

Art in America

Number One 1964

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
GROWTH OF A LEGEND

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The astonishing growth of The Museum of Modern Art from its modest beginning in an office building to international pre-eminence in splendid new quarters is traced by New Yorker profile writer Geoffrey T. Hellman, with vivid sketches that embrace personalities, policies, and a sampling of the Collections

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COVER

Alexander Liberman's collage design features a stylized rendering of architect Philip Johnson's building plans for the remodeled Museum of Modern Art. Examples of Liberman's paintings, sculpture, photography and graphic art are included in Museum Collections

SPECTRUM OF STYLES IN LATIN AMERICA

RAFAEL SQUIRRU

To try to give a comprehensive view of the newest talents and trends in Latin American art today is, to say the least, an impossible task. Any one of the leading Latin American coun-

RAFAEL SQUIRRU is the Director of the Department of Cultural Affairs in the Pan American Union, Washington, D.C. A poet and art critic, he formerly directed the Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

tries would more than amply justify an article of the proportions of this one; I must, therefore, warn readers that I shall not even attempt a more or less complete list of names with individual characteristics of each painter and sculptor working today. I shall hope that the sampling of illustrations will give the reader, with the help of his imagination, a glimpse of what is actually going on in the world of Latin American art—an idea of

how, out of Aztec, Inca and Mayan cultures fused with styles from Europe and the Near East, Latin American artists evolved their own approach to art.

Such an article as this one must first answer a long-standing accusation that deeply disturbs our artists, an accusation summed up in a word: *derivative*. What does this accusation mean?

Obviously, used in the pejorative sense, "derivative" implies lack of authenticity, personality,

originality. Some observers feel cheated when, confronted with either an Argentine or Peruvian painter, they can relate him to the abstract movements current in the United States or Europe. The fact that there was such an important school as that of the Mexican muralists, Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros, has prejudiced these critics, giving them the notion that all Latin American art should be based on similar colorful anecdotes. I am not

Fernando Botero (Colombia) photo by Hernán Díaz.





Gironella: The Queen Mariana, oil on canvas, wood and collage, 1962. Galería Juan Martín, Mexico City.



José Luis Cuevas working on a wash drawing, 1963.



Pedro Friedeberg: La Mujer Tatuada, plaster mannequin painted in oil, 1963. Collection of author.

disparaging that important renaissance in Mexican painting, but surely to pretend that art, whether in Mexico itself or in any other Latin American country, should be dominated by a particular style or movement is as nonsensical as if he were to regret that European painting has deviated from surrealism or that American painting did not follow more closely the school of Winslow Homer. It is very important to realize that the term "derivative" must be used more cautiously than we have been accustomed to using it.

Related cultures

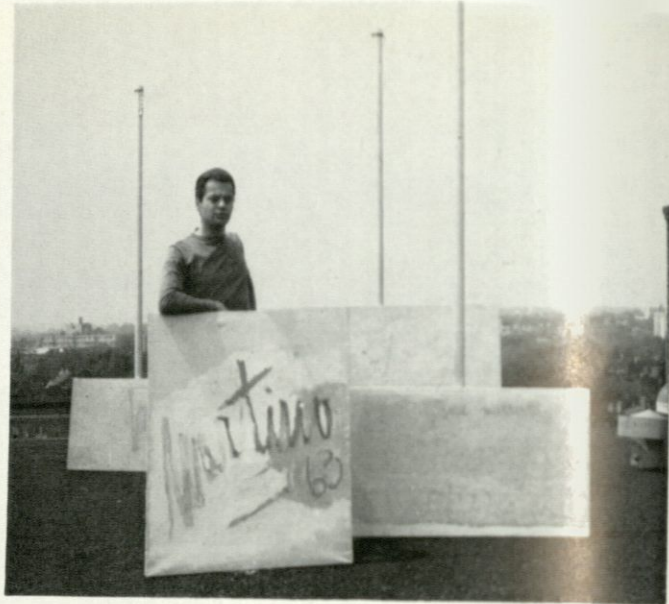
All art is in a certain sense derivative. Just as the history of man has followed a continued development since earliest times, the history of art has developed continuously since the earliest cave paintings. This development has perhaps not always been for the best, yet one stage has nevertheless followed another. There is no reason to be ashamed of a relationship between Latin American art and European art; indeed, it would be ridiculous not to expect such a relationship. As the very words imply, Latin America is a product of both native American and European forces, which were joined in the 15th century with the beginning of the European immigration that has continued steadily ever since. How can one

expect people belonging to a certain tradition not to be influenced by it? It is not a question of imitating any particular style; it is simply a question of being oneself, and to be Latin American is to be European as well.

