

Latin America at the Venice Biennale: Histories of Unrealised National Pavilions**Anita Orzes****Abstract**

The article reconstructs the histories of Latin American national pavilions, which, between 1948 and 1972, had the opportunity to build a distinctly national architecture at the Giardini but ultimately did not. By consulting unpublished documentation and analysing the cross-history of the Giardini and its pavilions, this investigation contributes to the little-explored field of research of unrealised pavilions and shows how these failed attempts are part of the dynamics and difficulties of the structure of the Venice Biennale. Furthermore, the research brings to light a complex map of political and cultural issues that interweaves the vicissitudes and choices of both the countries (Argentina and Mexico) and intergovernmental institutions (Cartagena Agreement countries), which did not obtain a permanent venue, alongside those that were successful in erecting a national pavilion (Brazil, Venezuela, and Uruguay).

Keywords

Latin American Pavilions, Brazil Pavilion, Mexico Pavilion, Argentina Pavilion, Venice Biennale

Latin America at the Venice Biennale: Histories of Unrealised National Pavilions¹

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The Giardini di Castello (hereafter: Giardini) are “a micro-city where history is reflected in the details of its planning”.² So wrote Antoni Muntadas in his working notes while preparing his participation in the 51st Venice Biennale (2005). In the Spanish pavilion, the artist presented *On Translation: I Giardini*, the result of research into the history and topographical development of the Giardini, the national pavilions erected there and the proliferation of satellite pavilions in the city. In the central hall of this pavilion, there was a rectangular module that served as a database: one side contained photographs of the pavilions of the participating countries and information about their history, while the other included a list of the names of the countries excluded from that edition.

Through this installation, Muntadas transformed the pavilion into a complex metaphor for what he considers the Venice Biennale to be: a hierarchical structure that places the countries that have a pavilion in the Giardini in a privileged position, which they maintain, without needing to legitimise it, to the detriment of the others that, forced into renting buildings in the city, constantly need to revalidate their right to be there. This is because, as stressed in a conversation between the artist, Bartolomeu Marí and Mark Wigley, the national pavilion model imposed by the Biennale seems to affirm that those countries that do not have a pavilion are not countries, transforming architecture into both a way to participate in the event with dignity and a tool for legitimising national identity.³

At that edition, five Latin American pavilions participated. Inside the Giardini were Brazil, Venezuela, and Uruguay; outside, were Argentina and the Latin American pavilion. In 2007, Mexico became the third of these satellite pavilions.

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Antoni Muntadas, “Notes, November 2004”, in *Muntadas On Translation: I Giardini* (Madrid: Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación, 2005), 141. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are by the author.

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“A Conversation Between Antoni Muntadas and Mark Wigley, New York” in *Muntadas On Translation: I Giardini*, 269 -320.

The participation of Latin America has progressively increased to the extent that the last two editions of the Biennale (2019 and 2022) included ten and eleven countries respectively.⁴

The project presented by Muntadas in the Spanish pavilion was complemented by the catalogue, which includes historical research on the history of the Giardini, accompanied by an extensive visual documentation on its urban development.⁵ The catalogue thus became a tool for the study of the Giardini and the national pavilions, and its publication made it possible to update studies that were already outdated. Indeed, until then, the main bibliographical reference was *I Padiglioni della Biennale di Venezia* by Marco Mulazzani, published in 1988.⁶ Therefore, the importance of *On Translation: I Giardini* also lies in the weight it gives to the cross-history of the Giardini and the pavilions, a conjunction which, despite its significance, has not been comprehensively studied.

In this regard, it is worth noting, firstly, that in the case of countries without a permanent venue at the Giardini, art historians have approached what we can call the ‘pavilion issue’ more in terms of projects, artists or artworks than of the history of national architecture. In the case of Latin America, an example of this is the research concerning Argentina and Mexico, countries that, since 2013 and 2015 respectively, attained a venue at the Arsenale.⁷ In both cases, studies have reconstructed the exhibitions presented at the Biennale, analysing the changing aesthetic conditions of the local art scene and the influence of different political contexts on the criteria of national representation.⁸ Similarly, in the case of the Latin American Pavilion, which participated first in 1972 and then consistently from 1986 to 2015, what have been studied are the artistic projects but not the vicissitudes inherent to the pavilion.⁹

Secondly, the existing research on the background of the Giardini, which has the merit of having studied the origin and development of the pavilions, has been mainly interested in the tangible history of this space.¹⁰ However, the pla-

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In 2019, Argentina, Chile, Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and Haiti participated; in 2022, Haiti was absent, but Bolivia and the Dominican Republic joined in.

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Muntadas, “On Translation: I Giardini”; Maria Vittoria Martini, “A Brief History of I Giardini” and Francesca Comisso, “Selected Chronology”, in *Muntadas On Translation: I Giardini*, 109-139, 206-223, and 235-267, respectively. The catalogue also contains a selected chronology that interweaves the history of the Biennale and its pavilions with that of the universal exhibitions and other biennials, as well as historical events.

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This first edition was followed by other, expanded and revised ones (2004, 2011, 2014 and 2022), which nevertheless did not make any major changes to the original corpus. On national pavilions see also the recent research Clarissa Ricci, “From Obsolete to Contemporary: National Pavilions and the Venice Biennale”, *Journal of Curatorial Studies* 9, no. 1 (2019): 8-39.

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The dates are indicative of the Visual Arts Biennial and not the Architecture one. In 2011 Argentina signed a lease for a space in the Arsenal for twenty-two years, while Mexico signed in 2013 for twenty years. Both countries are located in a large construction called *Sala d’Armi* (Weapons Rooms), consisting of two large two-storey buildings. On this, see Già Alajmo, “Kirchner come una popstar nella nuova ‘casa’ argentina”, *Il Gazzettino*, Venice, June 4, 2011; Sonia Àvila, “México firma convenio por 20 años en la Bienal de Venecia”, *Excelsior*, Mexico City, June 6, 2014.

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Rodrigo Alonso, *Berni y las representaciones argentinas en la Bienal de Venecia* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat, 2013); Carlos Molina, “Fernando Gamboa y su particular versión de México”, *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, no. 8 (2005): 117-143; Alejandra Ortiz Castañares, “Historia del pabellón mexicano en la Bienal de Venecia”, in Erika Galicia Isasmendi, Fernando Quiles García, and Zara Ruiz Romero (eds.) *Acervo mexicano. Legado de culturas* (Seville: Hacer-VOS. Patrimonio Cultural Iberoamericano, 2017), 410-429; Carolina Nieto Ruiz, “Retelling the History of the Mexico Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia”, *Storie dell’arte contemporanea / Atlante delle Biennali*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2019): 377-397; Paola Natalia Pepa, “L’argentina alla Biennale d’Arte di Venezia”, *Storie dell’arte contemporanea / Atlante delle Biennali*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2019): 305-317.

9

Simone Zacchini, “Il Padiglione dell’Istituto Italo-Latino Americano alla Biennale. Storia di un progetto d’identità culturale”, *Quaderni Culturali ILLA*, no. 1 (2022): 85-99.

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Martini, “A Brief History of I Giardini”, 206-223; Federica Martini and Vittoria Martini, “I Giardini: Topografia di uno Spazio Espositivo”, in *Venezia Venezia. 55ª Esposizione Internazionale d’arte La Biennale di Venezia, Padiglione del Cile* (Barcelona: Actar, 2013), 21 – 22; Gian Domenico Romanelli, “I Padiglioni stranieri della Biennale,” *Annuario 1976. Eventi 1975* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 1976), 838-864.

planimetries of the Giardini show that, before the map became immutable, there were numerous countries that at one time had a pavilion and today do not. This scenario becomes more complex upon examining the Historical Archive of Contemporary Arts (ASAC), which provides access to planimetries that study the possible locations of pavilions that were never built. Consulting these planimetries prompted a questioning of what can be defined as the potential yet invisible history of the Giardini.

It is also worth acknowledging that recent research has shown how the history of biennials changes when viewed from a Southern perspective. In *Biennials, Triennials and documenta*, Anthony Gardner and Charles Green ask: “What might a Southern perspective of biennials look like?”¹¹ On the basis of this investigation, they have begun to rescue the biennials of the South, destabilising the canonical narrative, redefining the temporal arc of the so-called second wave of biennials and defining alternative turning points for rethinking the history of biennials.¹²

The question can be transferred to the pavilions of the Giardini, with a specific focus on Latin America, a region more often absent than present. In fact, of the twenty Latin American countries, only three have built their pavilions. Thus, taking up the statement by Antoni Muntadas who describes the Giardini as “a micro-city where history is reflected in the details of its planning”, and understanding that the current topography represents only a part of this history, it is worth considering what a Southern perspective on the pavilions would like.

This article investigates unrealised projects of Latin American national pavilions between 1948 and 1972, significant dates in the crossed history of the Venice Biennale and the participation of Latin America. On the one hand, 1948 was the year in which the exhibition reopened after the closure dictated by the Second World War and the year in which Latin American participation began to increase under the direction of Rodolfo Pallucchini (Secretary General of the Venice Biennale, 1948-1956).¹³ On the other hand, 1972 was the last edition before the reform of the Statute (1973) and the first to see the participation of the Italo-Latin American Institute, a space that welcomed Latin American nations that did not have their own pavilion.¹⁴

This research explores previously unexamined aspects of the Venice Biennale through archival research in Italy and Brazil. By studying unpublished documents from Historical Archive of Contemporary Arts, Wanda Svevo Historical Archive and Library of the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo, the article reconstructs the history of unrealised pavilions and shows how they are integrated into the dynamics of the structure of the Biennale. This demonstrates the need of Venice to manage the success of its own model.

The article opens with a brief *excursus* that explains the origin and development of this structure. The historical contextualisation is followed by four sections that draw a complex map interweaving the vicissitudes and decisions of both countries (Argentina and Mexico) and intergovernmental institutions (Car-

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Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, *Biennials, Triennials and documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 83.

