

# Macy's Latin American Fair A Temple Built on the Anxieties of Inter/Americanism

Lisa Crossman

Volume 79, 2014

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/mcr79art04>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Cape Breton University Press

ISSN

1718-1259 (imprimé)

0000-0000 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Crossman, L. (2014). Macy's Latin American Fair: A Temple Built on the Anxieties of Inter/Americanism. *Material Culture Review*, 79, 60–77.

Résumé de l'article

*En 1942, en pleine guerre mondiale, le grand magasin Macy's organisa à New York une gigantesque foire-exposition. À travers une analyse de la conception de cette dernière, de son importante exposition artistique et de sa couverture dans la presse populaire et les écrits des critiques d'art, cet article explore la façon dont les visées diplomatiques et les inquiétudes des élites américaines au sujet de la culture, de l'économie et de la politique, ont renforcé les stéréotypes au sujet des Latino-américains. Les biens culturels de la foire-exposition ont servi d'accessoires à un resserrement intentionnel des liens diplomatiques, tandis que cet événement a incidemment fait jouer à l'Amérique latine le rôle de l'Autre vis-à-vis duquel les États-Unis ont exprimé leurs propres préoccupations quant à la redéfinition d'une identité « américaine ».*

---

LISA CROSSMAN

Macy's Latin American Fair:

A Temple Built on the Anxieties of Inter/Americanism

*Résumé*

*En 1942, en pleine guerre mondiale, le grand magasin Macy's organisa à New York une gigantesque foire-exposition. À travers une analyse de la conception de cette dernière, de son importante exposition artistique et de sa couverture dans la presse populaire et les écrits des critiques d'art, cet article explore la façon dont les visées diplomatiques et les inquiétudes des élites américaines au sujet de la culture, de l'économie et de la politique, ont renforcé les stéréotypes au sujet des Latino-américains. Les biens culturels de la foire-exposition ont servi d'accessoires à un resserrement intentionnel des liens diplomatiques, tandis que cet événement a incidemment fait jouer à l'Amérique latine le rôle de l'Autre vis-à-vis duquel les États-Unis ont exprimé leurs propres préoccupations quant à la redéfinition d'une identité « américaine ».*

*Abstract*

*In 1942, amidst an international crisis, Macy's Department Store held a large-scale Latin American Fair in New York City. Through an analysis of the fair's design, extensive art exhibition, and its coverage in the popular press and contemporaneous art writings, this paper explores the manner in which diplomatic aspirations and the cultural, economic, and political anxieties of U.S. elites reinforced stereotypes about Latin Americans. The fair's cultural goods were used as props in an intentional push for improved diplomatic bonds, while the event inadvertently cast Latin America as the Other against which the U.S. expressed its own preoccupations with redefining "American" identity.*

---

At the start of the Second World War, politicians and corporate leaders in the United States were continuing to assert and redefine the nation's presence in the world amidst a global humanitarian crisis and the end of the Great Depression. While some elite factions tried to bolster support for the Good Neighbour Policy and pondered the potential for increased inter-American ties, others questioned the success of such policies. In this tense climate, R. H. Macy and Company held a Latin American Fair at its Herald Square location between January 17 and February 7, 1942 (Pike 1995: 258). The fair was neither an

anomaly nor a complete novelty. But it was one of the largest of such cultural events organized at a department store during this period.

Macy's encouraged New Yorkers to visit the fair, proclaiming in an advertisement in the *New York Times* (Fig. 1), "It is a thrilling, vital exposition of Latin America today," which coincided with the Inter-American Conference in Rio de Janeiro and was meant to serve as the retailer's "contribution to Pan-American amity" ("Display Ad 13-No Title" 1942: 7). An estimated 825,479 people attended the fair, and the displays occupied about 40,000 square feet (3,700 square

metres) of space ("Latin American Fair Ends" 1942: 51; "Fair to Aid Trade of Latin America" 1941: 16). While the details of the layout of both the fair and its art exhibition are unknown, the architectural elements and aesthetic features that shaped the fair's atmosphere, the events that were

held, and the objects that were sold can be gleaned from an assortment of popular publications, including the store's own materials. Among such constructions as The Temple of Jewels and plazas of Rio de Janeiro, Macy's arranged saleable goods that ranged from a cup of maté to a letter written

Fig. 1  
"Display Ad 13—No Title," *New York Times*, January 16, 1942, 7.

**Display Ad 13 -- No Title**  
*New York Times* (1857-current file), Jan 16, 1942; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2003)  
 pg. 7

**IT OPENS TOMORROW!**

**Macy's Latin American Fair**  
**GREATEST EXPOSITION OF ITS KIND EVER STAGED BY A DEPARTMENT STORE**

Tomorrow the lights go on—the curtain goes up—on Macy's long-awaited Latin American Fair... the culmination of many months of research, planning, and buying. Dramatically opening at the very moment when representatives of the Latin American nations and of the United States are meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Macy's Fair helps point the way to future trade development between the Americas. This is no museum exhibit confined to ancient arts. It is a thrilling, vital exposition of Latin America today...

**MONTHS AGO**, Macy's became imbued with the desire to make our contribution to Pan-American unity. We were aware of the importance of inter-hemispheric trade to all the governments concerned. We knew that business enterprise was necessary to make it a reality. It has taken months of work, to assemble an important and comprehensive collection of merchandise from all Latin America. But now this pioneering job is done. And tomorrow we open Macy's Latin American Fair, with the hope that it is a symbol of greater things to come.

**HERE'S JUST A HINT OF WHAT YOU'LL SEE** at the Fair. You'll step through the Ranch José Esporway, adapted from the original near Mexico City, or the Arequipa doorway, inspired by a wonderful church in Peru. Find yourself in the Market Place—a healthful street scene sparkling with tinware, copper, wood, and straw; with dolls in native costume, exotic foods, toys, perfumes.

**EXPLORE A MACY-MADE JUNGLE**. Luxurious with huge leaves, splashy wild blooms, and banana trees. Catch your first glimpse of gorgeously plumed tropical birds and a princely pair of real live chinchillas. See rare orchids in the glass Orchid House...

**EVERY DAY THE ENTERTAINMENT'S FREE** in Fiesta Square. Listen to Terig Tucci, Music Director for La Cadena de las Americas at CBS, and the CBS Tipica Orchestra. Hear Graciela Parry sing her delightful Cuban songs. Watch the dances of the Trio Maitese. Movies, lectures, singing, dancing—every day there's something different. Meet representatives of the Latin American republics who, on successive days, will be guests of honor.

**EVERY AMERICAN WILL ENJOY THE FAIR**. Latin Americans will see the products of their own and neighbor countries. North Americans will discover the arts, the products, the culture of twenty fascinating republics. If you're an architect, a designer, a decorator, an artist, you'll find it an endless source of inspiration. If you're a musician, an educator, a student, you'll haunt Fiesta Square. And if you're a home-maker, you'll see hundreds of exciting things you'll want—and can own.

**STALLS** stacked with textiles, woodware, ceramics, and glass. Find jewelry and tableware along the Street of Silver. And don't miss the Rug Mart and the Fur Shop...

**THE CLASSIC MODERN GALLERY IN CARACAS** was the inspiration for our Art Gallery. Here, in an impressive setting, you'll find contemporary Latin American paintings and sculptures, rare manuscripts and letters.

**THE EXQUISITE TEMPLE OF JEWELS**, an exact scale copy of the Maya Temple of the Warriors in Yucatan, holds a fabulous collection—including emeralds, Brazilian diamonds—even the legendary Crown of the Andes (reported to be worth over \$3,000,000!).

**WHEN YOU STROLL DOWN AVENIDA 1942**, you'll see the influence of Rio's Air Terminal; you'll hunt for bargains in books, phonograph records, leather goods, charming accessories. The gaily lit Fair Arcade is lined with...

**EVERY DAY THE ENTERTAINMENT'S FREE** in Fiesta Square. Listen to Terig Tucci, Music Director for La Cadena de las Americas at CBS, and the CBS Tipica Orchestra. Hear Graciela Parry sing her delightful Cuban songs. Watch the dances of the Trio Maitese. Movies, lectures, singing, dancing—every day there's something different. Meet representatives of the Latin American republics who, on successive days, will be guests of honor.

