlo Ferrari, 1899) 107. On discussions about Brazilian identity in relation to art, see Rafael Cardoso, "The Braziliannes of Brazilian Art", *Third Text* 26, no. 1 (January 2012): 17-28.

11
On Collivadino's Italian training see Giulia Murace, "Artista geniale e amico di tutti", in Nora Altridi and Carolina Vanegas Carrasco (eds.), *El taller de Collivadino* (Buenos Aires: UNSAM EDITA, 2019), 106-137.

Italy from 1890 to 1907, also participated in the next two Biennales.[12] In 1905 another Argentine artist (this time not the child of Italian emigrants, but rather the descendant of a Spanish and Argentine family), Cesáreo Bernaldo de Quirós, exhibited his *Ritorno dalla pesca* (Return from the fishing, 1905) in the International Room, a fishing scene set in a Mediterranean port (either Naples or Mallorca, where Bernaldo de Quirós lived at the time).[13]

The first Venezuelan artist to exhibit at the Biennale, the Impressionist Emilio (or Émile) Boggio, was, like Collivadino, the child of an Italian emigrant. Trained at the Académie Julien and living in France at the time, Boggio was described as "French" in the catalogue of the 1901 Venice Biennale, where he showed a painting titled *Labour* in the International Room.[14] The first Mexican artist to exhibit at the Biennale (albeit in the Spanish Room) was the Symbolist Ángel Zárraga, who in 1910 presented two works: a sensual interpretation of a biblical scene, *Marta e Maria* (Martha and Mary), and a triptych entitled *Isabella*, *Pietro e Pastora* (Isabella, Pietro and Pastora).[15] The latter, which Zárraga had painted while living in Toledo (Spain), had already been exhibited to great acclaim at the 1909 Munich Secession – an institution whose organisation and aesthetic preferences had a profound effect on the early Biennales.[16]

After World War I and under the secretariat of Vittorio Pica (1922-1927), Latin American artists continued to exhibit – albeit sporadically – at the Venice Biennale. In 1920, at least two avant-garde Argentine artists exhibited at the Biennale: Futurist Emilio Pettoruti and the Nabis Guillermo Butler.[17] In this same year, the Cuban-born Federico Armando Beltran-Masses became the first artist born in Spanish America to have a solo exhibition at the Biennale.[18]

Pica's administration should also be credited with spearheading the first official national representation of a Latin American country at the Biennale: the Argentine Room at the 1922 Biennale. In this 13th Biennale, thirty works by Argentine painters and sculptors were displayed in a dedicated room in the Central Pavilion.[19] Argentina was thus the third non-European country (after Japan and the USA) to have a national presence at the Venice Biennale. [Fig. 1]

The success of the *Exhibition of Argentine Artists* led to more sustained contact between the Biennale and Argentine art authorities. Just before the 1922 Biennale closed, the organisers contacted the Biennale administration and asked

12
Collivadino returned to Argentina in 1908 and from that year to 1936 would be the director of Buenos Aires' Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes. On Collivadino's career see Laura Malosetti Costa, "Pío Collivadino y la Academia de Bellas Artes en Buenos Aires", *Revista Ciencia y Cultura* 23, no. 43 (December 2019): 283-295.

13
Sesta Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della città di Venezia (Venice: Premiato Stabilimento di Carlo Ferrari, 1905), 22.

14
Quarta Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Città di Venezia (Venice: Premiato Stabilimento di Carlo Ferrari, 1901), 48. When no date is provided for the works mentioned, their location and production date are unknown; the given titles are those indicated on the Biennale catalogue.

15
Nona Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della città di Venezia (Venice: Premiato Stabilimento di Carlo Ferrari, 1910), 28.

16
Rodolfo Panichi, "Ángel Zárraga", *Vita d'arte* III, vol. VI, no. 32 (August 1910): 52-65.

17
Dodicesima Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della città di Venezia (Venezia: Bestetti e Tumminelli, 1920), 21; 89 and 92.

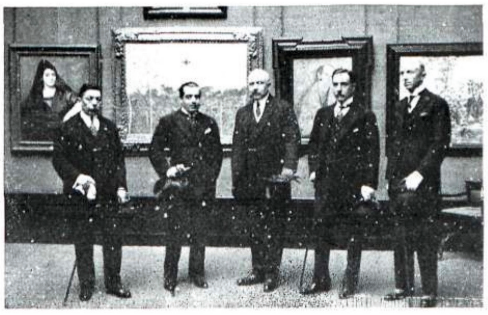
18
Dodicesima Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della città di Venezia, 22.

19
The most complete reconstructions of this episode are Alonso Rodrigo, *Berni y las representaciones argentinas en la Bienal de Venecia* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat, 2013) and especially Pierpaolo Luderin, "La Mostra degli Artisti Argentini alla Biennale di Venezia del 1922", *Quaderni della donazione Eugenio Da Venezia,* no. 22 (2015): 41-61. See also María Teresa Spinetto, "El arte argentino busca su lugar en el mundo", in Maria Inés Saavedra (ed.), *Buenos Aires: artes plásticas, artistas y espacio público 1900-1930* (Buenos Aires: Vestales, 2008), 171–205 and Paola Natalia Pepa, "L'Argentina alla Biennale d'arte di Venezia", in Stefania Portinari and Nico Stringa (eds.), *Storie della Biennale di Venezia* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2019), 305-317.

fig. 1
El arte argentino en la Exposición de Venecia, Caras y Caretas, 1243 (July 29, 1922).

Distintos aspectos de la sala donde los artistas argentinos expusieron sus cuadros y esculturas.

EL ARTE ARGENTINO EN LA EXPOSICION DE VENECIA



El ministro argentino en Italia, doctor Angel Gallardo, con el director del Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, doctor Cupertino del Campo, el señor Alfredo González Garaño y otras señores en el acto de la inauguración.

Ha sido una jornada auspiciosa para el arte argentino la inauguración de la sala en que nuestros pintores y escultores exponían algunas de sus mejores obras. Los comentarios que la crítica y el público asistente a la exposición han hecho acerca del mérito artístico de lo expuesto, bien puede constituir un motivo de justa satisfacción para sus autores, porque esos comentarios, además de lo que puede haber de cortesía, han surgido a raíz de temidas comparaciones, y de ahí su positivo y alto valor.

for a space in the Giardini to set up an Argentine pavilion.[20] [Fig. 2] The pavilion was originally scheduled to open in 1924. At that time, only European countries had permanent spaces at the Biennale: Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, Hungary, Spain, Holland, and Russia. Had it opened then, the "Padiglione Argentino" would have been the first non-European pavilion at the Biennale, as the US did not yet have its own space there. However, despite the enthusiasm of the Argentine art world and Biennale officials, a lack of economic support for the pavilion's construction from Argentine congressmen stalled negotiations.[21] The Argentine pavilion was not ready for the 1924 Biennale, nor for the ones of 1926 and 1928.[22] In 1929, the Biennale finally informed the Argentine organisers that the space originally reserved for their pavilion would be occupied by the new US Pavilion.[23] Argentina had missed its opportunity to have a permanent space at the Biennale, but as it will be demonstrated, the Biennale administration still considered the presence of artists from the Americas a priority.

