



# Listen Here Now!

**Argentine Art of the 1960s:  
Writings of the Avant-Garde**

Edited by Inés Katzenstein

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

This publication was generously sponsored by The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art. Additional support was provided by Nelly Arrieta de Blaquier, Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Emilio Ambasz, Eduardo Costantini and Malba-Colección Costantini, Mauro and Luz Herlitzka, Fundación Espigas, and Diana and Rafael Viñoly.

Produced by the Department of Publications,  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

The contents of this book were selected and compiled by Inés Katzenstein, except for those in Chapter II, which were selected by Andrea Giunta. An advisory committee consisting of Paulo Herkenhoff, Marcelo E. Pacheco, and Jay A. Levenson assisted Inés Katzenstein.

Edited by Jasmine Moorhead  
Designed by Gina Rossi  
Production by Christina Grillo and  
Christopher Zichello  
Printed and bound by Editoriale  
Bortolazzi-Stein s.r.l., Verona

© 2004 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.  
All rights reserved.  
Certain illustrations are covered in claims to copyright  
cited in the Photograph Credits on p. 375.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2004101577  
ISBN: 0-87070-366-8 (MoMA)

Published by The Museum of Modern Art,  
11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019  
www.moma.org

Distributed in the United States and Canada by  
D.A.P., New York

Distributed outside the United States and Canada by  
Thames & Hudson Ltd., London

Cover: Alberto Greco circling Argentine artist Alberto Heredia with chalk as part of the *First Live Art* exhibition, Paris, March 1962. Courtesy Vanina Greco. See p. 43.  
Frontispiece: Oscar Bony. *La familia obrera* [*The Working Class Family*]. 1968. Installation in *Experiences 68*, Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires. Courtesy Carola Bony. See p. 131.  
Back cover: View of Florida Street with artworks destroyed by the artists included in the exhibition *Experiences 68*. Courtesy Patricia Rizzo. See p. 292.

Printed in Italy

## Contents

- 9 Introduction: Inés Katzenstein
- 14 **I: The First Ruptures of the Decade**
- 16 From the Modern to the Contemporary: Shifts in Argentine Art, 1956–1965  
By Marcelo E. Pacheco
- 28 **DESTRUCTIVE ART**
- 28 **Destructive Art** • Kenneth Kemble • 1961
- 32 **Foundation for an Aesthetic of Destruction** • Aldo Pellegrini • 1961
- 36 **RUBÉN SANTANTONÍN**
- 36 **Why I Call These Objects “THINGS”** • Rubén Santantonín • 1964
- 38 **ALBERTO GRECO**
- 38 **Vivo-Dito Manifesto** • Alberto Greco • 1963
- 41 **Grand Vivo-Dito Anti-Manifesto Manifesto Scroll** (excerpts) • Alberto Greco • 1963
- 45 **Alberto Greco, Five Years after His Death** • Luis Felipe Noé • 1970
- 56 **JULIO LE PARC**
- 56 **No More Mystifications!** • Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel • 1961/64
- 59 **MARTA MINUJÍN**
- 59 **Destruction of My Works in the Impasse Ronsin, Paris** • Marta Minujín • 1963
- 61 **LUIS FELIPE NOÉ**
- 62 **Untitled text** • Luis Felipe Noé • 1963
- 64 **Anti-Aesthetics** (excerpts) • Luis Felipe Noé • 1965
- 71 **FUTURA**
- 72 **Futura** • Theater script of a work by Alfredo Rodríguez Arias based on an essay by Eduardo Polledo • 1968
- 76 **II: Jorge Romero Brest: Rewriting Modernism**  
Edited by Andrea Giunta
- 78 **Rewriting Modernism: Jorge Romero Brest and the Legitimation of Argentine Art**  
By Andrea Giunta
- 93 **JORGE ROMERO BREST** • Andrea Giunta
- 93 **What Is Informal Painting?** • Jorge Romero Brest • 1961
- 98 **Informal Art and the Art of Today** • Jorge Romero Brest • 1963
- 102 **Introduction to New Art from Argentina** • Jorge Romero Brest • 1964
- 107 **La Menesunda** • Jorge Romero Brest, Marta Minujín, and Rubén Santantonín • 1965
- 110 **“Awareness of Image” and “Awareness of Imagination” in the Process of Argentine Art**  
• Jorge Romero Brest • 1966
- 117 **Visual Experiences 1967** • Jorge Romero Brest • 1967
- 119 **Report and Reflection on Pop Art** • Jorge Romero Brest • 1967
- 130 **Experiences 68** • Jorge Romero Brest • 1968
- 132 **Letter from Buenos Aires** • Jorge Romero Brest • 1969
- 139 **Art for Consumption** • Jorge Romero Brest • 1969
- 146 **The Revolutionary Mandarin** • Interview with Jorge Romero Brest • 1969
- 150 **Analysis of the Situation of the Centro de Artes Visuales (ITDT)** • Jorge Romero Brest • 1970



