

In making selections and proposing groupings for this exhibition, «New Art of Argentina,» our objective was to present museum visitors in the United States with the most viable and stimulating aspects of current Argentine art. The foreign eye, by necessity, chooses works that show a relationship to the international idiom of contemporary art. In this respect Argentina, perhaps more than any other Latin American country, is highly susceptible to the winds of change and innovation. Artists in Argentina not only assimilate ideas and impulses from abroad, but have taken an active role in the promulgation and expansion of their own ideas. Their part in new directions and movements has been recognized by the international art world.

Since the nineteenth century, France has been the dominant tastemaker for painters and sculptors in Argentina, endowing them with a sense of order and clarity, a love for theory and experiment. Italy, through its gifted emigrants and its many cultural ties, accounts for a high degree of creative imagination and surprising versatility in Argentine art. The Germanic countries may have contributed some of their single-minded ideological pursuit and methodology in the elaboration of plastic principles. Contemporary Spain's effect on Argentine art is evidenced by a taste for violent, often ghoulish imagery, as well as for monochromatic, earthy painting surfaces. The common denominator of Latin American art, a death awareness, derived from both Indian and Spanish cultures, is less apparent in Argentine art. There is little of the self-consciously folkloric, and none has been included in this selection.

The «new» in Argentine art already has a noteworthy, young tradition. Argentina's involvement in the art activities of Western Europe, particularly those of France, dates back to the middle forties, when Kosice founded the «Madí» movement and Maldonado preached the gospel of Max Bill. The Bauhaus and De Stijl were their models and sources of inspiration. Concrete art was the watchword. Representatives of the «Madí» movement were shown at the «Salon des Réalités Nouvelles» in Paris in 1948, and Arden-Quin, one of «Madí's» co-founders, directed a Paris chapter of that movement until 1953. From 1958 to the present, a similar extension of a French esthetic «chapel» can be found in Julio Llinás' relentless promulgation of the «Phases» group. Le Parc's and Demarco's roles in the foundation of the «Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel» in 1960 constituted another example of the two-way exchange between the arts of Argentina and Western Europe. The 1946 publication in Buenos Aires of the «Manifiesto Blanco» by Argentine art's important innovator, Lucio Fontana, further illustrates how ideas of international effect have been launched from the banks of the River Plate. Because Fontana's work, within the context of «Spazialismo,» has become an integral part of the living tradition of contemporary Italian art, we have decided against its inclusion in the present survey.

Recent exhibitions of Latin American art in which Argentines were prominently included have established identity for that country's artistic expressions in the United States (notably, «South American Art Today,» organized by the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts in 1959, and «Latin

America: New Departures,» organized by the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art in 1961). In these showings abstract art, the predominant trend from 1952 until the emergence of a new figuration in 1962, was featured in the works of such artists as Fernández-Muro, Grilo, Ocampo, Pucciarelli, Sakai and Testa. The geometers and constructivists gained more acceptance for their work in Europe than in this country, where they were never more than incidentally included in exhibitions. The same applies for the «Phases» group, whose members, like the constructivists, had opportunities to exhibit their works in Paris, but not in the United States. An incipient familiarity with paintings of the new figuration was created through the efforts of the Visual Arts Division of the Pan American Union, in Washington, D.C. A breakthrough in the United States for this group, consisting of Deira, Macció, Noé and de la Vega, came with their recent inclusion in the 1964 Guggenheim International Award exhibition, and they are now assuming status that was once solely the abstract painters' prerogative. A vanguard group, whose allegiances are divided between French «nouveau réalisme» and American «pop art» and whose reputation has not yet spread beyond Buenos Aires, is presented in the United States for the first time in this survey. Of the sculptors in the exhibition, those who live in Paris (Kosice, Penalba and Di Teana) are in varying degrees known in this country. Their colleagues in Buenos Aires (Badii, Gerstein and Iommi) may be unknown to the North American art audience, although they have exhibited in Venice and São Paulo biennials.

In 1959, Rafael Squirru, then Director of the Museo de Arte Moderno of Buenos Aires, stated that the Argentines were the least innocent people in the world, and that this fact was clearly illustrated by their art. If we interpret the word «innocent» as «naïve,» «steeped in isolation» and «parochial,» then the statement most certainly holds true, particularly in 1964. It is unlikely, and of questionable desirability, that the many styles and idioms of contemporary art in Argentina will ever congeal into one national style. Such a monolithic expression is as unlikely there as it is in any other country involved in the complexities of modern times. The phenomenal migration which drains artists of talent from the Buenos Aires community at an alarming rate (thirteen Argentines in this exhibition presently live or work abroad) has at least one beneficial effect: it accelerates the «internationalization» of Argentine art and contributes to the art of other countries. Emigration, which used to be an escape and an indictment of the barrenness of the national climate, now takes on the positive quality of a search for new challenges, stylistic alignment and companionship of ideas. With the increasing facilities of the capital city and the notable sophistication of its artistic climate much that has been carried abroad will no doubt return to Argentina, fuller in fact and potential.

«New Art of Argentina» is the second in the Walker Art Center's series of exhibitions devoted to contemporary art in Latin America, the first being «New Art of Brazil» which, after its premiere here in 1962, was circulated nationally. In organizing the present exhibition, we had the support of the Walker Art Center Board of Directors

and the invaluable sponsorship of the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires. The Instituto generously agreed, through its Executive Director, Enrique Oteiza, to assume responsibility for the assembly and shipping of all works of art coming from Buenos Aires, as well as for the printing and financing in part of a substantial catalogue. The Director of the Instituto Torcuato Di Tella's Centro de Artes Visuales, Professor Jorge Romero Brest, and its Sub-Director, Samuel Paz, deserve our greatest thanks. In making the selections for this exhibition, we had the active assistance of Professor Romero Brest, formerly Director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes and an acknowledged connoisseur of Argentine art. We had the good fortune of being accompanied in Buenos Aires in our visits to studios, galleries, museums and private collections, by Samuel Paz, who also took care of numerous details pertaining to the exhibition and catalogue.

In Buenos Aires for assistance in meeting artists and seeing their works we are indebted to Hugo Parpagnoli, Director of the Museo de Arte Moderno, Samuel Oliver, Director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, and Mario Fano, Director of the Galería Lirolay. Ignacio Pirovano introduced us to the geometrist artists, and Julio Llinás acquainted us with the «Phases» group. Guillermo Whitelow and Enzo Manichini of the Galería Bonino, Sra. Blanca Sagazzola de Junerur, Director of the Galería Rioboo and Natalio Jorge Povarche, Director of the Galería Rubbers, gave of their time and interest.

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Sr. Squirru, Director of the Department of Cultural Affairs, showed a special interest in this exhibition. Dr. Gomez-Sicre, Chief of the Visual Arts Division, generously made available to us the excellent resources of his office.

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