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See also Anthony Gardner and Charles Charles, “South as Method? Biennials Past and Present”, in *Making Biennials in Contemporary Times. Essays from the World Biennial Forum n° 2* (São Paulo: Biennial Foundation, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo and ICCo Instituto de Cultura Contemporânea, 2014), 37-46.

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Until this date, Argentina was the only country that had participated in the Biennale. In 1948, there were no participations from Latin America despite invitations extended by the Biennial. Under the direction of Pallucchini, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico participated for the first time in 1950, Bolivia and Cuba in 1952 and Venezuela and Uruguay in 1954. On the direction of Pallucchini see Maria Cristina Bandera, “Pallucchini protagonista della Biennale” and Lia Durante, “Le mostre all'estero delle Biennali di Rodolfo Pallucchini (1947-1957)”, *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte*, vol. 35 (2011): 75-92 and 93-116, respectively.

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For an analysis of two turning points in the history of the Biennale, such as 1948 and 1973, see Stefano Collicelli Cagol and Vittoria Martini, “The Venice Biennale at its Turning Point”, in Noemi del Haro García, Patricia Mayayo, Jesus Carrillo (eds.), *Making Art History in Europe After 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 83–100. See also Laura Moure Cecchini, “The Padiglione dell'America Latina: A Fascist Project of Cultural Diplomacy at the Venice Biennale, 1929-1932”, *OBOE Journal* 5, no. 1 (2024): 4-12.

tagena Agreement countries) that did not manage to build a permanent venue in the Giardini, and those countries (Brazil, Venezuela, and Uruguay) that did attain a national pavilion.

National Pavilions: A Brief History

The national pavilions were a logistical measure that led to the international consolidation of the Venice Biennale. Born on paper as *Esposizione biennale artistica nazionale* (National Biennale Art Exhibition) in 1893, the Biennale opened its doors as *Prima Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Città di Venezia* (First International Art Exhibition of the City of Venice) in 1895. Behind the change was the idea of the advisory committee to reserve a section for foreign artists and the survey conducted by Riccardo Selvatico (Mayor of Venice and President of the Venice Biennale, 1895) which checked its feasibility. The feedback was encouraging and it was decided to organise an international art exhibition.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the international character of the exhibition soon provoked criticism from Italian artists who felt that they did not have enough space in the Palazzo dell'Esposizione (henceforth: Central Pavilion).¹⁶ The turning point came when, in 1907, Antonio Fradeletto (General Secretary of the Venice Biennale, 1895-1914) managed to find a solution to this dilemma, proposing to place the artworks of foreign artists in national pavilions to be built in the Giardini. Countries were required to submit a project to the municipality of Venice, the institution responsible for both its approval and the transfer of the land. Once built (or purchased), the country officially owned the pavilion, and had to assume all expenses for its conservation and refurbishment. This strategy allowed the Biennale not only to have more space for Italian artists in the Palazzo dell'Esposizione but also to guarantee constant international participation, externalising costs.

The first two settlement areas were established on the two Cartesian axes that structure the Giardini: the one from the city to the *Motta di Sant'Antonio* (Montagnola), known as *Viale alla Motta*, and the one from the lagoon to the Central Pavilion, called *Viale dei Tigli*.¹⁷ In fact, the first national pavilions were either built on the left side of the *Viale dei Tigli* (Belgium, 1907; Netherlands, 1914 [1912]; Spain, 1922) or on the *Montagnola* (Great Britain, 1909; Germany, 1909; France, 1912; Russia, 1914).¹⁸

The increasing number of requests by countries meant that the Giardini began to become overcrowded in the early 1930s. To solve this problem, the area of Saint Helena Island was annexed in 1932. In the same year, the architectural complex of Brenno Del Giudice, consisting of a central hemicycle and a pavilion on either side, was constructed. In 1934, Greece and Austria joined and in 1938, the Del Giudice's complex was extended with another pavilion on each side.¹⁹

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Romolo Bazzoni, *60 anni della Biennale di Venezia* (Venice: Lombroso Editore, 1926), 13-33. The advisory committee was composed of Bartolomeo Bezzi, Enrico Castelnuovo, Antonio Dal Zotto, Marius De Maria, Antonio Fradeletto, Pietro Fragiaco, Michelangelo Guggenheim, Cesare Laurenti, Marco Levi, Emilio Marsili, Giuseppe Minio, Nicolò Papadopoli, Augusto Sèzanne, and Giovanni Stucky. Selvatico's survey was carried out among the "most eminent artists of the time", who later became part of the sponsoring committee of the 1st Biennale.

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Palazzo dell'Esposizione was the denomination given to the building in the first editions. Over the Biennale's history, it has changed its name and function several times (e.g., *Palazzo dell'Esposizione – Padiglione Centrale – Padiglione Italia*). In the documentation consulted, it appears mostly as the Central Pavilion; this nomenclature will be adopted throughout.

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The *Motta di Sant'Antonio* corresponds to a mound probably raised with the rubble of the buildings demolished for the realisation of the Giardini. In many of the documents consulted, it appears as *Montagnola*, which means 'mound' in Italian.

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The Netherlands Pavilion (used by this country since 1914) was built by the Biennale in 1912.

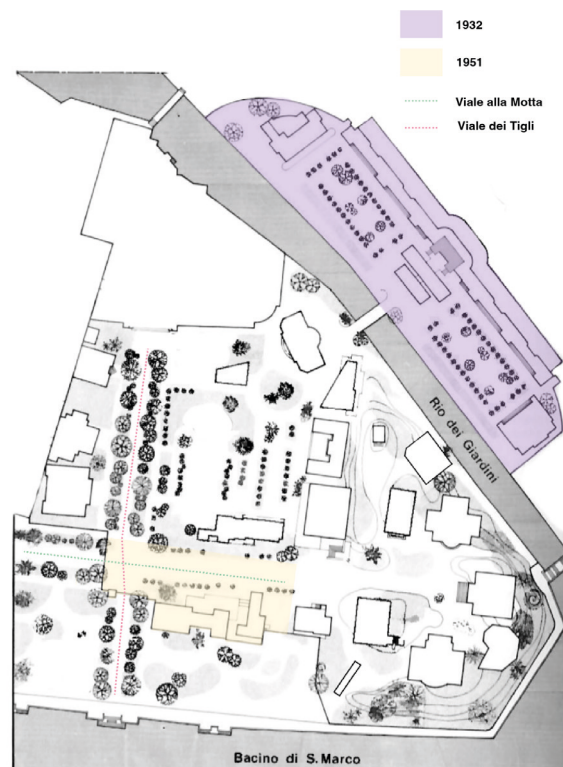
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This architectural complex hosted several national delegations. Currently, on the left of the central hemicycle are Serbia and Egypt and on the right are Poland and Romania. The central hemicycle is the Venice Pavilion. On the enlargement of the 1930s and Del Giudice's project see Marco Mulazzani, *I Padiglioni della Biennale di Venezia* (Milan: Electa, 2011), 73-85.

In the 1950s, the problem of spatial saturation was intensified due to the wave of post-war requests and the 1957 panoramic constraint. The latter prohibited the felling of trees, thus limiting the possibilities of finding new buildable areas. Consequently, the Biennale launched a series of measures to try to address the situation. Firstly, in 1951, a second enlargement was carried out [Fig. 1], then the street leading to the *Motta di Sant'Antonio* was annexed, shifting the Biennale's boundary from the Russian to the Swiss pavilion (1952). Furthermore, smaller plots of land began to be allocated. Secondly, a reorganisation project for the Giardini was launched, which sought both to restructure the Central Pavilion and to provide space for future national pavilions. Between 1958 and 1968, there were three projects that, although approved by the municipality, never got off the drawing-board.²⁰ Thanks to this project of reorganisation many nations hoped to gain a permanent venue at the Giardini during the period. Nonetheless, over the course of this decade, only a few countries inaugurated their pavilions, namely Canada (1958), Uruguay (1961), Nordic Countries (1962), and Brazil (1964).²¹

After the 1960s, only Australia (1988) and South Korea (1995) gained entrance to the Giardini. Two years before the opening of the Australian pavilion, countries without a pavilion (including Australia) had been hosted at the Arsenale, a space that would progressively be incorporated into the Biennale throughout the 1980s, becoming its second venue.²² The 1980s should also be remembered for the designation of the Giardini as a no-build zone (1988) and, a decade later, in 1998, many pavilions were declared to be of historical and artistic interest, making any

fig. 1
Illustrative reconstruction of
the two enlargements of the
Giardini of the Venice Biennale.
Reconstruction by the author,
2022.



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The three projects were by the Passarelli & Co. group (1958), Carlo Scarpa (1962-1963) and Luis Kahn (1968). For a detailed description see Gian Domenico Romanelli, "Le sedi della Biennale. Il Padiglione "Italia" ai Giardini di Castello (già Palazzo dell'Esposizione)", in *Annuario 1975. Eventi 1974* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 1975), 645-655.

21

The Nordic Countries Pavilion houses Sweden, Norway, and Finland.

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In 1986, the countries present at the Arsenale were Argentina, Australia, Cyprus, Colombia, Cuba, Italy, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, German Democratic Republic, South Korea, San Marino, and the Italo-Latin American Institute. It is important to note that, with the gradual incorporation of the Arsenale, the Biennale gained a second venue to house national pavilions. However, these accommodations are concessions of pre-existing architectural spaces for a fixed period, subject to prior agreement with the Biennale.

change definitively impossible.²³ Three years earlier, in 1995, the Biennale offered countries without a pavilion the opportunity to make use of building outside of the Giardini, an initiative that resulted in the phenomenon of satellite pavilions.

