

Austrian Ludwig Foundation for Arts and Science

AESTHETICS,  
ETHICS,  
IDENTITY  
—  
MUSEUM  
OF THE  
21st CENTURY

40th  
Anniversary  
Symposium

Tania Bruguera  
Sabeth Buchmann  
Carla Cugini  
Brigitte Franzen  
Max Hollein  
Karola Kraus  
Christian Kravagna  
Mahret Ifeoma Kupka  
Ana Gonçalves Magalhães  
Theresia Niedermüller  
Florian Pumhösl  
Susanne Titz  
Gottfried Toman

## Colophon

Austrian Ludwig Foundation  
for Arts and Science  
Aesthetics, Ethics, Identity –  
Museum of the 21st Century  
40th-Anniversary Symposium

This publication summarizes  
the results of the 40th-  
Anniversary Symposium of  
the Austrian Ludwig Foun-  
dation at mumok, Vienna,  
on November 19 and 20,  
2021. A full recording of the  
event can be found at  
[www.ludwig-stiftung.at](http://www.ludwig-stiftung.at)

Editor: Austrian Ludwig  
Foundation

Austrian Ludwig Foundation  
MuseumsQuartier  
Museumsplatz 1  
Stiege 2/2B  
1070 Vienna, Austria

Managing Editors: Bettina  
Brunner, Sabeth Buchmann,  
Gottfried Toman

Authors: Tania Bruguera,  
Sabeth Buchmann, Carla  
Cugini, Brigitte Franzen, Max  
Hollein, Karola Kraus,  
Christian Kravagna, Mahret  
Ifeoma Kupka, Ana Gonçalves  
Magalhães, Theresia  
Niedermüller, Florian Pumhösl,  
Susanne Titz, Gottfried Toman

Copyediting and Proofreading:  
Greg Bond

Graphic Design:  
grafisches Büro, Vienna

Lithography: Pixelstorm,  
Vienna

Printing: Gerin Druck GmbH,  
Wolkersdorf

Paper: Munken Print White 18,  
90g; Cover: Invercote G, 220g

Distribution: SCHLEBRÜGGE.  
EDITOR (Vienna): Austria and  
Switzerland; Runge Verlags-  
auslieferung (Steinhagen):  
Germany; John Rule, Art Book  
Distribution (London): Europe  
and worldwide

© 2022 Austrian Ludwig  
Foundation, SCHLEBRÜGGE.  
EDITOR, the authors, the  
artists, the photographers, all  
image rights holders

Printed in Austria  
All rights reserved, including  
the right of reproduction  
in whole or in part in any form

Published by  
SCHLEBRÜGGE.EDITOR  
Q21, MuseumsQuartier  
Museumsplatz 1  
1070 Vienna, Austria  
T/F: +43 1 367 94 72  
[schlebruegge.editor@aon.at](mailto:schlebruegge.editor@aon.at)  
[www.schlebruegge.com](http://www.schlebruegge.com)

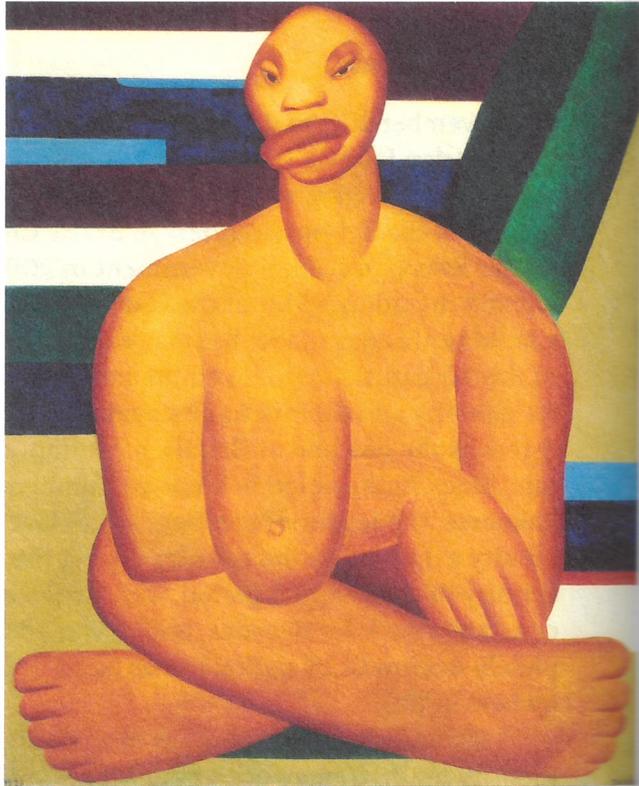
ISBN 978-3-903172-96-8

REVALUATING THE COLLECTIONS  
OF THE MUSEUM  
OF CONTEMPORARY ART OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF SÃO PAULO