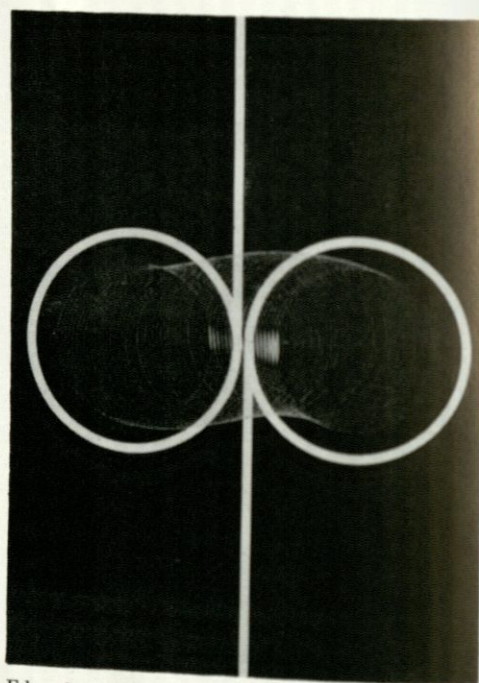
When I say "European as well" I am implying that Latin Americans are something more than European. Unlike the Anglo-Saxons in the North, who found only wild Indian tribes, the Spaniards encountered at least two highly refined cultures in the Aztec Empire in Mexico and the Inca Empire in Peru, not to mention the Mayas in Yucatán or the Chibchas in Colombia. These cultures had already attained excellence in the arts, as anyone with a mild curiosity about pre-Columbian achievements can see for himself. But since all artists do not drink from the same fountain, one cannot expect to find all Latin American artists sipping from the source of these ancient indigenous American cultures. Yet one can perceive in Latin American artists an awareness of the richness of these cultures and an increasing incorporation of their forms into their art. This is no condemnation of Latin American art; it is a phenomenon that may have a significance equal to the cubists' discovery of African art. The important thing is, I think, to scrutinize a given work for the characteristics of valid origi-



Enrique Barilari: *City Lights and Every Man for Himself*, wood and metal, 1962. Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires.



Martino with several of his oils, 1963; signature and date are the theme. Collection of the artist.



Eduardo MacEntyre: *White, Yellow and Black*, oil, 1962. Collection of Catherine Ward.

nality and authenticity instead of being thrown off the track by whatever relationships it has with other cultures.

The paths divide

Is a Latin American version of abstraction, whether lyrical or geometrical, the same as that of Europe, the United States, or Japan?

No! The forms of expression are international but the Latin American artist handles them in a new, different, original manner all his own. Once this point has been made perfectly clear we can start to speak more comfortably about our subject. A final warning: this emphasis or accent is by no means the same in

all artists. There is a wide range, from those artists close to the indigenous American roots to those who, being perhaps first-generation Latin Americans, are close, as is quite logical, to the European tradition. In between these extremes lies the whole gamut of Latin American art, from Mexico to Patagonia.

A considerable number of the new painters and sculptors are still working along abstract lines. Of these, lyrical abstraction executed with deep painterly concern has leading representatives: in Brazil, Mabe, Di Prete, Camargo and Serpa; Szyzlo in Peru; Maria Luisa Pacheco and also Da Silva in Bolivia; Dutari in Panama;

Armando Morales, of Nicaragua; Testa, Fernandez Muro, Martino, Raquel Forner and Forte in Argentina; Obregón in Colombia; Antunez and Opazo in Chile; Abularach (Guatemala); Villacis (Ecuador), and innumerable others.

Pop art by another name

The "hard edge" group, also abstract, has important adherents in Brazil (Serpa), Venezuela (Otero), and Argentina (MacEntyre, Capristo and Vidal). A great many artists are also working along new figurative lines: Cuevas (Mexico); Barreda and Castrocid (Chile); Botero (Colombia); Noe, Maccio, de la Vega, Deira (Argen-

tina). Finally, there is a movement which is becoming stronger in these last few years. This is the equivalent of what is called pop art in the United States and which, in Latin America, has been baptized "the art of things." It consists, basically, of transforming elements of everyday life into a personal expression.

