

## Curatorial Statement

*Past/Future/Present: Contemporary Brazilian Art from the Museum of Modern Art, São Paulo* presents a panorama of the most innovative art produced in Brazil from the 1990s to the 2010s. More than a cross-section of contemporary Brazilian art, however, it constitutes an exhibition of contemporary art made by Brazilian artists. This distinction highlights a fundamental question: In the era of globalization, in which the internationalization of art has increasingly eroded regional differences, what is “Brazilian” about contemporary Brazilian art?

The answer is ultimately too slippery to grasp in a determined totality. It is impossible to pin down a homogeneous essence of contemporary Brazilian identity or a monolithic idea of Brazilian culture. In addition, the place of an artist’s birth is insufficient for establishing a sense of “*brasildade*,” or “Brazilianness.” Were this the case, Lasar Segall (Lithuania, 1891 – Brazil, 1957), one of the great artists of Brazilian modernism, or Mira Schendel (Switzerland, 1919 – Brazil, 1988), an artist who quietly revolutionized abstraction in Brazil between the 1950s and the 1980s, would not be duly recognized as landmark references in the history of art in Brazil. Rather than their relation to physical geography, one central factor that ties contemporary artists to a Brazilian tradition is a shared symbolic repertoire drawn from images, experiences, and histories to which they often allude. Other common threads are references to social norms (and transgressions), internal art historical traditions (both in homage and subversion), and historical moments.

In the globalized present, the accelerated pace of cultural exchange, as well as the dynamic displacement of artists from their home territories to other parts of the world, have engendered intense debates over the dissolution of national identities. In some areas, this has led to a resurgence of the local. In the past decades, a significant dialectic has emerged, a push-pull, in which Brazilian artists speak fluently in artistic languages spotlighted on the global stage at the same time that their art has itself become an international reference point.

In the early 20th century, Brazilian art was characterized by a process of appropriation of outside influences and their subsequent transformation into original artforms. The *Antropofagia* (Anthropophagy, or cultural cannibalism) movement of the late-1920s exhorted artists, writers, and intellectuals to cannibalize world culture, synthesize it with their own heritage, and thereby create something entirely new. This operation continues today, but is often inverted: artists mine the local, but with an acute consciousness of developments beyond borders, which they fuse in varied works in their own distinct idioms. The exhibition title, *Past/Future/Present* alludes to this complex maneuver. Contemporary Brazilian artists maintain a creative dialogue with past Brazilian artistic traditions but also look toward the future with a global perspective that fosters boundless creativity.

This exhibition showcases stellar works integral to the development of contemporary art in Brazil during the 1990s and 2000s by artists who are now recognized as the pioneers of their generation. Rarely seen side-by-side outside the country, these artworks also illustrate the international resonance of Brazilian artistic experimentation. This is a unique opportunity for American audiences to experience an in-depth look at the practice of Brazilian artists working in the past decades. It is also the first large-scale exhibition in the United States to feature the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art's extraordinary collection.

*Past/Future/Present* features 70 artworks created by 59 artists primarily between 1990 and 2010, as well as several historical anchors dating from the late 1970s. The represented artists espouse varied approaches and work in diverse media, including painting, sculpture, installation, photography, video, and performance. The exhibition is organized around five thematic nuclei. **The Body/The Social Body** focuses on diverse ways in which artists present artworks as bodies, often to make the physical body into a politicized site of conflict or to engage fraught subjects like homosexuality, racial discrimination, and otherness. **Shifting Identities** examines ideas of native versus foreign, reality versus stereotype, seeing versus being seen. **Landscape, Reimagined** features innovative works that question traditional conceptions and visual representations of "indigenous" soil, landscape, and urban space and the lasting imprint of human interventions upon them. **Impossible Objects** highlights artists' transformation of the pervasive "anxieties of influence" of artistic phenomena like surrealism and the ready-made into uncanny works that supersede both. And **The Reinvention of the Monochrome** reflects artists' ongoing engagement with legacies of both Brazilian and international traditions of monochromatic artwork and the many means by which they imbue them with cultural specificity.

The catalogue is also organized around these themes, but reflects the porous boundaries between them that is highlighted in the gallery installation. During the course of the exhibition, featured artists Laura Lima, Vik Muniz, and Jac Leirner will travel from Brazil to Phoenix to give public lectures on their artistic practice. Phoenix Art Museum will also screen a series of cutting-edge Brazilian films, bringing an even wider view of Brazil to Arizona.

Because of the rich depth and diversity of the São Paulo Museu de Arte Moderna's collection, this exhibition presents only one constellation of artworks among many others that could be imagined. It is not intended as a definitive look at the praxis of contemporary art production in Brazil, but rather aimed to contribute to the fruitful, ongoing conversation about what Brazilian art is and can be.

Dr. Vanessa K. Davidson (Phoenix Art Museum)

Dr. Cauê Alves (Museu Brasileiro da Escultura e Ecologia de São Paulo)

Featured Artists: Albano Afonso, Keila Alaver, Efrain Almeida, Rafael Assef, Dora Longo Bahia, Rodrigo Braga, Waltercio Caldas, Rogério Canella, Carlito Carvalhosa, Leda Catunda, Lia Chaia, Sandra Cinto, Felipe Cohen, Rochelle Costi, José Damasceno, Lenora de Barros, Antonio Dias, Iran do Espírito Santo, Marcius Galan, Anna Bella Geiger, Carmela Gross, Tadeu Jungle, Lucia Koch, Nelson Leirner, Jac Leirner, José Leonilson, Artur Lescher, Laura Lima, Antonio Manuel, Cinthia Marcelle, Marepe, Rodrigo Matheus, Cildo Meireles, Beatriz Milhazes, Odires Mlászho, Marcelo Moscheta, Pedro Motta, Vik Muniz, Ernesto Neto, Rivane Neuenschwander, Nazareth Pacheco, Rosana Paulino, Pazé, Penna Prearo, Florian Raiss, Caio Reiszewitz, Rosângela Rennó, Eryk Rocha & Tunga, Thiago Rocha Pitta, Regina Silveira, Valeska Soares, Ana Maria Tavares, Tunga, Adriana Varejão, Cássio Vasconcellos, Laura Vinci, Carlos Zilio, Marcelo Zocchio.