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# Editorial Introduction

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Collecting, cartography, mural and easel painting, the formation of regional schools, civil architecture, art exhibitions, cultural and aesthetic transfers, tradition and modernity, installations. This is a quick glimpse of the principal themes that this special issue of *RACAR*, broadly entitled *Contemporary Scholarship on Latin American Art*, addresses.

This collection, which includes articles by Canadian and foreign specialists, is organized in chronological order. It covers a vast timeframe, from the pre-Columbian era to the present, and a large number of countries, including Mexico, Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela. We also felt it was important for the book review section to address literature related to our theme.

The idea for a series of articles focused on current research on Latin American art surfaced following two sessions organized by Aléna Robin, one of this issue's guest editors, and held during the University Art Association of Canada's annual conferences in Edmonton in 2009 and Ottawa in 2011. Stepping back into the Canadian academic environment after ten years abroad, Robin wanted to know who in Canada and the United States was interested in her area of specialization. The quantity and quality of talks presented during these sessions, as well as the audiences' enthusiasm, convincingly showed that this area was extremely dynamic.

Interest in Latin American art has grown considerably in Canada over the last few years. Today, many universities offer courses in this field, and some departments have even created specialized positions. A similar trend is observable in the country's museums and other cultural institutions. Exhibitions are organized on different subjects, artists, and time periods related to Latin America; lesser-known collections are studied and highlighted, and these collections, moreover, continue to grow.

As this issue goes to press, the exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts on Peru, *Kingdoms of the Sun and the Moon*, has just ended its run. In Toronto, the Textile Museum of Canada will soon be launching an exhibition on Maya textiles, *Ancestry and Artistry: Maya Textiles from Guatemala*. Last year, the Art Gallery of Ontario showed an exhibition of the works of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, *Frida & Diego, Passion, Politics & Painting*. Also in 2012, the Royal Ontario Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization collaborated on *Maya: Secrets of their Ancient World*. The Royal Ontario Museum recently organized three other exhibitions on different aspects of Latin American visual culture: *Carnival: From Emancipation to Celebration*, showing costumes and photographs from the

Toronto Caribbean community's celebration of this festival; *Ancient Peru Unearthed: Golden Treasures of a Lost Civilization*, relating to the Sicán, a culture that preceded the Incas; and *Carlos Garaicoa*, a retrospective of the work of one of Cuba's major contemporary artists. In 2012, the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec hosted *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*.

This list is far from exhaustive, but it does show the interest and curiosity generated by Latin American visual and material culture among Canadian institutions and, just as importantly, among the public.

*Contemporary Scholarship on Latin American Art* begins with the study by Erell Hubert and Victor Pimentel of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' collection of pre-Columbian art that comprises more than 1,150 objects from over fifty different cultures. The development of this collection, which took place over a century, constitutes an important chapter in the history of collecting in Canada, particularly in Montreal. Hubert and Pimentel's aim is not simply to shine a spotlight on these works. The authors trace museums' efforts to render transparent the origins of the objects in their collections in order to call attention to the question of protecting cultural heritage. For many Latin American countries, this is an issue of great current relevance regarding both pre-Columbian objects and colonial art.

Cody Barteet's study centres on cartographic objects developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the Yucatán Maya and by other Indigenous peoples of Hispanic America. Barteet argues that these works were part of the strategy of Philip II and his followers to define, govern, and control the newly conquered territories. He refers to current theories of cartographic practices in order to emphasize the heterogeneity of the artists and the syncretism of their language. Cartographers constructed an alternative representation of American reality, as their political, judicial, and economic motivations did not necessarily correspond to the interests of the centralized power. Barteet studies the evolution of the geographical map as an abstract form and describes the formation of a hybrid culture, with elements from the pre-Columbian cartographic tradition surviving into the viceregal period. With their subtle blending of text and image, maps are visual manifestations of the countless multicultural negotiations that took place in the "New World."

Sebastián Ferrero presents another case of cultural convergence in his study of the early-seventeenth-century mural paintings adorning the church of San Pedro d'Andahuayllillas, in the Peruvian valley of Quispicanchis. He analyzes these

paintings in conjunction with different contemporary texts to argue that the San Pedro decorative program creates links between Catholic dogma and Andean agrarian rituals. According to this perspective, the faithful of the San Pedro agrarian community participated in European iconographic representations while maintaining their own ancestral religious convictions. Those responsible for the program, the visionary priest Juan Pérez Bocanegra and the skilful painter Luis de Riaño, created a complex but harmonious work, where painting, music and liturgy combined to bring the Andean parishioners closer to divine providence.

Michael Brown transports us to the viceroyalty of New Granada, home of the painter Gregorio Vásquez de Arce y Ceballos (1638–1711). Vásquez occupies an important place in the history of Latin American colonial painting. A surprising number of his drawings—over 106—survive, a unique legacy for a painter from this period. Vásquez worked for the greatest patrons of the time in his native Bogotá and in other cities in what is now Colombia. His extensive output was made possible by a large studio that he directed adroitly. Through an analysis of a group of Vásquez's paintings recently rediscovered at the Denver Art Museum, Brown charts the formation of the Colombian painting school, examines the master's studio practices and teaching methods, and traces the circulation of European prints and the role of Vásquez's drawings within these practices.

