



Brazzil
October 1998
Art

Artists and Cannibals

Organizers of São Paulo's 24th Bienal are expecting that 450,000 will be drawn by the international art mixing that will be open until December 13. Among the artists being shown: René Magritte, Francis Bacon, Vincent van Gogh together with national treasures Tarsila do Amaral, Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark.

Émerson Luís

Bishop Sardinha, a character from the early Brazilian history, whose main claim to fame derives from the fact that he was eaten by Brazilian cannibals is the great inspiration for the just-opened 24th Biennial in São Paulo, the world's third most important art exhibit, just behind the Venice Biennial from Italy and the Documenta exposition from Kassel, Germany. The bishop's deglutition had already inspired in the early '20s the so-called anthropophagic movement, which proposed the cannibalizing of the European culture. The same idea was again adopted by the *tropicalista* music movement from the late '60s.

In 1928, writer Oswald de Andrade, one of the leaders of the Movimento Modernista, wrote the celebrated Manifesto Antropófago after looking at Tarsila do Amaral's painting *Abaporu*, one of the stars of the exhibit. United by the anthropophagic theme there are foreign geniuses like Belgian René Magritte, British Francis Bacon, and Dutch Vincent van Gogh as well as William Blake, Auguste Rodin, and Salvador Dalí. From the Brazilian side besides Tarsila do Amaral, there are other heavyweights like Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark. These works were insured for half a billion dollars, \$100 million of which to cover 15 paintings and 13 drawings and prints by Van Gogh. The Bienal itself consumed \$15 million to be organized.

All these names may give the impression that after decades—the event started in 1951 by the hands of São Paulo Maecenas Ciccillo Matarazzo — promoting avant-garde and cutting edge art, the Bienal has become a museum. Not quite. These are just the decoys for close to 1000 works by 270 artists from 55 countries. And for the first time there is a section entirely dedicated to the Brazilian contemporary art. Among the close to 60 Brazilians artists there are Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Alfredo Volpi, Leonilson, and Tunga.

Among the innovations introduced in the latest version of the Bienal it is the so-called contamination. According to the organizers, every work was chosen as an illustration for the anthropophagic theme, the global inter-borrowing of ideas. The idea of artistic contagion continues inside the expo, which abolishes the geography and time to purposefully juxtapose the old and the new, the classic and the experimental, the national and the foreign. In a way that you can admire in the same room the distraught faces of Francis Bacon (1909-1992) and the *Trouxa* (Bundle of Clothes) of Brazilian sculptor Arthur Barrio. Barrio created his *trouxas* at the end of the '60s during the most repressive phase of the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985. They reminded people of the "presuntos" (literally, hams), cadavers who were found on the streets and covered by a sheet or newspaper waiting to be picked up by the police or the coroner.

Organizers are expecting that 450,000 will be lured by the international mixing and will come to the show that will

remain open until December 13. A hailstorm with gusty winds on the opening day (October 3) provoked panic and the building on the exhibit in the Ibirapuera Park had to be closed for four days while the place was cleaned up and repaired. According to the organizers there was no irreparable damage to the paintings and other works of art.

During the press conference held the day after the accident, Belgian curators of the Magritte room, Paolo Vedovi e Gisèli Olligns, commented that such "whims of nature" could happen anywhere in the world. Touched by the show of solidarity, curator Paulo Herkenhoff cried copiously.

According to a report by weekly *Isto É* the episode and its consequences were much worse than admitted by the Bienal's organizers. "What we saw on the modernity temple projected by Oscar Niemeyer was one of the saddest demonstrations of carelessness with an inestimable national and foreign artistic patrimony." The magazine described in vivid tones rain and sleet coming from the roof and hitting the works of art while José Carlos Libânio, a UN representative, commented: "That's the ultimate act of anthropophagi. Brazilian nature took care of devouring the world's works of art."

In the third floor, the hardest hit, Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti's bronze pieces felt the rain's full brunt. In the panicky reaction by the Bienal's workers that followed, sculptures were hurriedly taken out of the way and almost were broken. It took more than half an hour after the storm started before the workers started evacuating the building.

For more than ten minutes a painting by Argentinian Guillermo Kuitca was left under a jet of water while many people cried looking at the disaster. Comment from Swedish cameraman Pontus Kiandrafter after having filmed the situation: "Which artist will wish to expose here again after this tragedy?"

Several exhibits that used electricity were short-circuited and for a few seconds the whole building went dark leading people to start screaming. The climatized room with the Francis Bacons and Van Goghs weren't affected, though.

