Picturing Haiti: Philomé Obin, Hector Hyppolite, and the Participation of the Centre d'Art at the 4th Bienal de São Paulo (1957)[1]

Bruno Pinheiro

Abstract

This article analyses the participation of Philomé Obin and Hector Hyppolite, artists associated with the Centre d'Art, in Haiti's national representation at the 4th Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo in 1957. This study examines the negotiations that took place between 1951 and 1957, which made it possible for the artist to participate. The research is based on the correspondence found at the Wanda Svevo Historical Archive. Furthermore, the text highlights the involvement of the Visual Arts Section of the Pan-American Union in the production of aesthetic and political projects with the intention of achieving hegemony on a continental scale. Finally, the article proposes a reading of the works presented at the exhibition by Obin and Hippolyte. It suggests that those artists contributed to a political culture that aimed to combat the marginalisation of the Haitian social experience through the dynamics of visibility.

Keywords

Bruno Pinheiro, Bienal de São Paulo, Centre d'Art, Philomé Obin, Hector Hyppolite, Haitian modernism, 1950s.

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Picturing Haiti: Philomé Obin, Hector Hyppolite, and the Participation of the Centre d'Art at the 4th Bienal de São Paulo (1957)

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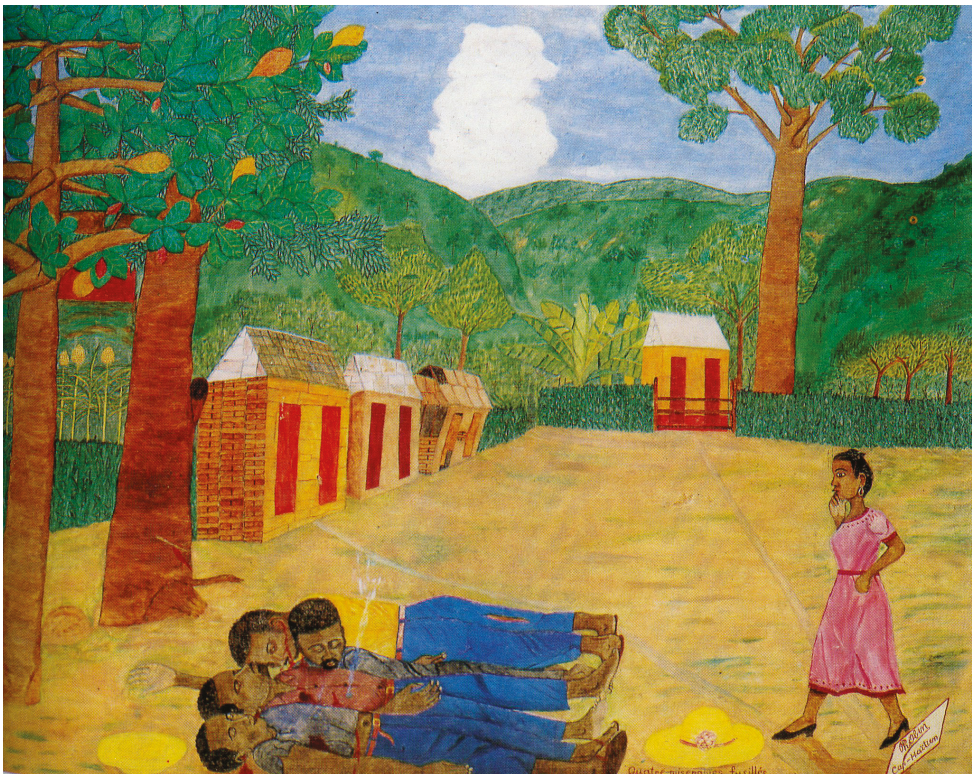

fig. 1
Philomé Obin, *Four Innocent Wretches Executed*, 1957. Oil on wood. 61x76cm. Courtesy of Collection of the Musee d'Art Haitien du College St Pierre.

1
Translated from the Portuguese by Marco Alexandre de Oliveira.

In the face of the profusion of works from the forty-three national representations at the 4th Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, held between September 22 and December 30, 1957, it is possible that the first participation of artists from the Centre d'Art of Port-au-Prince went unnoticed by a share of its audience. In a niche with works from Haiti, positioned between the representations of Bolivia and Argentina, there were ten paintings by Gabriel Alix, Wilson Bigaud, Prefete Duffaut, Hector Hyppolite, André Normil, Philomé Obin, Seneque Obin, Fernand Pierre, and Louverture Poisson – all part of the centre of artistic training and exhibition founded in 1944.