Luis Gordo Peláez details the history of the construction of the *alhóndiga* (granary) of Guanajuato, in New Spain, through a rigorous reading of archival documents. He shows that many individuals from the highest spheres of viceregal society were involved in this project, which was influenced by Enlightenment ideas and by policies of building public works for the common good. Its construction beginning in 1798, the *alhóndiga* quickly became a major example of Neoclassical civic architecture in Hispanic America. Despite the need for a larger and better-equipped granary, the building became the target of controversy, provoked in part by its high cost. This “palace for the maize,” as its detractors named it, was completed on 8 November 1809, a few months before it became one of the battlegrounds in the war of independence.

Elizabeth Boone examines the Spanish art displays at three exhibitions—in Buenos Aires, Mexico City, and Santiago de Chile—that marked the centenary of independence in 1910. Boone observes that these exhibitions were modelled on the 1889 Paris Exposition universelle. Using diplomatic correspondence as well as journalistic accounts and popular imagery, she describes the artworks shown and charts the three exhibitions, from their initial design to their reception by the local press. She addresses the cultural and political stakes of the time, and reflects on the characteristics of a national culture and its links with other cultural traditions. Adopting a transnational

vision of art history, yet recognizing the historical and cultural specificities of each country, she explores the relationship with Spain and the place of Europe in the creation of a Latin American identity.

Katherine Brodbeck studies two exhibitions, the *Salão da Bússola* (*Salon of the Compass*) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1969, and *Do Corpo à Terra* (*From Body to Earth*), in Belo Horizonte in 1970. She examines the relationship between international art and Brazilian artists of the 1960s and 1970s. The *Salão da Bússola* flatly rejected the dominant artistic practices and marked the emergence of “anti-art,” characterized by corporeal performance and the use of so-called poor materials. *Do Corpo à Terra* was Brazil's response to the budding international movements of “post-studio” art, such as *arte povera* and land art. Brodbeck contends that these movements should be understood as a reaction by Brazilian artists both to the European avant-garde tradition and to local economic and political concerns in an experimental practice that parallels international art.

Finally, John Corso invites us to penetrate into the universe of Venezuelan artist Jesús Rafael Soto (1923–2005), one of the emblematic figures of the kinetic art movement. Corso argues that art historians have underestimated the political dimension of Soto's works. Having spent many years in Paris in voluntary exile, Soto tended to dissociate his artistic activity from the political realm. Yet Corso proposes a new reading of Soto's *Penetrables* installations in the light of the philosophy of Hannah Arendt (1906–75). Corso uses Arendt's critical theory to reveal the political implications of Soto's created environments, which call for the viewers' active participation.

We hope these brief outlines provide a foretaste of the richness and diversity in current studies of Latin American art. None of the articles in this collection focuses specifically on the nineteenth century. The artistic life of this period was greatly affected by the independence movements and their political after-shocks, a century of historical and political events that moulded present nations. This period continues to be the least studied by historians of Latin American art, both internationally and locally. The absence of texts on the nineteenth century in this issue is therefore but a reflection of the realities of historiography.

*Contemporary Scholarship on Latin American Art* proposes an autonomous approach to the study of Latin American art and culture. This does not stem from an epistemological bias on our part. Rather, it reflects a historiographical updating in line with our personal disciplinary interests and that probably echoes the elective affinities we foster in a cultural field that is astonishingly rich and diverse. A cultural field which is, moreover, specific to our continent.

Still too often, Latin American art is left in the margins of “Western art” and of the general art history textbooks that

are used in our schools. While many factors might explain this situation, we will limit ourselves to naming two here: first is the lack of information that has been available in this field, a situation that has radically changed over the last few years; second is the inadequacy of some of European art history's analytical categories to address the specificities of American reality. There again, the situation is correcting itself thanks to the development of new disciplinary paradigms. Be that as it may, it is paramount to observe that Latin American art is not simply a derivative of European art; it does not exist in the margins of Western artistic movements. On the contrary, it participates fully, with its own characteristics, in the construction of a Western culture that is constantly in the making. Whatever differences there may have been in the past have abated and have tended to disappear in contemporary art, as is shown in this special issue.

Since its first contacts with Europe, the American continent has been part of a world that has been globalized by commercial, cultural, and technological exchanges; by the presence of the Catholic Church and different religious orders' evangelical endeavours; by the circulation of ideas; and by the constant comings and goings of patrons, artists, and other cultural agents. To this transatlantic circulation we should also add contacts with the Pacific: in viceregal times, the American continent constituted a strategic halt on the route toward Hispanic and Lusophone Asian colonies. This aspect is not treated in the current issue, but it is increasingly sparking interest in academic milieus. We should also bear in mind that even before the Europeans' arrival, the peoples of Latin America continually engaged in exchanges among themselves. It is undoubtedly true that culture is made through creative acts, but it is also produced by encounters, transfers, and miscegenation, as is apparent in many of the articles in this collection. In this regard, we regret that another aspect of globalization, the impact of Latin American art on the European artistic scene, could not be studied in this issue. We hope nonetheless that this publication will contribute to the development of studies on Latin American art and visual culture, particularly in Canada.

To all those who made the publication of this issue possible, to the authors and anonymous readers, to the *RACAR* editors, who recognized the pertinence of these questions, to Ery Contogouris, the journal's managing editor, who patiently accompanied us throughout this process, we wish to express our most sincere gratitude. ¡Muchas gracias! Obrigado! ¡Enhorabuena! Parabéns!