Antonio Maraini's Biennale: "a Geneva for International Contemporary Art"

Under the secretariat of Antonio Maraini, sculptor, art critic, and (after 1932) "Commissario straordinario" of the Fascist Fine Arts Syndicate, the Biennale made a sustained effort to increase the number of countries it represented.[24] As Massimo De Sabbata put it, the Italian press stressed "art as an instrument of peaceful coexistence among peoples and [the] Biennale as the most accredited place achieving this aspiration".[25] Art and diplomacy, to quote the title of De Sabbata's book, were the two poles of Maraini's vision for the Biennale.

Until the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 and the subsequent sanctions imposed on Italy by the League of Nations, Maraini conceived of the Biennale as an allegedly neutral and non-partisan space for international cultural diplomacy. As he wrote to Mussolini's secretary in 1932,

> I would like to draw His [Mussolini's] attention to the fact that the conclusion of the [1932] Congress of Contemporary Art was to consider Venice as "a Geneva for international contemporary art" [...]. And if I dare say so much it is because it was He who said in one of the audiences granted to me, that this is what the Biennale should aim at.[26]

For Maraini, the inclusion of as many countries as possible on the Biennale site was part of the diplomatic role he envisioned for himself and for the institution he headed. The opening of the US pavilion in 1930 was a particularly significant step in this respect, as was the fact that the Biennale attempted to become the preeminent

20
Francesco Armellini to Romolo Bazzoni, December 4, 1922, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", Fondo Storico, Padiglioni, atti 1897-1893 (serie cosiddetta Scatole nere. Padiglioni), b.15. Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee, Biennale di Venezia (Venezia), from now on ASAC—SNP, b.15; "Pabellón argentino en Venecia. Su próxima erección", *La Prensa* (November 13, 1923).

21
Telegram from Esposizione Internazionale di Venezia to Martin Noel, October 8, 1923, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC—SNP, b.15.

22
See documents in "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC—SNP, b.15.

23
Commissario Straordinario al Comune di Venezia to Fernando Pérez, Ambassador of Argentina to the Italian Kingdom, September 20, 1929, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC—SNP, b.15.

24
On Maraini's Biennales see Giuliana Tomasella, *Biennali di guerra: arte e propaganda negli anni del conflitto, 1939-1944* (Padova: Il poligrafo, 2001); Massimo De Sabbata, *Tra diplomazia e arte: le biennali di Antonio Maraini (1928-1942)* (Udine: Forum, 2006).

25
De Sabbata, *Tra diplomazia e arte: le biennali di Antonio Maraini (1928-1942),* 28. All translations hereafter, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.

26
Antonio Maraini to Guido Beer, May 12, 1932, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri 1934-1936, b.14.1.283.

fig. 2
Pabellón argentino en Venecia.
La Prensa (November 13, 1923).

PABELLON ARGENTINO EN VENECIA

SU PROXIMA ERECCION

Así como el año pasado fué nuestro país el único del continente cuyos artistas, especialmente invitados, tuvieron una sala propia en la XIII Exposición Internacional de Arte de Venecia; para el próximo, si las Cámaras sancionan un reciente mensaje del Poder Ejecutivo, la República Argentina será la primera nación americana que ostente un pabellón exclusivo, al lado de los de la Gran Bretaña, Francia, España, Alemania, Hungría, Bélgica, Holanda y Rusia.

Como se sabe, los certámenes bienales de Venecia marcan en el ambiente artístico mundial una importancia mayor que la de los Salones de París. Inaugurados en 1895, deben su realce no solamente a la circunstancia de permitir a los artistas extranjeros presentarse en dos medios distintos (ya sea en las salas internacionales del "Palazzo dell'Esposizione", en inmediata confrontación de valores con los de otras naciones, ya sea en el recinto propio, dentro de la evolución con-

Secco Marina y de la dársena grande del arsenal.

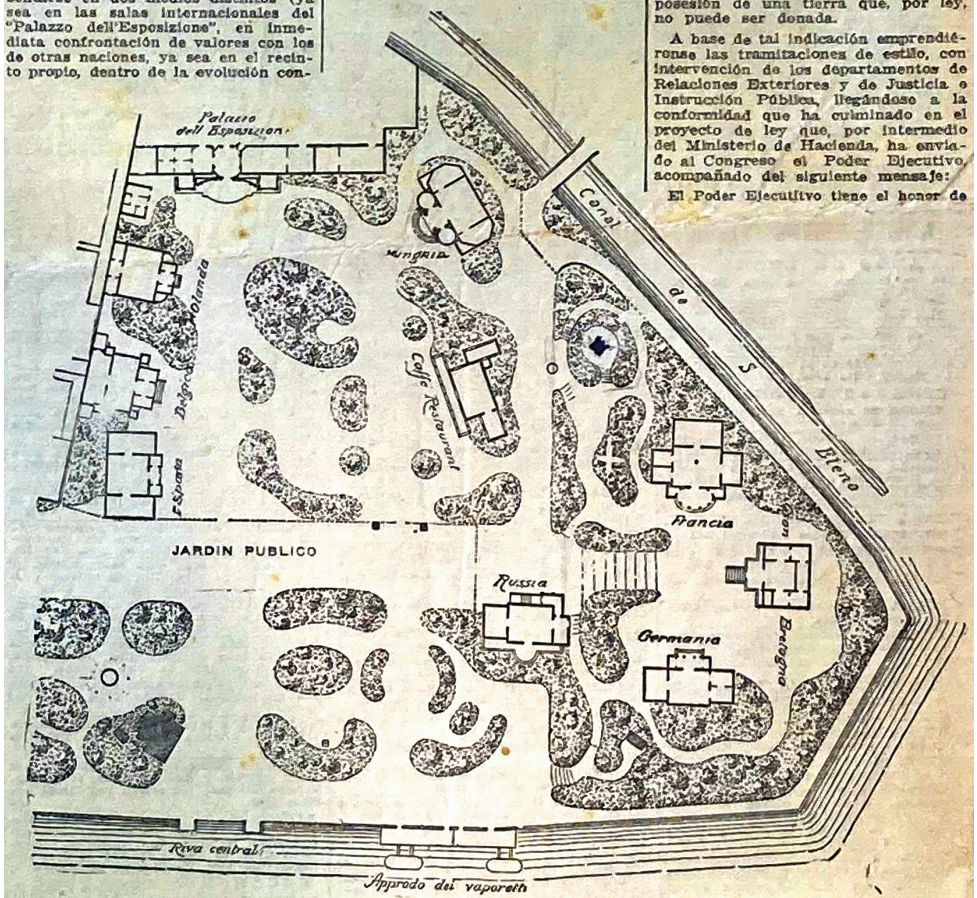
El terreno cedido, como puede comprobarse en el grabado ilustrativo, no puede estar mejor ubicado. Detrás del pabellón de Francia y entre los de Hungría y Gran Bretaña, su posición resulta más cómoda aún si se considera que está a pocos pasos del desembarcadero, sobre el canal de Santa Elena, e inmediatamente delante del gran "restaurant" que reune a todos los turistas y "amateurs" que por docenas de millares frecuentan diariamente, durante un mes, las bienales exposiciones de Venecia. Por último, y para que el lector pueda apreciar debidamente todo el significado de la actitud del gobierno italiano en esta emergencia, recordaremos que