Ana Gonçalves Magalhães

On November 20, the date of the second day of the Austrian Ludwig Foundation's 40th-Anniversary Symposium, we celebrate the national holiday of Black Consciousness in Brazil. Created by the Brazilian federal government in 2003, but still not adopted by all the country's states as a holiday, this day marks the many struggles of the African-descendant communities in Brazil for equality and their struggles against racism. It recalls the day one of Brazil's most important Black figures died in combat: Zumbi dos Palmares, the leader of the biggest ex-slave community ever built in the country during the first century of our colonial period, which resisted constant attack for decades, until it was completely destroyed by militia forces hired by landowners in 1695.

I could choose many ways to write about identity in the framework of the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC USP). I will tackle the issue here by looking back into our historical collections, our efforts to propose a decolonial approach to the works in them, and the attempts we have been making to tell other stories in which many forms of Otherness are reassessed. In this sense, I will take one of



Tarsila do Amaral, *The Negress*, 1923, oil on canvas, Collection of MAC USP.  
Photo: Romulo Fialdini. © Estate Tarsila do Amaral.

the most celebrated paintings in our collections, by the Brazilian modernist painter Tarsila do Amaral, and consider this work in the light of two specific projects in our curatorial program through which we endeavor to deal with Otherness through our institutional history and collections. The first of these projects is the Clareira, which addresses these themes and also renews our relationship with the museum's surroundings. The second is the curatorship for the new exhibition of our permanent collections. I will start by analyzing Tarsila do Amaral's *The Negress* (or *The Black Woman*, 1923) [Fig. 1], then give some brief information about the museum's institutional history, and finally present the two projects.

The Brazilian modernist writer, Oswald de Andrade, today known around the world for his Anthropophagite manifesto of 1928, wrote another earlier manifesto, the "Manifesto da Poesia Pau Brasil" ("Manifesto of Pau-Brasil Poetry"), which he ends with these words: "Barbarous, credulous, picturesque and tender. Readers of newspapers. Pau-Brasil. The forest and the school. The National Museum. Cuisine, ore and dance. Pau-Brasil."<sup>1</sup>

Originally published in a São Paulo newspaper in 1924, in this manifesto Oswald makes references both to modernity (the newspaper readers) and to Brazilian colonial history, hence its title. Pau-Brasil or Brazilwood was the very precious wood that the legendary cannibal

1 Oswald de Andrade, "Manifesto of Pau-Brasil Poetry," trans. Stella M. de Sá Rego, *Latin American Literary Review* 14, no. 27 ("Brazilian Literature"), 1986: 184–87.

Tupinambá Indians extracted from the coast of Brazil to trade with the French in the first decades of the country's colonization by the Portuguese, and that led to their persecution by the Portuguese, who considered them savage, ferocious, and unreliable.

The "Manifesto of Pau-Brasil Poetry" is not only understood as one of Oswald's attempts to formulate a new, modern aesthetic for Brazilian literature, but also gives us a glimpse of how he and his peers embraced modernity and foresaw its incorporation into a national project for Brazil. With the expression "the forest and the school" Oswald recognizes the importance of the contribution of the Indigenous communities of the country to our cultural formation.

This all goes hand in hand with one of the most celebrated paintings in the collections of MAC USP, *The Negress* by Tarsila do Amaral. When painting this work, Tarsila was Oswald's intellectual partner and wife. Both Oswald's Pau-Brasil manifesto and Tarsila's work were presented in Paris in the 1920s, where, through the help of French poet and writer Blaise Cendrars, they established contact with the Parisian artistic circle of modern artists and intellectuals, and were able to promote their own and their São Paulo friends' initiatives to modernize Brazil's culture.

Tarsila's and Oswald's role in the Brazilian avantgarde has seen renewed interest in recent decades, especially after the 24th Bienal de São Paulo in 1998, when a room was dedicated to Tarsila and included *The Negress* and many other important works, and Oswald's anthropophagy was internationally absorbed as a postcolonial

concept *avant la lettre*.<sup>2</sup> After that, Tarsila's work has not only been associated with the Week of 22, which highlighted Brazilian modern art in 1922 and is considered the milestone of Brazilian modernism to this day, even if it was not shown on the occasion. Most importantly, it has been illustrated and used by primary and secondary school teachers to educate their students about modern art in Brazil. Therefore, when visiting MAC USP, Brazilian audiences come to see *The Negress* as a masterpiece of our collections.