Brazil

“The Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo always longed to see one of its long-held aspirations fulfilled: that of organising the participation of some of the most significant painters of Brazilian modern art in the Biennale”.²⁴ Thus opened the letter that Francisco Matarazzo sent to Giovanni Ponti in December 1949 to endorse the Brazilian participation at the 25th Venice Biennale (1950). Ponti (Extraordinary Commissioner of the Venice Biennale, 1948-1952) expressed his gratitude to Matarazzo not only for his willingness to take charge of organising the Brazilian exhibition, but also for the offer to institute the Museum of Modern Art São Paulo Brazil award, which would contribute towards increasing the prestige of the Biennale.²⁵ He also indicated that, in order to have an official status, the participation had to have the approval of the Brazilian government.²⁶

Indeed, the “old aspiration” to which Matarazzo referred corresponded to his first attempt at organising the Brazilian participation in the 1948 Biennale. On that occasion, both the possibility of sending an official national delegation and the option of participating within a room called *Centro d’Arte Moderna del Brasile* (Modern Art Centre of Brazil) was offered.²⁷ The option they chose was the first, yet the room reserved for the country remained empty. With the exhibition already opened and the catalogue printed, Pedro de Moraes Barros (Ambassador of Brazil in Rome) informed the Biennale that they had been unable to send the artworks in time.²⁸

In 1950, in order to avoid the same *impasse*, Pallucchini contacted the diplomats referring to what had happened in 1948 and indicating the Biennale’s keen interest in the terms of collaboration offered by Matarazzo. He also requested an agreement with the Brazilian authorities so that the exhibition could have an official endorsed national character.²⁹ Located in a room within the Central Pavilion,

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Martini and Martini, “I Giardini: Topografia di uno Spazio Espositivo”, 21 - 22.

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Letter from Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho to Giovanni Ponti, São Paulo, December 5, 1949 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.05).

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The Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo was created by the initiative of industrialist and patron Francisco Matarazzo, who was its president until 1963. The prize offered was 500,000 Italian lire and was open to artists of any nationality. In 1950 it was given to the Mexican David Alfaro Siqueiros.

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Furthermore, national governments had to have received a prior invitation from the Biennale. The Brazilian government was officially invited on January 22, 1948. See “Regolamento”, in 25. *Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d’Arte* (Venice: Alfieri, 1950), 1 - 11; Letter from Giovanni Ponti to Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, Venice, January 7, 1950; Letter from Giovanni Ponti to the Ambassador of Brazil in Italy, Venice, January 22, 1948 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.05).

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The ASAC preserves Pallucchini’s response to Matarazzo but not Matarazzo’s previous letter (about the participation in 1948). Other correspondence in the archive shows that the communication took place in 1947. See Letter from Rodolfo Pallucchini to Pasquale Fiocca, Venice, December 1, 1947; Letter from Rodolfo Pallucchini to Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, Venice, January 8, 1950 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.05). The *Centro d’Arte Moderna* was the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo, inaugurated in 1948.

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On the communication of non-participation of Brazil and the response of the Biennale (its proposal to inaugurate the Brazilian exhibition at a later date) see the Telegram from Pedro de Moraes Barros to Rodolfo Pallucchini, June 15, 1948; Letter from Rodolfo Pallucchini to Pedro Moraes Barros, Venice, June 17, 1948 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.05); For an analysis of the country’s non-participation and the Brazilian political and cultural context see “1948: un’occasione mancata” in Dunia Roquetti Saroute, “La partecipazione brasiliana all’Esposizione internazionale d’arte di Venezia (1950-1964)” (PhD diss., Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia, 2019), 20-33.

29

Letter from Rodolfo Pallucchini to Mario Augusto Martini (Ambassador of Italy in Rio de Janeiro), Venice, February 23, 1950 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.05).

Brazil's inaugural participation was thus curated by the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo (MAM). The exhibition had been set up by Paolo Matarazzo and curated by José Simeão Leal (Director of the Documentation Service of the Ministry of Education).³⁰ Meanwhile, Francisco Matarazzo was organising the Bienal de São Paulo, whose first edition took place in 1951.³¹

The Museum of Modern Art (MAM), which was responsible for organising the Bienal de São Paulo, also oversaw the Brazil's participation in the Venice Biennale until 1964, fostering a closely intertwined relationship between the two biennials.³² In this inter-institutional relationship, Francisco Matarazzo played a crucial role as an interlocutor and served as the pavilion's curator on several occasions.³³ One such instance occurred in 1952 when he expressed his desire to promote national architecture.³⁴ The correspondence between the Biennale and Brazilian diplomatic institutions shows that the initial idea was to have a national pavilion in the 1954 edition, but it was not carried out.³⁵

The first real indication of what terrain was available dated back to 1958 and corresponded to the area behind the pavilions of the United States and Czechoslovakia. This proposal came in January from Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua (General Secretary of the Venice Biennale, 1958-1968), who indicated that the total area measured 191 square metres, corresponding to the brown part of the map [Fig. 2]. Due to the characteristics of the space (its being partly in pendency) and the heritage value (containing trees that could not be felled), the green area could not be encroached upon. Instead, Dell'Acqua granted the opportunity to occupy a plain area (in yellow) to obtain an overall surface of 254 square metres. He also explained that this area had initially been allocated to India but, since their project had not been fulfilled, he considered that the municipality of Venice would allow the subrogation.³⁶ Indeed, the resolution came to pass in February of that year, with prior approval of the architectural project reserved.³⁷

However, the official communication from Brazil approving the construction of the pavilion did not arrive until more than a year later. In July 1959, Francisco Matarazzo wrote to the Ambassador in Rome that "the Museum had received the agreement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the construction

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The Biennale documentation of the period under consideration uses the Italian term of *commissario*, which in this article is translated as curator.

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In the Brazil section of the Venice Biennale catalogue, the art critic Sérgio Milliet announced that the MAM was organising a biennial "on the model of the Venice Biennale". See Sérgio Milliet, "Brasile", in 25. *Esposizione Biennale internazionale d'arte* (Venice: Alfieri, 1950), 221 – 222.

32

The MAM organised the Brazilian participation in Venice until 1960 and the Bienal de São Paulo until 1961. From 1962 to 1964, the MAM and the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo (FBSP, founded in 1961) collaborated in the organisation of the Bienal de São Paulo. The FBSP has been responsible for the organisation of the Brazilian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale since 1966, with the exception of the period between 1970 and 1995 (in charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and 2009 (in charge of the Fundação Nacional da Artes -FUNARTE).

33

Matarazzo was the curator of the Brazilian Pavilion in 1952 and 1954 and from 1962 to 1968. The documentation preserved at ASAC reveals that he was one of the interlocutors arguing for the construction of the pavilion. For example, in 1964 Matarazzo went to Italy with Mario Dias Costa (Head of the Office of Cultural Promotion at the Ministry of Foreign) to discuss this issue. See Communication to Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, Rome, March 9, 1964 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.123).

34

Letter from Giovanni Ponti to Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, Venice, July 13, 1953 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.05).

35

Letter from Giovanni Ponti to Carlos Alves de Souza (Ambassador of Brazil in Rome), Venice, January 14, 1954 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.05). Since Brazil could not build the pavilion for 1954, the Biennale reserved a space in the Central Pavilion "also to return the cordial hospitality of the Second Bienal de São Paulo to the official Italian section".

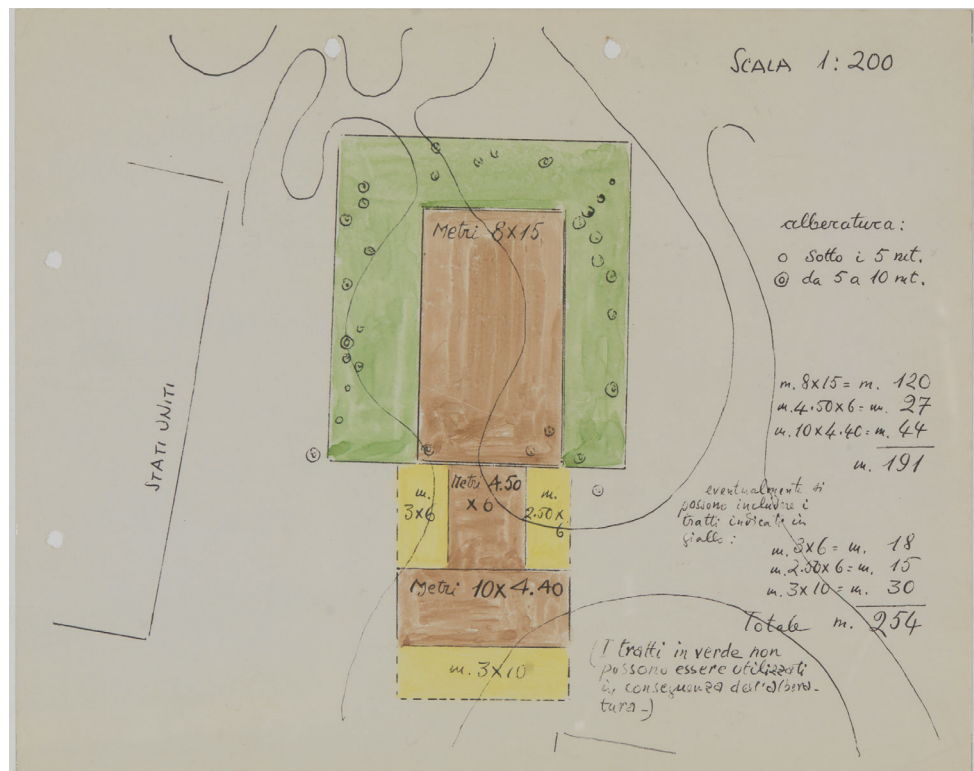
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Letter from Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua to Renato Pacileo, January 16, 1958 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.05). The lawyer Renato Pacileo was one of the interlocutors between the Venice Biennale and the Brazilian representation. As regards the Indian pavilion, this was not built for economic reasons.

