

# ATELIER 17

and Modern Printmaking in the Americas

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## Organization

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ebook

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Atelier 17 in the Tropic of Capricorn.  
The Museum of Modern Art (MAM),  
São Paulo Biennial, and American  
Printmaking as Viewed from Brazil<sup>1</sup>

Ana Magalhães

This publication is a record of both the exhibition and the international conference, organized in partnership between the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC USP) and the Terra Foundation for American Art, which takes as its theme Atelier 17 as a hub of modern printmaking between the United States and Brazil in the 1950s. It was made possible by two elements: scholarly research and the resources to support the loans, not only from the Terra Foundation, but from two other institutions in the United States: The Brooklyn Museum and the Art Institute of Chicago. Support from the Terra Foundation was also given to provide all the resources to the preparation of the exhibition and respective publication, whereas MAC USP, as a counterpart, searched for resources to the conference and to bring art historian, Christina Weyl, to give a minicourse at the Museum, between April 15 and 18, 2019.

Through this partnership, São Paulo will see for the first time the impressive collection of American prints gathered by the Museum of Modern Art (MAM) through important donations, in comparison to a group of works that give the Brazilian audience a panorama of the making of American print collections, in those years, and their impact on the Brazilian artistic milieu. The exhibition shows 56 works in printmaking, by Stanley William Hayter (the creator and founder of Atelier 17) and his followers between Brazil and the United States — among them, Minna Citron, Jackson Pollock, Sue Fuller, Geraldo de Barros, and Lívio Abramo.

The concept of the project has its origins in the Master thesis of Carolina Rossetti de Toledo, presented in 2015 (TOLEDO, 2015). Toledo's thesis aimed at studying the donations Nelson Rockefeller made to Brazil, in 1946, to foster the foundation of

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1 The Tropic of Capricorn cuts the State of São Paulo practically in half. A reference to it was first used in the selected writings Aracy Amaral published in the early 2000. See Amaral, 2002. It is interesting that she avoids using the term "tropic" alone, which may not only point to the fact that she is making a statement about her precise locality (the city of São Paulo, which is actually also cut in half by the Tropic of Capricorn), but also that she wants to refrain from suggesting any approach to exoticism.

museums of modern art in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, taking MoMA as a model.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that Rockefeller's act has always been mentioned in the historiography concerned with the creation of the two museums, the works donated have never been studied nor exhibited together in Brazil. Toledo's research first focused on understanding their selection, the issue of them having never been distributed between the two MAMs (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro), and to propose their interpretation in the light of new evidence that our research group had been working on, and which concerned the making of the collection of the São Paulo MAM (MAGALHÃES, 2016).<sup>3</sup>

As the research in the group advanced, our attention was driven mainly by two things. The first one was the fact that when Rockefeller arrived in Brazil, in November 1946, and despite the engagement of the American consul in São Paulo and René d'Harnoncourt as MoMA's artistic director in the discussions and the committee that would prepare the creation of MAM, the Museum's chairman, industrialist Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho (alias *Ciccillo* Matarazzo)<sup>4</sup> was already on an acquisition campaign in Italy and France, so as to bring representative works to start the first nucleus of the Museum's collections. The second was the fact that though the American representatives played a key role in the conception of the institution, the presence of American artists did not correspond to that influence. One important aspect to be considered here is that in the second half of the 1940s, American art had not yet come to be the paradigm of modernism, and was still struggling to make itself be seen in Paris (GUILBAUD, 1983). The United States foreign cultural policies were not always driven to Brazil, and when Rockefeller came to the country in 1946, he was having a hard time at home, to give continuation to President Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy" (TOTA, 2014). Roosevelt's successor, President Dwight D. Eisenhower was totally taken by the creation of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the implantation of the Marshall Plan in Europe.

2 The São Paulo MAM was founded in 1948, and MAMRJ was created in 1949. See LOURENÇO (1999), BARROS (2002), NASCIMENTO (2003), and OSÓRIO & FABRIS (2008), among other studies.

3 MAC USP was founded in April, 1963, at the University of São Paulo, upon receiving the collections that the São Paulo MAM had gathered in its first decade of existence. In the negotiations between Matarazzo and USP, the idea was, at first, to transfer MAM's administration to the University. Dissident members of the Museum's Board of Trustees contested this decision, and fought with the University along the 1960s, to have the collections back. MAC USP and the Fundação Bienal de São Paulo (São Paulo Biennial Foundation) are institutions that were created out of the São Paulo MAM, between 1962 and 1963, when the Museum had entered a financial crisis.

