

## **Day 1**

Thursday, February 6, 2020, 5:30–8:30 p.m.

MoMA, The Celeste Bartos Theater

### **Paulo Herkenhoff in conversation with Glenn D. Lowry**

#### **Lisa Blackmore**

##### **“Art and Infrastructure: Circulatory Environments”**

In the cultural history of Venezuelan modernism, the city has played a starring role as the support and backdrop to the seismic shift that occurred as landscape and figurative aesthetics gave way to abstract geometric and kinetic art in the mid-20th century. In this talk I explore the site-specificity of the large-scale projects that were commissioned in these emergent aesthetic trends by engaging with a context that exceeds the architectural imaginary to think through the relationships between artworks and infrastructure. The mid-century boom of state-commissioned modern artworks was followed in the 1970s by another oil-fueled uptick of outsize interventions into the circuitry of Venezuela’s infrastructure. From silos to hydropower plants, roads to airports, artworks by the likes of Carlos Cruz-Diez and Alejandro Otero became embedded in the economies and ecologies that fed, powered, and moved the nation. As such, kinetics became imbricated with diverse forms and flows of human and non-human matter, mapping onto circulatory environments, mirroring notions of movement and progress inseparable from Western paradigms of development, whose grounds have now irrevocably been shaken by political and ecological crises. Rather than simply cast *cinetismo* as an accomplice of urban and extractive modernity, I consider more unexpected temporalities, flows, and forms of stasis that emerge through kinetic works’ dynamic interactions with the sites where they are embedded.

#### **María Amalia García**

##### **“Vernacular Readings of South American Abstraction from the 1950s”**

This presentation offers a preliminary approach to something that, at first glance, may appear contradictory: the combination of high modernism, represented by abstract art, and vernacular South American culture. In the first instance, I will take a cursory look at the magazines *Habitat*, from Sao Paulo (edited by Lina Bo Bardi), and *A. Hombre y expresión*, from Caracas (run by Carlos Raúl Villanueva), in order to identify the coexistence of modern art and local culture. Secondly, I will address the Buenos Aires-based magazines *Nueva Visión* (edited by Tomás Maldonado) and *Conjugación de Buenos Aires* (run by Edgar Bayley and Juan Carlos La Madrid) in order to challenge established views of Argentine Concrete art. My hypothesis is that these magazines read the aesthetic-constructive aspects of the vernacular from a modernist perspective, focusing on procedures such as synthesis, formal values, and material honesty. In the Argentine case, I argue that art history’s reading of Concrete art from Buenos Aires, and of Tomás Maldonado specifically, has privileged the internationalist streak over vernacular concerns.

#### **Isaac Julien**

##### ***Lina Bo Bardi – A Marvellous Entanglement***

Isaac Julien’s *A Marvellous Entanglement* explores the life of visionary architect Lina Bo Bardi. The multi-screen installation mirrors Bo Bardi’s curatorial and architectonic strategies to propose an open-ended reflection on the visionary architect and her approach to Brazilian culture. By creating an immersive experience that allows the audience to contemplate moving-image and architectonic space at once, Julien creates connections between past and present that are relevant not only in the Latin American context but also globally.

## **Day 2**

Friday, February 7, 2020, 1:00–5:00 p.m.  
Columbia University, The Lantern, Lenfest Center for the Arts

**Kaira Cabañas**

**“Toward a Common Configurative Impulse”**

Brazilian art critic Mário Pedrosa’s theorization of art’s affective power, whereby the relational contract with the spectator is neither rational nor purely visual but is infused with feeling, was decisive for understandings of geometric abstraction as *expressive* in the 1950s. “Toward a Common Configurative Impulse” turns to another modernism, nestled alongside the geometric ones that would come to define the aesthetic of artists associated with Concrete art in these years. Beyond Concrete art, Pedrosa’s modernism also encompassed the creative production of diverse practitioners, among them popular artists, self-taught artists, and psychiatric patients. (The latter is the subject of my book *Learning from Madness*). With this in mind, this lecture tracks the historical and discursive origins of such an inclusive modernism, and how Pedrosa’s embrace of different artistic subjectivities calls for a shift in the historiography of Brazilian modernism at mid-century.

**Cecilia Fajardo-Hill**

**“Her Abstraction: Other Abstractions”**

Art is gendered, whether gender issues are at the center of an artist’s work or not, and this is made evident by the limited presence of women artists in art history, including Latin American modern abstraction. This presentation will introduce the work of modern abstract women artists to propose different and more expansive perspectives on modern abstraction in Latin America. Feminist art historical perspectives are necessary, not as much for reading gender issues in abstraction when is not central to the work, but in order to increase the presence of women, to create richer, more nuanced and diverse art histories and collections. This presentation proposes a challenge to the mechanisms by which so many abstract women artists have been excluded, and asks why only a few are prominent.

**Barry Bergdoll**

**“Carlos Raúl Villanueva: Reconfiguring the Spectator in Architectural Space”**

Alexander Alberro’s recent *Abstraction in Reverse: The Reconfigured Spectator in Mid-Twentieth-Century Latin American Art* offers a model for a critical reading of Neo-Concrete art, in which relationships both between spectator and art, and between art and the spaces of daily life, were radically reconfigured. Taking Alberro’s critical reading of the famous synthesis of the arts at Carlos Raúl Villanueva’s campus of the Universidad Central de Venezuela as a point of departure, I propose to look at the radical shift of Villanueva’s concept of architectural space from the 1950s to the 1960s. During this period Villanueva worked closely with artists, from his designs for the Museo de Belles Artes in Caracas to his design for the Venezuela Pavilion at Expo '67 in Montréal. It is a shift with parallels in the work of other major Latin American designers, but rarely with such an intense engagement with shifting practices in the visual arts and in the very theory of art. Particularly at UCV, he defined new paradigms of the relationship of both the eye and the body to complex interior and exterior spaces and to the landscape.

**Karin Schneider and Nicolás Guagnini, Union Gaucha Productions**

***Phantom Limb***

*Phantom Limb* is a fictional 16mm documentary about the development of modernism in Argentina, Brazil, and Poland, countries with specific cultural traditions that have nonetheless never been considered cultural centers in mainstream art-historical terms. We can thus define them as “relative peripheries.” Under these atypical cultural paradigms, the system of successive ruptures, typical of avant-garde movements, is replaced

in these countries by often asynchronous movements of continuity. This substitution has happened under different historical circumstances in each country. For example, in Poland, Unism, developed by Strzemiński and Kobro in the early 1920s, was pushed through the 1930s and into World War II by its authors (as opposed to Russian Constructivism, which was aborted by Stalinism long before). In Brazil, Neo-Concrete artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica left Concrete formalism in the late 1950s to work with experimental performance art in the '70s, within a logical development. Raul Lozza developed his Percetismo in Buenos Aires under Concretism in the 1940s, and kept with his investigations for several decades. *Phantom Limb* excludes the idea of a center; rather than position “alternative modernities” in relation to a central narrative, we will discuss them in relation to each other.