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Communication from the municipality of Venice to Ente Autonomo La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, February 19, 1958 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.123).

fig. 2
Planimetry of the area offered by the Venice Biennale behind the pavilions of the United States and Czechoslovakia in 1958, Acervo de Biblioteca da FAUUSP.



of the Brazilian pavilion at the Venice Biennale”.³⁸ Brazil requested a site that would “easily allow a large number of visitors” and informed the Biennale that architect Henrique Mindlin would visit the Giardini to inspect possible locations.³⁹ Dell’Acqua reported that the available areas were the same as in 1958, with the aggravating factor that a small pavilion had been built near the United States and Czechoslovakia pavilions, for which there were ongoing sales negotiations with one country.⁴⁰ That country was Uruguay, which acquired it in 1960.⁴¹

In December 1959, the pavilion-bridge project by architects Henrique E. Mindlin, Giancarlo Palanti and Walmyr L. Amaral was ready. The document details that the choice of the site was due to the lack of other available space in the Giardini and the wish not to affect existing trees and gardens. The desired location was “the one located in the area behind the Hungary and Israel pavilions, where there is a small bridge, over the Giardini’s Canal [Rio dei Giardini]”.⁴² Aware of the peculiarity of the location, the architects emphasised that the architecture would be sober, integrating discreetly and harmoniously into the existing group of multifaceted buildings. Furthermore, the pavilion would increase the height of the existing bridge allowing on the one side, a wide and improved view of the Church of San Pietro di Castello and, on the other, a perspective of the Lagoon.⁴³

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Letter from Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho to Adolpho Cardoso de Alencastro Guimarães (Ambassador of Brazil in Rome), São Paulo, July 13, 1959 (AHWS, 01-01120).

39

The communication of the construction of the Pavilion reached the Venice Biennale through an exchange between the Italian Embassy in Rio de Janeiro and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. See “Comunicazione Ministero Affari Esteri. Oggetto: XXXV Biennale d’Arte di Venezia – partecipazione del Brasile”, Rome, July 4, 1959 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.123).

40

Letter from Gian Alberto Dell’Acqua to Arturo Porfili (General Secretary of the Bienal de São Paulo, 1953-1959), Venice, July 13, 1959 (AB FAUUSP).

41

In 1958, this pavilion accommodated Tunisia, Turkey and Malta.

42

“Il Padiglione del Brasile nella Biennale di Venezia. Progetto [1] degli architetti Henrique E. Mindlin, Giancarlo Palanti y Walmyr L. Amaral” (ASAC, FS, SP, b.05). On the project, see also “O Brasil construirá pavilhão próprio na Bienal de Veneza”, *Estado do São Paulo*, São Paulo, July 8, 1959 (AHWS, 27-00017).

43

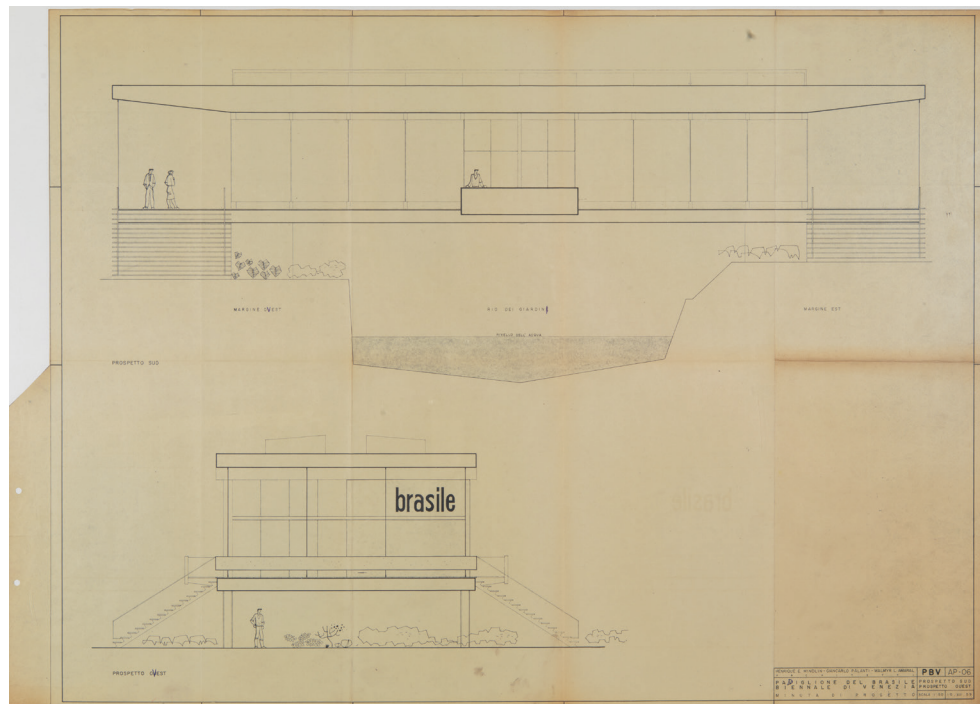
The height of the pavilion would increase from 3.5 to 5 meters above the water level.

The rectangular volume of the exhibition hall was twenty-five metres long, ten metres wide and four and a half metres high, flanked by large windows and with a balcony on each side. The floor and roof extended for five metres at each edge of the canal, allowing access via two stairways on both sides of the building and canal [Fig. 3]. The document also pointed out that it was a prefabricated metal structure that could easily be transported elsewhere in the event of a re-organisation of the Giardini' site.⁴⁴

This project generated an extensive discussion between the Biennale and the Brazilian architects, mainly because of the existing bridge. First of all, the water and gas pipes that supplied Saint Helena's Island passed under the bridge. Secondly, the bridge was not only used for public transit, but also as a loading and unloading point (with a weight-bearing capacity of thirty quintals) during the Biennale set-up. The first pavilion-bridge project envisaged moving the existing bridge to the area behind the Central Pavilion; however, due to its functional importance, the Biennale proposed not modifying its position and rather moving the pavilion-bridge to the right.⁴⁵

In response to this proposal, the Brazilian architects pointed out that such a displacement would relegate the pavilion to a rather hidden area, create an aesthetic interference between the pavilion-bridge and the existing bridge, and limit the view of the Church of San Pietro di Castello.⁴⁶ They proposed to integrating the pavilion bridge with the existing bridge by constructing a ramp bridge accessible to truck.⁴⁷ [Fig. 4] This design would align the axis of the bridge would continue to coincide with the axis of the Venice pavilion, maintaining the symmetrical visual

fig. 3
Henrique E. Mindlin, Giancarlo Palanti and Walmyr L. Amaral,
Project for Brazil Pavilion
(South Façade and West
Façade) for the XXX Venice
Biennale, 1959, Acervo de
Biblioteca da FAUUSP.



44

As previously explained, by that time there was a project to build the New Central Pavilion which would have modified the topography of the Giardini.

45

Letter from Deuglesse Grassi (Deputy Administrative Director of the Venice Biennale, 1960) to Giancarlo Palatini, Venice, March 15, 1960 (AB FAUUSP).

46

Letter from Giancarlo Palatini to Deuglesse Grassi, São Paulo, March 24, 1960 (AB FAUUSP).

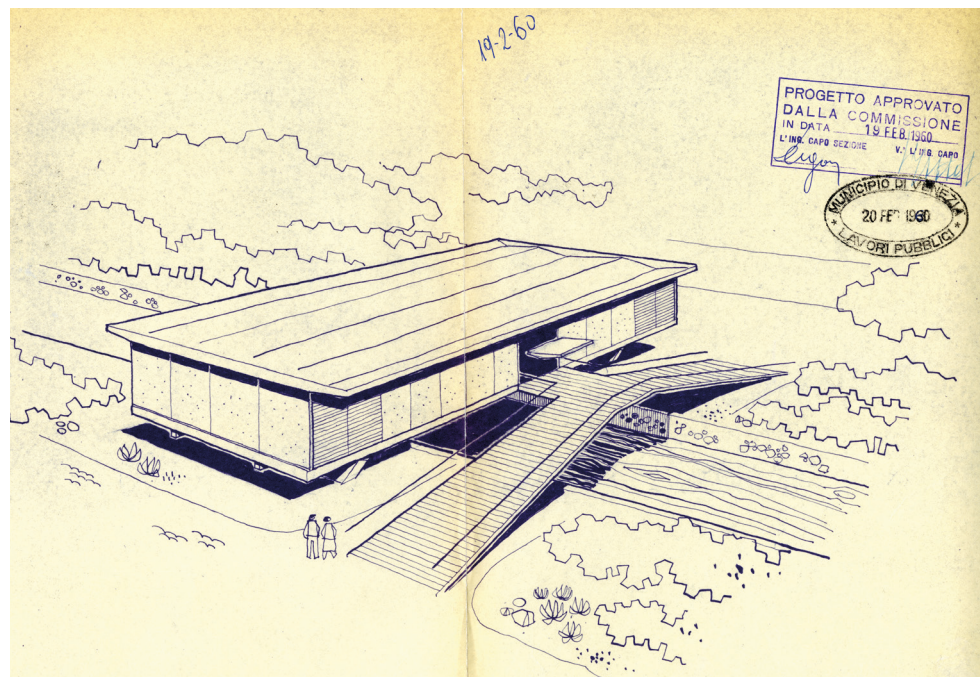
47

“Il Padiglione del Brasile nella Biennale di Venezia. Progetto [2] degli architetti Henrique E. Mindlin, Giancarlo Palanti e Walmyr L. Amaral” (AB FAUUSP). In this document the architects mention another solution, indicated as “C”, which was briefly described. It consisted of “making two bridges on both sides of the pavilion, making the pattern of the two facades the same”.

connection with the Del Giudice's complex and ensuring the necessary height for the view of the church, while preserving the load-bearing capacity of the existing bridge.⁴⁸

The project was finally approved, and the Brazilian pavilion was scheduled to open at the 1960 Biennale.⁴⁹ The prefabricated structure was supposed to be shipped from Brazil to Italy for assembly at the Giardini. Due to delays from the Brazilian National Steel Company, the pavilion's construction was postponed first to 1962 and then to 1964.⁵⁰ Finally, in 1964, a different pavilion was built in another location, no longer straddling the canal but situated along the axis joining the bridge over the canal to Del Giudice's complex.⁵¹ The new project was conceived by the Venetian architect Amerigo Marchesini and it was composed of two volumes intersected by a covered gallery, which directs the gaze towards the pavilions behind. The current pavilion opened in 1964 "not fully completed but, at least, in a condition to be able to showcase [...] the artworks of our [Brazilian artist] participants".⁵²

fig. 4
Henrique E. Mindlin, Giancarlo Palanti and Walmyr L. Amaral,
Project for Brazil Pavilion
approved on February 19, 1960,
Archivio Storico della Biennale
di Venezia - ASAC.