**EVERY AMERICAN WILL ENJOY THE FAIR**. Latin Americans will see the products of their own and neighbor countries. North Americans will discover the arts, the products, the culture of twenty fascinating republics. If you're an architect, a designer, a decorator, an artist, you'll find it an endless source of inspiration. If you're a musician, an educator, a student, you'll haunt Fiesta Square. And if you're a home-maker, you'll see hundreds of exciting things you'll want—and can own.

**PRACTICALLY EVERYTHING IS FOR SALE**—whether it's a letter written by Cortez in 1524 (Macy-priced at \$33,499) or a contemporary earthenware salbraz (Macy-priced at 14c).

**COME TOMORROW! SEE THE WIDEST COLLECTION OF LATIN AMERICANA EVER ASSEMBLED IN THIS COUNTRY!**

**Macy's fifth floor**

**JANUARY 17th TO FEBRUARY 7th \* ADMISSION FREE!**

FIESTA SQUARE is a recreation of the square at Rio de Janeiro, with its half-way street and fountain pavilions. The stage is an adaptation of the Plaza of Rio de Janeiro. The walls are built of stone blocks. The surroundings are arranged and landscaped.

THE TEMPLE OF JEWELS is an exact scale replica of the famous Temple of the Warriors in Yucatan, Mexico. Macy's has created a remarkable scale model for this house of precious stones.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

by Hernán Cortés in 1524 (“Display Ad 13–No Title” 1942: 7). Macy’s published texts about the event, and the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs’ (OCIAA) short documentary *Pan-American Bazaar* confirms that the fair was intended to recreate an informative image of the region’s culture and a sampling of products for the entertainment of New York shoppers, while also providing a platform for a series of activities designed for visiting foreign diplomats.<sup>1</sup>

The fair included an art exhibition that showcased approximately 400 original works of art from the region, selections of which were rotated throughout the duration of the fair (Macy’s 1942). Macy’s promotional material and scholars such as art historian George Kubler touted it as being the most comprehensive exhibition of modern Latin American art to date, notably showing work not only from Mexico, but also from nations in Central and South America (Kubler 1943). An overview of the show, gleaned from *Macy’s Paintings and Sculpture from Latin America: The Art Gallery Macy’s Latin American Fair* (the principal source available on the exhibition’s contents), reveals that a broad selection of paintings and sculptures were displayed. The pamphlet includes an inventory of 302 works from the exhibition, which accounts for the art that arrived before press. Works by artists from Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, and Chile composed the majority of paintings and sculptures documented in the catalogue. In fact, 232 artworks of the 302 documented were by artists from one of these South American nations.<sup>2</sup>

This exhibition, in conjunction with the fair’s combination of diplomatic events, entertainment and sale of a diverse selection of merchandise, revealed the intersection of culture, politics, and commerce in efforts to advance north-south ties.

The display and sale of art in major U.S. department stores such as Macy’s, Gimbels, and Bloomingdale’s was common during the first half of the 20th century (see Whitaker 2006). In fact, Gimbels’ Centennial Exhibit coincided with Macy’s fair, featuring a display of pre-Columbian and colonial art from South America, prominently including works from Peru (“Show Stresses Art of South America” 1942: 16). Located across the street from one another, these events positioned the Latin American region in the commercial

spotlight. They show both evidence of the spread of Latin American art beyond the confines of U.S. museums, and the extent to which goods and art from this region were promoted to a middle to upper-middle class audience for the sake of inter-American solidarity.

From the late 1930s through the early 1940s, art from around the Latin American region seemed a burgeoning trend of which the OCIAA, directed by Nelson Rockefeller, was a prominent sponsor (Bales 1992: 120, 146; Erb 1982: 74). Rockefeller’s participation in the advisory committee for Macy’s Latin American Fair, the event’s timely coincidence with the January 1942 Inter-American Conference in Rio de Janeiro, and the invitation of various diplomats from the region highlight the extent to which the fair was fused with a larger political agenda. While, as a corporation, Macy’s was interested in profit, the Latin American Fair’s symbolic importance as a diplomatic gesture is clear.

Popular reports about the fair emphasized its manifestation of “good will,” framing it with the “good neighbour” rhetoric, which asserted the U.S. government’s commitment to be a better neighbour and foster inter-American bonds, a rhetoric that dominated public discourse about Latin America at this time. As the U.S. entered the war, the fair exemplified the political exploitation of commerce and culture as a means to construct inter-American ties. The fair’s representation of Latin America offers a glimpse of U.S. political and commercial preoccupations of the time, revealing the government’s attempt to reframe its relationship to the south through its emphasis on diplomacy and culture.

Macy’s fair encouraged the public to buy art and other material goods from nations in Latin America, and allowed (albeit less explicitly) for some elite members of the political and business communities to counter the stereotype of the U.S. as a nation devoid of culture with an image of a nation that actively (and monetarily) supports the arts and encourages knowledge of other cultures.

Art is a potent symbol of identity that has been deployed by the state as part of cultural exchange efforts. Removed from a museum context, the art object’s function as a saleable good is made explicit, and its inclusion in the fair provided a means for the cosmopolitan shopper to learn



about or even purchase paintings and sculptures made by Latin American artists, fostering the U.S. consumer's sophistication.

The staging of the Latin American Fair in a department store also notably emphasized a subtext of freedom through consumption. In "Learning to Consume: Early Department Stores and the Shaping of the Modern Consumer Culture (1860-1914)," sociologist Rudi Laermans establishes how the department store served as a means to democratize consumerism, giving more people access to luxury goods and permitting women, in particular, access to a leisure space in which they could circulate relatively unrestricted (Laermans 1993). The Latin American Fair's design was characterized by opulent spaces still shaped by the aesthetics of Orientalism which had dominated displays in department stores since the late 19th century in major cities in the U.S., revealing consumerism as a performative gesture that granted a sense of elevated status through the purchasing of foreign goods (Said 1979; Laermans 1993; Whitaker 2006).

The reviews of this art exhibit and others at the time also demonstrate that some U.S. politicians, like cultural institutions and critical voices in Latin America, were not looking at each other as equal cultural allies. Despite the more open dialogues that happened between artists from various nationalities, the overall perceptions of north and south were still mired in stereotypes. While the fair's art exhibition was held in a department store, the way that it was discussed in the press indicates the manner in which Latin American art on a broader scale would continue to be cast in critical dialogue as a relatively homogenous field and repeatedly positioned as the north's "neighbour" and by implication Other in subsequent decades. An analysis of the reviews of Macy's art exhibition and major museum exhibitions of art from Latin America at this time reveal that the perceived diplomatic nature of these shows overshadowed the work and often prevented the art from being discussed in popular and critical art writing as more than mere symbols of regional partnership.

## Foundations of Inter-American Exchanges

The political and cultural division between the U.S. and South America was grounded on stereotypes: the U.S. was renowned for its technological modernity, but its art was generally conceived of as obsolete; conversely, the geographical region of Latin America was often framed in terms of its underdevelopment and exotic appeal. The north was popularly and critically envisioned as the capitalistic, cultural wasteland that Uruguayan philosopher, José Enrique Rodó, proclaimed in *Ariel* (1900), in which he starkly contrasted the culture of Latin America with the "materialistic" culture of the U.S. (see also Castañeda 2009). The south was either championed by modernists within the framework of "primitivism," exoticized in popular imagery and seen as a bastion of surrealist tendencies in certain instances, or negated for less idealized notions of the "primitive." These misperceptions rested on the limited direct exposure that many U.S. and Latin American citizens had with each other, as well as from a long history of U.S. imperialistic political and economic interventions in Latin America, including past representations of Latin America in the United States and such policies as the Monroe Doctrine, proclaimed by President James Monroe in 1823, which asserted that Europeans were not to intervene in the Americas, and thereby implied the U.S.'s dominance in the hemisphere.

The showy design of the Macy's fair and its Orientalizing nature were premised on certain modes of displaying consumer goods in general, and the region of Latin America in particular, that were established in the creation of earlier world's fairs, Pan-American fairs, and department store displays. These styles of display perpetuated stereotypes and an uneven partnership between the consuming north and the developing south. The Pan-American fairs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries are of particular note as they were meant to construct a vision of Pan-Americanism. In *Designing Pan-America: US Architectural Visions for the Western Hemisphere*, Robert Gonzalez asserts:

This Pan-America was tied to epic narratives of an indigenous past, to the discovery of the New World and its independence from

the Old World, and to the establishment of new cities and mission sites throughout a perceived tropical, virgin land. U.S. citizens motivated by the desire to foment commerce and trade emerged as the movement's most committed supporters and shapers (Gonzalez 2011: 3; see also Tenorio-Trillo 1996).

Gonzalez observes, however, that the fairs did not present the north and the south as equals. The design favoured the U.S. as the powerful sponsor and embodiment of modern progress, while representing Latin America mainly through its "raw materials and 'exotic' indigenous cultures" (Gonzalez 2011: 1, 21-22, 47). The fairs are a prime example of Orientalism, which is premised on "uneven exchange" and "exteriority" that is more reflective of the constructor than the constructed (Said 1979: 12). So, the fairs' designs inform us of the U.S.'s imperial ambitions for Latin America, asserting the legitimacy of its power through its industrial development, geographical proximity, and claim of shared regional traits, such as indigenous heritages.

Fairs such as the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York (1901), were motivated by the U.S. government's desire to increase hemispheric trade, and were intended to improve Latin American governments' perceptions of the U.S. and to gain the consumer support of U.S. citizens (Rydell 1984: 128). Beginning in 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt continued efforts to improve the negative image that the U.S. had created for itself through militaristic and economic interventions by instituting the Good Neighbour Policy. Despite Roosevelt's efforts, most countries in Latin America maintained their distrust of the U.S., and many even increased their own nationalistic agendas at this time.<sup>3</sup>

The political environment in the U.S. in January of 1942 was characterized by a growing unease. On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, providing sufficient incentive for the U.S. to officially enter the Second World War. While U.S. officials had begun courting nations in Latin America to unite against Germany, Italy, and Japan in 1938, by 1942 commercial and diplomatic ties were still not severed between many of these nations and the Axis powers (Pike 1995: 257). The extent to which nations in Latin America were resistant to cooperating with the

U.S., as well as their ties to Axis nations, varied. In January of 1942, while Macy's staged its Latin American extravaganza, the American republics' foreign ministers assembled in Rio de Janeiro and the U.S. government again sought to persuade South American nations to dissolve economic and political partnerships with the Axis countries (Pike 1995: 257-59).

The fair, in part, functioned as a more colourful means to demonstrate that the U.S. government and some corporations were committed to supporting these nations' industries and expanding new markets for their goods—offering a carrot, rather than a stick, so to speak. This strategy aligned with Roosevelt's general policies toward Latin America, in which the U.S. maintained its paternalistic position toward the nations of the southern hemisphere but sought to gain cooperation through non-militaristic means.

The fair is indicative of the U.S. government's efforts to encourage the sale of goods, especially those that were handcrafted or novel, from Latin America to replace Asian and European imports that were difficult to obtain during the war, and more generally in supporting development in the region. Augustine Sedgewick ties together the impact that the New Deal's domestic and foreign policies had in the 1930s in shaping the U.S. as a "consumers' republic" and in its rising international role as an imperial power.<sup>4</sup> In particular, the U.S. encouraged the production and importation of tin, rubber, and hemp, in addition to items such as housewares and handmade goods, pointing out the economic appeal of cheap labour in Latin America. In the 1930s, more industrialized nations in Latin America such as Argentina, Brazil and Chile were expanding their production of manufactured goods, seeking to reduce their dependency on foreign nations through the adoption of import substitution industrialization (2012: 50-51, 57-59, 61). Sedgewick also notes that beginning in 1939 the Department of Commerce invited retailers such as Macy's to meet with diplomats from Latin American nations to create goods that would appeal to U.S. markets.

Domestically, the fair was also used to entice shoppers to consume through the introduction of new products that would carry cultural currency because of their novelty, as affirmed by Macy's in the fair's promotional material. The OCIAA's film

*Pan-American Bazaar*, which documents Macy's fair, stresses the diversity and quality of goods offered, showing the availability of new merchandise while asserting the benefits of cultivating inter-American ties. *Pan-American Bazaar*, along with numerous other short documentaries produced during these years, demonstrates the government's interest in garnering domestic public support for increased economic and diplomatic ties with Latin American nations.<sup>5</sup> Such films were part of a much larger network of inter-American efforts that created an illusion of a democratic partnership and a semblance of unity (see Crossman 2008).

U.S. officials promoted inter-American relations as an extension of the Good Neighbour Policy. Macy's department store, like the U.S. government, demonstrated interest in strengthening partnerships within the hemisphere. In the publication *Macy's Latin American Fair*, January 17-February 7, 1942, Macy's informed its audience that two years of planning were put into crafting a fair that was intended to both teach its customers "how [their] neighbors look and live," as well as to establish long-lasting trade with Latin America (Macy's 1942). The company reiterated all the key propagandistic phrases, stating that its version of friendship was based on a "free and profitable exchange of the products of the hands and hearts of men," claiming the inherent freedom of capitalist pursuits (Macy's 1942). In a *New York Times* article from January of 1942, Macy's further encouraged its capitalist enterprise by stating that they supported the sale of products made by the "nimble fingers belonging to poor women" ("Latin American Fair Aids Peasant Women" 1942: 14), asserting that the company would provide a livelihood to people struggling to survive, and through this claim endorsing a push for development in the region that would become more pronounced in subsequent decades. For instance, Harry S. Truman proclaimed the need to alleviate poverty in "underdeveloped" nations in his inaugural address in 1949. This term thus defined these nations as inferior to the "developed" nations (see Sachs 2010).<sup>6</sup>

The tone of Macy's text, of course, advocates a neocolonial relationship with Latin America—the merchant promoting itself as a pioneer discovering a new market and becoming a paternal partner (Macy's 1942). While Macy's

expressed a desire to educate the U.S. public about Latin America through its products, much of their merchandise was altered to meet the needs of its market, adapting "authentic" items to appeal to New Yorkers (Macy's 1942).<sup>7</sup> The use of this third-world/first-world binary, in which a U.S. corporation cast itself in a paternalistic role toward its neighbours is, of course, not unique to this situation. Macy's statements are a mere reinforcement of neocolonial attitudes, an era that was characterized by imperialist relationships between Latin American nations and, most notably, the U.S., and Great Britain, which dictated the terms of progress. This period was followed by a resurgence of nationalist rhetoric and populist regimes (see Chasteen 2011).

Macy's roster of advisory committee members further reveals the financial and political interests that motivated the fair's production and evidences that commercial and institutional agendas overlapped. The committee consisted of wealthy collectors, businessmen, and representatives from governmental agencies and organizations such as the Pan-American Union (Macy's 1942). In particular, Dr. Leo S. Rowe, Director General of the Pan-American Union, who organized a Latin American exhibition at the Riverside Museum in New York City in 1939 (United States, New York World's Fair Commission, and Riverside Museum, "Foreword"), and John Hay Whitney, who worked under Nelson Rockefeller in the OCIAA (1941-1945), demonstrate that the fair was composed of figures engaged in a larger economic and political campaign for Pan-American solidarity. Of course, the terms of this partnership have been disputed and reflect an array of individual motivations and understandings of inter-American policy, cultural and historical bonds. Still, it is apparent that the advisory committee's members, along with Nelson Rockefeller, used the fair as an attempt to create a vision of partnership that was performed through a series of activities and publicity, and cemented with actual economic transactions.

At the time of the fair in 1942, Rockefeller was the active director of the OCIAA, which Roosevelt created in 1940 under the advisement of Rockefeller himself ("Army of Amateurs" 1941: 1). OCIAA documents attest to the perceived importance of culture and education as a means to support other types of hemispheric bonds

(United States Government Printing Office 1947). The agency implemented a large-scale cultural propaganda campaign that sought to promote a positive image of the U.S. throughout Latin America and to educate the U.S. public about the southern region. The OCIAA organized exhibitions and symposia, produced films, published handbooks and catalogues, and funded opportunities for specialists to participate in inter-American exchanges.<sup>8</sup> For instance, the group assembled a travelling collection of U.S. contemporary painting that was shown in ten major Latin American capitals in 1941. Much like Macy's collection of contemporary art, this exhibit showcased a broad range of work and was principally framed in terms of diplomatic efforts and as a testament to the nation's dynamic field of visual arts ("Pictures on Parade" 1941; Crossman 2008).

Rockefeller's other associations, including his position as heir to Standard Oil, which had holdings in the region, and as the president of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) 1939-1941, make plain his varied ties to the region and interest in culture. These associations also explain his position on the advisory committee and make it probable that he had some involvement with the fair's exhibition of painting and sculpture (Rasmussen 1993: 12). The Rockefellers, including Nelson, were renowned collectors of art who understood the power of culture as a form of propaganda that could be used to encourage political and economic agendas.<sup>9</sup>

The OCIAA used a variety of tactics to increase support for inter-American cultural exchange domestically as well. Some of the OCIAA's endeavours were intended for elite audiences, while others were created for a more general public. The circulation of Latin American art within smaller venues was likely meant to promote the concept of solidarity to a wider audience who had been previously conditioned to distrust their "neighbours." In 1941, a three-part travelling exhibition was sponsored by the OCIAA. It was designed for display in spaces such as college galleries and town halls. According to the OCIAA's documents, the agency developed nearly 200 inter-American educational and art exhibitions that circulated through public schools in the U.S. between 1940 and 1945 (see "Cultural

and Educational Activities," 110; Barnet-Sanchez 1993: 168).

In the U.S., many scholars have recognized the opportunistic political and business impetus behind numerous exhibitions of Latin American art, especially those organized by the MoMA. For example, art historian Shifra Goldman has argued that the "proliferation of Latin American art exhibits in the U.S." generally signifies "underlying political motivations" (Goldman 1994: 317). The involvement of International Business Machines Corporation (IBM), Rockefeller, and the Pan-American Union in organizing shows during this era indeed reveals underlying monetary interests.

During the 1940s, Latin American art was promoted through exhibitions in a variety of venues.<sup>10</sup> Galleries such as the Corcoran Gallery in Washington D.C. and the Valentine Gallery in New York City often showcased the work of Latin American artists at this time, as occasionally did other museums such as the MoMA. The MoMA played an important role in promoting Mexican art in the United States and also helped coordinate exhibitions for the OCIAA during the Second World War. The display of Latin American art, however, was not confined to museum and gallery exhibits, but extended to other venues such as Macy's that would have attracted a more diverse audience and encouraged the consumption of objects produced in Latin America.

In subsequent decades, after the OCIAA was dissolved in 1945, private businesses and politicians continued to see the sponsorship of the arts of regions where they were involved as advantageous and, as historian Frederick B. Pike among other scholars has recognized, the U.S. government utilized many of the programs begun during the Second World War again during the Cold War under the auspices of the State Department's Cultural Division (Pike 1995: 254). Other institutions, most notably the Americas Society (founded by David Rockefeller), continued to support the arts from Latin America, in a sense continuing the efforts of Nelson Rockefeller. The legacy of such institutions and the problem of categorizing the art from a heterogeneous region under a single label have been critiqued at length by scholars (Falconi and Rangel 2000; Ramírez 1992: 60-68). Macy's fair, like numerous exhibitions to follow, played up regional cohesion and



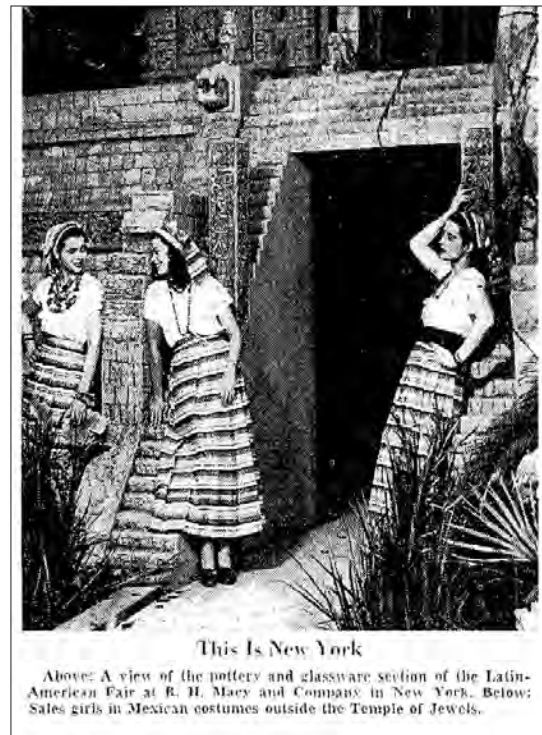
similitude, while centering on the appeal of the region to U.S. consumers through its differences.

### Marketing the “Other” Americas: A Tour of the Latin American Fair

Macy’s fair merged the individual cultures of participating countries into a simplified, marketable version of the region, celebrating a U.S. conception of contemporary Latin American nations through their consumable products. The event functioned as a bridge between political interests and consumer choice at a time when Macy’s status as tastemaker held much sway (Whitaker 2006: 22-24, 146-49). The event would have appealed to eager post-depression shoppers and cultural enthusiasts, as well as important figures from the nations represented at the fair (Whitaker 2006: 22). The event was held at the “world’s largest store” since 1924 in New York City, the cultural and economic centre of the U.S., symbolizing the fruition of the U.S.’s promise of economic support and increased trade with Mexico and the nations of South and Central America (Macy’s 2006).

Macy’s Latin American Fair was meant to woo the public to buy products from the “other” Americas, showcasing Latin American food, fashion, music, and art. As a means of presenting a “genuine” image of the region, Macy’s posted fifty-one photographs of people and places from select nations at the entryway to the fair. Architectural models designed by architect Wallace K. Harrison framed each of the fair’s sections. Some facades, like the entrance gate and the Temple of Jewels, were imitations of actual buildings located in Latin America (Fig. 2). Macy’s purported that the entrance gate was modelled after the “Ranch Jose doorway,” located outside Mexico City and that The Temple of Jewels was “an exact scale replica of the famous Temple of the Warriors in Chichen Itza, Yucatan” (“Display Ad 13–No Title” 1942: 7). The renaming of the store’s model of the Temple of the Warriors as the Temple of Jewels attests to the structure’s new function as a showroom for jewellery, while also revealing the underlying exoticized tenor of the fair. The photograph of three female employees dressed in “Mexican costume,” lounging against the facade of the Temple of Jewels further emphasizes the

Fig. 2.  
“Sales Girls in Mexican  
Costumes Outside  
the Temple of Jewels,”  
Christian Science  
Monitor, January 19,  
1942, 3.



theatricality and Orientalist tone of the fair, which was circulated through popular advertisements and reports of the event.<sup>11</sup>

As Laermans has demonstrated, department stores were known for their “presentation of products against an exotic background in order to increase their appeal.... They often used images of the Orient to give clothes, chinaware, furniture or other nouveautés a distinct look” (Laermans 1993: 89, 93). Designers used colour, glass, and lighting effects in department stores to craft a theatrical environment meant to encourage consumer desire (Leach 1989: 103; see also Rydell 1989: 191-216; Bronner 1989: 217-54). Macy’s construction of an environment and organization of Latin American-themed events employed these strategies, making this region seem both more immediate and intriguing. This mode of display also mimics the tourist industry’s tactics of selling particular places by emphasizing difference and standard methods of ethnographic exhibition that utilize objects, photographs, and installations to teach audiences about other cultures, which were popularly used in international expositions.

The architectural replicas would have encouraged consumers to imagine themselves as tourists in a foreign land, buying souvenirs to cart home with them. Architectural construc-

tions like the pottery and glassware section's archways represented more generalized designs that "authenticated" the goods and provided a captivating visual experience. As stated in Macy's publications, even the fair's background colours were given names like "Inca orange" and "Amazon jungle green" (Macy's 1942). While it is unclear whether people would have encountered the names of these colours while at the fair, they reflect a concerted effort to sell Latin America as an exotic, and therefore more marketable, destination.<sup>12</sup> Macy's thus facilitated its customers' journey to a theme park-like representation of Latin America that was supported by foreign officials, using architecture and photographs to validate the adventure.

Macy's publicity material and contemporaneous popular reviews were steeped in rhetoric that portrayed the Latin American region as a land of rich resources and its peoples as "good neighbours." Numerous publications on the fair appeared in prominent newspaper and popular magazines during January and February of 1942. One such example is a full-page advertisement that was published in the *New York Times* on January 16, which includes illustrations of the building models that were erected like stage sets in the store for the event and a photograph of the three aforementioned salesgirls, posing outside the Temple of Jewels (Fig. 2) (This image also appears in "Girls in Mexican Costumes Outside the Temple of Jewels" 1942: 3). This particular advertisement demonstrates Macy's objective to show Latin America's "living culture," while trying to entice potential visitors through the creation of a theatrical environment that would immerse the shopper in a simulated experience, or tour, of the region ("Display Ad 13–No Title" 1942: 7).

The publicity and sizeable audience that the fair received suggest that the event played a role in shaping and reinforcing the public's perception and expectations of Latin American culture in the U.S. Macy's control over the goods that were included in the fair and their display reinforces an image of Latin America as less powerful in that the region's value was premised on the appeal of its resources to the U.S. consumer. In addition, the public was permitted the opportunity to buy exotic goods without leaving the country, further strengthening the consumer's position of power.

Macy's hosted numerous events that emphasized the diplomatic importance of the fair, including the dedication of each day to one or sometimes two countries, which was honoured by a special performance by guests such as Carmen Miranda and a visit by a representative from that country. Governmental participation further emphasized the importance of building an actual inter-American political partnership and each administration's support of cultural and economic exchange. Some of these proceedings also spotlighted foreign dignitaries as honourable guests. In fact, Mrs. Roosevelt appeared at the preview ceremonies before 600 representatives from across the republics of the Americas to emphasize the importance of this message ("Preview Tonight of Latin American Exhibit" 1942: 19). In addition, Jack I. Straus, president of Macy's, used the fair to promote trade and persuade his guests, including national retailers, of Latin America's economic potential ("Latin Americans Honored at the Fair" 1942: 30). Pan-American Airways and United Fruit Company (which has a long, violent history with Central America (Chapman 2009)), among other corporations, assisted in the planning of the "travel bureau," which was meant to encourage tourism (Macy's 1942). The variety of events and products would have catered to consumer interests, securing a greater pool of customers and supporters of inter-American exchanges (Tanen 1991: 370).

Even the paintings and sculptures, in this context, functioned as cultural commodities that could shape the buyer's identity through the symbolic purchasing of a region, and therefore espousal of a commitment to strengthening inter-American ties (Wallis 1991). Brian Wallis's essay "Selling Nations" elucidates the "role of culture in defining the nation for the natives and foreigners alike" in art festivals and exhibitions during the 1980s (1991: 85-86). Furthermore, in Wallis's "Institutions Trust Institutions" he describes how corporate-sponsored, temporary exhibitions are characterized by "cautionary exclusion, the fixing of stereotypical interpretations, and the development of abstract rather than historically specific concepts" (1987: 54). Macy's fair, like other fairs and exhibitions, fixed these artworks within a frame of national and Pan-American discourse that was reinforced through U.S.-sanctioned

rhetoric that emphasized concepts such as “democracy” and “goodwill.”

### Macy’s Art Exhibition and the Problem of “Good Will” Rhetoric

Macy’s art exhibit was inserted into the store’s part-fanciful, part-educational diorama, offering another means by which patrons could get a glimpse of art from various parts of the Americas and, perhaps, even purchase original artwork from a foreign locale. The art, while displayed in a separate gallery, was incorporated into the fair’s larger context. The art gallery’s entrance was modelled after the facade of the classic-modern Art Gallery in Caracas, Venezuela, providing a simulated experience of viewing these works of art abroad (Macy’s [Fair] 1942). Besides the catalogue’s list of artworks included, and the fact that government officials from each nation were responsible for choosing the works submitted to Macy’s, specific curatorial decisions are indeterminate; there are no known photographs that give evidence of whether the artworks were arranged by region, theme or style. The direct involvement of government officials in the curatorial process maintained the significance of the exhibit as a product of inter-American exchange in which individual paintings and sculptures served as symbols of an alliance.

The art display’s placement within the fair’s constructed narrative would have shaped the reception that it received and solidified its function as a diplomatic tool and consumer good. The sculptures and paintings composed a section of the fair that the *New York Times* reported was “well patronized” (“Chile Honored Today” 1942: 15). The show in fact received much contemporaneous publicity in the *New York Times*, *The New Yorker* and *Times Magazine*. In addition, the specialized art journal *Art Digest* incorporated articles about some of the artists exhibited at Macy’s around the same period. Furthermore, critics’ responses to other exhibitions of Latin American art in the U.S. at this time reveal the general preoccupation with inter-American cultural exchange in the early 1940s and the manner in which art was couched within this narrative, making it clear that even when Latin

American exhibitions were less overtly displayed as part of this inter-American dialogue, it still was subjected to the same diplomatic veil.

Although little critical attention has been paid to this exhibition, it did in fact exhibit a broad range of artworks from the region, most of which seem to have been created between the 1920s and early 1930s. Works by prominent artists such as Antonio Berni, Tarsila do Amaral, Roberto Burle Marx, and, of course, the Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco were represented. However, some artists that now occupy a prominent position in art historical discourse about this period such as Joaquín Torres-García, Norah Borges, Xul Solar, Lasar Segall, Emilio Di Cavalcanti and numerous Cuban vanguards such as Victor Manuel or Amelia Pelaéz were not represented (see Crossman 2008: 60-68). In some instances, such omissions may reflect the conservative tendency of official taste which perhaps did not favour the avant-garde work of those artists, the lack of interest by particular artists in sending works to be shown in this context, or practical obstacles such as transportation issues. Regardless, the exhibit, like the fair, included an extensive assortment of objects from various nations in Latin America that would have provided the viewer with an unarticulated glimpse of this region’s visual art. The catalogue, for instance, merely lists the represented artists alphabetically, stating the artist’s nation, the title of the work, its medium, and price. While the exhibition was purported to be the most comprehensive show of art from this region shown in the U.S. to date, the size, breadth, and framing of the exhibition and the fair’s theatrical backdrop would have eclipsed the possibility of offering visitors a critical introduction.

The diplomatic significance of the art and artists was especially important in the curation of the fair. Maria Martins, for instance, was often recognized not only for her talent as an artist, but also for being Brazilian and the wife of a diplomat. She was one of the most frequently mentioned Latin American artists in U.S. art journals during the 1940s and three of her works were included in the fair. Both *Art Digest* and *Art News* published many brief announcements about the sale and U.S. exhibition of Martins’s sculptures. She was an accomplished Brazilian



sculptor who gained recognition in the U.S., France, and Brazil. MoMA purchased her sculpture *Christ* and the Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired *St. Francis* in 1942. Her connection to the Surrealists in the U.S. likely began after her show at the Valentine Gallery in 1943 (“Latin in the Modern” 1942: 18; Geis 2012).<sup>13</sup> Martins’s *Samba Dancer*, a figurative work made of the native Brazilian wood jacaranda, was exhibited at the fair, and a reproduction of this sculpture was published in the *Art News* article “Some Living Artists of Brazil” (Macy’s [Firm], *Paintings and Sculptures* 1942: 8). In *Art News*, a photograph of *Samba* (Fig. 3) was published in an article entitled “Sculptures of the Western Hemisphere” on a page with the title “Skillful Use of Tropical Woods” along with Nicaraguan sculptor Amador Lira’s *Woman and Child* and Ecuadorian artist Jaime Andrade Moscoso’s *Walnut Tree* (Anonymous, June-July, 1942: 19). The lumping together of these contemporary artworks with others from ancient times and the grouping of them all under the framework of art produced in the “Western Hemisphere” highlights the contemporaneous preoccupation with creating an art of the Americas and establishing a historical premise for such production. The anonymous text further remarks that contemporary Brazilian art is characterized by “a blend of new European trends with a native colonial base,” implying that the work is both “authentic” and modern. Remarks about current diplomatic exchanges were intertwined with general reflections on the art, making it evident that the rise of exhibitions of Brazilian art was tied to political and economic partnerships.

Despite Martins’s success as an artist, specialized art publications such as *Art News* never failed to mention that her husband was the Brazilian Ambassador to the U.S. (“Sculptures from Brazil” 1941: 12). This fact would have been of added importance to Macy’s, whose fair was already playing host to many foreign dignitaries and government officials. In an analysis of Martins’s work years after Macy’s show, Terri Geis writes:

Maria’s sculpture and its reception by the surrealists created a dialogue on freedom from many different perspectives: political liberation from colonialism, freedom to experiment with new sculptural form, rebirth and transformation in the face of the horrors



**Fig. 3**  
 Maria Martins, *Samba*,  
 Jacaranda, unknown  
 date, I.B.M. Collection  
 (*Art News*, January  
 15-31, 1942, 19).

of the Second World War, and perhaps most prominently, sexual freedom. (2012: 143)

Geis demonstrates that the dialogue of freedom that surrounded Martins’s sculptures extended beyond the superficial association with her diplomat husband and Brazilian nationality that Macy’s and the popular press emphasized, to its association with avant-garde production. The discourse of freedom tied to the avant-garde ran parallel to the U.S. government’s interest in supporting artists’ freedom to produce art without censorship. Yet official discourse emphasized her dual status as artist and diplomatic envoy. Martins’s art was therefore symbolic on several fronts, serving as an icon of cultural exchange and diplomacy that was emphasized through her husband’s political ties, while also embodying something that was touted as the essence or an authentic aspect of Brazil which was captured through the work’s reference to samba and her use of native *jacaranda*. Beyond these associations, her work echoed a desire among some artists for the exploration of freedom and nationality through artistic experimentation.



Images of Gerson Bosori's *O Morro*, Candido Portinari's *The Teaching of the Indians*, and Jose Pancetti's *Pasture* were also included in the *Art News* article ("Some Living Artists of Brazil" 1942: 19). Portinari and Pancetti also had works that were exhibited at Macy's. The brief paragraph accompanying these images mentions the Pan-American Conference in Rio de Janeiro and Macy's exhibition, clearly making a connection between the two. The captions state that *Samba* and *Pasture* were owned by IBM, *O Morro* by Macy's, and *The Teaching of the Indians* by the Library of Congress's Hispanic Foundation in Washington, DC. Each of these institutions has been credited with expanding the exposure of works by Brazilian and other Latin American artists to audiences in the United States; at this time, art from South America was beginning to be purchased and exhibited to a larger degree.

Other lesser-known Brazilian artists such as Gerson Bosori, who is virtually unheard of today, were also represented in the fair and in the aforementioned article (Macy's [Firm], *Paintings and Sculptures* 1942: 1). Women and children are depicted in the foreground of his painting *O Morro*. The figures are bulky and stylized. The favela in the background and the hills beyond are simplified. The image thematically recalls the paintings of two Brazilian artists who are better known today: Argentine Lino Eneas Spilimbergo's painting *Arrabal de Buenos Aires*, which was exhibited at Macy's, and Brazilian Candido Portinari's *Moro*, which was also on display, but not for sale (Macy's [Firm], *Paintings and Sculptures* 1942: 12). Such examples represented figurative works that to some degree incorporated regional themes.

The inclusion of Portinari's painting in the Macy's exhibit is of particular note as his work was showcased at MoMA between October 9 and November 17, 1940. In his critique of MoMA's exhibition *Portinari of Brazil*, Milton Brown commented: "With the United States evincing a growing interest, predatory or not, in Latin America, we will be hearing a great deal about our southern neighbours. *Portinari* is the first ambassador in what we hope will be a fruitful new cultural relationship" (Brown 1940: 37). Brown's statement evidences that contemporaneous art critics reiterated the popular slogans that were being used to promote Latin American art, while

the artist's work at Macy's in fact extended his role as "cultural ambassador."

Pachita Crespi, an artist from Costa Rica, is, like Bosori, relatively unheard of today. Her painting, *Manuelito*, which Macy's titled *Manuelito Costa Rica*, depicts one single figure within a minimal interior setting (Macy's [Firm], *Paintings and Sculptures* 1942: 3). The boy alluded to in the title is less stylized than Spilimbergo's figures, exhibiting a greater degree of naturalism. An article in *Art Digest* from this time introduced Crespi as the granddaughter of José María Castro Madriz, a former president of Costa Rica. The author further stated that her work possessed a combination of "native whimsy and Nordic wit," an assessment that reflects the tendency of art writers from this period to emphasize both the Latin American origin of this work and its European heritage ("New York Sees Costa Rica" 1942: 16).

In articles from the early 1940s, Latin American art was usually described as possessing an innate quality that represented the region as a homogenized culture and emphasized geography as a key marker of identity. "Native flavour" and "national rhythm and swing" are just two examples of phrases that were used to assign its representative role as a cultural good from this particular region ("Show IBM's Latin American Prints" 1941: 24). Instead of examining how the works had negotiated the specific social, political, economic, and artistic conditions present in each country at particular times, Latin American art was reduced to symbols of individual nations that were framed by an overarching regionalist program and political agenda. Such phrases emphasize the region as colourful and exotic, positioning the southern nations as the Other that the U.S. government was strategically courting and that the popular public could consume.

Numerous scholars, including Mari Carmen Ramírez, have critiqued the problematic construction and use of the category "Latin American art," which assumes varying degrees of similitude, in relation to its articulation and permutations in various decades. In Ramírez's seminal article "Beyond 'the Fantastic': Framing Identity in U.S. Exhibitions of Latin American Art" (1992), she critiques standard exhibition models that have been used in the United States to showcase Latin American and Latino art, calling into question

the stereotypes that are perpetuated by survey exhibitions based on Western tenets, which do not account for the region's diversity and unique relationship to modernism based on its social, political, and economic history. She states:

Curatorial practices based on this perspective [the Euro-American perspective of "domination over less materially developed cultures"], therefore, are not only incapable of viewing the arts of non-First World societies without the ethnological lens that resulted from colonialism, but also tend to divest these manifestations of the complexity of their origins and development. These practices invariably replicate the us/them perspective whereby the achievements of the colonized subject are brought up for objective scrutiny to determine their degree of rationality or authenticity, thereby reducing them to derivative manifestations or variations of already existing tendencies (62).

Her remark allows a useful vantage point from which to consider Macy's art exhibition as a whole, as well as the individual works that were displayed. The individual works, like each detail of the fair, functioned as parts of an orchestrated construction of Latin America as a unified entity that was meant to sell the region's commercial potential and to strengthen diplomatic ties through a flashy promotion of its culture. In this context, the identity of the region is further qualified based on the commercial and political interests of U.S. elites and marketing strategies that maintain a hierarchical ordering premised on colonial precedents. Macy's fair, however, equally sought to recast the United States' own identity as a champion of freedom and culture, while selling the importance of inter-American alliances to domestic and foreign critics.

The potential of indigenous art to serve as a source or foundation for cultural and "spiritual" revitalization in the Americas was reinforced in the U.S. in both the institutional realm of museums and those supported by governments and corporate sponsors, as well as by some collectors and artists. Beginning in the 1920s, in efforts to shape national identity in the United States, some individuals began to exhibit and buy Native American works, upholding them as cultural objects that promoted national heritage and were key facets of a collective American

identity (Mullin 2001). Interestingly, while politicians aspired to expand political and economic bonds between north and south in the wake of the war, some contemporary artists, on a smaller scale, were cultivating visions of a distinct art of the Americas that distinguished itself from Europe and offered a reappraisal of national and regional heritage through the adoption, in certain instances, of distilled references to the region's ancient indigenous arts. Discussions among these artists, as well as those espoused by cultural institutions and official proclamations, spoke of idealistic agendas that embraced various notions of freedom and national and regional identities. In particular, Barnett Newman's writings and Joaquin Torres-García's formation of *universalismo constructivo* [universal constructivism] exhibit each artist's exploration of ancient indigenous arts, as well as each one's desire to create an abstract style that could simultaneously be read as universal and as originating from the Americas (either north or south).

Barnett Newman's creation of a theoretical framework for an "inter-American culture" in a number of essays similarly reveals the extent of the preoccupation with hemispheric exchange. Newman contributed such essays as "Escultura pre-columbiana en piedra" (Pre-Columbian Stone Sculpture) of 1944 to *La Revista Belga*—a Belgian propagandistic journal published in South America. In this essay, Newman asserted that the large body of pre-Columbian art "should unite all of the Americas since it is the common heritage of both hemispheres" and that this art should serve as the "moral base for that intercultural community that is the foundation of permanent friendship" (Newman 1990: 63). This sentiment was reiterated in U.S. publications in which he proposed "a new 'inter-American' culture that would transcend the divisions of modern politics and forge a common bond between modern individuals" (Anthes 2006: 60).

Luis M. Castañeda, in framing his analysis of the exhibition of Olmec art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, offers a brief examination of artists' interest in pre-Columbian objects in the 1940s. He aptly shows how Newman saw the potential of the remnants of indigenous cultures as symbols of a common heritage, which was "potentially subversive because it could unite the people of the Americas in challenging

these governments' authority" (2013: 25). Pre-Columbian art, the war, and efforts to create a new "American" art acted as unifying platforms from which some artists, like Newman, worked.

It is clear in Newman's writings of the late 1930s and 1940s that he too was interested in the moral and aesthetic promise of ancient American arts. In Newman's 1944 review, "Adolph Gottlieb," he acknowledges the work of contemporary artists from South America (an interest that was likely supported by his preoccupation with pre-Columbian art), stating that it is "alright for Europeans and South Americans to function as modern artists," while artists from the U.S. are not allowed to "escape [from] the little world of genre," meaning that they are forever relegated to American Scene painting—typified by naturalistic scenes of everyday life—that was prevalent between the 1920s and early 1940s in the United States (Newman 1990: 60). Newman's statement makes plain that American artists were also seeking to liberate themselves from the shackles of outmoded styles and criticism; in this instance, clearly seeking a path away from regionalism, and toward a means of embodying "America" beyond its literal representation in art. Newman's writings are emblematic of the formal and conceptual preoccupations of a number of artists about what embodied "American" art—a concern that occurred parallel to the institutional mission, which was bound to political and economic agendas, to showcase the art of Latin America and to reshape the U.S.'s cultural reputation.

The non-utilitarian function of paintings and sculptures would have enhanced the art objects' claim as signifiers of cultural status at Macy's Latin American Fair (Plattner 1998: 482). As nearly all the works in Macy's were for sale, the art overtly played the role of commodity—a good that was being bartered for the supposed well-being of the

hemisphere. The consequence of promoting art as cultural product, as a symbol of another nation, is that the exchange inevitably endorses a sense of otherness. Macy's fair did not really show how Mexico, South, and Central Americans lived, but created a parody of their culture. The fair manufactured an image that promoted the cultures of Latin America as exotic, offering elite visitors and middle-to upper-middle-class viewers from the U.S. a sense of privileged empowerment over Latin Americans. It manufactured stereotypes and generalizations that continued to be perpetuated in various cultural forms. Similarly, albeit to a lesser extreme, the rhetoric attached to Latin American art exhibitions at this time created an environment that devalued the significance of the works as unique objects by making them emblems of a nation or region, rather than of individual talent.

While the event was clearly designed to appeal to New York City's consumers, the fair was also meant to persuade Latin American officials of the U.S.'s commitment to an inter-American alliance. Macy's department store offered a popular parallel to the Inter-American conference that was simultaneously being held in Rio de Janeiro. The fair's design was meant to advertise Latin American products by selling consumers an exotic land to be discovered. Inca orange, the Temple of Jewels and artworks shaped a representation of Latin America as an exotic and developing Other. The fair reiterated tropes of the Other that are bound to tourism's commercial enterprise and colonial precedents. An examination of the fair, however, also reveals that its foundation was fashioned from U.S. elites' own cultural, economic, and political insecurities, as well as from a desire to redefine the nation's role in the international arena.

## Notes

1. The OCIAA (originally the Office of the Coordinator of Economic and Cultural Relations between the American Republics) was designed as a temporary organization intended to monitor the Axis presence in Latin America, counter Nazi propaganda, and promote solidarity through an elaborate cultural exchange program. While the Office of the Coordinator acted as a separate entity, it collaborated with the State Department in

cultural affairs throughout the war. The transfer of this responsibility from the State Department to a separate organization composed mostly of businessmen caused some contention between the two entities. In 1946, a year after the OCIAA was dissolved and the programs transferred back to the State Department, many of the programs were terminated.

2. A quantitative breakdown of the contents of the show originating from these nations is as follows: 58 artworks by 39 Argentine artists; 68 artworks by 20 Brazilian artists; 51 artworks by 29 Chilean artists; and 54 artworks by 29 Colombian artists. Artists from the following nations were not listed as having artworks in the fair: Ecuador, Peru, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Paraguay, Haiti, Belize and the Dominican Republic.
3. Two notable examples are Argentina and Mexico. Argentina was notoriously resistant to cooperating with the United States. For more information, see Tulchin (1990). While less resistant in certain instances, Mexico nationalized its oil in 1938 under the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) much to the chagrin of the U.S. government.
4. The New Deal (1933-1939) was a domestic program instituted by Roosevelt's administration that promoted economic relief through welfare programs that targeted the worker and reform to programs such as housing and agriculture. It notably developed the Works Progress Administration.
5. A sampling of other films produced by the Office of Inter-American Affairs in the 1940s: *Guadalajara*; *Mazatlan*, 1940s; *Mexico City*, 1940s; This is – *Ecuador*, 1942-1945; *Wealth of the Andes*, 1943; and *Gracias Amigos*, 1944.
6. For more on the government's interest in supporting efforts to increase the quality of life in Latin America and thereby decreasing the likelihood of revolution, see Sedgewick (2012: 50-56).
7. Macy's frequently implied that its fair accurately represented the region, occasionally using the word "authentic" in its publications. Such assertions as the fair's design being a "composite of a thousand authentic details" combines both a claim of the "authentic" and the manufactured (Macy's 1942).
8. The tactic of using culture for foreign policy had previously been employed by U.S. officials in the late 1930s as an attempt to strengthen bonds with Mexico. As Anna Indych-López has demonstrated, a number of large Mexican exhibitions were held at major museums during this period, including at the MoMA and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, in an effort to encourage positive diplomatic relations with the administration of Lázaro Cárdenas, which had threatened to nationalize Mexican oil reserves (Indych-López 2009: 125-58). Culture, in fact, was an important part of the Good Neighbor Policy, as exhibited by the signing of a treaty at the inter-American conference in Buenos Aires in 1936 that permitted the circulation of publications and the promotion of art exhibitions, in addition to Roosevelt's establishment of the State Department's Cultural Relations Division in 1939 and later the OCIAA. For more information, see Pike (1995) and Bales (1992).
9. For more information, see Americas Society (2000), Bales (1992), and Rockefeller (1967).
10. For a critical account on cultural exchange in the 1940s from an Argentine perspective, see Serviddio (2004).
11. For more on ethnographic display and World's Fairs see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998).
12. For more on the use of colour in state-sponsored expositions, see Rydell (1984: 131-132, 134, 136), on the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo in 1901. He examines the use of bright colours to represent the exotic, primitive, and untamed nature, and the use of lighter, more refined colours to represent progress.
13. Much scholarship has reflected on the problematic nature of the association made between Latin American art and Surrealism. Luis M. Castañeda, for instance, demonstrates that André Breton's political vision was bound to an essentialist vision of Mexico (2009).

## References

- Americas Society. 2000. *A Hemispheric Venture: Thirty-Five Years of Culture at the Americas Society*. New York: Americas Society.
- Anthes, Bill. 2006. "Our Inter-American Consciousness" Barnett Newman and the Primitive Universal. In *Native Moderns: American Indian Painting, 1940-1960*, 59-88. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Anonymous. 1942. Sculptures of the Western Hemisphere. *Art News* (June-July, 1942): 19.
- Army of Amateurs. 1941. *Time*. June 9, 1.
- Bales, Peter Relyea. 1992. *Nelson Rockefeller and his Quest for Inter-American Unity*. PhD dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook.



- Barnet-Sánchez, Holly. 1993. *The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art: United States Museums and the Role of Foreign Policy in the Appropriation and Transformation of Mexican Heritage, 1933-1944*. PhD dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles.
- Barnitz, Jacqueline. 2001. *Twentieth-Century Art of Latin America*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bronner, Simon J. 1989. Object Lessons: The Work of Ethnological Museums and Collections. In *Consuming Visions: Accumulation and Display of Goods in America, 1880-1920*, ed. Simon J. Bronner, 217-54. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Brown, Milton. November 1940. Exhibitions: New York. *Parnassus* 12 (7): 37.
- Castañeda, Luis M. 2009. Surrealism and National Identity in Mexico: Changing Perceptions, 1940-1968. *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas* 3 (1-2): 9-29.
- . 2013. Doubling Time. *Grey Room* 51:12-39.
- Chapman, Peter. 2009. *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World*. New York: Canongate.
- Chasteen, John Charles. 2011. *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*, 3rd ed. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Chile Honored Today. 1942. *New York Times*. January 21, 15.
- Crockcroft, Eva. 1988. The United States and Socially Concerned Art: 1920-70. In *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970*, ed. Charles Miers, 184-221. New York: The Bronx Museum of the Arts and Harry N. Abrams.
- Crossman, Lisa. 2008. Inter-American Perspectives on *La pintura contemporánea norteamericana*, 1941. MA Thesis, Tulane University.
- Cultural and Educational Activities. 1947. In *Chapter VIII: The History of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs: Historical Reports on War Administration*, 110. Washington: United States Government Printing Office.
- Display Ad 13—No Title. 1942. *New York Times*. January 16, 7.
- Erb, Claude Curtis. 1982. *Nelson Rockefeller and United States–Latin American Relations, 1940-1945*. PhD dissertation, Clark University.
- Fair to Aid Trade of Latin America. 1941. *New York Times*. October 15, 16.
- Falconi, José Luis and Gabriela Rangel, eds. 2006. *A Principality of Its Own: 40 Years of Visual Arts at the Americas Society*. New York: Americas Society.
- Geis, Terri. 2012. “My Goddesses and My Monsters”: Maria Martins and Surrealism in the 1940s. In *Surrealism in Latin America: Vivísimo Muerto*, eds. Dawn Ades, Rita Eder, and Graciela Speranza, 143-57. Los Angeles: Getty Publications.
- Girls in Mexican Costumes Outside the Temple of Jewels. 1942. *Christian Science Monitor*. January 19, 3.
- Goldman, Shifra. 1994. *Dimensions of the Americas: Art and Social Change in Latin American and the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gonzalez, Robert. 2011. *Designing Pan-America: U.S. Architectural Visions for the Western Hemisphere*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Indych-López, Anna. 2009. *Mexican Muralism without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1998. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kubler, George. 1943. Spanish American Art: General. *Handbook of Latin American Studies* 8. Washington: Library of Congress. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?hlsretro:2:/temp/~hls\\_GQsU::@@@mdb=hlsbib,hlsretro](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?hlsretro:2:/temp/~hls_GQsU::@@@mdb=hlsbib,hlsretro) (accessed September 10, 2006).
- Laermans, Rudi. 1993. Learning to Consume: Early Department Stores and the Shaping of the Modern Consumer Culture (1860-1914). *Theory, Culture and Society* 10 (4): 79-102.
- Larsen, Susan C. 1974. The American Abstract Artists: A Documentary History, 1936-1941. *Archives of American Art Journal* 14 (1): 2-7.
- Latin American Fair Aids Peasant Women. 1942. *New York Times*. January 19, 14.

- Latin American Fair Ends. 1942. *New York Times*. February 8, 51.
- Latin Americans Honored at Fair. 1942. *New York Times*. January 17, 30.
- Latins in the Modern. 1942. *Art Digest* (February 1): 18.
- Leach, William. 1989. Strategies of Display and the Production of Desire. In *Consuming Visions*, 99-132.
- Macy's. 1942. *Macy's Latin American Fair, January 17-February 7, 1942*. New York: R. H. Macy and Company.
- . 1942. *Paintings and Sculpture from Latin America: The Art Gallery Macy's Latin American Fair*. New York: R. H. Macy and Company.
- . 2006. Macy's Milestones. Macy's. <http://www1.macys.com/store/about/history/index.jsp> (accessed September 12, 2006).
- Martínez, Juan A. 1994. *Cuban Art and National Identity: The Vanguard Painters, 1927-1950*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Meyer, Michael C., William S. Sherman and Susan M. Deeds. 2003. *The Course of Mexican History*, 7th ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mullin, Molly H. 2001. *Culture in the Marketplace: Gender, Art and Value in the American Southwest*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Newman, Barnett. 1990. *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- New York Sees Costa Rica. 1942. *Art Digest* (May 15): 16.
- Pictures on Parade. 1941. *Time*. July 28.
- Pike, Frederick B. 1995. *FDR's Good Neighbor Policy: Sixty Years of Generally Gentle Chaos*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Plattner, Stuart. 1998. A Most Ingenious Paradox: The Market for Contemporary Fine Art. *American Anthropologist*, n.s. 100 (2): 482.
- Preview Tonight of Latin American Exhibit. 1942. *New York Times*. January 16, 19.
- Ramírez, Mari Carmen. 1992. *El Taller Torres-García: The School of the South and Its Legacy*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Rasmussen, Waldo, ed. 1993. *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art.
- Rockefeller, Nelson A. 1967. *Good Art is Good Business and Good Politics*. New York: Sequoia Graphics.
- Rydell, Robert W. 1984. *All the World's a Fair*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1989. The Culture of Imperial Abundance: World's Fairs in the Making of American Culture. In *Consuming Visions*, 191-216.
- Sachs, Wolfgang. 2010. *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. London: Zed Books.
- Said, Edward W. 1979. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Sculptures from Brazil. 1941. *Art Digest* (October 15): 12.
- Sedgewick, Augustine. 2012. "The Spice of the Department Store": The "Consumers' Republic," Imported Knock-Offs from Latin America, and the Invention of International Development, 1936-1941. *International Labor and Working-Class History* 81:49-68.
- Seiberling, Nancy Jackson. 1942. Chilean Art Featured at Toledo in Good Will Exhibition. *Art Digest*, 15.
- Serviddio, Luisa Fabiana. 2004. Intercambios culturales panamericanos durante la segunda guerra mundial: El viaje de Pettoruti a los EE.UU. In *Arte argentino y latinoamericano del siglo XX. Sus interrelaciones*, 57-82. Buenos Aires: Fundación Espigas.
- Sheinin, David. 2000. Rethinking Pan Americanism: An Introduction. In *Beyond the Ideal: Pan-Americanism in Inter-American Affairs*, ed. David Sheinin, 1-8. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Show: IBM's Latin American Prints. 1941. *Art Digest* (October 15): 24.
- Show Stresses Art of South America. 1942. *New York Times*. January 14, 16.
- Some Living Artists of Brazil. 1942. *Art News* (January 15-31): 19.
- Tanen, Ted M.G. 1991. Festivals and Diplomacy. In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Tenorio-Trillo, Mauricio. 1996. *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tulchin, Joseph S. 1990. The Origins of Misunderstanding: United States-Argentine Relations 1900-1940. In *Argentina Between The Great Powers, 1939-1946*, ed. Guido di Tella and D. Cameron Watt, 34-55. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

United States, New York World's Fair Commission, and Riverside Museum. 1939.

Foreword. In *Latin American Exhibition of Fine and Applied Art*. New York: Riverside Museum.

Wallis, Brian. 1987. Institutions Trust Institutions. In *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business*, ed. Brian Wallis, 52-60. Massachusetts and London: MIT Press and Cambridge.

———.September 1991. Selling Nations. *Art in America* 79 (9): 84-91.

Whitaker, Jan. 2006. *Service and Style: How the American Department Store Fashioned the Middle Class*. New York: St. Martin's Press.