lar a las estipuladas con los otros Estados concurrentes, reciba, señor comisario, las expresiones de mi particular distinción y mis agradecimientos para la Comisión Nacional de Bellas Artes y para el gobierno de la República Argentina".

La convención a que se alude en el párrafo trascripto implica un contrato de locación (nuevamente formal) por un número de años a convenirse y nunca inferior a veinticinco—renovable a su vencimiento—contra reembolso, por concepto de arrendamiento de diez liras anuales, lo que equivale, más o menos, en nuestra moneda, a pesos 1.50 moneda nacional. Como se ve, esta insignificante suma solamente se establece como expediente legal para justificar la posesión de una tierra que, por ley, no puede ser donada.

A base de tal indicación emprendiéronse las tramitaciones de estilo, con intervención de los departamentos de Relaciones Exteriores y de Justicia e Instrucción Pública, llegándose a la conformidad que ha culminado en el proyecto de ley que, por intermedio del Ministerio de Hacienda, ha enviado al Congreso el Poder Ejecutivo, acompañado del siguiente mensaje:

El Poder Ejecutivo tiene el honor de



Planos de los jardines públicos y de los terrenos ocupados por el palacio y los pabellones extranjeros de la Exposición Internacional de Arte de Venecia.—La (X) indica la ubicación del pabellón argentino

organiser of exhibitions of contemporary Italian art abroad, after almost a decade in which this task had been carried out by private individuals such as Margherita Sarfatti or by a section of the Ministry of Public Education.[27] These exhibitions organised by the Biennale abroad (for instance in Vienna in 1933, in Paris in 1935, or in Berlin in 1937) had, as Sileno Salvagnini writes, "foreign policy intentions, through which the supremacy of Fascist Italy was also demonstrated in the [art] field".[28] For Maraini, the Biennale was to be not only the preeminent institution tasked with hosting international art in Italy, but also the one in charge of carefully shaping the view of contemporary Italian art promoted abroad.

Therefore, in Maraini's vision, cultural relations between Italy and Latin America were to have two directions: the promotion of Italian art in Latin American countries, on the one hand, and the presentation of Latin American art at the Biennale, on the other. The former was a pressing concern for many members of the Italian art world, who, since the 1920s, had noticed that while there was a flourishing art market in cities such as Buenos Aires, São Paulo, or Rio de Janeiro, it was mostly focused on French, German, or Spanish art; Italy lagged behind in marketing its artistic production abroad. In the case of Argentina, projects such as the Italian section of the 1910 *Centennial Exhibition*, the 1923 *Italian Fine Arts Exhibition* or Sarfatti's *Novecento show* (all held in Buenos Aires) aimed to encourage local collectors to acquire Italian art.[29] In ideal continuity with this project of promoting Italy's art abroad, Maraini's Biennale was originally intended to organise an exhibition of contemporary Italian painting and sculpture in Buenos Aires, which finally opened in 1938, but was limited to the decorative arts.[30] Another was planned for 1940, but Italy's declaration of war on France and Great Britain prevented it from taking place. In the end, despite these numerous projects to promote Italian art in Latin America, during the Fascist regime the Biennale was only responsible for two exhibitions of Italian engravings and prints in the region. These toured Central and South America in 1939 – although of the five countries that had been asked to take part in the Padiglione dell'America Latina, it only visited Mexico.[31]

As part of the diplomatic purview of the early Maraini administration, in preparation for the 1930 Biennial there were several failed attempts to include Latin American art in the Biennale. In 1929, for example, a last-ditch attempt was made to persuade Argentina to finally provide the funds needed to build its pavilion, but to no avail.[32] Mexico was invited to participate in the 1930 Biennial, but negotia-

27
Giuliana Tomasella, "La Biennale di Venezia. Le mostre all'estero", ON. *Otto/Novecento* 1 (1996): 48-53; Sileno Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia 1919-1943* (Bologna: Minerva, 2000), 75-85; Lia Durante, "Mostre all'estero della Biennale di Venezia", in *Quaderni della Donazione Eugenio da Venezia* 15 (2005), 91-100; Francesca Cavarocchi, *Avanguardie dello spirito: il fascismo e la propaganda culturale all'estero* (Roma: Carocci, 2010), 185-193; Chiara Fabi, "Arte e Propaganda: l'identità del regime nelle mostre d'arte all'estero, 1935-1937". In *MODERNIDADE LATINA Os Italianos e os Centros do Modernismo Latino-americano. Anais Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo,* 2014, http://www.mac.usp.br/mac/conteudo/academico/publicacoes/anais/modernidade/conteudo.html (accessed July 2022).

28
Sileno Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia 1919-1943*, 79.

29
María Isabel Baldasarre, "La otra inmigración. Buenos Aires y el mercado del arte italiano a comienzos del siglo XX", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 51, no. 3/4 (2007): 477-502; Laura Moure Cecchini, "A Fascist Tango in Argentina: Novecento Italiano in Buenos Aires, 1930", *Oxford Art Journal* 45, no. 3 (December 2022): 359-381.