Visitors who are more attentive or interested in the art of that country may have found themselves perplexed by the explicit violence of the work *Four Innocent Wretches Executed* (1957) by Philomé Obin or the luxuriant compositions of *Blue Angel* (1947) [fig. 2] and *Composition* (1948) by Hector Hyppolite – the only artist from the center with more than one work in the exhibition.

fig. 2
Hector Hyppolite, *Blue Angel*, 1947. Oil on cardboard. 64x65cm. Courtesy of Collection of the Musee d'Art Haitien du College St Pierre.

If the way the Centre d'Art projected international modernism in the exhibition spaces can be easily understood based on the close relationship between its managers and international organisations such as the Pan-American Union and UNESCO, the notoriety that the works of Hector Hyppolite and Philomé Obin attained in the period also answers to a recognition of the solidity of the poetics that they individually constituted in their prolific careers, which may seem at first to contrast with each other. The work presented by Obin at the 4th Bienal was in line with his extensive production as a visual chronicler of his time, which began two decades before he joined the Centre d'Art in 1944. In his composition, we see the bloody bodies of four black men laid on the ground, observed by a woman who is moving towards them. On the large piece of land that surrounds them, there is no sign of their executioners. In the lower portion of the painting, there is the artist's signature along with its title in French, and its location, Cap Haitien – the city where the painter was born and

where, at the time when the work was produced, he directed the local headquarters of the centre. In the case of Hyppolite, the two works on display had been produced at a time when the painter was most productive, which led him to hold a solo exhibition at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in 1948, the same year as his premature death.[2]

The presence of works from the Centre d'Art at the Bienial meant eight long years of dialogue marked by disagreements, conflicts, and reconciliations. The Cuban art critic José Gómez-Sicre, director of the Visual Arts Section of the Pan-American Union, was the primary mediator of the negotiation. Such dialogues inform us about the consolidation of relations between this supranational entity and the Museu de Arte Moderna de Sao Paulo and position these as pivotal for understanding the professional networks of the art system during the post-war period. Indeed, they evidence the dynamics of inequality between different countries on the continent and their access to these networks. They elucidate Haiti's position in aesthetic and political projects produced on a continental scale in the period after the end of the United States military occupation of the island (1915-1934); and delineate that country's entry into the spectrum of Good Neighbor Policy actions along with its position in post-war Pan-Americanist policies.[3]

Building upon this context, the text examines the negotiations that made Haiti's participation in the 1957 Bienal de São Paulo possible, based on the correspondence held at the Wanda Svevo Historical Archive. Proceeding from this analysis, I will observe how the aesthetic and political projects that were intended to be hegemonic on a continental scale are expressed in the exhibition's design, and how the works of Obin and Hyppolite provided lines of flight to these narratives.[4]

Haitian Art in the Networks of International Modernism

The relations between the Bienal de São Paulo and Haitian art institutions – mediated by the Visual Arts Section of the Pan-American Union – dated back to the first iteration of the exhibition. On January 26, 1951, Gómez-Sicre revealed his enthusiasm for the exhibition's organisation to the art critic Lourival Gomes Machado, artistic director of the 1st Bienal. This was an official correspondence from the office headed by Gómez-Sicre in Washington, D.C. that also marked the beginning of an institutional relationship that would be quickly consolidated over the years. As a gesture of cooperation, the Cuban critic committed to the promotion of the Bienal in his publications, and made available the Pan-American Union's archive of artists from the Americas, asserting that it was the most comprehensive regarding art from the organisation's member countries. On March 2 of the same year, Gómez-Sicre sent a second correspondence to Machado, in which he lamented that there was no way to meet the request made by his Brazilian interlocutor to send the contents of the archive as the documents could only be accessed in loco. However, he vividly stated that, out of the

2
On the professional trajectories of Obin and Hyppolite, see Gerald Alexis, "The Caribbean in the Hour of Haiti", in Deborah Cullen and Elvis Fuentes (eds.), *Caribbean: Art at the Crossroads of the World* (New York: El Museo del Barrio; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Júlia Vilaça Goyatá, *Haiti popular: saberes antropológicos e artísticos em circulação (1940-1950)* (Ph.D. diss.: Universidade de São Paulo, 2019).