48

Letter from Giancarlo Palanti to Deuglesse Grassi, São Paulo, March 24, 1960 (AB FAUUSP). Load capacity was increased to 5 tonnes.

49

Telegram from Giancarlo Palanti to Henrique E. Mindlin, Venice, February 20, 1960 (AB FAUUSP); "Concessione terreno nel recinto della Biennale per la costruzione del padiglione per l'arte brasiliana. Comune di Venezia. Ufficio Patrimonio", Venice, May 6, 1960 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.123).

50

Letter from Valeriano Pastor to Giancarlo Palanti, Venice, March 15, 1960; Letter from Giancarlo Palanti to Valeriano Pastor, March 22, 1960; Letter from Giancarlo Palanti to Deuglesse Grassi, São Paulo, March 24, 1960; Letter from Deuglesse Grassi to Giancarlo Palanti, Venice, April 7, 1960 (AB FAUUSP). Letter from Sérgio Corrêa da Costa (*Charge d'affaires* of Brazil in Rome) to Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, Rome, April 26, 1962 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.123). Despite not being able to build the pavilion for the 1960 edition, the idea was to send the material as soon as possible. Indeed, architect Palanti asked if it would be possible to start work during the opening months of the Biennale. Grassi replied that construction should be postponed until after the Biennale was over.

51

The only information I found about the abrogation of the bridge-pavilion project was in the correspondence of Giancarlo Palanti. In a confidential letter, the architect reported that the decision was due to "internal political reasons of the Biennale". See Letter from Palanti to Michelina Michelotti Pastor, São Paulo, May 26, 1964 (AB FAUUSP). The architect Michelina Michelotti Pastor was the wife of the architect Valeriano Pastor.

52

Letter from Landulpho A. Borges da Fonseca (Consul of Brazil in Milan) to Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, Milan, April 20, 1964 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.123).

Mexico

In 1950, Mexico participated for the first time in the Biennale. It did not have its own pavilion but was hosted on the far right of the architectural complex of Saint Helena Island, a position currently occupied by Romania. In the following edition (1952), it again occupied this pavilion, sharing the space with Guatemala. The debut of Mexico in Venice was curated by Fernando Gamboa (Deputy Director of the National Institute of Fine Arts - INBA, 1947-1952), with artworks by muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Rufino Tamayo.⁵³

The success of the exhibition was so great that in July, not even a month after the inauguration, Gamboa received two letters in which the Biennale proposed the construction of the national pavilion. The first one, penned by Giovanni Ponti, lauded the exhibition and wished that “as a result of such a flattering premise, Mexico too would like to be present with its own pavilion in the next edition”.⁵⁴ In the second, Rodolfo Pallucchini reiterated the congratulations and the wish that the Mexican government would want to support the construction of the pavilion so that it could be a permanent exhibition venue for studying and promoting Mexican art.⁵⁵

From July 1950 to December 1951, a dense correspondence developed concerning the erection of Mexico’s national architecture. While Gamboa was insisting on the importance of building the pavilion with Mexican authorities, possible sites for its location were being discussed. In fact, during the second enlargement of the Giardini, the annexed area of *Viale alla Motta*, to the right of the new entrance, had been assigned to it. However, the silence of the Mexican government, and the high number of requests received, finally led the Biennale to decide to cede this space to Switzerland.⁵⁶

Pallucchini reported this decision to Gamboa in October 1951. Nevertheless, after recalling the different occasions (March and May) and ways (by letter and in person) in which this space was offered to Mexico and a response requested, he indicated that the Venetian institution could reserve another space in the area. The proposal corresponded to the parcel of land between the new Swiss pavilion and the Russian one [Fig. 5]. In this way, the country would enjoy a privileged position, maintaining its proximity to the main entrance. It was also located close to the street that led to the Central Pavilion on one side and to the *Montagnola* pavilions (France, the United Kingdom and Germany) on the other.⁵⁷

The final refusal came in December of the same year. It was for economic reasons, since the Mexican government had decided to invest “the whole budget for Fine Arts activities abroad” in the *Art mexicain du précolombien à nos jours* exhibition (Mexican Art from pre-Columbian times to the present day) to be held at the Musée National d’Art Moderne of Paris in 1952.⁵⁸ On this occasion, Gamboa expressed his regret about the decision, predicting that the resonance of this exhibition “will raise the interest of our Government in making Mexican art known in

53

On this first Mexican participation see Fernando Gamboa, “Messico”, in 25. *Esposizione Biennale internazionale d’arte* (Venice: Alfieri, 1950), 350 – 359.

54

Letter from Giovanni Ponti to Fernando Gamboa, Venice, July 3, 1950 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.40).

55

Letter from Rodolfo Pallucchini to Fernando Gamboa, Venice, July 6, 1950 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.40).

56

From 1932 to 1950, Switzerland had its pavilion in the Del Giudice’s complex, occupying the first pavilion to the left of the central hemicycle. In July 1951, the country agreed the new position with the Biennale and ceded its previous space to Egypt. The new Swiss pavilion was inaugurated in 1952. See Mulazzani, *I Padiglioni della Biennale di Venezia*, 91-93.

57

Letters from Fernando Gamboa to Rodolfo Pallucchini, Mexico City, July 27, 1950 and February 24, 1950; Letter from Rodolfo Pallucchini to Fernando Gamboa, Venice, October 25, 1951 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.40).

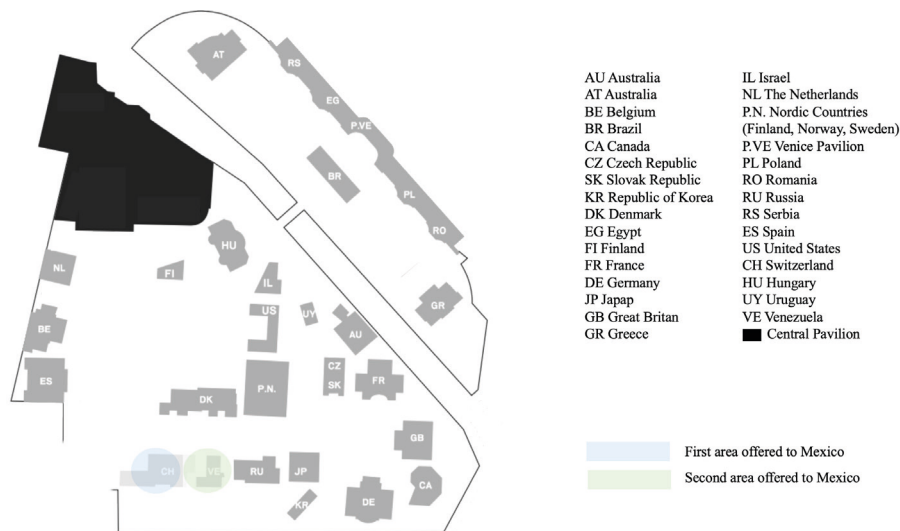
58

On this exhibition and the cultural policy of Mexican art exhibitions, see Adriana Ortega Orozco, “México-Francia: una larga historia de exposiciones como herramientas diplomáticas”, *Ideas. Ideas d’Amériques*, no. 8 (2016 –2017), doi: 10.4000/ideas.1729, accessed April 2022.

Europe even higher, and, consequently, the next government will be interested in providing the funds necessary to realise both the wishes of the Biennale as well as yours and mine to build the Mexican pavilion in Venice”.⁵⁹

At the 26th Venice Biennale (1952), Mexico was hosted in the same pavilion as previously, presenting a large collection of engravings instead of the great Mexican muralists, which were held back in the French exhibition.⁶⁰ Despite the success of the Paris exhibition, the pavilion did not materialise at the Giardini. In September of the following year, architect Carlo Scarpa was commissioned to conceive the Venezuelan pavilion, the construction of which began in 1954. Consequently, the Venezuelan pavilion opened its doors between those of Switzerland and Russia, taking advantage of the space left vacant by Mexico.⁶¹

fig. 5
Areas offered to Mexico by the Biennale, 1950 - 1951. Reconstruction by the author, 2022.



Argentina

In July 1949, the Direction of the Biennale received a letter from Francisco Armellini (Secretary of the National Academy of Fine Arts of Buenos Aires, 1949-1960), who, in 1922, had curated the third (and, for the time-being, the last) Argentine participation.⁶² Armellini expressed the will to ensure the participation of this country in the 25th edition (1950) and to resume formalities for the construction of the pavilion. He cited it as “the supreme ideal”, referring to a previous unfinished project.⁶³ Hence, this letter opens a window into the 1920s while inaugurating two decades of requests concerning the construction of national architecture.

59

Letter from Fernando Gamboa to Rodolfo Pallucchini, Mexico City, December 6, 1951 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.40).

60

Venice received the exhibition of engravings because the paintings of the four great Mexican muralists were being exhibited in Paris.

61

The pavilion was inaugurated in a “provisional state” in October 1954 (the Biennale had begun in June) and finally finished by June 1956. See Mulazzani, *I Padiglioni della Biennale di Venezia*, 94-95.

62

The National Academy of Fine Arts (ANBA) was created by presidential decree on July 1, 1936. Between 1944 and 1963 Martin Noel was the President.