30
Lamberto Lattanzi, "Aspetti dell'arte sacra all'esposizione italiana di arte decorativa a Buenos Aires", *Osservatore Romano* (Rome, September 30, 1938).

31
It also visited Mexico: *Mostra italiana di incisioni organizzata dal Ministero della Cultura Popolare d'intesa con i ministeri degli Affari Esteri e dell'Educazione Nazionale, a cura della Biennale* (Venice: Biennale di Venezia, 1939).

32
Commissario Straordinario al Comune di Venezia to Fernando Pérez, Ambassador of Argentina to the Italian Kingdom, September 20, 1929, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC – SNP, b.15.

tions seemed to have stalled prematurely and came to nothing.[33] The Venetian painter Cesare Mainella, who was working in Peru at the time, proposed the creation of a "small room" of Peruvian artists at the 1930 Biennial. But in this instance, unlike the cases of Argentina and Mexico, the Biennale was not interested in the project: as Romolo Bazzoni, the Biennale's administrator, wrote to Maraini, "the issue is suspended for lack of space, since many other nations that do not have their own pavilions have also asked to exhibit".[34] The consequences of these fiascos were far-reaching: to this day, neither Argentina, nor Mexico, nor Perù has a permanent building in the Biennale, instead having temporary spaces in the Arsenale.

All these attempts having failed, the last try on the part of the Maraini administration to include Latin American countries at the Biennale took place in preparation for its 1932 iteration.[35] Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome, the 28th Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte brought to fruition the changes planned by the Maraini-Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata administration, which aspired to fascisticise the Biennale and to turn it into a state-organised exhibition (rather than a municipal one, as it had originally been).[36] With a new modernist façade by architect Duilio Torres, this Biennale also saw the inauguration of the Venice International Film Festival and of the first Congress of Contemporary Art, expanding Venice's scope as the venue for international debates on an expanded definition of art.

"Latin America" and *latinità* during the interwar period

The 1932 Biennale had the highest number, until then, of foreign countries with their own pavilion, thirteen; the expansion of the international participation was Maraini's utmost priority. It was for this reason, then, that the Biennale officials decided to include Latin American artists in the 1932 iteration.

Perhaps remembering the labyrinthine negotiations with Argentina and the lack of space in the Giardini, the Biennale did not encourage the creation of individual national pavilions, but rather a single one, the Padiglione dell'America Latina. This was a highly unusual step in the Biennale's history: there was, of course, no "European Pavilion" – "art" was considered at the time to be an "unmarked case, implicitly representing "European" art – but neither was there one for North America, Africa, Asia, or Oceania. At the Biennale, pavilions observed strict national boundaries – and changed when they did: see, for example, the case of the Austrian pavilion after Hitler's Anschluss: no longer an independent nation, Austria did not participate in the 1940 or 1942 Biennales. The only exception at that time was the USSR pavilion, which included all the nations under the aegis of the Soviet Union.[37]

Conceptually, however, the Padiglione dell'America Latina was a different proposition from that of the USSR. Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil, the countries that would each have a room in this pavilion, were politically

33
Gustavo Pulitzer Finali to Antonio Maraini, "Messico", ASAC – SNP, b. 15. Mexico would have its first national participation in the Biennale in 1950, with a well-received pavilion devoted to David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and Rufino Tamayo. See Mario Sartor, "La fortuna critica di Diego Rivera in Italia", *Il Veltro* 3-4 (August 1993): 329-355; Chiara Stella Sara Alberti, "Il Messico in Italia; Uno sguardo dal fondo de Micheli", *Quaderni Culturali IILA*, 1(1), 31-42; Alice Gerotto, "Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, José Clemente Orozco, e Rufino Tamayo. Mostre di arte messicana in Italia. Analisi di una fortuna critica dalla XXV Biennale del 1950". (BA thesis: Ca' Foscari University, Venice 2020).

34
Romolo Bazzoni to Antonio Maraini, 16 December 1929, "Peru", ASAC – SNP, b. 15.

35
Tredicesima Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte (Venice: Premiato Stabilimento di Carlo Ferrari, 1932); *Le muse inquiete: la Biennale di Venezia di fronte alla storia* (Venice: Archivio storico delle arti contemporanee, 2020).

36
On these changes see Maria Stone, "Challenging Cultural Categories: The Transformation of the Venice Biennale under Fascism", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 4, no. 2 (1999): 184-208.

37
Matteo Bertelé, *Arte sovietica alla Biennale di Venezia* (Milan: Mimesis Edizioni, 2020).

and economically independent, with different histories and cultures. Four were Spanish-speaking, one was Portuguese-speaking. Four were in South America, one, Mexico, in Central America. Although all three under Spanish rule in the colonial period, what is now Uruguay and Argentina were part of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, while most of modern Chile was part of the Capitanía General de Chile; Brazil, of course, was part of the Portuguese Empire.

In fact, "Latin America" is a Euro-centric term that homogenises very different geopolitical entities. As historian Mauricio Tenorio Trillo puts it, "[Latin America] has never been a real place, a clear civilisation, or a well-demarcated and unique culture or group of cultures".[38] The concept of *latinité* was originally developed by French intellectual Michel Chevalier in 1836 on the eve of the first French military intervention in Mexico. *Latinité* was intended to justify France's cultural and political influence in the region and to counter the growing expansionism of the United States.

After the independence of the former colonies of the Spanish Empire, the term was often appropriated by creole elites to mark their difference from the indigenous and African populations of the region, as well as to diminish the influence of Spain – associated with a shameful past of colonial occupation and oppression – and to enhance that of France – associated instead with modernity and positivist values. In the early 20th century, however, *latinidad* (latinity) was often also a term that implied the defence of *mestizaje* (racial mixture) and a new, synthetic, racially mixed identity.

Further destabilising the category of Latin America has been the role played by Brazil in its conceptual construction: does this country, despite its different history and language from the former Spanish colonies on the continent, share enough characteristics with them to be considered part of Latin America? Do former Spanish and Portuguese colonies have ties that lead to a common Iberian identity? Should linguistic, geographical and cultural differences between Brazil and the rest of Latin America be emphasised or played down?[39] The tensions surrounding the idea of Latin America, but also the usefulness of the concept to describe the similarities between certain nations and their differences, on the one hand, with respect to Europe and, on the other, with respect to the United States, have led the French historian Guy Martinière to call for the use of Latin America as a mere "operational concept".[40]

In early 20th-century Italy, the concept of *latinità* (latinity) acquired other meanings that need to be addressed in order to understand the Biennale's decision to propose a Padiglione dell'America Latina. The term was prominently used in the interventionist press during World War I in opposition to the idea of *germanità* (germanism). *Latinità* served to encourage Italians to intervene in the war on the side of the Allies on the basis of a supposed common cultural tradition between Italy and France.[41] After the First World War, "latinità" was used to express the idea of a Latin racial "essence" purportedly shared by Italy and Latin American

38
Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 1-2. For the history and conceptual problems attending such nomenclature, see Walter D Mignolo, The Idea of Latin America (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008) and, most especially, Tenorio-Trillo's aforementioned book, which addresses the encroachment of this concept in US academia.