3
On the form assumed by Pan-American political projects in the 20th century, see Norberto O. Ferreras, "El Panamericanismo y otras formas de relaciones internacionales en las Américas en las primeras décadas del Siglo XX", *Revista Eletrônica da ANPHLAC*, no. 15 (2013): 155-174. On the impact of Pan-American networks in the constitution of liberal professions in the early decades of the 20th century, see Leonardo Faggion Novo, "O lugar da arquitetura no império da técnica: redes e projetos profissionais nos Congressos Pan-Americanos de Arquitetos (1920-1930)", *Revista Brasileira de História da Ciência* 11 (2018): 141-154. On the political programme of the José Gómez-Sicre management at the head of the Visual Arts Section of the Pan-America Union, see Claire F. Fox, *Making Art Panamerican: Cultural Policy and the Cold War* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). On the participation of Haiti in the Pan-American project, see Chantalle F. Verna, *Haiti and the uses of America: post-US occupation promises* (New Jersey NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017).

4
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri, *Mil Platôs: Capitalismo e Esquizofrenia,* vol. 1 (Rio de Janeiro: Editora 34, 1995).

twenty countries represented by the organisation, at the event the inclusion of artistic production from Mexico, Cuba, and Haiti would be unavoidable.

Thus, he indicated the institutions and individuals in each of the three countries that had to be sought so that the appropriate national representations could be organised. Gómez-Sicre suggested that the Centre d'Art and the Foyer des Arts Plastiques be contacted to prepare the exhibition that would represent Haiti. Gómez-Sicre's rapprochement with Haitian art institutions occurred years before he took on his position at the Pan-American Union in 1948. Indeed, the critic visited Port-au-Prince in 1944 as director of exhibitions at the Institución Hispanocubana de Cultura, which was based in Havana, to hold an exhibition of Cuban modernist painting at the headquarters of the Centre d'Art.[5] The space had been inaugurated that same year under the direction of the American painter Dewitt Peters who had landed in Haiti in 1943 to work as an English teacher as part of a programme linked to the Good Neighbor Policy,[6] an activity that, as Chantalle Verna observed, led a series of professionals to move from the United States to Haiti that year, as part of the effort to bring the two countries closer together.[7]

Gómez-Sicre was but one notable visitor to the Centre d'Art among many who made it possible for the production displayed there to quickly enter the networks of international modernism. In this context, the Centre also received a visit from the Austrian-American art critic René d'Harnoncourt, who had long worked at the Office of Inter-American Affairs. Years later, d'Harnoncourt became director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) and played a crucial role in the representation of the United States at the 1st Bienal de São Paulo, being a member of that exhibition's awards jury. Not by chance, it was in 1944 that the first acquisition of an Haitian work by MoMA occurred – *Cock Fight* (1940) by René Vincent –a purchase made as a result of the dialogue between Peters and d'Harnoncourt.[8] In 1945, it was the Afro-Cuban painter Wilfredo Lam's turn to spend a short period of time in Port-au-Prince, alongside the French surrealist writer André Breton,[9] which saw him holding an exhibition at the Centre d'Art the following year, in January 1946. Upon returning to Paris, Breton began to publicly associate the name of the painter Hector Hippolyte with the surrealist movement.[10] This process made it possible to intensify international exhibitions of the Centre's work in the following years.

The Foyer des Arts Plastiques was created in 1950, as a result of dissent from Centre d'Art artists who were dissatisfied with the excessive influence of foreign interests in the local art system.[11] Its creation marked the resumption of an indigenist aesthetic and rhetoric, which had been a recurring reference in the resistance to the American military occupation of the island and in the denunciation of its racist dimension. Valuing local narratives, the movement originating in the 1930s came into prominence through the work of the anthropologist and politician Jean Price-Mars, after the publication of his *Ainsi Parla l'Oncle* (1928) and the edition of the journal *Re-*

5
Fox, *Making Art Panamerican*, 85-88.

6
Luis M. Castañeda, "Island Culture Wars: Selden Rodman and Haiti", *Art Journal* 73, no. 3 (2014): 56-70.

7
Verna, *Haiti and the uses of America*, 113-121.

8
On MoMA's role in the internationalization of Haitian painting, see: Marta Dansie and Abigail Lapin Dardashti, "Notes to the Archive: MoMA and the Internationalization of Haitian Painting, 1942-1948", *Post – Notes on Modern and Contemporary Art Around the Globe*, January 3, 2018, https://post.moma.org/notes-from-the-archive-moma-and-the-internationalization-of-haitian-painting-1942-1948, accessed July 2022.

