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2015-07

Colonial unconscious on display

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representational system that could not be more different from Miranda's, these images are graphic equivalents of a spoken story relating the death of a woman in the village, her grieving relatives, and the importance of cremation as a way to free the soul. Clusters of dots and stick-like figures are arranged in circular configurations, with arrows pointing in and out. The juxtaposition of these drawings with the colonial prints and photography—legible as horizontal narratives but also in contrast on the vertical axis—was one of the most punchy, eloquent, and moving curatorial statements I have seen in years.

The only weakness of *Mestizo Histories* was some of the contemporary work. Aside from Varejão and Jonathas de Andrade (the latter represented by a vast wall installation about laborers on a banana plantation, *40 negro bom é 1 real* [40 Good Blacks for R\$1.00, 2013], in the gallery devoted to "Labor"), the newly commissioned pieces were significantly less striking than the historical ones. This contrast was particularly acute in "Cosmologies and National Emblems," where Sidney Amaral, Thiago Martins de Melo, and Luiz Zerbini were invited to produce alternative versions of 19th-century history paintings celebrating national events such as the first Catholic mass, the abolition of slavery, and the proclamation of the republic. These flamboyant paintings didn't stand a chance against the modest set of crayon drawings by Marubo elders and shamans collected by the anthropologist Pedro Cesarino, which show the layers of the Marubo cosmos and the path of the dead, or (in the previous room) religious statuary of black saints unique to the Brazilian Catholic church.

It will never be easy to place the indigenous—a category discursively locked into the world of anthropology—alongside the art historical, but a critical distance toward colonial and religious

art certainly helps to mediate this gap. *Mestizo Histories* did not attempt to shoehorn these indigenous traditions into Euro-American art history, but rather aimed to demonstrate the irreconcilable frictions that give lie to the fantasy of harmonious *mestizaje*. (At several points in the show, the curators made the polemical decision not to translate indigenous captions—a decision that respected singularity but increased alterity.) At its best, such an anthropological gaze can diminish the present-ism of contemporary art and allow it to become a method or system of thinking, as best seen in the gallery "Encounters and Dis-encounters." Would that more curators, in more countries, had the nerve to investigate so unflinchingly cherished national myths, particularly via racial identity. In the midst of protests against race-based policing across the United States right now, this task seems particularly pressing.

COLONIAL UNCONSCIOUS ON DISPLAY

Cristina Freire

A "colonial unconscious" dominates discourse and practices in Brazil today. Curated by Adriano Pedrosa and Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, *Histórias Mestiças* (Mestizo Histories) at the Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, consistently elaborated the many layers of this collective imaginary.

Breaking at the outset with hierarchical interdictions, the exhibition presented an expressive set of 400 objects from different origins, times, and territories: paintings, drawings, sculptures, installations, maps, indigenous and African artifacts, historical documents, texts, and videos, organized into seven thematic nuclei: "Trails and Maps,"

"Encounters and Dis-encounters," "Masks and Portraits," "Cosmologies and National Emblems," "Rites," "Labor," and "Weaves and Graphic Inscriptions." Within these nuclei, the representations and values associated with racial *mestizaje* were juxtaposed over different axes and given many historical, anthropological, and cultural associations.

The question of *mestizaje* has been present for some time in the research of the curators. As an adjunct curator of the 24th Bienal de São Paulo (1998), Pedrosa, along with Paulo Herkenhoff, took anthropophagy—in the form of Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropófago" (1928)—as a starting point. Andrade's manifesto is about the local swallowing up of European references, the acceptance of which could be more complete, he argues, if it included African and Amerindian cultures. This concept was emphasized again in the banquet of *Mestizo Histories*. Pedrosa explains: "As an instrument for swallowing up the European tradition, it (antropofagia) was an early post-colonial strategy. But its indigenous and African roots have not yet been totally eaten up."¹

Schwarcz, a historian and anthropologist, also assigns different values to the notion of *mestizaje*. It is in her analysis a social and historical construction, and should be considered through antagonistic ideas, ranging from racial democracy to the violence that it mobilizes; inclusion and exclusion are two sides of the same coin. The different layers of *mestizaje* in Brazilian culture and the violence emerging from it (besides the myth of racial democracy) refer back to the notion of trauma: trauma of colonization, trauma of slavery, trauma of genocide of the natives, trauma of invasion (covered over by the image of discovery).