Anxiety

It is easy to understand why emotions are running high and Herkenhoff has been crying more than expected. He had cried already during the opening ceremonies when a crowd of 12,000 broke the record of public for the event. He said at the time: "Everything is working out." But just barely. Many works only arrived at the last second. People were already walking the corridors when Van Gogh's *Le Moulin de la Gallet* was whisked to its place on the third floor.

Only recently the Bienal started to recoup some international respect. Proof of its increasing reputation—at least before the rain incident—is the fact that the organizers were able to borrow pieces from the Louvre, a first time. MoMA, the New York Museum of Modern Art, broke also a 10-year policy of not lending any work to Brazil. All the charm of curator Paulo Herkenhoff was not enough though to get a single piece by Van Gogh from the Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam. The Bienal had to appeal to smaller museums and private collectors being unable to show a single self-portrait of the artist.

The São Paulo art show used to be a very popular event during the '60s and the '70s. Júlio Landmann, president of Fundação Bienal, who as a child used to visit the exhibit with his father, talked about these times: "It was the era of pop-art, op-art and kinetic art, which drew all kinds of visitor." By 1979 however, attendance to the 15th Bienal had fallen to 70,000 visitors. With the creation of the museum space in 1994, the crowds came back and Bienal version 22 saw a record 500,000 visitors.

The 24th Bienal can be virtually visited at <http://www.uol.com.br/bienal/24bienal>. On the site hosted by UOL (Universe Online), the largest Internet provider in Brazil, visitors will be able to see among other offerings the 55 artists from different countries reunited under the National Representations umbrella. The pages have blown up images of the works presented and people have also the option of sending their favorite works as electronic card. For the first time the Bienal includes virtual exhibits with addresses of sites that are doing art on line.

These are some of the selected sites: "Vulnerables" by Fabiana de Barros (<http://www.vulnerables.ch>); "Valetesjacks in Slow Motion" by Kiko Goifman; "HoME" by Lawrence Chua (<http://red.nticc.or.jp/HoME/javahome.html>); "Memento

Mori, an Interface for Death" by Ken Goldberg and Wojciech (<http://www.memento.ieor.berkeley.edu/>); and "No name DC", Sabine Bitter and Helmut Weber (<http://www.plexus.org/omnizone/works/bitter-weber/index.htm>).

CICCILO'S LEGACY

It was the Venice Biennial that inspired *Paulista* (from São Paulo) industrialist Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, better known as Ciccillo Matarazzo, to start in 1951 the Bienal Internacional de São Paulo. Matarazzo was the president of MAM (Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo—São Paulo Modern Art Museum) and made the new event part of the museum. The Bienal Foundation would only start in 1962.

In 1953, for its second edition, the exhibit had Picasso's *Guernica* and works by the likes of Brancusi, Calder, Ensor, Klee, Laurens, Mondrian, and Munch, and drew a public of 100,000. Four years later the Bienal got its own space, the Pavilhão Ciccillo Matarazzo in the Ibirapuera Park in São Paulo, a 30,000 sq. meter (323,000 sq. feet) structure designed by Oscar Niemeyer, the architect who dreamed Brazil's modern capital city, Brasília.

The '60s and '70s were the best of times for the Bienal. All the big names of pop art were represented at the 10th Bienal in 1967: Lichtenstein, Oldeburg, Rauschenberg, Rosenquist, Ruscha, Segall, Andy Warhol, and Wesselman. Starting in the late '70s, however, the massive presence of concept art works made the public shun the event. A mere 70,000 people went to see the 1979 Bienal.

**Send your
comments to
Brazil**

[MAGAZINE](#) / [CALENDAR](#) / [FORUM & CHAT](#) / [FREE CLASSIFIEDS](#) / [FREE YELLOW PAGES](#) /
[MUSIC](#)
[BACK ISSUES](#) / [BREAKING NEWS](#) / [BRAZZIL IN PORTUGUESE](#) / [BRAZZIL CLASSIC](#) /
[BRAZZIL MIRROR](#) / [FORUM ARCHIVE](#)
[PORTUGUESE FORUM](#) / [HOMEPAGE](#)

[Forum Map](#) / [2000 Board](#) / [2003 Board](#) / [Black](#) / [2002 Board](#)
[1988 Constitution](#) / [4](#) / [3000](#) / [Archive](#) / [Privacy](#) / [Investment in Brazil](#)

VILLA
GRISEBACH
AUKTIONEN

www.villa-grisebach.de

Feedback - Ads by Google

