



DEUTSCHES FORUM  
FÜR KUNSTGESCHICHTE  
CENTRE ALLEMAND  
D'HISTOIRE DE L'ART  
PARIS

## Report on the Transregional Academy

### **“Modernism” (São Paulo, 16-24 July 2016)**

The Transregional Academy “Modernities, Concepts, Contexts, Circulations” held in July 2016 came out of a new transregional research emphasis at the DFK Paris and inscribes itself in a fundamental paradigm shift in the humanities, the opening up to non-European cultures. It was organized together with the Forum transregionale Studien, whose seat is in Berlin, and was conceived in exchange with the network of art historians from Latin American universities and museums. The Terra Foundation for American Art was gained as an additional partner and assumed part of the funding. With the aim of fostering young researchers, the format was designed to fit doctoral candidates and postdocs in art history and adjacent disciplines.

Following a call for papers<sup>1</sup> published in early November 2015, 20 applications were selected from among 190. These were international participants from Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, France, Switzerland, the United States, Germany, Denmark, Spanish, Italy, Greece, and Poland, most of whom work in a university context and others in the museum area. Requests were made in advance to nine Seniors to supervise the work of the Fellows, together with Lena Bader and Thomas Kirchner, as a Steering Group: Jens Baumgarten (Universidade Federal de São Paulo, Unifesp), Margit Kern (Universität Hamburg), Hannah Baader (Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz/Max-Planck-Institut/Art Histories and Aesthetic Practices, Berlin – later represented by Gerhard Wolf), Patrick Flores (University of the

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<sup>1</sup> The call for papers was published in five languages: German, French, English, Portuguese, and Spanish. On this, see: <https://dfk-paris.org/de/event/transregional-academy-%E2%80%9Cmodernisms%E2%80%9Ds%C3%A3o-paulo-1213.html>



Philippines, Manila), Thierry Dufrêne (Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense), Anne Lafont (Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Paris, INHA), Ana Gonçalves Magalhães (Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, MAC USP), Gabriela Siracusano (Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, UNTREF, Buenos Aires), and Diana Wechsler (Museo de la Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, UNTREF, Buenos Aires). As internationally recognized experts, they are integrated in research projects and networks devoted to issues of transculturality and/or modernism in various regions of the world.

The goal of the Academy was to enable an exchange among different countries and regions about concepts and variations of modernism. In the sense of such a transregional perspective, the aim was to place the debates on modernism in the Latin American countries alongside the discussions carried out in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America and to locate them in a global context. In question were issues of appropriation and delimitations, revisions and translations of developments and processes that are reflected in designations like colonial art, independence, originality, primitivism, or nation building.

The Academy was held from 16 to 24 July 2016 at the Universidade Federal de São Paulo (Unifesp) and the Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo (MAC USP) and concluded with a public conference on 23 July. The activities were accompanied by a blog on which texts and information were already published in advance.<sup>2</sup> Supplemented with evening excursions, viewings, and walking tours, two formats structured the program: project presentations in which the Fellows presented their research and thematic sessions in which texts by Fellows and Seniors were presented for discussion in a reader compiled beforehand. In both cases, an additional participant introduced and moderated the discussion, to support the intellectual exchange. The alternation between project presentations and thematic sessions enables a balance between concrete examples and canonical texts. Viewing all the individual research projects and general theoretical positions together made it possible to discuss both region-specific aspects and fundamental methodological questions. Beyond that, integrating Seniors and Fellows in the preparation and implementation of the program (lecture suggestions, text selection, moderation, project discussion) had the beneficial side effect of creating an extremely productive discussion atmosphere in which all took equal part. The

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<sup>2</sup> <http://academies.hypotheses.org/modernisms-concepts-contexts-and-circulation>



conference did without keynote speakers. The participants' exchange and involvement were characterized by strong intellectual generosity.