9
Lowery Stokes Sims, "Surrealism in the Caribbean: The Art and Politics of Liberation at the Crossroads of the World", in Deborah Cullen and Elvis Fuentes (eds.), *Caribbean: Art at the Crossroads of the World* (New York: El Museo del Barrio; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

10
Terri Geis, "Myth, History and Repetition: André Breton and Vodou in Haiti", *South Central Review* 32, no. 1 (2015): 56-75.

11
Dansie and Dardashti, "Notes to the Archive".

vue Indigène (1927-1928).[12] It is through significant exchanges with the African-American artists that this visual arts movement further developed.[13]

In the set of correspondence from the 1st Bienal, it is possible to observe how on March 9, 1951 identical letters were sent, to both the Centre and to the Foyer, as Gómez-Sicre had suggested. In this first message, the institutions were informed that, if they were interested in participating in the competition, they should contact the state authorities responsible to formalise their representation. Max Pinchinat, painter and director of the Foyer, quickly replied to this first message. In his correspondence, sent twelve days after receiving the initial missive, he confirmed the participation of the Foyer at the 1stBienal and declared that he had already informed Camille Llhérisson, Haiti's Minister of National Education. Pinchinat's quick reply was welcomed with excitement by Oliveiros Ferreira, undersecretary of the Bienal: "We received with great satisfaction your letter from March 21 and the news that the Government of Haiti is deeply interested in being represented at the 1st Bienal de São Paulo, thus enabling it to exhibit its already well-known modern art alongside European and American painters".[14] As a consequence of such a positive response, the exhibition organisers came to consider the Haitian representation as already determined. As such, the subsequent response from the Centre d'Art, which also expressed its interest in presenting the works of its artists, was followed by a message from the Bienal informing that the other group would be responsible for the country's representation. Twenty-four works produced by eighteen artists associated with the Foyer des Arts Plastiques were sent to the 1st Bienal,[15] which was possibly one of the first international exhibitions held by the group that had been founded just the year before. Certainly, the absence of the Centre d'Art generated comments among critics who expected to see works that had already been consolidated by international art networks. In an assessment made via correspondence with the Pan-American Union about the participation of the continent's countries in the first edition of the exhibition, MoMA reveals its dissatisfaction with Haiti's representation. Furthermore, in the Bienal's correspondence, doubt is cast on the continuity of the country's participation in future editions: "Haiti: I know that they are interested but I don't know, how far? We should like to have their primitives. But the real ones".[16] In this brief comment, the emphasis given to the expectation to see "authentic primitives" in the Haitian offerings, echoed one of the multiple meanings the expression had in the art system: the constant naturalisation that the presence of subalternised racial groups in art institutions should always be under tutelage. This issue is reflected in the quest to keep the narratives associated with the artistic production of these groups under the control of mediators.[17]

The expectations expressed by the Bienal were met in the second iteration of the exhibition, in which the Centre d'Art was the only institution involved. On March 24, 1953, the invitation was sent to the Centre and the consular authorities of both countries, a procedure which demonstrates the Bienal's greater alignment with the current protocols of international relations. On the occasion of this first

12
On the intellectual debates about the Haitian indigenist movement, see: Frantz Rousseau Déus, "The Construction of Identity in Haitian Indigenism and the Post-Colonial Debate", *Vibrant* 17 (2020): 1-17.

13
On the exchanges between African-American and Haitian artists in modernism, see: Krista A. Thompson, "Preoccupied with Haiti: The Dream of Diaspora in African American Art, 1915-1942", *American Art 21,* no. 3 (2007): 74-97.

14
Correspondence from Oliveiros Silveira to Max Pinchinat, 10 April 1951. 01-00173-00029, Folder 20-7. Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, São Paulo, Brazil.

15
Among them were: Dieudonnè L. Cedor, Spencer Despas, Dènis Emile, Joseph Eustache, Renè Exume, Enguerrand Gourgue, Luckner Lazard, Joseph Jacob, Alexandre Jeanty, Emmanuel Jolicoeur, Luckner Lazard, Gabriel Leveque, Lusimons Merelus, Max L. Pinchinat, Elzire Mallebranche Pinchinat, Denis Vergin, Spencer Despas, and Lucien Price.

16
Correspondence from Arturo Profili to José Gómez-Sicre, 28 January 1953. 01-00494-00010, Folder 57-2. Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, São Paulo, Brazil.