39
For this issue, see "Does Brazil Belong to Latin America?" in Mari Carmen Ramírez and Thomas Ybarra-Fausto (eds.), *Resisting Categories: Latin American and/or Latino?* (New York: Yale University Press, 2012), 301-337; Afranio Coutinho, "¿Qué es América Latina?", *Mundo Nuevo,* no. 36 (June 1969), 19-20; Darcy Ribeiro, "A América Latina existe?", in *Ensaios insólitos* (Porto Alegre: L & PM Editores, 1979), 217- 225.

40
Guy Martinière, *Aspects de la coopération franco-brésilienne: Transplantation culturelle et stratégie de la modernité* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'homme, 1982), 25-37.

41
Rosario Romeo, "La Germania e la vita intellettuale italiana dall'Unità alla Prima guerra mondiale", in *L'Italia unita e la prima guerra mondiale* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1978), 109-41; Luisa Mangoni, *Una crisi fine secolo: la cultura italiana e la Francia fra Otto e Novecento* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1985); and Seamus Dunn and T. G. Fraser, *Europe and ethnicity: The First World War and contemporary ethnic conflict* (London: Routledge, 1996).

countries, which supposedly justified Italy's role as the leader of the "Latin race" and its political and economic intervention in the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries of Central and South America. The actual content of *latinità*, however, was extremely vague, including signifiers such as Catholicism, the Baroque, the Latin roots of Spanish and Portuguese, and the presence of Italian emigrant communities across the Atlantic.

Emboldened by this fictional Latin "essence", fascist officials saw the region as ripe for commercial and cultural intervention.[42] In the 1920s and early 1930s, the creation of institutions such as the Istituto Cristoforo Colombo (1923), the launch of journals such as *Rivista d'Italia e d'America* (1923-1928), *Vie d'Italia e dell'America Latina* (1924-1932) and *Colombo* (1926-1930), and the regular visits of many Italian intellectuals to Latin America (including Sarfatti, F. T. Marinetti and Pier Maria Bardi, for example) and Latin American intellectuals to Italy (José León Pagan and Eduardo Mallea, for example), aimed at further strengthening cultural, but also economic and political, ties between the Italian homeland and the Romance-language-speaking countries across the Atlantic. *Roma caput mundi* was seen as both a counterweight to the growing influence of the United States in the Americas and as an extension of Fascism's cultural influence across the Atlantic.[43]

Because of the aforementioned "Latin" essence that Italy and the Spanish-speaking countries of the Americas supposedly shared, the Fascist regime adopted here a very different colonial strategy from the one it employed in Africa, one based on art and culture rather than military occupation and economic exploitation. In 1926, the Italian government severely restricted emigration to Latin America, as it was considered a national disgrace by the Fascist regime. Nevertheless, the aforementioned cultural enterprises – and the Biennale's Padiglione dell'America Latina – were meant to maintain ties with the existing Italian communities abroad, as well as with Latin American citizens in general. We should understand the unprecedented project of creating a permanent pavilion for Latin American countries at the Biennale within this geopolitical context.

The Padiglione dell'America Latina (1931-1932)

The Latin American Pavilion was meant to be located on the island of Sant'Elena, which Maraini conceived as an extension of the Giardini.[44] Here architect Brenno del Giudice designed a modernist structure to house the Padiglione Venezia (dedicated to the applied arts produced in Venice) and pavilions for Poland and Switzerland. In front of the pavilion was an elegant exedra around a pool of water, which was

42
See João Fábio Bertonha, "Emigrazione e politica estera: la «diplomazia sovversiva» di Mussolini e la questione degli italiani all'estero, 1922-1945", *Altreitalie*, no. 23 (2001): 39-61; Eugenia Scarzanella, (ed.), *Fascisti in Sud America* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2005); Franco Savarino Roggero, "'En busca de un "eje" latino: la política latinoamericana de Italia entre las dos guerras mundiales,'" *Anuario del Centro de Estudios Históricos "Prof. Carlos S.A. Segreti"* 6, no. 16 (2006): 239-262; Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); David Aliano, *Mussolini's National Project in Argentina* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012); Carla Brandalise, "O conceito de América Latina: hispano-americanos e a panlatinidade europeia", *Cuadernos del CILHA* 14, no. 1 (2013): 74-106; Carla Brandalise, "Fascismo italiano na América Latina: entre romanità e latinità", *Anos 90* 23, no. 43 (November 30, 2016): 199-233. See also Marco Mugnaini, *L'America Latina e Mussolini: Brasile e Argentina nella politica estera dell'Italia, 1919-1943* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2008).

43
Paula Bruno and Rosa Aboy, *Visitas culturales en la Argentina: (1898-1936)* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2014); Paolo Rusconi, "Pietro Maria Bardi's First Journey to South America: A Narrative of Travel, Politics, and Architectural Utopia", in Valeria Galimi and Annarita Gori (eds.), *Intellectuals in the Latin Space during the Era of Fascism: Crossing Borders* (London: Routledge, 2020), 57-84; *Laura Fotia, Diplomazia culturale e propaganda attraverso l'Atlantico. Argentina e Italia (1923-1940)* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2019).