In the nucleus "Weaves and Graphic Inscriptions," photographs from the 19th century, for example images of black nursemaids with white children

on their laps, contrasted with more recent images showing socially admired black women. The iconic painting of Brazilian modernism, *A Negra II* (The Black Woman II, 1923) by Tarsila do Amaral, shared this space with masks from the Congo, Angola, and Benin, places from which most of the slaves being sent to Brazil came. Blacks and Indians, participants in an oral culture, were condemned to silence. As a result, against the background of hegemonic cultural standards, they were despised or put in subaltern positions, which was reinforced in art-critical categories.

Categorization is undoubtedly an exercise of power. The word “category” comes from the Greek *katēgoria*, which means “to publicly accuse.” In *Mestizo Histories* the curators opted to abandon categories such as native art, primitive art, religious art, naïf art, and popular art, among others, and proposed instead a horizontal relationship as a principle for perception. Graphics and indigenous designs, masks, paintings, and African drawings were paired off with photographs and works by artists such as Jean-Baptiste Debret, Johann Rugendas, Albert Eckhout, Pierre Verger, Rubem Valentim, Tarsila do Amaral, Adriana Varejão, Ernesto Neto, Claudia Andujar, and Jonathas de Andrade, among many other non-hierarchical and/or chronological connections. As a critical and political operation, therefore, *Mestizo Histories* stood out from the canons established by history and art criticism—and this is no mean achievement in Brazil, where abstraction from the historical and social context, a remnant from Modernist ideology, still often regulates relationships with art.

In the nucleus “Trails and Maps,” documents and works referring back to the time of slavery in Brazil were gathered, exposing the traumatic foundations on which modern capitalism is based. Among many other objects and historical documents, such as maps of the Quilombo de São Gonçalo neigh-

borhood in 1769, and drawings and maps for the piling of bodies on the ships that brought slaves to Brazil, there were contemporary works such as *Navio Negro* (Slave Ship, 2007) by the artist Emanuel Araújo, who founded and directs the Museu Afro-Brasil, the country’s first museum dedicated to Afro-Brazilian culture.

In the 19th century, the ideological conceptions of history (as development) and civilization (as hierarchy) gave support for an anthropology based on the superiority and hegemony of European culture in relation to other societies and peoples. As a matter of fact, the association of space and time—that is, the more distant in space, the more remote in time—are related to this linear and developing conception, which was fundamental for these narratives. With colonial rhetoric under suspicion and the rejection of the hegemony of Western societies’ claim to stand as a model for humanity, room is granted for the possibility of a border epistemology (to call up the idea formulated by the Argentine semiotician Walter Mignolo) that operates between the metropolitan legacies of colonialism and the legacies of the colonized areas.

Mestizo Histories stood in this battlefield as it brought together cultural objects set apart by the colonization of thought, and at the same time revealed many stories of violence and of silence. In the nucleus “Encounters and Disencounters,” for example, 38 watercolors from the 18th century described a conflict between the frontiersmen and the Kaingang Indians in the south of Brazil, and the drawings of the Yanomami artist Taniki Manippi-theri were juxtaposed with photographs of the Yanomami Indians by the Swiss photographer Claudia Andujar. In Andujar’s *Marcados* (1983–84) they are identified through numbers, just like the survivors of Auschwitz. In the nucleus “Weaves and Graphic Inscriptions,” ritual objects and paintings by Rubem Valentim

and Mestre Didi, as well as indigenous graphics, were set alongside paintings by representatives of Brazilian Concrete art. Such pairings served as an overall strategy for the exhibition and provoked a reconsideration of our usual associations with such work.

Mestizo Histories gathered objects from the most diverse Brazilian and international holdings, such as those from the Musée du Quai Branly in France, the National Museum of Denmark, the National Library Foundation of Brazil, the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology of the University of São Paulo, the Rio de Janeiro National Museum of Fine Arts, and the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo, among many other public and private collections. It presented them with new commissions by contemporary artists made specifically for this exhibition. Finally, the show was complemented by the publication of a carefully chosen selection of texts, bringing together authors and fundamental research and ideas to illustrate the roots of a culture over the centuries. *Mestizo Histories* exhibited, in the end, historical and political struggles within Brazilian mestizo culture against (always-updated) mechanisms of power.

Notes

1. Teté Martinho, “Histórias mestiças,” *Brasileiros*, August 29, 2014, <http://brasileiros.com.br/2014/08/historias-mesticas/>.

Translated from the Portuguese by David Alan Prescott

A MURKY HISTORY

Tobi Maier

When *Histórias Mestiças* (Mestizo Histories) opened at Instituto Tomie Ohtake in São Paulo, many were reminded of