or moral precepts. But never mind. Thanks to the value of *thinking in the proper manner*, aesthetics are finding a path to redemption, which is all that matters, and critics are approaching artists leaving aside the false impartiality of so-called universal laws.

Do not be surprised, then, reader, by this approach to Informal painting from a philosophical perspective, and by the references to other books of mine in which you will find the theoretical arguments that are missing here, and an analysis of past events from a new angle.<sup>2</sup> I can find no other way to guide you, and I will stick closely to the subject under discussion since I do not want to tell you what Informal painting looks like, but what *it is*.

### Notes

1. I recommend some of my books to the reader: *La pintura europea contemporánea (1900–1950)* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1952) and *¿Qué es el arte abstracto?* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Columba, Colección Esquemas, 1953); or, in particular, my recently published book *¿Qué ha sido la pintura? Introducción a la pintura de nuestro tiempo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Nova, 1961). [As far as we can tell, this book was not in fact published. Ed.] Alternatively, the reader should read any book on the subject, given that without this background information, he or she will not be able to comprehend what is happening today.
2. See my “Ensayo sobre la crítica de arte / A propósito de la pintura de vanguardia más reciente,” *Revista de la Universidad de La Plata*, no. 11 (1960). Also the book quoted above: *¿Qué ha sido la pintura?*, etc. etc.

—“¿Qué es la pintura informal?,” unpublished essay, 1961. Archivo Jorge Romero Brest, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires, C3-S2-A. Translated by Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro.

## Informal Art and the Art of Today: A Very Updated Article and New Reflections

By Jorge Romero Brest

1. It is not merely difficult to develop a theory of Informal art. For the time being it is impossible, unless we change the way in which we think, as physicists did when they discovered the world of atoms, electrons, quanta, signaling the end of the reign of *causality*. However, as we are far from this in the art world, we will have to make do with approximations. Whoever tries to explain this art will be cheated, and whoever tries to explain it logically will be a fraudster.

2. The problem emerges with the nomenclature. The most successful term, “un art autre” (“another art” or “a different art”), coined by Michel Tapié, indirectly denominates its essential character. Some less fortunate terms are “action painting,” chosen by Harold Rosenberg in the United States, which refers more to the painter than the painting; “art informel,” a term created by the dissonant joining of terms that are fundamentally opposed; and “art brut” (“brutal art”), which is even more contradictory. I would suggest “unconstructive” art in one sense, or “virginal” art in another, but I would not insist on these terms, which are as inappropriate as the others.

3. Is it correct to speak of Informal *art*? Initially one would say that it is better to speak of Informal *painting*, given that painters are the only ones who can escape from *reality* by placing a thin layer of matter over a flat support. However, this unique position is not justified, given that painters create *images* and therefore cannot escape reality.

What is more, Informalism is not a school nor tendency but rather a way of conceptualizing *existence*—including life, and not seeing existence through life as before—and thus it encompasses varied, or even opposed, manifestations.

4. Therefore, philosophy is the only way to approach Informalism. What other way is there to try to describe the *whole* that the artists *realize* through their work? In what other way can we forget the *detail*, while still taking it into account? This is a great moment in which aesthetics may discover its “Road to Damascus” through this art.

It does not matter that subtlety is being forced to extremes by *still* searching for explanations through Zen Buddhism, existentialism, psychoanalysis, or marxism. The instrument that will remove explanation is being sharpened, and this is what matters. It is about time that the “Cinderella of philosophy” realize who she is!