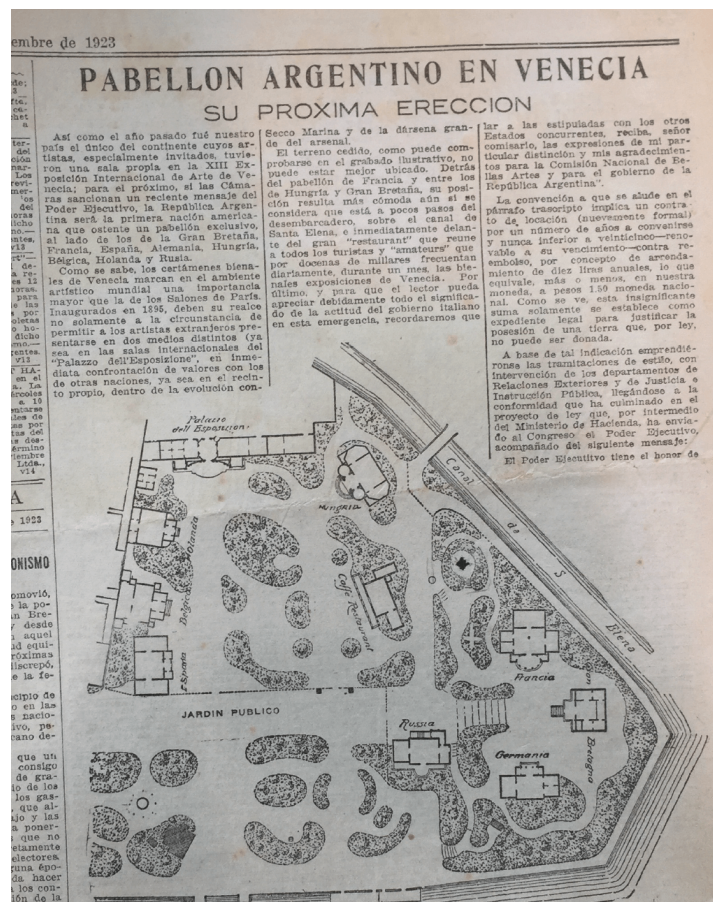
63

Letter from Francisco Armellini to Romolo Bazzoni, Varagnolo and Zorzi, Buenos Aires, June 11, 1949; Letter from Romolo Bazzoni to Francisco Armellini, September 21, 1949 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.01). Romolo Bazzoni was the Administrative Director of the Biennale in 1922. In 1950, he occupied the position of Advisor and informed Armellini that Rodolfo Pallucchini was the current Secretary General. It has not been possible to identify the other two recipients.

The project to which Armellini referred not only saw him involved as interlocutor between the Argentine government authorities and the Biennale, but also reached the Argentine press.⁶⁴ On November 13, 1923, *La Prensa* published an article about the upcoming construction of the Argentinian pavilion, showing its exact location on a map between those of France and Hungary [Fig. 6]. The article enthused that in 1924 “the Argentine Republic will be the first American nation to have an exclusive pavilion, alongside those of Great Britain, France, Spain, Germany, Hungary, Belgium, Netherlands and Russia”.⁶⁵

Furthermore, after highlighting the advantages of the space (such as its easy accessibility, proximity to the jetty, and location behind the restaurant), the article discusses the terms of the agreement, which involved the transfer of the land for a number of years, renewable upon expiration. It also mentions the assigned amount of 60,000 Argentine pesos and emphasises the symbolic cost of the lease contract, which was ten Italian lire per year, equivalent to one and a half Argentine pesos.

fig. 6
Photo of the article (detail)
“Pabellón argentino en Venecia. Su próxima erección”,
La Prensa, Buenos Aires,
November 13, 1923.



The role performed by Armellini is highlighted in the correspondence between Martin Noel (then President of the National Commission of Fine Arts of Argentina, 1920-1930) and Davide Giordano (Mayor of Venice, 1922 - 1924). Communications on the construction of the pavilion were also maintained with Giovanni Bordiga (President of the Venice Biennale, 1920 - 1926). Letter from Martin Noel to Davide Giordano, Buenos Aires, July 13, 1923; Telegram of Martin Noel to Giovanni Bordiga, August 26, 1923 (ASAC, FS, SN PAD, b.15).

“Pabellón argentino en Venecia. Su próxima erección”, *La Prensa*, Buenos Aires, November 13, 1923. The article also praised Argentina’s participation in 1922, stating that it was the “only country in the continent whose artists (...) had their own room”. Indeed, the United States, whose participation had been constant since 1895, did not participate.

Despite the level of detail of the article, which suggests an almost imminent onset of the works, the project did not reach its goal. On November 29, 1923, a few days after its publication, Martin Noel (President of the National Commission of Fine Arts of Argentina, 1920-1930) wrote to Giovanni Bordiga (President of the Venice Biennale, 1920-1926) requesting an extension for the construction of the pavilion until 1926. Stating “internal political reasons”, the missive explained that the National Congress had held a reduced number of sessions during the year, closing the parliamentary period without dealing with matters of “singular importance” such as the construction of the pavilion.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Noel ensured that the National Congress would approve the required amount in the new parliamentary period.

The Biennale confirmed the cession of the land until 1926, and in Venice, on July 22, 1925, Fernando Pérez (Ambassador of Argentina in Rome) signed a convention for the construction of the Argentina Pavilion.⁶⁷ Despite the agreement, the pavilion was neither built in the autumn of that year (as was stipulated for inauguration in the 15th edition) nor in the ensuing years.

In 1929, the Biennale informed Fernando Pérez that the municipality of Venice could not “keep a convention in force indefinitely that should have had an immediate effect”, underlining that the Biennale had not received any news since its stipulation. Furthermore, a new regulatory plan had been approved for the Giardini, “for which old buildings are being demolished and new ones are being erected, including the pavilion of the United States of America”. The letter concluded by stating that, should the Government of the Argentine Republic wish to resume the project, the institution would seek “another location or combination” to “provide hospitality to the art of its noble country”.⁶⁸

Despite the good auspices, the Southern Cone country did not participate again until 1950. Upon its return, it found the Giardini very different from how it had left them: the number of national pavilions had grown from eight to eighteen, the area of Saint Helena Island had been annexed, and the *Viale alla Motta* was to be incorporated, thereby further expanding the original nucleus by the subsequent year. During the 1950s, the existing problems of space were worsened by the wave of post-war requests for the construction of national pavilions and the panoramic constraint established in 1957. Thus, quick decision-making and financial availability became *conditio sine qua non* to achieve the possession of a pavilion. These circumstances led to the nomadism of Argentina in the ensuing decades, occupying any available spaces in the Giardini, from rooms in the Central Pavilion to temporarily unused pavilions (Czechoslovakia and Finland).⁶⁹

In the 1950s and 1960s, Argentinian participation was almost constant and the desire to build national architecture was expressed on numerous occasions.⁷⁰ The Biennale offered several options but underlined both the existence

66

Letter from Martin Noel to Giovanni Bordiga, Buenos Aires, November 29, 1923 (ASAC, FS, SN PAD, b.15). Prior to this missive, the Biennale had sent requests for updates and news on the construction of the pavilion. Telegram to Martin Noel, November 8, 1923; Letter from Giovanni Bordiga to Martin Noel, Venice, November 22, 1923 (ASAC, FS, SN PAD, b.15).

67

Letter from Giovanni Bordiga and Davide Giordano to Martin Noel, Venice, November 24, 1923; “Progetto di convenzione da stipulare fra il Governo della Repubblica Argentina ed il Comune di Venezia; Convenzione per la costruzione del Padiglione della Repubblica Argentina alla Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte. N. 395336 Seg.”, Venice, July 23, 1925 (ASAC, FS, SN PAD, b.15). The agreement established the lease of the terrain (starting in 1926) for twenty years (renewable at maturity) and the amount to be paid (ten Italian lire per year). The expenses for the construction and maintenance of the pavilion were to be paid by the government of Argentina.

68

Letter from Extraordinary Commissioner to the City of Venice to Fernando Pérez, Venice, September 20, 1929 (ASAC, FS, SN PAD, b.15).

69

In 1950, Argentina occupied the pavilion of Czechoslovakia (current pavilion of the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic). From 1952 to 1966, it exhibited in the rooms of the Central Pavilion (except in 1954 and 1960 when it did not participate), while from 1968 to 1972 it occupied the Finland Pavilion.

70

According to the documentation at the ASAC, requests were made in 1953, 1955, 1956, 1960, 1961 and 1968. See Correspondence between the Venice Biennale and the Embassy of Argentina in Rome (ASAC, FS, SP, b.01).

of few available areas and the fact that it was the municipality of Venice that decided on their assignment. Namely, in 1953, three sites were proposed: the one behind the Danish pavilion, the one to the left of this pavilion adjoining the Montagnola, and the one between the Swiss and Russian pavilions. In 1955, when faced with one new request, the Biennale indicated that there were no areas available. Of the three previously offered, the first one had been vetoed by the municipality and the other two had since been occupied. Furthermore, two other sites had been committed to Japan and India.⁷¹

However, the Biennale pointed out the existence of a project that sought to completely renovate the Central Pavilion and solve the space problems. First of all, the project envisaged moving the location of the building, making this area available to countries that wished to build a pavilion of their own. Secondly, there was the possibility that some of the rooms in the new Central Pavilion would be available for countries to establish their permanent venue.⁷² This new architecture was supposed to be finished in 1958, which ultimately did not happen.