4 Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho (São Paulo, SP, 1898-1977) was born into an Italian immigrant family of entrepreneurs, who had made their fortune in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, in São Paulo. Building a conglomerate of dozens of industries, *Ciccillo*'s uncle, Count Francesco Matarazzo, was considered the richest millionaire of Latin America. *Ciccillo* followed the steps of his uncle, creating his own group of industries, of which the Matarazzo Metallurgy was the most important. By the mid-1940s, he was engaged in presenting himself as a public figure to the São Paulo elite, so as to be both the image of the modernization of Brazil and the representative of that elite. In 1943, he married Yolanda Penteadó (Leme, SP, 1903 – Stanford, CA, EUA, 1983). Coming from a traditional family of coffee farmers and negotiators, Yolanda was by then a dame in the field of the arts. The alliance between *Ciccillo* and Yolanda is key to understanding the social relations that the São Paulo elite established to project itself as the beacon of the Brazilian new phase of the Republican period in the 1950s. See MAGALHÃES (2015).

The 1950s were somehow a consequence of such policies, where the US Foreign Affairs (especially through its cultural policies) would keep an interest in Latin America, mainly in Brazil and the São Paulo Biennial, but on a second instance, due to the major strength required to the policies of foreign affairs in Europe in the same period. In this sense, the museums of modern art in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro seemed to be less effective as the place of promotion of American art. In addition to this, one must not forget the long-term cultural relations Brazilian artistic milieu already had with Europe, mainly with France and Italy — the latter partially due to the fact that the country had the third largest community of Italian immigrants in the period. This might be why Brazil never had a representative collection of United States artists, despite their continuous and strong presence in the São Paulo Biennial ever since.

Going back to Toledo's research, its major contribution for the revaluation of the history of the São Paulo MAM collection was to have identified a second batch of donation made by Rockefeller that led to the unfolding of the history of the relations between Brazil and the United States in the field of printmaking in the postwar period. The 25 American prints that Rockefeller donated to the São Paulo MAM in 1951 had never been studied by Brazilian researchers, nor mentioned as part of his donations to the museum. As Toledo explains further in her essay in this book, these prints came to Brazil in a touring exhibition that would have promoted the new procedures and techniques of gravure disseminated in the United States context through Hayter's Atelier 17.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, this promotion of American printmaking was made in the early years of the creation of the Department of Prints and Drawings of MoMA, to which Nelson Rockefeller's mother, and founder of the museum, Abby Rockefeller, was the patron and first major donor.

It is interesting to compare these 25 prints with what the United States Delegation sent to the I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (I São Paulo Biennial) that same year. As d'Harnoncourt reminds us in his presentation text, the São Paulo MAM had just signed a cooperation agreement with MoMA, the year before. The New York museum was from then on in charge of organizing the American delegation in the editions of the São Paulo Biennial during the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> Their way of working was to call in curators and experts of various museums and institutions in the United States for the selection of works. In this specific case, MoMA seems to have made a pool of curators from the major museums in the East Coast, with a strong presence of New York institutions (I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1951, p. 74-86). Among the 124

<sup>5</sup> See also the importance of the dissemination of Hayter's book, **New Ways of Gravure**, launched in 1949, in various territories, Brazil included.

<sup>6</sup> With one exception. In the III Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (as it was first titled), it was a pool of institutions in the West Coast, coordinated by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which were in charge of organizing the United States Delegation. This participation is now the object of Toledo's PhD dissertation.

works selected for it, 30 were prints.<sup>7</sup> Some artists in this selection were again present in the Rockefeller donation. They were Sue Fuller, Misch Kohn, Armin Landeck, Boris Mago, and Louis Schanker, trained in Atelier 17. They represented half the number of artists exhibited as printmakers in the United States Delegation.

From d'Harnoncourt's presentation text on the delegation, we learn that four curators from the departments of prints and drawings, respectively, of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MoMA, and the Brooklyn Museum, were invited to select the printmakers that took part in it. Our attention goes especially to curator Una Johnson, whose curatorial input into the Brooklyn Museum collection of prints and drawings from the 1940s on has been most influential in the choices made for the core of the Rockefeller donation to the São Paulo MAM, as Toledo's research demonstrated.

Another element that calls one's attention is the fact that d'Harnoncourt speaks not of "printmaking", but of "graphic arts" in his text:

At the request of the Biennial organization, our "Museum" with the assistance of a jury of experts, selected a group of significant works in the field of painting, sculpture and the **graphic arts** of the United States, to send it to the exhibition (I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1951, p. 111) [my highlight].

So, the combination of expertise (in the field of curatorship) and the notion of graphic arts, rather than printmaking, suggests that the latter had been expanded to new techniques in the precedent decade, and that this was an important landmark to modern printmaking in the 1950s. In fact, when we look into the selection of works on this category for the United States delegation, there has been an attempt, not only to fulfill the idea of the panoramic program proposed by the organization as a whole, but mostly and more importantly, a search to present various techniques of printmaking. There are works on the more traditional techniques, such as woodcut and etching, and on the more new ones, emerging from the development of the graphic industries along the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century — such is the case of silkscreen, or in the case of Boris Margo's works, which are described as being produced by "*Cellocut*" technique of printmaking.