5. The idea of the “work of art” is being called into question as being without reason, and it is here that we can detect the *rupture* with the past implicit in Informalism. Despite the avant-garde violence of the first decades of the twentieth century, a painting by Picasso, Klee, or Vantongerloo remains as much a “work of art” as one by Masaccio or Velázquez, or a Byzantine icon. They all share an *intention* to create *perennial* forms as images of reality: ideas, feelings, or mandates. The painters of today who call themselves Informalist, and even those who do not, want to *be* in reality, escaping from the perennial form that constitutes the “work of art.” Of course, we can warn them that a jack-of-all-trades is master of none, but the warning will go unheeded.

6. The best way to describe the movement—not to judge it—is through *negation*. This will also help us to understand the long historical process that is unfolding before our eyes. Has this not happened through successive negations? It is in the empirical, natural, human, and manufactured world as the source of creative imagination; in ideas, feelings, and desires as impulses; in materials and even supports as vehicles. Now we would say that we have arrived at negation *itself*, but this is not something to fear. Especially as we still have a long way to go, and also because all negation generates its corresponding affirmation.

7. The Informal artist does not discuss the past, nor create a *crisis* in creation, as this would be a way of acknowledging it. He or she totally ignores the past and the norms of creation by practicing all kinds of *aesthetic* nudism, while struggling against not knowing how, or not being able, to transform this into *artistic* nudism. Alternatively, he or she may *do* artistic nudism without it corresponding to the necessary aesthetic nudism. This will result in a certain disconnect between a way of *living* and a way of *creating*, which is the only reason it will sometimes be unsuccessful.

8. This art falls into the most crass—and therefore most *poetic—realism*. In other words, those who called themselves *Realists* in the nineteenth century, or *Superrealists* [Spanish name for Surrealists] in the twentieth, did not raise the issue correctly, as these new artists are doing, albeit without resolution. Is the realist not the one most attached to reality? If so, who could be more realist than Alberto Burri or Jean Fautrier? Their impulse is to not deny the nature of their materials, and their pure desire is to stay within the imagination that these materials generate.



9. Reality sounds like a synonym of real, but it is not. What I call *real* is what *is* as a constituent; *reality* is what by being constituted is a *simulacrum* of the real. Therefore, I prefer to speak of *realities* in the plural, to avoid generalization in the field of *constituted* things, and to avoid them being confused with that which *constitutes* them, the only whole. This way, the *truth* that becomes evident in the work is not that unavoidably *relative* truth that is achieved through *experimentation* and *conceptualization*, but the *absolute* truth that is reached by *imagining* what exists. Although ephemeral, this can reach the *ineffable*.

10. Historical sequence derives from this subtle and dangerous fact. Only through the ineffable can the manifestations that constitute the history of art be interconnected. We should always distinguish between *classical* and *romantic* ineffability on the one hand—the result of isolation and introspection respectively, both of which search for the real *outside* the world—and *Informal* ineffability on the other, which is born from the artist's *openness* to discover the real in the *intestines* of the world.

11. Note that this word *openness* is the great slogan of our age. With it, we show our opposition to all the forms of *closure* that history demonstrates, be it of those who see and think, or of those who feel and fabricate. To be Informal is to be *true* in as much as one opens oneself to that which exists beyond what one sees, thinks, feels, or fabricates. Thus the field opens to include an aspect that had been forgotten in part for centuries: that of the *broadest* imagination.

12. Another issue is that of the materials and tools of creative action. The previous ones are rejected because they are *old* and they carry a heavy burden of tired *solutions*, but above all because they are the necessary elements for a *transposition* of reality. The Informal artists hate this word—they do not want to transpose anything—and anything that approaches it. Even if they do not say it, they would be happy to produce totally immaterial works, without the use of any tools, just taking advantage of *what is given*, or even more if the action of creation ultimately led to *inaction*: the root of their spirituality.

13. The physical characteristics of Informal works derive from this idea, because it is *original*. Remember that original does not mean different, it means a return to the *origin*, to the only reality, avoiding the deformities applied by man to knowledge. Return to origins? Perhaps this expression is the best one to describe the attitude of these artists: they wish to *return to the origin of everything*, that is, to the real.

