

## Art Agency, Partners


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## America—What's in a Name?

### Coming to Grips with the American in Latin American Art



Installation view of Cildo Meireles, *Através (Through)* (1983-89) from "Cildo Meireles: Installations" Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan (2014) © Cildo Meireles. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co., New York

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A mammoth art event is opening at virtually all the museums in Southern California this weekend, [Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA](#), an ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles (until January 2018).

I didn't know much about art from Latin America (nor have much curiosity for it) until around 14 years ago when I was asked by the Brazilian collector Bernardo Paz to help him form the thought process and programming for a museum. Bernardo was then just beginning to collect art made outside of Brazil, and his museum would become [Inhotim](#), a botanical park and cultural institution spread across thousands of acres of gardens, farms, forests and mountains. It is focused on several dozen single-artist pavilions comprising commissions, site-specific sculptures and major works which other museums cannot afford to devote the space to permanently display.

Once I began visiting Brazil, I quickly developed a passionate curiosity and deep respect for the wide-ranging and unique explorations of geometric abstraction that developed there after the Second World War. Up until that point, the movement could be traced along a European route from Malevich to Klee. But, it began to branch off into at least three distinct lines in the US, Europe and Latin America after the war. Each resulted in diverse lineages such as earthworks in the US or the various approaches to environmental and performative sculpture taken by artists in countries such as Argentina and Cuba.

The Latin American artists each brought an individual character, palette, scale, touch and poetry that was unique in its own way, while still remaining part of a rigorous and cohesive, broader investigation. It is notable that in Brazil the four most significant artists who came to prominence in the 1950s were three women and a gay man—which is very different to how great painters in 1950s New York were defined.

This year we have seen major retrospectives of Lygia Pape, “[A Multitude of Forms](#)”, at the Met Breuer and Hélio Oiticica at the Whitney (“[To Organize Delirium](#)”, until 1 October). But it does not go unnoticed that the [exquisite retrospective](#) of Mira Schendel at the Tate in 2013-14 (which was one of the most perfectly curated retrospectives I’ve ever seen); the late [Tunga’s \*A la lumière des deux mondes\*](#) at the Louvre in 2005; and the [2008-09 retrospective](#) of, likely, the greatest artist working in Latin America today—Cildo Meireles—never made it past the Tate. Or that MoMA’s fantastic [Lygia Clark retrospective](#) in 2014 didn’t find its way to another US institution.



Cildo Meireles, *Desvio para o vermelho I: Impregnação* (1967-84). Courtesy Inhotim Institute, Brazil. Photo credit: Daniela Paoliello

While this country is starting to get on track with this history, there is still so much to discover and learn. Not only does Brazil, for instance, have a rich and unique history but those foundations have created a continuum that today finds as many significant contemporary artists there, as throughout Europe—only a few of whom we know internationally.

So, PST comes none too soon—it is especially well timed to widen our awareness and understanding of the role of Latin artists in recent times. I will be arriving in LA just as this newsletter arrives in your inbox. There are so many exhibitions that sound fascinating and which I look forward to seeing (and many more which I probably won’t have time to see). Yet, as I look at the list of 90+ exhibitions, I can’t help but notice that this city and region-wide effort involving most of the major museums and galleries in Southern California is more focused on how Los Angeles begins to identify with its own Latin presence than how Latin America sees itself.

This vantage point naturally triggers the question of whether Los Angeles museums have ever, until now, addressed the contributions of the city’s own artists of Latin cultural roots and identity. I am unaware of any major survey show or retrospective of a Los Angeles-based artist of Latin lineage having taken place in the region (though perhaps someone can correct me) until now. Like a lot of recent rethinking of postwar art history, we are again late to the table. But, I am grateful

that we are here now, beginning to realize that it's a sloppy use of "America" to refer only to the USA, as though the other Americas have not existed.

Off the top of my head, I began to jot down extremely important artists from South America who belong in every art history book, but most of whom are probably still unknown to most in this country:

Beatriz González, Victor Grippo. David Lamelas, Cildo Meireles, Miguel Rio Branco, Claudia Andujar, Eugenio Dittborn, Doris Salcedo, Jac Leirner, Fernanda Gomes, Ernesto Neto, Rivane Neuenschwander, Adriana Varejão, Beatriz Milhazes, Gabriel Orozco, Carlos Garaicoa, Diango Hernández.

And of a younger generation: Alexandre da Cunha, Marepe, Damián Ortega, Marcius Galan, Jonathas de Andrade, Erika Verzutti, Mario García Torres, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Pedro Reyes, Gabriel Sierra, Adrián Villar Roja, Juan Araujo, whose delicate paintings are currently being made in Venezuela, where it is hard to find a loaf of bread, and are inspired by the utopian Modern architecture of Latin America, which defined the hope of America of the Southern Hemisphere.

I am sure I have left off at least as many important artists as I have listed, missing large swathes of Argentina, Chile, Peru, and the histories of Conceptual, feminist, and political art these nations have produced. These are just the names that poured out of my (increasingly random) memory, the tip of the iceberg.