44
Antonio Maraini, "La XVIII Biennale d'arte a Venezia", *Le Tre Venezie* VII, no. 8 (August 1931): 478-487.

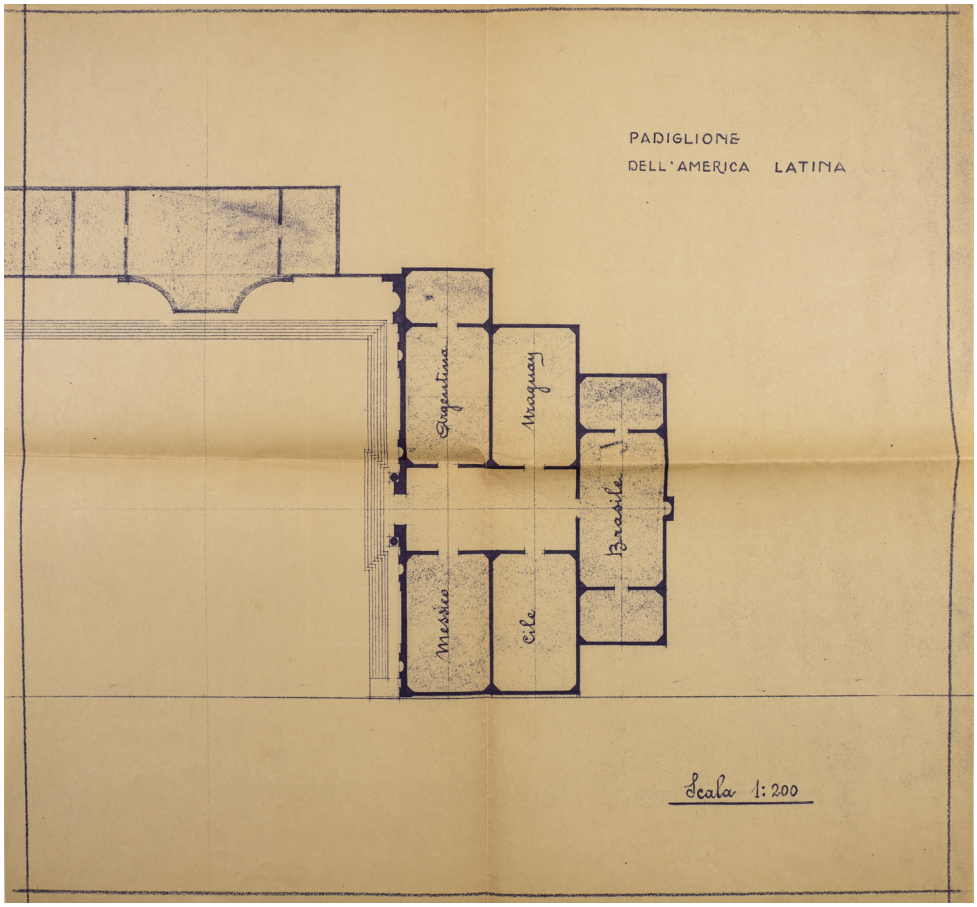


fig. 3
Padiglione dell'America Latina. "Disegni Padiglione + Scorcio Giardini", ASAC – SNP, b.15, © La Biennale di Venezia

demolished in 1964 to make way for the Brazilian pavilion.[45] The Latin American Pavilion was to be located on the site of the present Greek pavilion, with five separate spaces devoted to Mexico, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and Brazil.[46] [Fig. 3].

For the Latin American pavilion project, the Biennial's main interlocutor was the sculptor Vicente Morelli, born in Naples but based in Uruguay – one of the many unofficial transatlantic cultural diplomats on whom the Biennial has often relied to forge links with foreign art worlds.[47] In January 1931, Morelli wrote to Maraini to inform him that the Italian Foreign Minister, Emilio Pagliano, was "enthusiastic" about the project to increase the number of pavilions at the Biennale that Morelli had presented to him, as it would be "of great benefit for the cultural exchange between Italy and Latin America".[48] The next day Maraini received the following telegram from Pagliano:

45
See Giovanni Bianchi, "Il Padiglione Venezia, uno spazio alla Biennale per le arti decorative", *Quaderni della donazione Eugenio Da Venezia*, 14 (2005): 87-99; Giovanni Bianchi, "Brenno Del Giudice: una 'moderna' tradizione", in Marina Docci and Maria Grazia Turco (eds.), *L'architettura dell'altra modernità* (Roma: Gangemi, 2010), 268-79; Vittorio Pajusco, "Brenno Del Giudice e Duilio Torres architetti della Biennale", in Francesca Castellani, Martina Carraro, and Eleonora Charans (eds.), *Lo IUAV e la Biennale di Venezia: figure, scenari, strumenti* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2016), 29-48

46
"Disegni Padiglione + Scorcio Giardini", ASAC – SNP, b.15. The project for the Latin American pavilion is unsigned.

47
"Vicente Morelli", MNAV- Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, http://acervo.mnav.gub.uy/obras.php?q=na:639 (accessed July 2022). Morelli participated in the 1926 Biennale with his sculpture "Madonnina": http://asac.labiennale.org/it/passpres/artivisive/sem-ricerca.php?scheda=275305&p=1 (accessed July 2022).

48
Vicente Morelli to Antonio Maraini, 20 January 1931, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC—SNP, b.15.

> Mr. Vicente Morelli, Uruguayan painter [sic], reported that the management of this exposition would be willing to cede one or more pavilions to the governments of the Latin American republics. It would be appreciated to know the extent of the offer and its conditions.[49]

Several letters in the Biennale archives written by Pagliano and the frequency with which he is mentioned in Morelli's letters demonstrate the importance of the Latin American pavilion for Italian diplomacy in the early 1930s. With this reassurance, the Biennale felt justified in directly inviting Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay to share a new pavilion in Sant'Elena. It is not entirely clear why these countries were singled out: they all had important Italian emigrant communities and were among the largest on the continent, but Peru and Venezuela also did and yet were not included in the Padiglione dell'America Latina. Artists from Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, as I have shown above, had already exhibited at the Biennial, but none from Chile and Uruguay. By sharing a pavilion, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay would also share the cost of building it, while receiving all the facilities offered by the Biennial: free use of the site, assistance with transport, packing and unpacking of the works, as well as overseeing the pavilion and press publicity.[50] Invitations were sent out in July 1931.

A month later, the Argentine ambassador confirmed receipt of the invitation and assured Maraini that he would be in touch as soon as the Minister of Foreign Relations gave him precise instructions.[51] In October 1931, Maraini received a negative reply from Argentina: despite the project being approved by the Argentine National Directorate of Fine Arts, the country had no funds to contribute to the Latin American pavilion at the Biennale, "even though participation in such a prestigious exhibition would be an honour for the nation and an encouragement for the exhibiting [artists]", as Argentine officials wrote.[52]

The Chilean ambassador also acknowledged receipt of the Biennale's invitation, but there seems to have been no follow-up, as there are no further letters on the subject in the Biennale's archives.[53] The Biennale's archives also have no record of how Mexican officials reacted to the Latin American pavilion project, but they do have a copy of the Brazilian ambassador's letter to Maraini, in which he regretted (without further explanation) that "my government finds it impossible at this time to agree to contribute to the construction of the great Latin American pavilion, despite the importance of this exhibition".[54] We do not know from this laconic *communiqué* whether economic or geopolitical reasons, or rather Brazil's aforementioned reluctance to embrace the concept of Latin America, led the Brazilian authorities to refuse to participate in the Padiglione dell'America Latina.