17
On the perpetuation of practices of symbolic tutelage connected to the "primitive art" category, see: Sally Price, *Arte primitiva em centros civilizados* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ, 2000).

contact, Arturo Profili, general secretary of the Bienal, makes clear the organiser's expectations in relation to the profile of the expected works: "we hope that modern artists from Haiti, and especially the group of primitives, will participate in our manifestation".[18] Then he names them: "Obin, Hyppolite, Prefet Dufant, Wilson Bigaud, Rigaud Benoit, etc". This description not only insists on the interest expressed in the correspondence exchanged with the Pan-American Union, but also reflects the practice consolidated within the Bienal of suggesting to participating countries – or at least to a considerable portion of them – the character of the works that the exhibition expected to receive, which, in relation to the representations of Latin-American countries, occurred in dialogue with the aesthetic and political projects led by Gómez-Sicre.

The Centre d'Art's first reply to the invitation occurred on May 9, 1953. In the letter, Jansen Saley, the interim director of the institution at that time, confirmed the institution's interest in participating. In the same correspondence, however, he revealed that the cost of shipping the works would be an obstacle to participation, an issue that he said he would try to resolve by seeking support from the Haitian government and the Pan-American Union, a topic that had already caused a point of conflict in the previous competition. At the 1st Bienal, the Foyer works sent to São Paulo had been posted back to Port-au-Prince with funds coming from the sale of one of the works present in the exhibition, *Marchand de poisons* [Fish Merchant], by Luckner Lazard – purchased by an employee of the diplomatic service of the United States of Brazil.[19] At the 2nd Bienal, this logistical issue triggered tensions between the museum and Gómez-Sicre's office. Due to the lack of institutional support, the Centre sent eight works, a number that they considered limited. The works were delivered to the Brazilian embassy in Port-au-Prince but, for reasons that remain a mystery, were never displayed. Likewise, the list of works that were considered lost and the text produced by Pierre Monossiet, the assistant director of the Centre d'Art, were not published in the catalogue.

Finally, the Centre's paintings were exhibited at the 4th Bienal, in 1957. Once the invitation was sent, the organisers asked Gómez-Sicre to mediate the negotiation several times. Peters confided to the Cuban critic his extreme distrust since the disappearance of the works four years earlier. The problem was then addressed as follows: shortly before the Bienal, Peters was in Washington with a group of works to be exhibited in the city. Gómez-Sicre persuaded Peters to make a selection among the works and send them to São Paulo with transportation guaranteed by the Pan-American Union, which was how São Paulo finally saw the by then famous paintings by the Centre d'Art artists Gabriel Alix, Wilson Bigaud, Prefete Duffaut, Hector Hyppolite, André Normil, Philomé Obin, Seneque Obin, Fernand Pierre, and Louverture Poisson.

The Centre d'Art Goes to the Bienal de São Paulo

Upon analysis of the floor plan of the 1957 Bienal, it is possible to identify in its exhibition design the centrality of aesthetic projects that were consolidated as hegemonic. That year's exhibition took place at Industry Palace, one of the exhibition pavilions inaugurated along with Ibirapuera Park a few years earlier, to hold the celebrations of the 4th Centenary of the City of São Paulo. Upon entering the building designed by Oscar Niemeyer, visitors were greeted by an exhibition about Brasília – a city whose construction had begun in February of that same year, and whose buildings would all

18 Correspondence from Arturo Profili to Dewitt Peters, March 24, 1953. 00466-00005, Folder 51-4. Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, São Paulo, Brazil.

19 In the first editions of the São Paulo Biennial, issues linked to the lack of access to transport logistics for the works were a central issue for many of the national representations, above all those located in the global south. Similar experiences were observed by Luciara Ribeiro in representations from the African continent: Luciara Ribeiro, "Modernismos Africanos nas Bienais de São Paulo (1951-1961)" (MA thesis: Universidade Federal de São Paulo, 2019).

be designed by the same architect. The law that transformed it into the new federal capital had been signed a week after the exhibition started, and for a large part of the São Paulo public, the building they entered to see the exhibition, whose lines mirrored a solid project of state modernism, would become their archetypal representation of the city of the future. As suggested by the public's initial contact with the exhibition, a rhetoric of power guides the design of the entire visitor route.