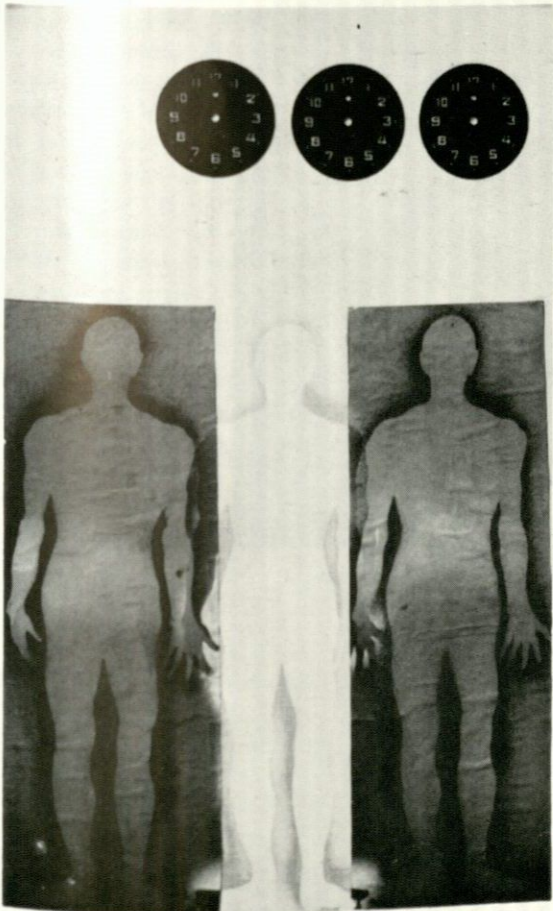
Many important painters who have worked with what we might call traditional techniques are now incorporating aspects of the pop approach and are producing works of great vitality and strength that enliven the panorama of the arts. In some cases there is the implication of social commentary in these works-



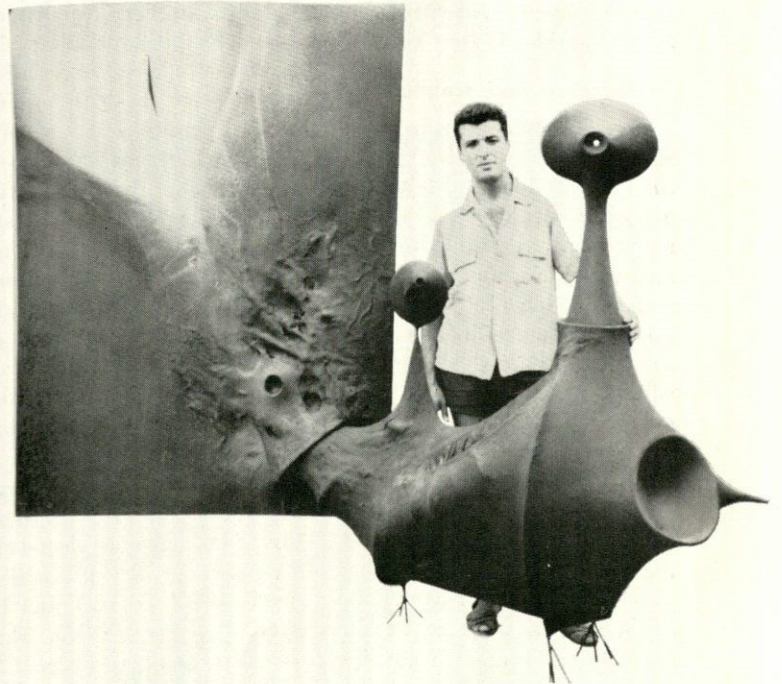
Antonio Berni, left, with Johnny Laguna Goes to Conquer the Big City, oil on wood and metal collage, 1963.



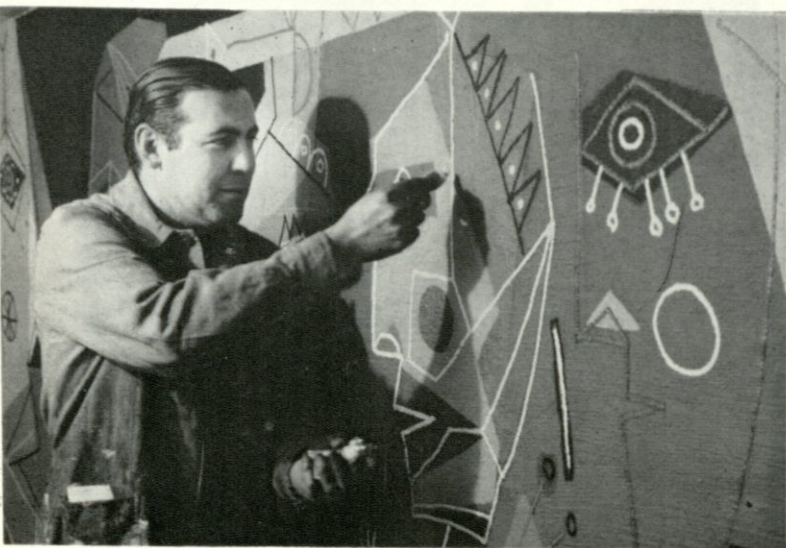
Alicia Penalba retouching the Grand Double, 1962, which was cast in bronze at her Paris atelier.