Discussed along with canonical texts of research literature (Walter Mignolo, Néstor García Canclini, Bruno Latour, etc.) and their topical reference points were concrete manifestations, including pioneering exhibitions and stagings of modernism, like “Les Magiciens de la Terre” and the “Festival mondial des arts nègres”. In the translation and overview of the various anchor points that were or are determinant for the respective horizons of thought, the Academy developed its most powerful potential: issues of popularization and identity-creation in the course of modernism were as much in the foreground as the ideological, cultural-political implications, but also the challenges that diversity and singularity pose to language and translation. The reverse side of modernism, its dark moments, were a central topic of the discussions and were extensively debated, especially in connection with issues of the Diaspora. Also examined were prominent sketches of a “Global Art History”, with a view to its ideological connotations, for example when imperial discourses are revived in the “discovery” of non-European art histories.

Buzzwords like hybridity, *métissage* (interbreeding), and transculturalism, which have accompanied the postcolonial orientation of art history as prominent catchwords, were critically reviewed and in part subjected to a vehement discussion: concepts like “multiple peripheries” and “alternative modernities” were discussed as alternative models of thought. That this involves a challenge to the history of ideas and to discourse analysis was taken as a theme with a view to a number of recent approaches that tend to retroactively reinforce the categories they claim to question. The virulence of historical caesuras that insist on the necessity for new paradigms, turns, and concepts was also questioned from the perspective of the theory of science. Geopolitical and terminological questions were a recurrent motif when it came to overcoming traditional, ideologically charged patterns of narration without ending up in essentialist foundation myths through which national categories are retroactively implemented (for example, in the debate with the anthropophagia movement and the *Escuela del Sur*). A thread running through the discussions was the search for alternative models to describe phenomena like transfer, translation, and reception to think about the connected forms of exchange in a nonhierarchical way.



For the Forum Transregionale Studien, which had already organized several international meetings of this kind, this was the first Academy in Latin America. The suggestion came from the DFK Paris, and connected issues were initially discussed in the framework of various workshops in Paris in 2014/2015. As a classic reference point of Postcolonial Studies and the paradigmatic model of the lived multitude, Latin America seemed an extremely suitable starting point for a transregional opening. For this spoke also the historically grown cultural relations between France, Germany, and Brazil, as well close collaboration partners of the DFK Paris who work in this field as proven experts.

The Transregional Academy was conceived as an important instrument for fostering young researchers. It offers them not only the possibility to deepen their own research in exchange with a variety of experts and recognized researchers, to explore new horizons, and to continue their intellectual learning, but also an opportunity to create international networks for their further careers. Thus, the first joint projects have already resulted following the meeting in São Paulo.

In the framework of the Transregional Academy in São Paulo, important perspectives for further work were also opened up. Valéria Petri, Vice President of the Unifesp, announced her strong interest in continuing to work together in the framework of the transregional research activities at the DFK Paris. The President, Soraya Soubhi Smaili, underscored this. Instructive points of connection also resulted for the Goethe Institut São Paulo, which has placed an emphasis of its cultural program work on encounters among the intellectuals and artists of Latin America and Africa.<sup>3</sup> Katharina von Ruckteschell-Katte, Institute Director and Regional Director for South America, invited the participants to a concluding program point in the Goethe Institut. Concrete perspectives, especially regarding further academies, were developed. For example, the plan was made with the colleagues from Argentina, Gabriela Siracusano and Diana Wechsler, for a Transregional Academy on the topic of “Mobility and Circulation” in Buenos Aires in 2017. And Mexico City is being considered for 2018. During a meeting with the Rector of the Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero (UNTREF, Buenos Aires), Aníbal Y. Jozami, who decidedly supports the plan, it was also resolved to found an Argentinian section in the international CIHA Association (Comité international d’histoire de l’art), whose Academic Secretary Thierry Dufrêne was present. In this way, the

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example: <http://www.goethe.de/ins/br/lp/prj/eps/akt/deindex.htm>



Academy was able to function as an important mediator. The Academy thereby proved itself to be an important science-policy instrument that helps Latin American colleagues and institutions to take part in the international research community. And so it remains to be hoped that the format can contribute also in the future to further expand the network of art historians from Latin American universities and museums, in order to promote scientific exchange on the international level.

Lena Bader and Thomas Kirchner



*Fellows and Steering Group* on the terrace of the Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo