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Klara Kemp-Welch

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/61776>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.61776

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Electronic reference

Klara Kemp-Welch, « María Amalia García, Abstract Crossings: Cultural Exchange between Argentina and Brazil », *Critique d'art* [Online], All the reviews on line, Online since 04 June 2021, connection on 25 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/61776> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/critiquedart.61776>

This text was automatically generated on 25 September 2020.

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- 1 The translation into English of María Amalia García's history of cultural exchange between Argentina and Brazil, spanning the mid-1940s to the end of the 1950s, offers an invaluable resource for transforming the ways in which post-war abstraction is thought, and, it is to be hoped, how it should now be taught. While Brazilian Neo-Concretism has become a well-known episode and the "Neo-Concretist Manifesto" of 1959, is, today, acknowledged as a canonical text, less has been published internationally concerning Latin American Concretism itself. This book makes it clear that the Rio vs. São Paulo rivalry habitually used to frame Brazilian artistic debates occludes at its peril the centrality of a third space: Buenos Aires. It also makes plain the extent to which creative developments in all three were inseparable from the wider socio-political complex of post-war international economic relations. The book begins "from below" by meticulously recounting the emergence of transnational artistic friendships and affinities and landmark artist-run journals, such as the famous *Arturo*. María Amalia García provides fascinating insights into the struggles of Argentine "Concrete-Inventionist" artists and others under the realist-oriented Perón regime, detailing the degree to which the conservative military coup of 1955, known as the "Revolución Libertadora", paradoxically produced fresh possibilities for artists to participate in Brazil's booming cultural scene, fuelled by strong relations with the US and a string of very wealthy private investors, paving the way for further "top down" diplomatically motivated cultural traffic between the two countries. If García does not much discuss how artists earned a living or fund the publication of their journals, or whether issues of race and gender were considered at all by the left-leaning, white, protagonists, in view of their claims for Concretism as the only truly revolutionary and universal artform, then, in a sense, these questions are already implicit in the ultimate

demise of the movement. Early critics of Concretism had already pointed to the danger of the slippage between abstraction and ornament; Drummond de Andrade, among others, had observed that “extreme denial of individualism, is, in the end, individualism” (1946). Concrete art’s sometime advocates, such as Jorje Romero Brest, proposed, however, that “it does not believe in the small cosmos of man of the flesh, in the small cosmos of a country or of a race, but rather in the great cosmos of the Universe” (1951). Among the many fascinating critical debates around divergent attitudes to abstraction and what Max Bill notably called “good form”, detailed in the book, the controversy around Bill’s first visit to Brazil serves as an entertaining punctum, recounting the consternation caused when the much-lauded winner of the first prize for sculpture at the Biennale roundly criticised the country’s pride and joy, its modern architecture, accusing Oscar Niemeyer’s feted Pampulha complex of “an excessive baroque style that is neither architecture nor sculpture” (1953) – after which he found he had been quietly removed from the jury of the next architecture Biennial. Ultimately, the book concludes, Swiss art may well have been put on the international map by Latin American art, rather than the other way around. Methodologically, *Abstract Crossings* is a model of a networked and comparative art history, elucidating the positions of well-known players while supplementing these with an occasionally dizzying array of less well-known artists, critics, and journals to convey the intensity of the cultural life of abstraction in the two neighbouring countries. The volume is the first in a new series of *Studies on Latin American Art* published by the University of California Press and I look forward to subsequent contributions with impatience.