Nevertheless, the project was still in force in 1961, as can be read in the *telespresso* (teletype) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to several embassies, among them the Italian Embassy in Buenos Aires.⁷³ The communication reiterated that the saturation of the Giardini and the panoramic constraint did not allow the Biennale to give precise guarantees for the construction of the Argentine pavilion. Simultaneously, the communication referred to the new Central Pavilion as a possible solution to this situation. It was also recommended that the procedures with the municipality start as soon as possible in order to obtain the approval in time.⁷⁴

While Argentina was making these requests, it was participating in some rooms within the Central Pavilion. In 1968, it exhibited in the Finnish pavilion for the first time. Two weeks after the closing of the exhibition, Federico Brook (Curator of the Argentine pavilion, 1968 - 1970) wrote to Giovanni Favaretto Fisca (President of the Venice Biennale, 1968) stating that this experience “made clear, once again, the need to build [Argentina’s] own pavilion”.⁷⁵ According to Brook, the country enjoyed greater freedom to exhibit, and experienced a large turnout from both the public and critics. For this reason, and due to the investment made in refurbishing the wooden architecture, he asked for “its recurring assignment to Argentina for as long as its own has not been built”.⁷⁶ The country exhibited there until 1972; in the remaining editions of the 1970s, the Finnish pavilion was occupied by Portugal, and Argentina did not attend the event at all.⁷⁷

71

As previously explained, the India pavilion was not built.

72

Letter from Mario Novello (Head of the Secretarial Office of the Venice Biennale, 1956-1960) to Erasto M. Villa (Chargé d’Affaires of the Argentine Embassy in Rome), Venice, June 15, 1955 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.01).

73

Telespresso N.31/22876. Rome, July 17 1961 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.122). The *telespresso* with the object “Nuovi padiglioni alla Biennale di Venezia – Argentina ed Artisti maltesi” (New pavilions at the Venice Biennale – Argentina and Maltese Artists) is sent to the Italian Embassies in Buenos Aires and London and to the Italian Consulate in Malta.

74

The recommendation to commence proceedings with the municipality of Venice as soon as possible also appears in other documents. See Letter from Italo Siciliano (President of the Venice Biennale, 1962) to Héctor Solanas Pachecho (Ambassador of Argentina in Rome), Venice, November 10, 1961 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.122).

75

Letter from Federico Brook to Giovanni Favaretto Fisca, Rome, November 5, 1968 (ASAC, FS, SP, b.01).

76

Letter from Brook to Favaretto Fisca, November 5, 1968.

77

In 1974, there was no national participation. In 1976, the Biennale proposed that Argentina exhibit again in the Finnish pavilion. Moreover, considering the condition of the building and the financial effort to rehabilitate it, the Biennale offered it the possibility of exhibiting there until the end of 1980. The Argentine Embassy in Rome communicated that the country would not have participated in the 37th edition. Letter from Carlo Ripa di Meana (President of the Venice Biennale, 1974 - 1978) to Abel Parentini Posse (Consul of Argentina in Venice), Venice, February 21, 1976; Letter from Guillermo A. Cash (Chargé d’Affaires of the Argentine Embassy in Rome) to Carlo Ripa di Meana, Rome, March 31, 1976 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.251).

Latin America and the Cartagena Agreement Countries

Argentina, Iceland, the United Arab Republic and Switzerland have joined the 36th International Biennale Art Exhibition that will open in Venice on June 11. This brings the number of countries that will participate in their own pavilions to twenty-eight, to which are added the Cartagena Agreement countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru), which will build their own pavilions, and those that are part of the Italo-Latin American Institute (Mexico, Cuba, Haiti, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay).⁷⁸

The Biennale press release, dated March 1, 1972, indicates that fifteen of the twenty Latin American Republics were expected to participate in the 36th Biennale. Some would have done so in national architectures and others in collective pavilions representing new geo-political alliances. For the participations of Cartagena Agreement countries and the Italo-Latin American Institute, Brook was the interlocutor with the Biennale, mainly with Mario Penelope (Deputy Extraordinary Commissioner of the Venice Biennale, 1972). In fact, from 1971 to 1977, Brook was Deputy Cultural Secretary of the Italo-Latin American Institute of Rome (IILA), an intergovernmental organisation created in 1966 as a tool to promote and strengthen relations between Italy and Latin America.⁷⁹

In November 1971, Brook presented the request for the participation of the Italo-Latin American Institute, proposing a series of rotative solo exhibitions.⁸⁰ Furthermore, he started to follow up on the project of the pavilion of the Cartagena Agreement countries, a request made in September of the same year by its executive board.⁸¹ This sub-regional integration pact was signed by Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, and Peru in 1969 and promoted stronger economic, political and social cooperation. In 1970, these countries signed the Andrés Bello Agreement to promote the development of education, science and technology through a process of integration that would have culture as a central axis. The erection of a pavilion to exhibit the art of the Andean countries was then part of its broader cultural policy.⁸²

In an already long-saturated space, the Biennale proposed a site between Russia, Japan, and Germany to the Cartagena Agreement Countries.⁸³ In January 1972, the municipality of Venice gave its approval for the chosen area. Faced with the imminent start of procedures for the cession of the terrain, Mario Penelope recommended “not to lose time and to immediately submit the project”.⁸⁴ In April 1972, the Executive Secretary of the Andrés Bello Agreement communicated the acceptance of the land and entrusted the Italo-Latin American Institute to carry out the formalities. The institute contacted Venetian companies in order to quickly

78

Press release “Altre adesioni alle 36. Biennale di Venezia”, Venice, March 1, 1972 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.183).

79

The IILA was created by the Italian politician Amintore Fanfani (1908-1999), who was then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy and President of the General Assembly of the United Nations. The member states of the IILA (today: International Italo-Latin American Organisation) are Italy and the twenty Latin American republics (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela).

80

Letter from Federico Brook to Mario Penelope, Rome, November 11, 1971 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.183).

81

Ibid; Letter from Javier Silva Ruete (Director - Secretary, Board of the Cartagena Agreement - JUNAC, 1970-1976) to Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, Lima, September 17, 1971 (ASAC, FS, AV, b. 251). In this letter, the Instituto Italo-Latino Americano is already indicated as the intermediary.

82

On the communication of its cultural projects to the Biennale, see Letter from Alejandro Deustua (Ambassador of Peru in Rome) to Mario Penelope, Rome, October 22, 1971 (ASAC, FS, AV, b. 251).

83

This space has finally been occupied by South Korea. This pavilion is the last one to be built in the Giardini, in 1995.

84

Letter from Mario Penelope to Federico Brook, Venice, January 28, 1972 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.251).

obtain the project presented to the municipality and start the works *ipso facto*.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the exhibition would be opened two months later, which was too short a period for the plan to succeed.

As in the case of the other unrealised pavilions, the project had not been abandoned but postponed. Thus, the eventual representation of Latin America was considerably lower than that announced in March, dwindling from fifteen to seven countries. Of these, Brazil, Venezuela and Uruguay participated in their permanent pavilions, Argentina in a borrowed pavilion, and Chile, Cuba and Peru in the rooms of the Central Pavilion curated by the Italo-Latin American Institute.⁸⁶

The project was officially dropped in 1973. On February 5, Brook wrote to Penelope, informing him that, “for reasons of priority”, the Executive Secretary of the Andrés Bello Agreement had had to “temporarily relinquish the pavilion”.⁸⁷ The next day, Brook wrote to Penelope again asking the Biennale to consider granting the space not used by the Andean group to Mexico. Along with the letter, he sent the Mexican telegram and an architectural project studied “in accordance with the needs of the municipality of Venice”.⁸⁸

Dated February 2, the telegram was sent by Luis Ortiz Macedo, the Director of the National Institute of Fine Arts (1972-1974), the same institution that had organised the national participation in the 1950s with Fernando Gamboa as curator. Ortiz Macedo informed Brook that the budget for the pavilion had been approved and asked him to confirm the possibility of building it “as soon as possible” since funds were available “only for this [that] year”.⁸⁹

The architectural project shows a single-storey building with a metal load-bearing structure. It consists of two main bodies and a central connecting one, complemented by outdoor paving. The room is lit both by full height glazing on all sides of the building and skylights in the roof slab. This project is signed by engineer Giuseppe Svalduz and bears the date of April 22, 1972, which is the month in which the Italian-Latin American Institute had contacted Venetian companies to design and build the pavilion for the Cartagena Agreement countries *ipso facto*. These elements lead one to wonder if the possibility of turning this pavilion into the Mexican pavilion was being considered.⁹⁰

Pavilions, Pavilions, Pavilions

Although not included in the period between 1948 and 1972, there is another event that deserves to be highlighted as an extension of the dynamics described in this article: the construction of precarious pavilions, destined to be dismantled after use. In the proposal to renovate the exhibition spaces at the Giardini, the architect Constantino Dardi explained that the problem of insufficient space and the need to preserve the green areas had been solved by the construction of a prefabricated and temporary pavilion in 1980.⁹¹

85

Letter from Federico Brook to Mario Penelope, Rome, April 10, 1972 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.251).

86

After this exhibition IILA would not attend the Venice Biennale for fourteen years. From 1985 to 2015, it participated with the Latin America Pavilion - IILA in the section of national participations and Federico Brook was curator in 1986, 1988 and 1990 editions. In the five-year period from 1985 to 1990, Brook was again Deputy Cultural Secretary of the IILA, a position that he had already held from 1971 to 1977 as explained in the Argentina section.

87

Letter from Federico Brook to Mario Penelope, Rome, February 5, 1973 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.251).

88

Letter from Federico Brook to Mario Penelope, Rome, February 6, 1973 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.251).

89

Telegram from Luis Ortiz Macedo to Federico Brook, Mexico City, February 2, 1973 (ASAC, FS, AV, b.251).

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The Biennale's response has not been located in the documents consulted at the ASAC.

91

Proposta di ristrutturazione degli spazi della Biennale / Arti Visive ai Giardini (ASAC, FS, LGS PAD, b.10). In 1980 the countries that exhibited in the temporary pavilion were Argentina and Peru.