14. The key is in the *experience*. The problem is that this word is the most deceptive of all; it is one of those words that we all use and think that we understand, even when it is one that generates our deepest conflicts. All human history rotates around *our own* experiences, which are constrained by ideas regarding the *validity* of what we think we have experienced. But it is one thing to have experience of *realities*, as in the past artworks were the *fruit of experience*, and quite another to have an experience of *the real*, as we do now that artworks are, in themselves, irrefutably *experience*.

15. We could say that this is all a *utopia*. Human work is always utopian, even when

it appears most practical, and Informal art is *notoriously* so. For this reason I believe in its *grandeur*, and I will call on Plato's discussion of madness in *Phaedrus* to back me up. Although I don't dismiss a return to the *tracks* of *valid* experience, I would simply warn us not to confuse the tracks with the trains, or even worse, with the arrival station. Doesn't validity depend on this arrival? When the station is discovered, we will have *valid* experience again. Until then, I prefer the Informalists to keep wandering, like those who shoot in the air. It is a risk but also a *chance*.

16. I admire Michel Tapié when he writes: "Personal reasons prove nothing, you say? But, between us, are not personal reasons the only ones that matter? And even more, between us, have you ever proved a general reason?" But I do not totally agree; I search for theoretical solutions that are not reasons, which seems to be a contradiction. Ah! I wait for the day in which I can eliminate the terms "why" and "because" from my vocabulary!

17. All the above were reflections written in 1961. I don't think that the ideas have *aged*, despite the changes of the last two years: those within Informalism that were to be expected, and those brought on by *New Figuration*, and followers of *Pop art*, not forgetting the latest *Superrealism*, which seems totally heretical to me. Yes, the art world has not stopped moving, but neither do we have any absolutely *new* tendency. And Informalism is still here, even if we have still not fully understood it.

18. The most surprising thing to note is the respectful tone used by those opposed to Informalism from totally opposite groups, as if they understood that the alarm call were still ringing. The call will still ring despite the oh-so-many reactionaries disguised as moderns, who chase the latest *novelty* to destroy the *previously* new. Not because in this case they agree with the New Figurationists or the Superrealists. Not at all! They do so to destroy the Informalists in the hope of eliminating everyone and affirming themselves in the past. The same thing happened with Cubism.

19. For their part, the Informalists are not feeling very secure. Many *did* Informalism, and others *exchanged* it for an Informalist Neoformalism. This is what happens when an ethic loses its support! A few are still fighting the good fight. Even Michel Tapié is finding difficulty in expanding his arm, and is loosening up. But this is not important as long as the spirit remains strong. And it is.

20. It is easy to prove. Do the newest movements not always return to previous forms? Fortunately these new movements *expand* the possibilities of Informalism, rather than reject them. They do this by calling on common things, either whole or fragmented, to put *objects* into the world; or by expanding successful experiences with materials with a humble attitude; or by recovering a genuine imagination, sometimes tortured by the great Informalists. All, I repeat, all of them exist in the *unconscious* of time, fighting against the annihilation of space, with an adventurous spirit that, *as never before*, does not fear risk nor surprise.

21. Although the perennial and majestic "work of art" is increasingly a *memory*, it cannot be totally lost. Perhaps because it is not possible.



22. The end of the century is approaching and the clouds are clearing; the earlier part was stormier. How surprising! Without anxiety and without desperation (its natural consequence), artists who cannot be classified as painters or sculptors, but only as *artists*, are creating with great *happiness*. Congratulations! Without knowing it, they are doing more with their craziness than all the pedagogues and moralists with their stiff rules. My optimism is solid and my faith strong. This Torcuato Di Tella Institute Prize will enrage more than one stubborn person, and this will encourage us. We will be deaf and blind to the shouts, words, and gestures of those who insist on delaying the process of the *real-ization* [sic] of man.

Buenos Aires, May 25, 1963

—Originally published as “El arte informal y el arte de hoy: Un artículo muy remozado y reflexiones nuevas,” in the catalogue for the 1963 National and International Prizes, Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires. Translated by Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro.