United States delegation was alone in highlighting the variety of printmaking techniques and their interaction with the graphic arts and industry, while the major European centers of the modern art seemed to have selected more traditional techniques of printmaking

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<sup>7</sup> It is important at this point to observe that along the 1950s, and due to the regulation of the awards given at the editions of the São Paulo Biennial (which also contemplated a regulation of acquisition awards), the delegations invited would always make a fair distribution of works on painting, sculpture, and paper. In Portuguese, the latter category might be simply called "gravura" (print), or with more precision "gravura" and "desenho" (drawing). It corresponds to the concept of prints and drawings in English, and to what the Italians in the context of the Venice Biennale called "*bianco nero*". However, such category sometimes involved awarding other kinds of works on paper. For instance, in the case of the acquisition of Kurt Schwitters' collage in the VI Bienal de São Paulo, in 1961. See the exhibition "Um outro acervo do MAC USP: prêmios-aquisição da Bienal de São Paulo, 1951-1963", curated by myself in 2012, and which corresponding catalog is under preparation for publication.

(I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1951, p. 111)<sup>8</sup>. If on the one hand, this might be due to the fact that modern printmaking had been experimenting again with traditional techniques, on the other, the development of the graphic industry had had already a major impact in modern printmaking. From the 1920s on, we can already see major transformations in the field. First, the spreading of the use of rotogravure and its possibilities of printing in color.<sup>9</sup> Second, the rise of experimentation with the dissemination of modern art by way of mechanical printing procedures, which federal policies of the United States in the 1930s had fostered, first through the activities of the so-called Associated American Artists (WASHINGTON, 2013).

Another American initiative that would be, as it seems, very successful in Brazil in the aftermath of World War II is the touring of various of the so-called “exhibition of multiples”.<sup>10</sup> These exhibitions were produced by MoMA, the Metropolitan Museum, and other museums in the United States, which in the case of the former actually organized a department to take care of their making. This was not something in which only United States institutions would engage, but also European institutions, mainly in the case of Great Britain and France, having as its background André Malraux’s ideas on the imaginary museum (MALRAUX, 1951).

In the context of Brazil, the arrival of these exhibitions coincided with the turning point of the arrival of advertisement and publicity companies in the country, stimulating even more the growth and improvement of the graphic arts and graphic design among us (SIMÕES, 2006). Although these developments might not have been considered in the history of modern printmaking, it is high time these phenomena be articulated to our main subject here, as the historiographical research produced in the last decade, in the United States, Brazil and Europe in general, has proved that we might get new interpretation of modern art while reviewing the relationship that the modernists had with mass communication and industry.

The 56 works selected for this exhibition were meant to show this turning point — when gravure expanded into high experimentation. There is a group of 14 prints that present the rise of printmaking in the United States in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>

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8 See the case of Italy. Great Britain took part mainly with prints, due to the engagement of British national collections with the Festival of Great Britain that same year. They were all described as “litographs”. France had also a very important selection of prints - as for instance the large series of etchings by Henri-Georges Adam that was incorporated to the São Paulo MAM as acquisition award. However, there was no precision on the part of the French organization to describing their techniques.

9 In the case of Brazil, the emergence of rotogravure resulted, for instance, in a special supplement of one of the biggest newspapers in the country, **O Estado de S. Paulo**, during the 1930s. In it, the most important modernist critic of the period, Mário de Andrade, contributed to an essay on the artist Jorge de Lima’s photomontage book *A pintura em pânico*. See Mário de Andrade, *Fantasia de um poeta*, **Suplemento em rotogravura de O Estado de S. Paulo**, São Paulo, n° 146, November 1939.

10 For a deeper analysis of these exhibitions, including MoMA’s *What is Modern Painting?*, see COSTA (2014). The terminology to describe this kind of exhibition making use of color reproductions seems to have at least three possibilities: “multiple circulating exhibitions”, “educational exhibitions”, and “color reproductions”.

century. They show both the connections between American printmaking with the European avant-gardes, and the rise of new techniques in the context. For this, it is interesting to point out to the work by Arthur Wesley Dow, where the artist explores the possibilities of very subtle color layers in woodcut on Japanese paper (**cat. 14**). The introduction of the graphic arts *per se* is the subject of Paul Landacre's work, *The Press* (1934), in contrast with Armin Landeck's *Studio Interior n° 1* (1935) (**cat. 34**), where he depicts a printing machine with precision.

42 works in the exhibition are concentrated around Hayter's work and Atelier 17, making his oeuvre converse with both American and Brazilian printmakers, who either took training with him or were well versed in the dissemination of his "new ways of gravure". They are the core of the show and were key in the understanding of the outstanding American print collection MAC USP now holds, as well as for us to go further in the investigation of American and Brazilian artistic milieus relations along the 1950s.

The essays presented here were written by experts who have been working in different aspects of this story, and are records of their participation in the international conference organized in the context of the exhibition. With this project, we have thus hoped to, first, show works of art that neither the Brazilians nor the Americans were aware of the existence in our collections. Finally, we have searched to throw new light on such works and help their interpretation in the context in which they ended up in a Brazilian collection.



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