The Biennale's archives contain a copy of the letter sent by the Uruguayan ambassador to Italy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recommending the country's participation in the Latin American pavilion, which gives us a valuable insight into how some of those involved saw the importance of this project for countries that aspired to geopolitical importance and yet struggled to have a significant artistic presence in Europe. The Latin American Pavilion, as the Uruguayan ambassador wrote, "would offer painters and sculptors from our country a regular opportunity to present their works in the international arena that characterises the

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49 Emilio Pagliano to Antonio Maraini, January 21, 1931, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC—SNP, b.15.

50 Biennale di Venezia to unknown, February 19, 1931, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC—SNP, b.15.

51 Fernando Pérez to Antonio Maraini, August 22, 1931, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC—SNP, b.15.

52 Ministerio de Justicia e Instrucción Pública de la Nación Argentina, October 31, 1931, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC—SNP, b.15.

53 F. Figueroa to Antonio Maraini, September 10, 1931, "Chile", ASAC – SNP, b.15.

54 Ambassade du Brésil to Antonio Maraini, October 7, 1931, "Brazil". ASAC – SNP, b.15.

Biennale, and to have them judged in competition with those of European exhibitors", a long-standing ambition of Latin American artists. "The realisation of this project", the Ambassador continued, "would also contribute to the effective intensification of our cultural relations with Italy"[55] – the Biennale was thus both an international environment and a space for cultivating bilateral relations; not really a neutral "Geneva of the arts", but rather the genteel face of Mussolini's international politics. A few months later, however, the Uruguayan artistic authorities (like their Argentinean counterparts) rejected the invitation because it came "at such a distressing time for our national finances, which is the reason why its crystallisation into a beautiful reality will be postponed for who knows how long".[56]

Morelli had anticipated, in a letter to Maraini, that economic difficulties might trouble the project of the Padiglione dell'America Latina: "The crisis has spread to all those rich republics, and this may stop our enterprise for the time being – but it will pass", he wrote at the end of 1931.[57] He was probably thinking of the effects of the Great Depression as well as the political instability that plagued the region throughout the 1930s. In retrospect, the violent regime changes in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay, and the unstable short presidency of Pascual Ortiz Rubio in Mexico (1930-1932), made any form of collaboration between these countries on a cultural project in Europe virtually impossible. It is not clear whether the Biennale officials ignored Latin America's economic and political conditions, or whether they thought they would be overcome in the interest of establishing cultural relations with the Fascist regime. In any case, it was clear that the priorities of the art worlds of Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, and Uruguay lay elsewhere at the time.

Nevertheless, Morelli did not lose faith in the Latin American pavilion project – for example, he suggested to Maraini that Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay be invited to participate in the International Congress of Contemporary Art organised during the 1932 Biennale. Even if they could not actually take part, as Morelli wrote,

> it would be an opportunity for these republics to keep the Venice Biennale in mind, and at the same time for them to see how the Biennale, despite the impossibility of the moment that prevents these republics from building their pavilion, always keeps them in mind [...], which I think will be appreciated by South American artists.[58]

In February 1932, Morelli wrote again to the Biennale:

> The crisis in Latin America is quite serious – but I have faith that this situation will soon improve and that we will still be able to reconsider the pavilion [...] We are at the beginning of [19]32 and we still have two years ahead of us. Hope is not lost.[59]

Maraini agreed with Morelli that inviting Latin American representatives to the Congress was a good idea – and Morelli suggested also inviting Latin American ambassadors to the opening of the 1932 Biennale since

55
Ubaldo Ramón Guerra to Juan Carlos Blanco, (July 29, 1931), "Uruguay", ASAC-SNP, b. 15.
56
Domingo Bazzurro to Antonio Maraini, September 12, 1931, "Uruguay", ASAC—SNP, b. 15.
57
Vicente Morelli to Antonio Maraini, November 20, 1931, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC—SNP, b. 15.
58
Vicente Morelli to Antonio Maraini, undated end of 1931-early 1932, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC—SNP, b. 15.
59
Vicente Morelli to Antonio Maraini, 8 February 1932, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC—SNP, b. 15.

> almost all [the Ambassadors] have recently changed and perhaps most of them are not familiar with the exhibition and if they go to Venice they will see "de visu" the grandeur and importance [of the Biennale] and of our project".[60]

Acting as veritable diplomats, both Maraini and Morelli believed that the 'soft power' of art could help Latin American representatives understand Italy's institutions and build broad support for the Fascist regime's economic and political aims in the region.

Morelli continued to work tirelessly on the Latin American Pavilion project with his Uruguayan contacts. In March 1932, he sent an official letter to Maraini asking for further clarification on the Padiglione dell'America Latina: would it be possible to avoid the expense of building a new pavilion by using an existing one? (A hand-written note from the Biennale laconically replied: "At the moment there is no such pavilion"). Morelli concluded on a hopeful note:

> I am pleased that the country of the promoter of this beautiful project is the first to take an interest in it, and I hope that, like Uruguay, the other four Latin American countries invited to participate will decide to ensure that our aspiration is realised at the 1934 Biennale, both in the name of art and for a greater artistic and cultural understanding between the countries of Latin America and this most noble nation.[61]

1932 was the year in which Uruguay's economic crisis, linked to the 1929 crash, reached its climax, and it was also the year in which President Gabriel Terra pushed for the constitutional reform that he would finally impose in 1933 with a "march on Montevideo" inspired by Mussolini's "march on Rome" of 1922. None of these economic or political aspects, however, emerge from Morelli and Maraini's correspondence: cultural diplomacy in this case functions as a veritable strategy of obfuscation for Italian and Uruguayan geopolitical interests.

And yet the "Pavilion of Latin America" was not to be. The last attempt to include an official Latin American representation at the Venice Biennale during Maraini's Secretariat was a project spearheaded by the Italian ambassador in Brazil, Vittorio Cerruti, in 1932. The year 1932 was the fiftieth anniversary of Giuseppe Garibaldi's death and the Fascist regime sponsored several celebrations and public ceremonies that were incorporated into the festivities for the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome.[62] Garibaldi's politics, however, were quite controversial from a Fascist point of view, so much of these celebrations centred on the figure of his Brazilian wife Anita, whose remains were buried in Rome and who was commemorated with a new monument on the Gianicolo, inaugurated by Mussolini in June 1932. As part of these celebrations, Cerruti encouraged Italian emigrants in Brazil to finance some form of tribute to Anita. But instead of a "modest monument to Anita in Rio de Janeiro", Cerruti wrote to the industrialist Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata (president of the Biennale),

> I had thought that it would be nice, on behalf of the Italian community in Brazil, to offer this government a permanent pavilion at the Venice Biennale, a pavilion that could be erected in the name of

60 Ibid.

61 Vicente Morelli to Antonio Maraini, March 10, 1932, "Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina", ASAC—SNP, b. 15.