For the 1982 edition, Dardi proposed “reconsidering the idea of the pavilion in the water”, which had obtained the approval of the critics.⁹² The numerous requests for participation led to an increase in the number of temporary structures from one to three pavilions. Two were located on the right side of the *Rio dei Giardini*, parallel to the Del Giudice’s complex and separated by the bridge; one was on the other side of the canal, behind the area occupied by Israel and the United States.⁹³ These precarious architectural pavilions hosted Argentina, Australia, Colombia, Cuba, India, Iceland, the Republic of San Marino, and Peru. Their construction was a major investment for the Biennale and, as in the previous Biennale, it was a non-repayable investment, since they were dismantled at the end of the exhibition.⁹⁴

These pavilions in the water, like the cases analysed above, are an example of the symbolic power that has been created around the possession of (or participation in) a pavilion. They also reveal how the Biennial adopted an original strategy to deal with the limited space available and mitigate the lack of architectural presence of the eight countries (four of which were from Latin America) that exhibited there. In more general terms, the historical period studied shows how the art event opened up to the geographical area in question. Indeed, between 1948 and 1972, numerous letters crossed the Atlantic in which the Biennale either sent invitations to join the event and build a pavilion or received requests to participate and build national architecture.

On several occasions, despite intentions held in common, the projects did not materialise. For example, the first attempt to build the Mexican pavilion was frustrated by the cultural weight of Paris compared to Venice: the country considered that it would be more appropriate to allocate the budget for Fine Arts activities abroad to a temporary exhibition rather than a permanent pavilion. On that occasion, the proposal for the construction of national architecture had been advanced by the Biennale, which, faced with delays in the response, had even offered two spaces: the second one located between the current Swedish and Russian pavilions. In 1953, this site was among the three marked as available to Argentina, following a new request that was not granted. And, although it takes us back to an earlier period, it should be remembered that, in the 1920s, the Biennale reserved a site for Argentina for a long period of time (1923-1929), whose pavilion was never built due to economic reasons and institutional silence. Financial instability also frustrated the aspirations of the Cartagena Agreement countries, which, despite having completed the project on paper, had to abandon their pavilion. The withdrawal of the Andean countries brings us back full-circle to Mexico, which quickly tried to appropriate the available site.

If the reconstruction of these failed attempts suggests that, in the majority of cases, the pavilions were not built for economic reasons, and their hypothetical location in the Giardini forms a completely different topography from the present one. Although speculative, would it not be interesting to superimpose the potential yet invisible history of this space with the visible one? That is to say, to create a map of the Giardini that features the unrealised pavilions and compare it to the current depiction? From this one could see, in the terms exposed by Antoni Muntadas, which countries could be the ones that maintain a privileged position without the need for legitimation and which would need to revalidate their right to be in Venice every two years.

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Art historian and critic Maurizio Calvesi, member of the Board of Directors in 1982 and Director of the Visual Arts Section of the Biennale in 1984 and 1986 referred to it as a “new and sapient pavilion on the canal” that had made it possible to improve the Biennale’s spaces. Maurizio Calvesi, “Zavorra in laguna”. Newspaper clipping included in the proposal (ASAC, FS, LGS PAD, b.10).

93

“Contratto di appalto per i lavori di realizzazione delle opere edili di 3 (tre) capannoni precari nei Giardini della Biennale da adibirsi a Mostra provvisoria per l’anno 1982” (ASAC, FS, AV, b.345).

94

The high cost meant that, in 1984, the precarious pavilion was built outside the Giardini, close to the entrance. In 1986, the countries without a pavilion participated in the Arsenale.

In this regard, the case of Mexico is significant because it also highlights the randomness of the current urban planning of the Giardini: the first terrain that was offered to Mexico today belongs to Switzerland, the country that had previously been allocated the space currently occupied by Egypt in the Del Giudice's complex. The second one corresponds to the current Venezuelan pavilion although, not long after the Mexican refusal, it had been offered to Argentina. The third one saw the arrival of South Korea, twenty-four years after the attempt to occupy the space left empty by the Andean countries.

It should be noted that what is presented in this article is not characteristic of the period analysed, but rather that the number of cases increases when one consults the documentation preserved in the ASAC. In 1931, the Biennale sent letters to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Uruguay proposing the building of a collective pavilion located on Saint Helena Island. The letters also indicated that “the pavilions of Greece, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland, the countries with which negotiations have been concluded, will be built on the same island for next year”, suggesting that Del Giudice's project was already at an advanced stage.⁹⁵

The planimetry shows a single-story building with a central hall which gives access to five rooms: Argentina and Uruguay on the left, Mexico and Chile on the right, and Brazil at the end.⁹⁶ The pavilion would have been located next to the Romanian one (originally intended for Greece) since Del Giudice's idea was to “close” the short sides of the architectural complex by means of this pavilion itself. Eventually, the agreement with the Latin American countries was not concluded and the presentation of a new project by Greece led to the quick construction of the independent Hellenic pavilion (1934) and the simplification of the Del Giudice's complex.⁹⁷

A short time after this attempt at a collective pavilion, the Biennale received a letter from the Italian Ambassador in Rio de Janeiro. Dated June 14, 1932, the missive explained that the Italian community in Brazil had organised a fund-raising campaign in memory of Anita Garibaldi.⁹⁸ “Instead of erecting a modest monument to Anita in Rio de Janeiro, we thought it would be nice to offer this government, on behalf of the Italian community in Brazil, a permanent pavilion at the Venice Biennale”, wrote the Ambassador. The pavilion could be dedicated to the heroine of the two worlds and remain a symbol of “the gratitude of the Italians who found ample hospitality in this country”. The Ambassador also claimed that Brazilian artists could be encouraged to “produce ever-improving works, knowing that they can exhibit in the biggest art exhibition in the world”.⁹⁹ Ultimately, the Anita Garibaldi pavilion did not come into being either. The documentation suggests that this is again due to the high construction cost, as only about half of the necessary sum was available.¹⁰⁰

Apart from this episode, Brazil is no stranger to the dynamics of the structure of the Biennale. In fact, as has been illustrated, the country had to face the limited availability of space in the Giardini and the failure of architectural projects. However, it finally managed to build a pavilion, and in a position that offers outstanding visibility at that. Moreover, the case of Brazil is undoubtedly interesting because

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Letter from the Venice Biennale proposing the construction of the Latin American Pavilion, Venice, February 19, 1931 (ASAC, FS, SN PAD, b.15). The total amount would have been 500,000 Italian lire, which meant a contribution of 100,000 lire per country.

96

Planimetry of the Latin America Pavilion (ASAC, FS, SN PAD, b.15).

97

Mulazzani, *I Padiglioni della Biennale di Venezia*, 73 and 84.

98

1932 is the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Giuseppe Garibaldi.

99

Letter from Vittorio Cerruti (Ambassador of Italy in Rio de Janeiro) to Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata (President of the Venice Biennale, 1930-1934), Rio de Janeiro, June 14, 1932 (ASAC, FS, SN PAD, b.15).

100

Letter from Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata to Vittorio Cerruti, Venice, July 11, 1932 (ASAC, FS, SN PAD, b.15). The average price of a pavilion was 250,000 - 300,000 Italian lire.

se it has made it possible to mention, albeit very briefly, the existence of relations between art institutions, or to be more precise, between biennials: from the first contacts between Matarazzo and Pallucchini to the role of the founder of the Bienal de São Paulo in the construction of the pavilion.

Even though that is not the aim of this article, it is relevant to point out that the period analysed corresponds to the years in which the biennial model begins to spread globally (e.g., 1951, Hispano-American Biennial; 1952, Tokyo Biennial; 1955 Alexandria Biennial; 1968, India Triennial; or 1973, Sydney Biennial), including in Latin America. Indeed, after São Paulo (1951), biennials were inaugurated in Mexico (1958, InterAmerican Biennial), Argentina (1962, American Art Biennial), Chile (1963, American Biennial of Engraving), Colombia (1968, Coltejer Art Biennial, 1971 American Biennial of Graphic Arts) and Puerto Rico (1970, San Juan Biennial).¹⁰¹

It is interesting to note that the rise of biennials in Latin America corresponds to the rise of the participation (or stated interest in participating) of these countries in the Venice Biennale. By way of example, after Mexico refused to build its pavilion, the country was absent from the Venetian exhibition until 1958, the same year in which the Inter-American Biennial was inaugurated. In the case of the Cartagena Agreement countries, the erection of a pavilion was part of their cultural policy project when Chile and Colombia had already inaugurated biennials in their respective countries. What relationship, if any, exists between the spread of the biennial model in Latin America and the participation of these countries in the Venice Biennale? Furthermore, what new perspectives might emerge from the joint study of the biennial phenomenon and the national pavilions?

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On these biennials, see Adriana Castellanos Olmedo, "Cali, ciudad de la gráfica: las Bienales Americanas de Artes Gráficas del Museo La Tertulia y Cartón de Colombia (1970-1975)", *Caiana*, 8 (2016): 17-30; Emilio Ellena (ed.), *Sobre las bienales americanas de grabado: Chile, 1963-1970* (Santiago de Chile: Centro Cultural de España, 2008); María del Mar González, "Introducción", in *Bienales de San Juan del Grabado Latinoamericano y del Caribe* (San Juan: Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte / Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Ríos Piedras, 2015), 4-7; Fabiola Martínez Rodríguez, "Mexico's Interamerican Biennials and the Hemispheric Cold War", *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, vol. XLIII, no. 119, (2021): 249-285; María Cristina Rocca and Riccardo Panzetta, "Bienales de Córdoba: arte, ciudad e ideologías", *Estudios*, 10 (1998): 93-108.

Abbreviations

AB FAUUSP Acervo da Biblioteca da Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo - FAUUSP

AHWS Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo – Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

ASAC Archivio Sorico delle Arti Contemporanee – La Biennale di Venezia

FS Fondo Storico

AV Arti Visive

LGS PAD Lavori e gestioni delle sedi. Padiglioni

SP Padiglioni, atti 1938-1968 (serie cosiddetta ‘Paesi’)

SN PAD Padiglioni, atti 1897 – 1938 (serie cosiddetta ‘Scatole nere. Padiglioni’)

b busta

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