

DIALOGUES
DE PAIX
DIALOGUES
OF PEACE



Palais des Nations Genève

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Ce monde est un monde de tempêtes sauvages dompté par la musique de la beauté, *Rabindranâth Tagore*
This world is a world of wild storms kept tamed with the music of beauty; Rabindranâth Tagore



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Carla Stellweg

Art Critic
Specialist in Latin American Art

In a world of borderless digital travel on the information super highway, the new Internauts promise global free and equal cultural exchange.

Meanwhile, Milton Hatoum, a Brazilian of Arab-Portuguese parents, practices the archaic art of storytelling and is writing in the margins of history, away from the center, in Manaus, Amazonia.

In addition, some of us working in New York City receive by mail, and through some miraculous twist around the U.S.- Cuba blockade, items like a catalogue of Banco de Ideas Z, from Havana. On its first page, the artists' collective states: "To you who has opened this book ..." which is followed by "With open eyes, by day and by night, I always dream", José Martí.

These few examples demonstrate the plural ways in which cultural dialogue is born and continues to exist in today's world. It is as varied as the people that inhabit this planet. And, the overwhelming amount of information surrounding each and every person, we all know is not to be confused nor equated with the meaning of information which, fortunately, continues to be formulated by people in dialogue everywhere.

Since its independence from Spain and Portugal, Latin American art and culture has traveled and transformed itself along the riverbanks of multiple and mixed cultural traditions. Depending on the traveler, the tales and myths of what constitutes its "Latin Americanism" are as varied and diverse as the landscape and peoples inhabiting the territory. To give a summarized account of its many art historical facets, its movements, its avant-garde, its traditions, its post and neo-colonialism, is to generalize. Instead, it is possible here to briefly signal some of

the current critical issues, in particular because these questions have also engaged most of the artists included in this exhibition.

Today Latin Americans, no matter where they are residing and working, are witness to and part of an intense dialogue with western art. This dialogue has been ongoing on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean and although complex, it is basically centered around the western crisis which has questioned the validity of its occidental centralized, hegemonic model and the so-called failure of modernity. The beginning of a global dialogue with cultures that have been for centuries on the "outside" seems to have opened up new venues for interchange.

At the same time, those artists and critics from the margin and periphery — like Latino Americans in North America and Latin Americans in the Caribbean and Southern hemisphere — have been tuning their own instruments to the new sounds, defining questions, developing new models and rewriting art history from an inclusive and egalitarian point of perspective. Cultural studies, publications/exhibitions and information focusing on the diverse aspects of art and culture in the Americas, has grown steadily in the past fifteen years. The many voices heard till now are delivering a polyphonic and multinational speech by which new parameters of art and cultural education are being shaped.

Yet despite this intense dialogue with what is considered the hegemony and "mainstream", a key, always urgent, question keeps emerging from the center. What and who is this Other, and how is its identity represented? It appears that legitimization of "otherness" continues to be subjected to and is part of a process connected to naive ideas of "authenticity" whereby the "other", the Latino/Latin American, is asked again and again to explain his/herself. It is a like having to show your driver's licence every time you get into a car. But while ignorance abounds in the North, it is also a fact that many people in Latin America do not know each other nor who is producing art and culture or for what reasons. Much research remains to be done.

In the U.S., one answer to the question of "others/otherness" has been a move toward multicultural art practices. Multiculturalism suggests on the one hand the possibility of coexistence of the center with the various "others" of different racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. And, on the other hand, the more utopian position envisions a single America, stretching from Alaska to Patagonia, where all cultural minorities are working towards a transnationalization and intercultural relations between the Third and First World. This position, which

suggests an implosion of different, at times opposing cultural values within the First World, seems radical and therefore frightening to the more conservative factions of the establishment.

Nevertheless, it follows that these two versions of multiculturalism pose a variety of obstacles. For one, artists living and working in Latin America are formed by whole sets of different relationships with the U.S. and their identities are articulated within traditions that are specific to their countries and family backgrounds. Some of these traditions remain rooted in the view that a national identity, a culture, is constructed by occupying a territory and building national monuments and collections in museums. Paradoxically the reality surrounding these examples of a national identity has become transnational.

Another paradox is that in many of these same places indigenous people are not part of a fabricated national identity and continue to struggle with the idea of "nationhood". Native American artists, in the U.S. and the rest of the Americas, feel that a multicultural America will probably not mean the eradication of an America of non-Indians and Indians, of them and us, opposed to issues of egalitarian assimilation or access to the mainstream.

The dilemma of mainstream versus minority is however still based on the mainstream's need for access to the periphery, to revitalize and because it continues to produce art and culture. And, in this sense, the strength and resonance of Latino and Latin American art today resides in the fact that although very specific and ritualistic in nature it is also problematically critical, experimental and universal.

Finally, the differences as well as affinities of Latino and Latin American art will make its contributions within this new international setting. By the same token, in this specific forum, the dialogue with global cultural issues will enrich both the artists as well as the audience. Exhibitions of this pluralistic magnitude, that truly afford an interchange on equal footing, can only be cause for celebration.