Finally, since *The Negress's* appearance in a retrospective exhibition of Tarsila's work in the United States in 2017,<sup>3</sup> and the growing popularity enjoyed by her figure and by Brazilian modernism conveyed by her work in the many global art histories written abroad, international museums have been knocking on our doors to have the painting on loan for temporary exhibitions reviewing modernism from a global perspective, while African Brazilian artists and intellectuals engage in its critical reading.

But, after 2018, and when preparing for the celebration of the centennial of the Week of 22 and the second centennial of its independence, Brazil has fallen prey to obscurantism in every possible way. International public opinion watches the fires in the Amazon forest escalate, and the

2 Paulo Herkenhoff and Adriano Pedrosa, eds., *XXIV Bienal de São Paulo - Núcleo Histórico: Antropofagia e Histórias de Canibalismos*, exh. cat. (São Paulo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1998).

3 Stephanie d'Alessandro and Luís Pérez-Oramas, *Tarsila do Amaral: Inventing Modern Art in Brazil*, exh. cat. The Art Institute of Chicago, Museum of Modern Art New York (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

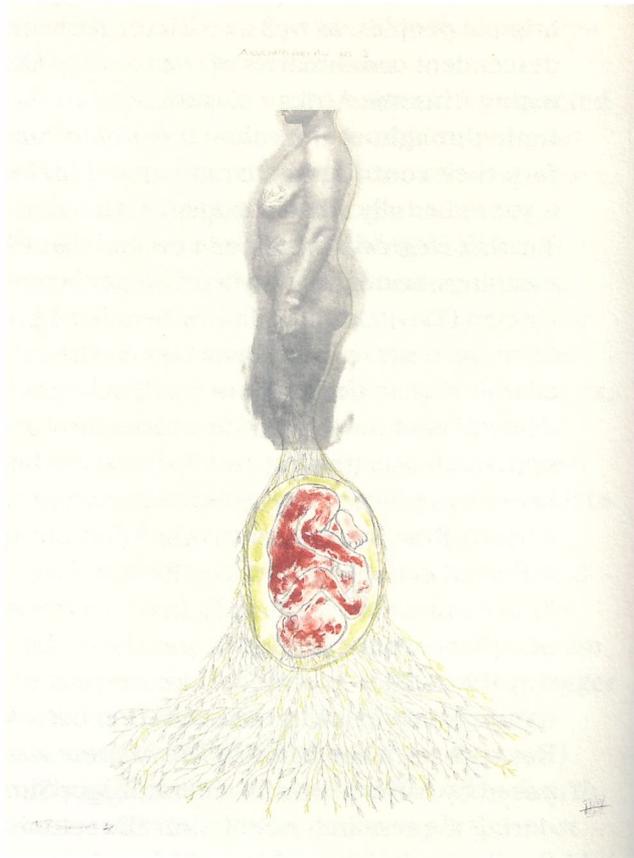
systematic genocide of Indigenous populations, not to mention the deep political, economic, and social crisis, which is further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The fire that destroyed the collections of the oldest museum in the country, the National Museum, itself a university museum, mentioned by Oswald in the quotation above, is a sad sign of the times.

Particularly in such a context it is expected that a university museum of contemporary art will be a place of exchange, encounters and, above all, critical thinking. Therefore the new curatorial program designed for MAC USP has conceived the institution as a laboratory, aiming at fostering artistic production, engaging more students in its activities, and investing in interdisciplinary partnerships with scholars, curators, artists, and educators in various fields. All of this is embedded in the museum's scholarly research and its collections with the aim to update them in the light of contemporary issues.

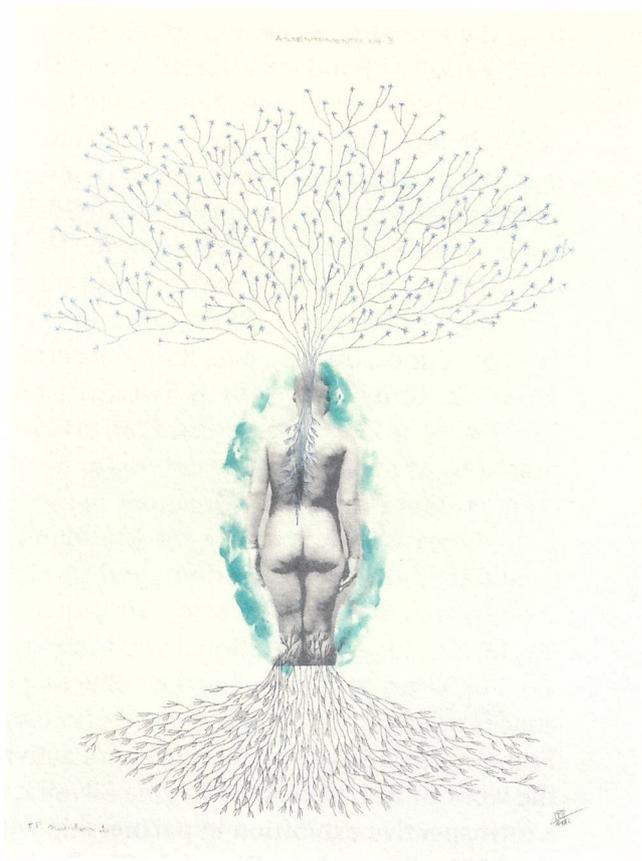
On the verge of its 60th anniversary, and permanently installed in its new venue at the Ibirapuera Park, MAC USP's curatorial program also recognizes the museum as part of this bigger landscape. Ibirapuera park (the Indigenous Tupi word for "forest that once was a forest") was inaugurated in 1954 to celebrate the fourth centennial of São Paulo, and today is the most popular green area of the city. It was designed by architect Oscar Niemeyer and a team of São Paulo architects, and now is declared a cultural landmark for Brazil, which grew around the historical botanical collection of the São Paulo region, thus the metaphor of the forest for the curatorial program of MAC USP.

The forest and the school, the binomial proposed by Oswald, must be updated and put into critical perspective today. After a century of modern experience in Brazil, it is clear to us that we have an asymmetrical, hierarchical, and violent relationship with this territory and its original peoples, as well as with the African-descendent communities of the country. Originating from the African diaspora due to slave trade throughout the colonial period of our history, their contribution to our cultural identity is yet to be fully acknowledged. In this sense, Tarsila's *Negress* has gained new and disturbing meanings, seeing the way a privileged white woman (Tarsila), whose family benefited greatly from the enslaved Black workers on their farm, alludes here to the figure of the Black "ama de leite" (wet nurse) in both a caricatural and sexualized way (the big, full lips, and the huge breast), as pointed out by many contemporary African-Brazilian women artists.<sup>4</sup> This critique is reflected in the two works by Rosana Paulino in our collections [Figs. 2, 3], in which the image of a Black woman's body is questioned by the way the artist depicts it as taken as part of nature, so to speak. A confrontation between Rosana's work and Tarsila's *The Negress* was proposed by African-Brazilian curator Igor Simões during the research webinar on "Decolonial Studies in the Visual Arts – African Diasporas

4 See, for instance, the participation of young African-Brazilian artist, Val Souza, at the cycle of online lectures "1922: Modernismos em Debate," a partnership between MAC USP, Instituto Moreira Salles, and Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, in 2021. Available in Portuguese at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQHHxD9ZMk&list=PLrRmfSeBV2C1MDXy-8\\_JnvcXoXHhMgQqa&index=9, 40:59](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQHHxD9ZMk&list=PLrRmfSeBV2C1MDXy-8_JnvcXoXHhMgQqa&index=9, 40:59) (accessed April 12, 2022).



Rosana Paulino, *Settlement No. 2*, 2012, color lithograph on paper,  
Collection of the artist (MAC USP holds copy no. 1/16). Courtesy the artist.



Rosana Paulino, *Settlement No. 3*, 2012, color lithograph on paper,  
Collection of the artist (MAC USP holds copy no. 2/16). Courtesy the artist.

MAC USP was founded in 1963 to receive the collections of the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (the first of its genre in Brazil) in the process of the separation of the institution from the Bienal de São Paulo, which resulted in the creation of Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, and the transfer of its collections to the University of São Paulo. The University of São Paulo thus received a collection of modern art that was formed mainly in the context of the 1950s and in the framework of the editions of the Bienal de São Paulo. This is the case not only of Tarsila’s *The Negress*, but also of many other works in our collections, for instance, the celebrated *Tripartite Unity* (1948–49) by Swiss artist Max Bill [Fig. 4], understood by Brazilian art historiography as the basis of the development of concrete art movements in the country in the 1950s.

Once at the university, the Museum continued to update its collections, and through the research of its first director, art historian Walter Zanini, gained national and international recognition by pioneering the collecting of conceptual practices, video art, and photography. From this first phase of the museum’s activity, the work of Brazilian artist Regina Silveira, with a retrospective exhibition in partnership with the 2021 edition of the Bienal de São Paulo, is a key example.

*Paradoxo do Santo* (Paradox of the Saint, 1994) is a work by Silveira that marks the way

5 A website with essays resulting from the webinar is under preparation to be launched soon.



Max Bill, *Tripartite Unity*, 1948–49, stainless steel, Collection of MAC USP.  
© Bildrecht, Vienna 2022. Photo: Romulo Fialdini.



Regina Silveira, *Paradox of the Saint*, 1994, painted wood and polystyrene plaques, Collection of MAC USP. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Romulo Fialdini.

the museum set a tone of institutional criticism through its collections [Fig. 5]. It is an installation that the artist first conceived for the Museo del Barrio in New York, from the study of a wooden sculpture by a Latin American self-taught artist depicting the figure of Santiago Matamoros (the patron saint of the Spanish colonial army in the conquest of the Americas). Always interested in phenomena of anamorphics, Silveira projects the shadow of the little figurine of Santiago Matamoros as the haunting equestrian statue of the patron of the Brazilian army, Duque de Caxias, designed by modern sculptor Victor Brecheret, the most celebrated artist of the famous Week of 22.<sup>6</sup>

The two projects to be considered here in the new curatorial program of MAC USP highlight these aspects of Walter Zanini's thinking, while updating them by looking into contemporary issues. In this sense, Otherness is key in re-evaluating our collections.

Otherness was central for the project of the Clareira.<sup>7</sup> The Clareira translates as "glade" in English, and is an area of grass vegetation, or of the undergrowth vegetation located within a forest or a woodland. Its formation is vital for the renewal of the forest and for its diversity, as it functions as a kind of granary. There, new species

6 The monumental equestrian statue by Brecheret now stands at Praça Princesa Isabel, in São Paulo's historical city center. Conceived originally for the Vale do Anhangabaú, the heart of São Paulo's colonial city, it was inaugurated in 1960. According to Brazilian historiography, it is considered not only the largest equestrian monument of the country, but also a feat from the point of view of its casting process.

7 See the whole 2021 program at: <http://www.macvirtual.usp.br/mac/conteudo/corsoseventos/clareira/home.asp> (accessed April 12, 2022).

can emerge and the existing ones guarantee their survival and germination. In the case of the Amazon rainforest, for example, these are the areas in which nomadic Indigenous groups establish temporary settlements. Installed on the ground floor of MAC USP's building, our "Clareira" is a place for welcoming visitors, while enhancing their connection with the "ground" of the city. A space with glass walls, the museum's ground floor is linked to the outside, a mix of trees, a garden, passers-by coming from the park, and just next to this, an expressway that crosses the city of São Paulo from north to south. As a program, the Clareira is a space where visual artists, musicians, performers, dancers, writers, actors, filmmakers, curators, and scholars are invited to present their work on Thursday evenings and are accompanied by two permanent installations of visual arts. Recent examples of activities in the Clareira include a performance by transgender artist, DC, addressing her life as a sex worker through interviews that she proposes to her white cisgender clients, in which she discusses prejudice against transgender individuals and oppression of sexuality. Further events were the performance *Absent Body (or at Night I Cry)* by Cristina Elias; the open rehearsal of the São Paulo State Dance Company with the performance of *Best Unique Day* by Brazilian choreographer Henrique Rodovalho; a reading from the book *Exiles: Stories of a Prison Hospital* by writer Natália Timmermann in parallel to the screening of the film *Without Penalty* by Eugênio Puppo; and percussionist Bruna de Prado performing the composition *i-131*, a radiophonic piece by composer Valéria Bonafé of the feminist music group Sonoras.

