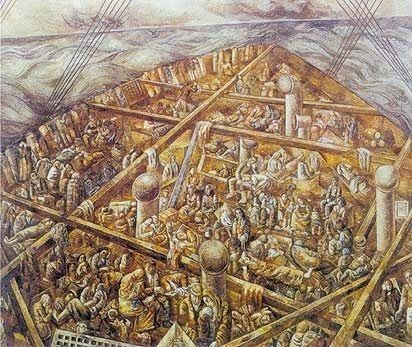
Contributor: Vera Beatriz Siqueira

**Segall, Lasar**

Born: 1891, Vilnius, Lithuania; Died: 1961, São Paulo, Brazil.



*Navio de emigrantes* (Emigrant ship), 1939-41, oil on canvas, 230 x 275 cm. Lasar Segall Museum, São Paulo, Brazil.

Since the early years when he left Lithuania for Germany, Lasar Segall was an important figure of the Expressionist movement. He moved to Dresden, an important cultural and artistic centre, and seat of **German Expressionism** in 1910, and at the time his works combined the free strokes of the **Impressionists** with **Romantic** themes and expressive tones. Segall travelled to Brazil in 1913, to visit his sister, and had his work exhibited in São Paulo and Campinas. During WWI, he was ousted from the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts and confined in Meissen (near Dresden). Afterwards he approached the Expressionist movement more decisively, co-founding, in 1919, the Dresden Secession Group, with which he held important shows, and participated in cultural events. In 1924 he migrated to Brazil, escaping from National Socialism in Germany. Immediately incorporated into Brazilian modernism, he developed a peculiar expressive poetics in which the local circumstances of Brazilian nature and culture were transformed in universal images of modern human tragedies. Since his first visit to the country, Segall made a lot of drawings and prints depicting ships and travellers of various social groups. In the late 1930s, however, he decided to create a more universal and less circumstantial image of emigrants. The result is a monumental work, in which emigration is transformed into a symbol of the human tragedies of displacement and adversity.

Lasar Segall was born on July 21, 1891, in the Jewish community of Vilnius, Lithuania, Russian Republic. After studying at the Vilnius School of Design, Segall moved to Berlin in 1906, where he enrolled in the School of Applied Arts and attended the Royal Prussian College of Fine Arts. Two years later his work was exhibited along with the Berlin Secession, winning the Max Liebermann Prize. The recognition stimulated him to move to Dresden in 1910. There, he enrolled in the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts, as a student-teacher, with his own studio, and had his first solo exhibition at Gurlitt Gallery. Later, in 1918 Segall published the print album *A Gentle Soul*, inspired by a Dostoevsky's short story, with 5 lithographs showing angular, concise and dramatic figures. During the first years of the 1920s, he participated actively in the cultural and artistic scene with his Dresden Secessionist Group. His works were exhibited in solo shows and purchased by Essen Museum, Folkwang Museum and Dresden City Museum. The toughening of National Socialist politics in Germany led him to move to Brazil, which he had visited earlier in the century and where he arrived in 1924.

Segall describes his first impression of Brazilian land as if it were the original contact of a child with the unknown, almost magical. Since he was a fundamentally educated man, we can assume that this naivety was a cultural construction, certainly related to the interest in the exotic and the mystical experience of estrangement. There, he devoted himself to the task of representing the country as a new challenge to the universality of his poetics. His paintings, prints and drawings made ​​in the early years of contact with the country witnessed the look of a stranger on Brazilian otherness. Less than the immediate integration of local colours and themes, these works are the testimony of a conscious desire to give form to the strange reality without engaging in the easy and descriptive realism.

Although, as a figurative painter, he had to deal with new objective landscapes and peoples, his interest was to include this new world in his universal expressionist poetic. Some of the earlier works in Brazil, like the painting *Morro Vermelho* (1926) or the series of engravings called *Mangue* (1928-1930), depicting prostitution in Rio de Janeiro, show his attempt to approximate this new reality to literary traditions and classical figures. A poor Afro-Brazilian lady is transformed in a modern representation of maternity, a Madonna surrounded by the houses of a *"favela"* and palm trees. Prostitutes seen through doors and windows were the image of fallen angels, symbols of abandonment and violence, arranged as in an altarpiece or icon.

