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| Semana da Arte Moderna de 1922 [Modern Art Week, São Paulo 1922] |
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| Arguably the single most influential event of the historical avant-gardes in Latin America, Brazil’s Modern Art Week (São Paulo, 1922)put forth a vision for new art that would prove influential throughout the twentieth century. A three-day event held at São Paulo’s Municipal Theatre, the Modern Art Week provided a point of connection for different artists and also displayed a new phenomenon to Brazil’s bourgeois public: the heady mix of ‘isms’ which were circulating in cosmopolitan European circles, including Expressionism, Surrealism, and others. Up until then, this vision had only been articulated in Brazil in piecemeal fashion. The Modern Art Week incorporated dance, music, theatre, literature, visual arts, and architecture, and featured artists and writers who would become some of the most influential in the boom of Brazilian modernism that was to follow, among them Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade, Manuel Bandeira, Anita Malfatti, and Tarsila do Amaral. Influenced by Brazil’s rapid industrialisation and modernisation, the event featured a heterogeneous group that, together, displayed the ambivalent modernisation process that characterises Brazilian modernism more broadly. Unlike many of their avant-garde contemporaries in Latin America and abroad, women artists played key roles in the Modern Art Week and in Brazilian modernist art more generally, especially in visual culture and dance. |
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Influenced by Brazil’s rapid industrialisation and modernisation, the event featured a heterogeneous group that, together, displayed the ambivalent modernisation process that characterises Brazilian modernism more broadly. Unlike many of their avant-garde contemporaries in Latin America and abroad, women artists played key roles in the Modern Art Week and in Brazilian modernist art more generally, especially in visual culture and dance.  The year 1922 was a watershed time for Euro-American modernism, and in this respect the Modern Art Week joined company with the publication of T. S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland,* James Joyce’s *Ulysses,* and César Vallejo’s *Trilce.* Analogous to the Armory Show of 1913 in the United States, the Modern Art Week in São Paulo was the first moment in which modernism was systematically articulated in Brazil. Previous to that, the manifestations had been spread out: in 1912, the writer Oswald de Andrade returned to São Paulo from Paris, and news of the Continental avant-gardes, including Marinetti’s Futurism, began to circulate in Brazil. The following year, the painter Lasar Segall had his first show in the city. In 1916, Anita Malfatti, recently returned from Berlin and New York, inaugurated a show of her work, which became the single most important precursor to the Modern Art Week. Her exhibition displayed strong influences of Expressionismand Cubism, and it was attacked by traditionalists such as Monteiro Lobato. Mário de Andrade and Oswald de Andrade — two writers who would become Brazil’s most influential literary modernists — defended Malfatti’s show. Debates on modernist art in mainstream publications such as the *Jornal do Comércio* and *Correio Paulistano* began to appear at the same time, even though the previous five years had in some ways presaged these new aesthetics.   File: Malfatti\_Yellow\_Man\_1916.jpg  Figure : Anita Malfatti, *Yellow Man* (1916).  Held at the Theatro Municipal [Municipal Theatre] on the nights of February 13, 15, and 17, the Modern Art Week was organised by a group of intellectuals primarily from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (although a few foreigners also joined in), including Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, Menotti del Picchia, and Oswald de Andrade. The event was given crucial support by Graça Aranha, an intellectual of the old guard who placed his wager on the next generation (but would later be criticised by them for not being sufficiently innovative or collaborative in his approach). In addition to Oswald de Andrade, del Picchia, and Di Cavalcanti, performances, readings, and talks were given by those who would become key modernist figures, many of them later divided by political and aesthetic differences, including Mário de Andrade, Raul Bopp, Ronald de Carvalho, Guilherme de Almeida, Elísio de Carvalho, Luís Aranha, Ribeiro Cuoto, Sérgio Milliet, Cândido Mota Filho, Plínio Salgado, and Manuel Bandeira. Mário de Andrade read aloud his ‘Ode to a Bourgeois Gentleman’ from his book of poems *Hallucinated City* (written prior to, but published after, the Modern Art Week), apparently to hisses, boos, and other expressions of shock and disgust at his poetic audacity. Lectures — for example, Aranha’s inaugural address, ‘The Aesthetic Emotion in Modern Art’ — were accompanied by music and poetry; the poet Ronald de Carvalho gave a talk on ‘Modern Painting and Sculpture in Brazil,’ also accompanied by music. The modernist composer Heitor Villa-Lobos performed; Mário de Andrade gave a talk on modern visual art, and Yvonne Daumerie performed a dance piece. The Modern Art Week was also a showcase for Brazilian modernist painters, including Malfatti and Di Cavalcanti, Zina Aita, and Tarsila do Amaral — the latter who would become the principal visual artist of the Brazilian movements of the 1920s.  File: Cover\_catalogue\_Modern\_Art\_Week.jpg  Figure : Cover of the Modern Art Week catalogue.  It would be impossible to discuss the Modern Art Week without noting São Paulo’s centrality in Brazil’s rapid industrialisation and modernisation. Like Milan — the cradle of Futurism — São Paulo produced the most euphoric and radical celebrations of modernity. Like *Klaxon,* the little magazine to which the Modern Art Week was linked, the event was funded by São Paulo’s industrial families.  The Modern Art Week was unique in Latin American history not only for its daring stance, but also because it coincided with the centenary of Brazilian independence. In this way, it was consecrated as both a showcase for the most avant-garde techniques (many of them imported from Europe), and as a national project of celebrating Brazil’s cultural specificity, anticipating the nationalist turn of later modernist production in the country. While critics often emphasise its polemic, nearly belligerent quality, perhaps taking its contemporaneous and retrospective accounts a bit literally, it is more apt to characterise the Modern Art Week as an inflection point or crystallisation of a growing frustration with the academicism of Brazil’s traditional artistic circles, as well as a desire to explore a variety of tendencies that had been circulating transatlantically during the late 1910s and early 1920s. It was both controversial and enthusiastically embraced by mainstream periodicals and the upper-classes, although some major periodicals didn’t even take note of the event until after modernism’s consecration later on in the decade. The event remains one of the markers of the rise of modernism in the region. |
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