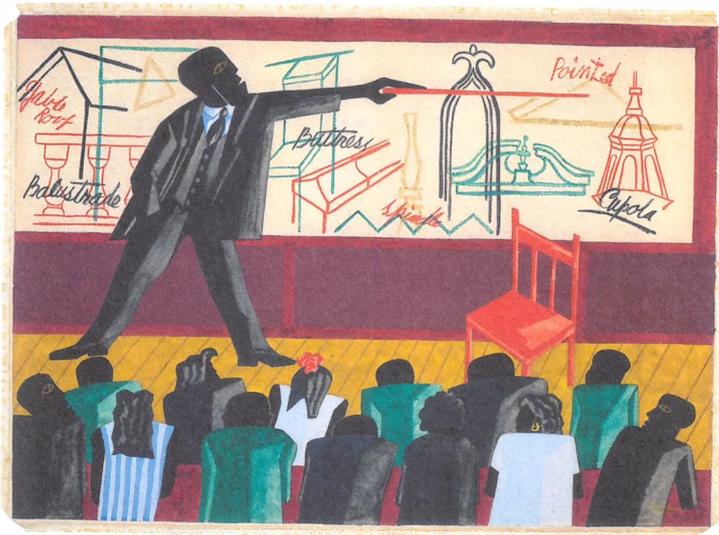
65 Both the Clareira and the research webinar “MAC USP Curatorial Practices: Critical Curating and Decolonial Studies in the Visual Arts – African Diasporas in the Americas,” organized with the help of artist Rosana Paulino and sponsored by the Getty Foundation Connecting Art Histories project, were key for us in defining the premises through which we are to conceive the permanent collections exhibition of the museum in 2022 and beyond.

A group of internal and external consulting curators identified three main axes for the selection of works. The first will consider various ways of performing and displaying identity, while questioning the erasure of Otherness. The second axis shall deal with the image of a political and social body. The third will be centered in the museum’s collection history, and how it reflects on a precise experience of modernity in the mid-twentieth century.

To give an example, one of the references for our revision of the museum’s collection history is the set of thirteen works that US collector and entrepreneur Nelson Rockefeller donated to Brazil through the care of the Institute of Brazilian Architects in 1946, to foster the foundation of the museums of modern art of São Paulo and of Rio de Janeiro. They are all now in our collections, and have always been taken by Brazilian art historians to exemplify US cultural hegemony in the country, bearing a direct connection to the promotion of abstract art. But the works donated by Rockefeller tell a much more complex and richer story. This is shown by the works by African-American artist Jacob Lawrence, and by Robert Gwathmey. Exhibited only in the 1950s

after arriving in São Paulo, Jacob Lawrence's *The Lesson* of 1946 is a vivid example of the artist's engagement and prominence in what is known as the New York Harlem Renaissance, the African-American neighborhood in the city that saw the heyday of Black cultural life in the 1930s and 1940s [Fig. 6]. Lawrence is one of the most representative artists of those days, and his works are testimonies of the contribution of these Black communities to modern American culture in the mid-century. As for Robert Gwathmey, his *Standard Bearer* of the same year was never before on show, neither at the Museum of Modern Art nor at MAC USP [Fig. 7]. This might be because the painting is a reminder of the major tensions of civil rights struggles of Black communities in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. Gwathmey creates an allegory of a politician of the southern states of the country, holding in his hand a standard with the symbol of justice wrapped around a hanging rope as used in lynchings of Black persons in the region. The composition also makes reference to the segregation laws.

These two works throw new light not only on the way we narrate the museum's collection history, but also suggest new dimensions to works such as Tarsila's *The Negress*—and everything that it hides—or the shining surface of Max Bill's *Tripartite Unity*. The latter, understood as an expression of modernity's rationality and universality, can be clearly questioned when we consider the many forms of violence and contradictions in Western technological progress as it developed through the twentieth century.



Jacob Lawrence, *The Lesson*, 1946, watercolor on paper.  
© 2022 The Jacob and Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence Foundation,  
Seattle / Bildrecht, Vienna 2022. Photo: Daniel Cabrel.



Robert Gwathmey, *The Standard Bearer*, 1946, oil on canvas, Collection of MAC USP. © Bildrecht, Vienna 2022. Photo: Daniel Cabrel.

As we understand it, to embrace Otherness we cannot deny our collections and their history. Instead, we believe we can indeed stimulate new approaches to them by looking at them through the eyes of contemporary issues. At the same time, it is our ethical role to discuss the many contradictions in the making of an institution like MAC USP, firstly and foremost as a reflection of a modernizing project that grew out of the violence of our colonial past and was parallel to the promotion of the myth of racial democracy in Brazil. The latter was a farce that of course never existed in the country, and it is high time this changes.