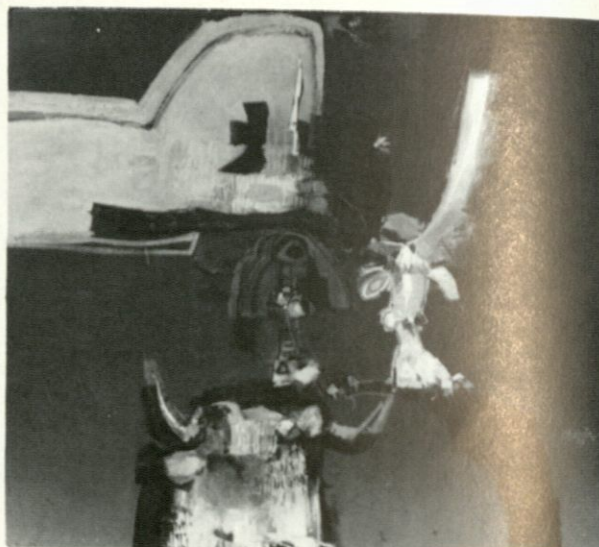
Carlos Squirru: Wet Shadow, collage and oil on canvas, 1963. Galería Bonino, Buenos Aires.



Emilio Renart: Bio-Cosmos I, canvas especially prepared to give it a leathery texture, 1963. Collection of the artist.



Carlos Paez Vilaró (Uruguay) working in 1960 on the mural, Roots of Peace, Pan American Union, Washington.



Alejandro Obregón (Colombia): Bull and Condor, oil, 1963. Collection of the artist.

Others are simply esthetic in their aim. As examples I would mention Antonio Berni, who won the International Engraving Prize in Venice, Delia Puzzovio, Carlos Squirru, Marta Minujin, Kenneth Kemble, Ruben Santantonin, Zulema Ciordia, Emilio Renart, all of whom are working in Argentina, and Alberto Gironella, an outstanding Mexican artist, together with Marisol Escobar, of Venezuela, one of the world's leading exponents of pop art now working in New York.

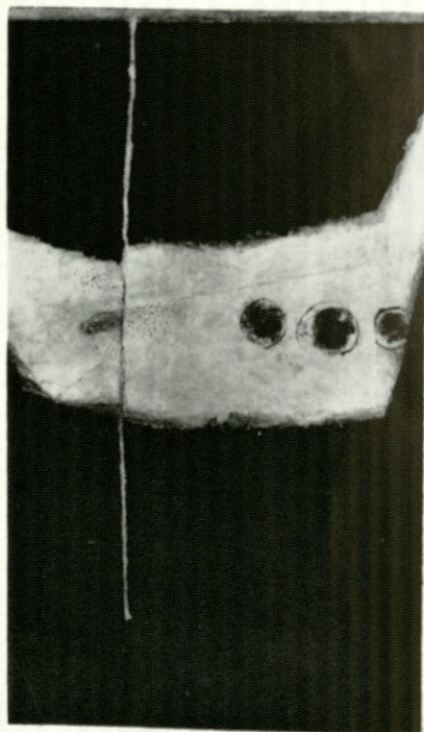
Muralists and sculptors

Special mention must be made of the muralists who, working as they do hand-in-hand with the new architects, have very strong representatives. In Uruguay, artists like Lincoln Presno have made valuable contributions in this field, along with others such as Alfredo Pareja, who works with mosaics in the Venetian style, and Carlos Paez Vilaró. In Argentina, mention should be made of Luis Seoane who has executed well over twenty murals, Leopoldo Presas, and the younger Celis Perez who, like the sculptor Hugo Rodríguez now working in Brazil, draws a good deal of his inspiration from pre-Columbian sources. An important movement, called *Espartaco*, includes Carpani, Di Bianco, Mollari, and others who carry on the Mexican tradition but with less realistic

emphasis and who have done vigorous work for the buildings of several trade unions in Buenos Aires. Otero, in Venezuela, has executed important metal sculptures done as integral parts of wall design.

Among the Latin American sculptors perhaps none is so widely known as Alicia Penalba, now living in Paris, who won the International Sculpture Prize in the last São Paulo Biennial. Also working in Paris is Kosice, known for his hydraulic sculptures, and a group experimenting there on the basis of Vasarely's geometrical patterns that counts among its members several Latin Americans. This group, highly inventive and vital, includes artists Le Parc, Sobrino and Garcia Rossi; Tomasello is also working with similar objectives in wood reliefs. Marina Nunez del Prado from Bolivia is an interesting artist; her refined sensibility contrasts with the strength of Nelly Schneider and Sergio Castillo of Chile or Bruno Giorgi from Brazil. Mention should also be made of the geometricist Lygia Clark (Brazil) and her method of construction, which has great purity of style.

The variety of sources that inspire it, the many rich traditions, the multiplicity of styles, add up to a new Latin American art that is certainly one of the vital forces in the world today.



Armando Morales (Nicaragua): Moon, oil, 1963. Collection of the artist.