When accessing the first floor, visitors had contact with the Brazilian representation, which the Bienal decided to present alongside those from countries in the Global North that seemed connected due to their lack of alignment with regional narratives: Canada, Switzerland, Austria, and Israel. The Eskimo pavilion, located on the same floor, had been organized by the Canadian government. Nevertheless, it presented a series of indigenous artworks whose authorship was unknown. The vast majority of national representations were located on the second floor of the building. Upon arrival via the ramp that connected the two floors, visitors were greeted by the representation of the Pan-American Union, which was established during the previous iteration of the exhibition as the only official representation of a supranational body. In the oimmense open space surrounding the ramp, seventeen works representing the countries of the Americas were arranged. Such a sequence of rooms was completed with works from the United States, which occupied a proportionally larger space in comparison to other countries, thus allowing them to be viewed in isolation. As a consequence, the spatial arrangement produced a rigid border that separated works from the Americas from those of Europe, Asia, and Africa, which occupied the following rooms of the pavilion.

The display of works from Latin American countries, located between the representations of the Pan-American Union and the United States, staged in space the close relationship established between the Bienal and the cultural policies of Pan-Americanism. The way in which these countries were distributed in the exhibition space, in niches of varying sizes and juxtaposed in an apparently random way, provides little information about the multiple positionalities of the aesthetic and political projects constituted in each of these countries by their artists. Moreover, it does little to reveal the possible alignment of these individuals with the interests expressed by the Bienal in its correspondence. In this sense, Obin's *Four Innocent Wretches Executed* radically distances itself from expectations regarding "authentic primitives" planned for the Haitian representation, thus making the work an important document that informs us about aspects of the political experience of his country and about the relation between the painter and the art system.

Obin was part of the first generation of painters from the Centre d'Art, and his professional career was permeated by the internationalisation of Haitian painting. Upon receiving news of the opening of the art space in Port-au-Prince, Obin sent a gift to the institution. The painting, produced in 1944 and titled *Visite du président F.D. Roosevelt a Cap Haitien, 5 Juillet 1934* [Visit of President F.D. Roosevelt to Cap Haitien, 5 July 1934], portrayed the visit of American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the north of the island in the previous decade.[20] Roosevelt's trip to the city where Obin was born and lived his entire life became an official act that led to the end of the occupation of Haitian territory by the USA army and to the country's entry into the spectrum of the Good Neighbor Policy.[21]

To gift the newly created Centre d'Art with a piece about such a topic signals the optimistic perception that the painter had at that time about the political changes that had occurred over the previous ten years. When visiting the Centre d'Art in 1944, Gómez-Sicre was introduced to the aforementioned painting by Obin, which led him to suggest to Peters that the institution diversify the profile of its painters by including individuals from the urban and rural working classes.[22] This assessment led not only to the transformation of the profile of the institution's artists, but also to

20
Goyatá, *Haiti popular*, 170.
21
Verna, *Haiti and the uses of America*, 62-72.
22
Goyatá, *Haiti popular*, 169-171.

the creation of the Centre's second headquarters, based in Cap Haitien and directed by Obin. In the work from 1957, which was sent to the 4th Bienal, Obin makes use of a much less optimistic political rhetoric, thus reflecting the period in which the country was becoming a neighbour in the political field. That year, François Duvalier would be elected president, leading to a rupture with the democratic system and establishing a state of exception in line with other authoritarian experiments that spread through different Latin American countries in the second half of the 20th century. In the year that Obin completed his painting, the Tonton Macoute, a Duvalierist paramilitary militia, was already executing political enemies of the regime in the countryside and the cities.

For the Bienal's audience, the straightforward political rhetoric of Obin's painting seemed to contrast with the other nine works on display, which depicted everyday scenes, religious subjects, or dreamlike compositions. Hyppolite's paintings, meanwhile, evidence a significantly different perspective. Completed a decade earlier, when the country's political climate was radically different from that of 1957, they prove foundational for observing a clear difference in the poetics produced by both individuals in the face of the reality that they were experiencing.

Hyppolite's paintings stand out for their dreamlike portraiture of black women framed by elements of flora and fauna. While in *Blue Angel* he presents a floating figure whose body is transformed into a mass of colour by the blue dress that she is wearing, *Composition the profile of a nude figure* [fig. 3] reveals his concern for drawing the body. At the time when he completed the two paintings, Hyppolite was at the height of his brief professional career. The painter joined the Centre d'Art in 1944, when he also began to circulate his works in the art system. In the following years, Hyppolite continually participated in group exhibitions in Haiti and abroad. In 1948, funded by UNESCO, he held his first solo exhibition abroad, in Paris and New York In the same year, Hyppolite died in Port-au-Prince, causing great public commotion.[23]