The conciliation of the affectionate interest in Brazilian reality with the Expressionist poetic marked Segall's work. Maybe because Brazil was far from the European context of political and cultural crisis, he could maintain his affiliation to expressive art that collapsed in Europe during WWII. If in Germany, his works were included in the Degenerated Art Exhibition (Munich, 1937), in Brazil they participated in major art shows, being praised by critics and purchased by collectors.

Segall became a representative artist of Brazilian modern art. During the 1930s, after a two-year stay in Paris (1928-1930) he participated in important events of the modernist movement, such as the so-called "Revolutionary Salon" (38th General Exhibition of Fine Arts, 1931), the foundation of SPAM (Society for Modern Art, 1932) and the May Salon in São Paulo (1937 and 1939). In 1938, two French museums (Jeu de Paume Museum of Paris and the Art Museum of Grenoble) acquired his works. He also illustrated books and designed sets and costumes to balls, ballets and theatre plays.

In 1943, Segall had his first retrospective exhibition at National Museum of Fine Arts (Rio de Janeiro). In the same year, he published his print album Mangue, with texts by three important Brazilian writers, Mario de Andrade, Manuel Bandeira and Jorge de Lima. In 1944, Revista Acadêmica published a special issue on him, and he participated in the Brazilian Modern Painting Exhibition at Royal Academy of Arts in London. In 1951, another retrospective exhibition was held in MASP (Art Museum of São Paulo), and he had a special room at the first Biennial of São Paulo. He had some solo shows in Brazil, Europe and the United States. The National Museum of Modern Art in Paris began plans for a retrospective in 1956, realised only in 1959, after Segall's death from heart disease on August 2, 1957.

Between 1958 and 1962, his widow Jenny Klabin, and his sons Mauricio Segall and Oscar Klabin Segall coordinated a series of posthumous exhibitions in Europe and Israel, trying to divulge his works and preparing the creation of the Museu Lasar Segall in São Paulo. The museum was founded in 1967, is maintained by Brazilian Ministry of Culture, and houses many of the art works of Segall.

**References and Further reading:**

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**List of works:**

*Strassencafé* (Open-air café), 1911 (?), oil on canvas. Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil.

*Totenbett* (Deathbed), 1917/18, lithography, 34,5 x 37,5 cm. From the print album *A gentle soul*, inspired on Dostoevsky's short story. Lasar Segall Museum, São Paulo, Brazil.

*Strasse – Zwei Frauen* (Street – Two women), 1922, oil on canvas, 131 x 98 cm. Lasar Segall Museum, São Paulo, Brazil.

*Die ewingen Wanderer* (Eternal wanderers), 1919, oil on canvas, 138 x 184 cm. Lasar Segall Museum, São Paulo, Brazil.

*Paisagem brasileira* (Brazilian landscape), 1925, oil on canvas, 64 x 54 cm. Lasar Segall Museum, São Paulo, Brazil.

*Morro Vermelho* (Red Hill), 1926, oil on canvas, 115 x 95 cm. Private collection, São Paulo, Brazil.

*Bananal* (Banana plantation), 1927, 87 x 127 cm. Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo, Brazil.

*Casa do Mangue* (House in mangue), 1929, woodcut, 31,5 x 42 cm/40 x 53 cm. Lasar Segall Museum, São Paulo, Brazil.

*Navio de emigrantes* (Emigrant ship), 1939-41, oil on canvas, 230 x 275 cm. Lasar Segall Museum, São Paulo, Brazil.

*Floresta com vislumbres de céu* (Forest with glimpses of sky), 1954, oil on canvas, 115 x 89 cm. Oscar Klabin Segall Collection, São Paulo, Brazil.