62 For the contentious appropriation of Garibaldi's myth on the part of fascism see Mario Isnenghi, "Usi politici di Garibaldi, dall'interventismo al fascismo", *Rivista di storia contemporanea* XI, no. 4 (1982): 513-522; Claudio Fogu, "Fascism and Historic Representation: The 1932 Garibaldian Celebrations", *Journal of Contemporary History* 31, no. 2 (1996): 317-345; Eva Cecchinato, "Modello guerriero o eredità ideale ? La tradizione garibaldina tra appropriazioni fasciste e recuperi antifascisti", *Transalpina. Études italiennes*, no. 15 (December 7, 2012): 119-138.

> Anita Garibaldi and that would remain as a worthy monument of the gratitude of the Italians who found ample hospitality in this country. Brazilian artists, so many of whom are children of our blood, would have had an incentive to produce ever better works, knowing that they would be able to exhibit them at the greatest art exhibition in the world. On the other hand, the Brazilian government would have had reason to be grateful to the Italians living here for the gift they received and, above all, for the great influence that their presence at the Venice Biennale would have had on Brazilian art.[63]

But the funds that Cerruti was able to collect from Italian emigrants in Brazil were not enough to build an independent pavilion at the Giardini. Despite the Biennale's enthusiasm for Cerruti's project, this too remained unfulfilled. Like the other Latin American countries mentioned above, Brazil would have to wait decades to attain national representation at the Biennale. Its pavilion on the island of Santa Elena was inaugurated in 1964, although the creation of the Bienal de São Paulo in 1951 (spearheaded by a child of Italian emigrants, Francisco "Ciccillo" Matarazzo) perhaps better fulfilled the aims of Italian-Brazilian friendship outlined in Cerruti's letter. Brazil and Uruguay, which inaugurated its pavilion in 1960, are the only countries originally invited to be part of the Padiglione dell'America Latina that today have a permanent building at the Biennale.

Conclusion

Although Latin American artists continued to exhibit sporadically during the last years of the Maraini administration, the Biennale did not pursue the construction of permanent pavilions for these countries at this time. After the invasion of Ethiopia and the sanctions imposed on Italy by the League of Nations, pan-American politics gained momentum, aligning Latin American nations with the United States rather than with the transatlantic networks envisioned by the Italian fascists. During the Second World War, contrary to what fascist ideologues in Italy had hoped throughout the 1920s and 1930s, all of Latin America (with the exception of Argentina) immediately sided with the Allies against Germany, Italy, and Japan.

However, the idea of a Latin American Pavilion was taken up again in very different geopolitical circumstances in 1972, when the first 'Padiglione dell'Istituto Italo-Latinoamericano' was inaugurated at the Biennale. This pavilion opened regularly at the Biennale from 1986 to 2015. By the 1970s, the idea of 'Latin America' – as a geopolitical entity identified with the Non-Aligned/Third World bloc – was accepted as a given by many European intellectuals and art critics, for whom the region's cultural production was relevant only in so far as it had a strong anti-US imperialist thrust. However, despite being curated by Latin American critics in several of its iterations, the IILA pavilion was not directly managed by Latin American countries. The Istituto Italo-Latinoamericano is an intergovernmental body based in Italy, founded in 1966 thanks to Amintore Fanfani, the Italian Foreign Minister and President of the 20th UN General Assembly that year. The fact that it is managed by an institution based in Italy, rather than granting autonomy to Latin American countries directly, makes the "Padiglione dell'Istituto Italo-Latinoamericano" very different from the Padiglione dell'America Latina envisaged by Morelli and Maraini, although, like the latter, it remains a diplomatic project disguised as a cultural one.[64] In other ways, however, the "Padiglione dell'ILAA" was the heir to its unrealised inter-war predecessor, in that it sought to provide a space for artists from Latin

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Vittorio Cerruti to Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, June 14, 1932, "Brasile", ASAC – SNP, b.15.

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Simone Zacchini, "Il Padiglione dell'Istituto Italo-Latino Americano alla Biennale di Venezia. Storia di un progetto d'identità culturale", *Quaderni Culturali* IILA 1, no. 1 (2019): 85-99.

American countries who were still struggling to gain a foothold at the Biennale, and to broaden its scope to include countries that were often absent from the radar of the Italian (and international) art world.

Nevertheless, the "Padiglione dell'IILA", in its various iterations, often addressed the vexed notion of what, exactly, "Latin America" signified. Such a notion seems to have been considered unproblematic and straightforward in the inter-war period, as the correspondence of Biennale officials contains no reflections explaining why the Padiglione dell'America Latina included certain countries rather than others, or what characteristics the art of all these nations actually shared – it is interesting that in the Biennale documents I have consulted on this matter, there is no reference to a single Latin American artist, even though by the 1930s there was a fairly long history of painters and sculptors from that region participating in the Biennale. It was the geopolitical importance of the region, rather than an authentic interest in giving a stage to a specifically Latin American aesthetic, that guided the Biennale's efforts in the 1930s. It is crucial to acknowledge that the Italians' very superficial knowledge of the political cultures and histories of Latin America, and more specifically of the art worlds of these nations, doomed projects such as the Padiglione dell'America Latina from the outset – even if episodes such as these might force us to note the importance of emigrants' interpersonal and social networks in shaping the Venice Biennale.

The idea of the nation-state has been challenged from many quarters, and its contested nature is one of the most common criticisms directed at the organisation of the Venice Biennale. Yet the demise of the 'Padiglione dell'ILAA' shows that as Latin American art thrives in the globalised art world, it is on a national basis (rather than around the mostly fictional notion of "Latin American art") that artists from the region prefer to exhibit at the Venice Biennale. In the 2024 Biennale, for example, ten of the twenty-one Romance-speaking countries of the Americas were represented with either permanent or temporary pavilions. This very multiplicity forces us once again to consider the Biennale as a laboratory of globalisation, as well as a space of resistance to totalising narratives and the promotion of difference.[65]

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Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, "Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global", Third Text 27, no. 4 (July 2013): 442-445.

Author's Biography

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