A hypothetical visitor who has seen the works of the two painters might conceive of their attitudes towards social life as antonymous. Although I did not analyse primary documents that would allow me to approach the specificities of the experience of each of these individuals in greater detail, I will present a reading by the contemporary Haitian novelist Dany Laferrière that will help us to clarify these differences. In the novel *Pays sans chapeau* (A Country Without a Hat), Laferrière, son of François Duvalier and political exile from the regime of Jean-Claude Duvalier, describes a neighbour of his in Haiti, who worked as a highly successful painter. According to him, the painter created "Grand landscapes. Enormous fruits. A luxuriant nature. Slender, hieratic women who descend the hills with enormous vegetable baskets on their heads" – a description that evokes the works created by Hyppolite.[24] Faced with the international circulation of the painter's work, Laferrière describes the following situation:

> One day, a journalist from the *New York Times* came up to me.
> "Baptiste," he asked, why do you always paint landscapes that are so green, so rich, trees bending from the weight of ripe fruit, smiley people, while around you there is only poverty and desolation?"
> A moment of silence.
> "What I paint is the country I dream of."
> "What about the real one?"
> "The real one I don't need to dream of".[25]

23
In her doctoral dissertation, Júlia Vilaça Goyatá performs a detailed analysis of the notes of the French anthropologist Alfred Métraux and the images captured by the Franco-Brazilian photographer Pierre Verger who would witness the tributes to Hyppolite in Port-au-Prince after his death. See "Haiti popular: saberes antropológicos e artísticos em circulação (1940-1950)" (Ph.D diss.: Universidade de São Paulo, 2019).

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Dany Laferrière, *País sem chapéu* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2011), 217.