## Introduction to New Art from Argentina

By Jorge Romero Brest

It would be useless to search for a distinctive stylistic contribution from Argentine art of the last 150 years. A national identity can develop in a country's art only when there is a free yet unified response by its artists to the country's spirit. Such an atmosphere can produce works of art that are dynamic, in a dialectic relationship with that spirit. Although Argentine art is still far from this position, our efforts to attain it continue.

Unfortunately, our artistic tradition was established by those generations whose concept of pictorial form was limited. They were unable to profit from past experience. Moreover, progress was slowed up by the affliction of positivistic philosophies that obscured rather than enlightened the creative mind.

The backwardness of Argentine art is understandable. Conservative elements have predominated since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The second-rate European artists who came to Argentina depicted the picturesque Río de la Plata area in the styles of their native countries, thus imposing a naïve, representational folk style upon those native-born artists who were trained at their sides, and disregarding the possibility of stylistic influence from the colonial environment. Consequently, as the Europeans continued to employ their traditional ideas and methods, the Argentines did likewise, but were only able to adapt these superficially. This resulted in paintings and prints based on forms, which the mediocre among them rapidly converted into stereotypes.

Our artists' inferiority complex vis-à-vis Europe probably developed at this time, and it did not disappear as they visited Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. Were these artists impressed by French Impressionism or by its counterpart, the Macchiaioli art of Italy? Not at all. Unfortunately, they were attracted by European academicians and, therefore, painted in a Neoclassical and naturalist manner. The subsequent generation of Argentine artists visiting Europe discovered the more progressive movements, but again adapted these superficially. There were a few notable exceptions who, freed from the craft itself, sought to understand the new styles.

New directions finally appeared in the art of the 1920s and 1930s. How did these new currents develop? Certainly not in an overt manner, although the majority of Argentine painters and sculptors spent considerable time in Europe, particularly in France. Thus in Argentina, there were almost no extensions of Fauvism, Cubism, Surrealism, or Futurism. Most of our art was timid and lacking in nerve or vigor. Abstract artists were, so to speak, still in diapers. Consequently, the development of Argentine art was initially stunted by artists so conservative that they were unable to transcend a limited view. This was not caused by their being “Europeanized” but by their not being fundamentally “Europeanized.” It was caused at first by thoughtless rejection of new forms of expression, then by much belated, timid acceptance, which led to a bastardization of the new forms. These generations should have realized the need to look inward as well as outward, for only by looking upon what truly exists can man himself exist. Instead, the belated new Argentine movements, in their spurious and adulterated development, barred the creative impulse from developing along its redemptive path.

The initially conservative art, inherited from European academic art, is to this day addressed to the large lay public of Argentina, while experimental art, also derived from an alien tradition, found a smaller, more discriminating audience. It is impossible to successfully integrate the old and the new if they have nothing in common. The result is either sterility or chaos. Such were indeed the chaotic results of Argentine painting in the 1930s and 1940s, a period during which not even art critics could distinguish clearly between paintings of the so-called “old school” and those of the “modern style.” This “modern style,” though widely discussed, was generally misunderstood, as the significance of its derivation from the European Fauvism was ignored. Almost none of the European innovators had been exhibited in Buenos Aires at that time.

Considering this lack of contact and understanding, how can we then explain that some of our painters and sculptors did create fine works, and occasionally masterpieces? These were the products of isolated fires such as dare burn in the chilly atmosphere of repression. Sixteen years ago I expressed the thought in the first issue of the magazine *Ver y Estimar*:

The worst calamity is the lack of a common emotional climate among the artists, the lack of a sort of intimacy among and within themselves. These conditions, if established, would lead the artists to a discovery of our national identity, via the individual vision, which paradoxically is the only way toward a sense of universal being.

I am glad to say the situation has changed. By adopting a freer attitude toward art, our younger artists echo a spirit generated in other countries. Such rapprochement is possible in contemporary art. The difference between the art of our young generation and that in other countries might seem subtle. Even among us, some say there is actually no difference, but I disagree and say that indeed there is. Upon this certainty we base our optimism, strengthened by similar judgments of the foreign art critics who have visited us in recent years: Lionello Venturi, Giulio Carlo Argan, and Gillo Dorfles from Italy; André Malraux, Jean Cassou, and Jacques Lassaigue from France; Herbert Read from Great Britain; Willem Sandberg from Holland; and James Johnson Sweeney from the United States.