25
Laferrière, *País sem chapéu*, 217.

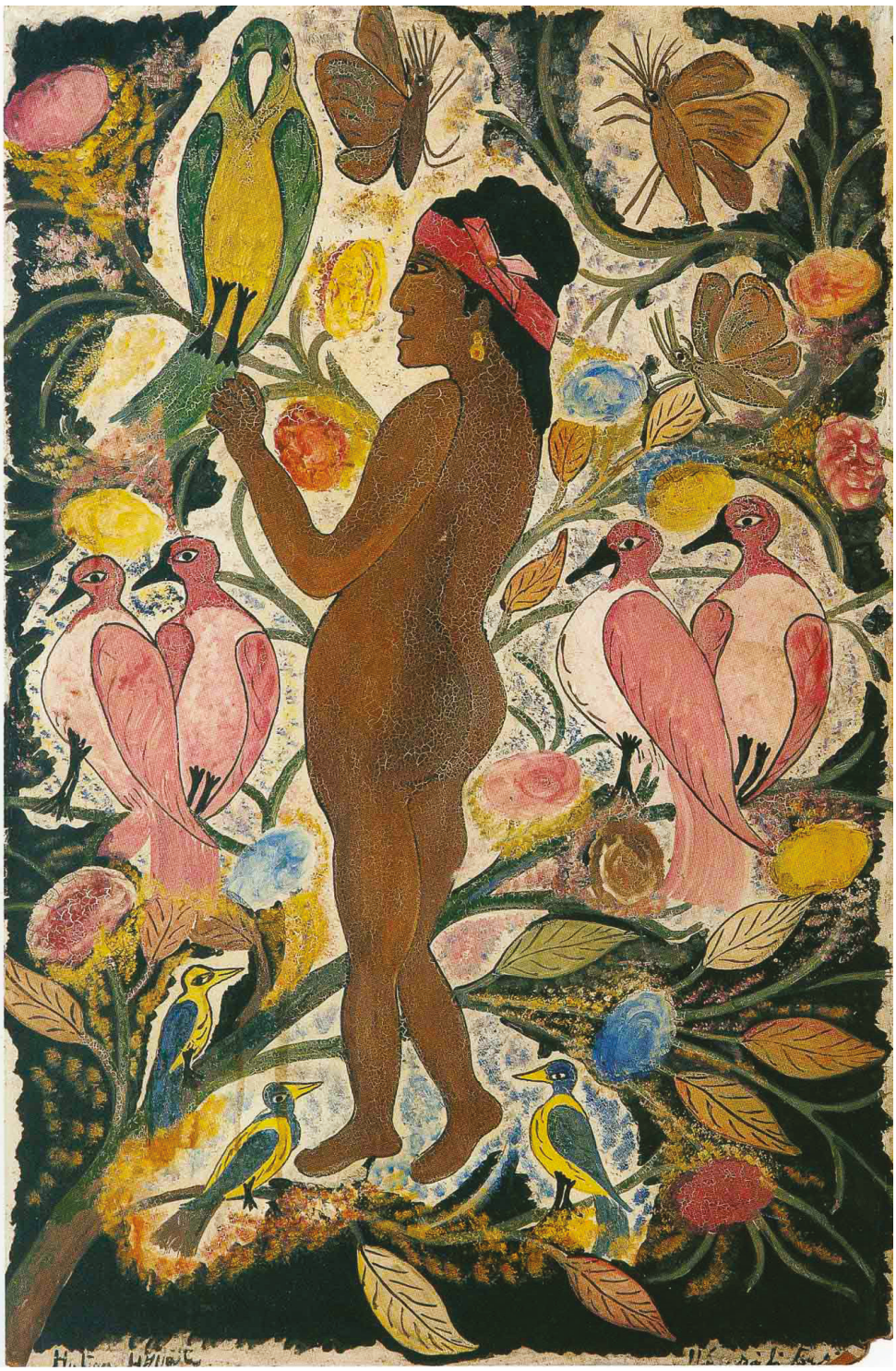

fig. 3
Hector Hyppolite, *Composition*, 1948. Oil on cardboard. 86x67cm. Courtesy of Collection of the Musee d'Art Haitien du College St Pierre.

Based on the novelist's writing, we can deepen the meanings produced by Hyppolite's speculative projections, in which dreamlike elements are taken as significant data from everyday reality. This distinction allows us to acknowledge the diversity of aesthetic and political projects disseminated among painters from the black working classes of Haiti. Furthermore, it expands the understanding of their practice beyond the meanings articulated by the mediators who saw Hyppolite's canvases alongside those of Obin, Wilson Bigaud, or Gabriel Alix through the prism of the "primitive" which populated the art system of the period.

Conclusion

Analysing the negotiations that led to the Centre d'Art's participation in the 4th Bienal de São Paulo, I was able to locate crucial points related to the reorganisation, on a continental scale, of the art system and its professional networks in the post-war period. Throughout the process, I observed how, over the years, the Bienal de São Paulo gained a central position in the reproduction of the aesthetic and political guidelines proposed by the Visual Arts Section of the Pan-American Union and its director, the Cuban art critic José Gómez-Sicre.

Bringing into focus the 1957 Bienal, I observed how Pan-Americanism's narratives from the mid-20th century were mirrored in a rigid way in the path designed for visitors at the exhibition, from the entrance to the niche where the works of the Centre d'Art artists were located. Moreover, I was also able to locate tensions in relation to the power projects that constituted in the period, both in the negotiations undertaken between 1951 and 1957 and in the character of the works Haiti sent to the competition. Although the individuals working at the Pan-American Union and Centre d'Art participated in similar professional networks, it is possible to identify friction in the Haitian artists' production in relation to the narratives that were presented as hegemonic. These tensions allowed me to understand the circulation of these artists in modern art spaces apart from the expectations of art critics and their understanding of "authentic primitives".

As such, the political narratives of Philomé Obin and the visionary fantasies of Hector Hyppolite gain historical density by reproducing elements of a political culture interested in producing visibility for local narratives in national and international art spaces. Whether by giving continuity to the tradition of images that, between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, sought to support a nation-building project born from the successful revolution of enslaved black women and men that occurred on the island, or through its developments in the 20th century, in which modernist protocols encountered the constant subalternisation of the country within international power dynamics.[26] These articulations prove pivotal for understanding the Haitian painters that participated in the 4th Bienal de São Paulo and their respective poetics as distinct ways of approaching the same social reality. Such perspectives can be situated as part of a political culture that sought, based on a dynamic of visibility, to combat the subordination of the Haitian social experience. These positions, each in their own manner, expand beyond the hegemonic narratives constituted at the time between national projects and regional blocs.

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On the Haitian artistic traditions from the 18th to 19th centuries see: Gerald Alexis, "The Caribbean in the hour of Haiti"; Bethânia S. Pereira, "Os dois retratos de Jonathas Granville: categorias raciais e representação artística nos Estados Unidos e Haiti no século XIX", Revista Eletrônica da ANPHLAC 27 (2019): 12-36.
For recent works about the internationalisation of Haitian modernism see: Terri Geis, "Myth, History and Repetition"; Júlia Vilaça Goyatá, "Haiti popular"; Krista A. Thompson, "Preoccupied with Haiti"; Lindsay J. Twa, *Visualizing Haiti in U.S. Culture, 1910-1950* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

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