

NEW CITY BRASIL

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CULTURAL EXCHANGE: SELECTIONS FROM THE MCA CHICAGO ARE ON DISPLAY AT MASP

By Cynthia Garcia



Panoramic view of "Picture Gallery in Transformation, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago at MASP", through January 1, 2020 at the MASP, São Paulo.

Now on view at the Museum of Art of São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP) is "Picture Gallery in Transformation, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago at MASP." The collaboration between the two museums juxtaposes rare works from both collections, and highlights visual rhymes displayed in Lina Bo Bardi's iconic glass easels. Among them is Forrest Bess, "Dedication to van Gogh," (1946) from the MCA Chicago collection, side by side with one of the jewels of the MASP, van Gogh's "A Walk at Twilight" (1889-90). The strongest statement assembles powerful political works by four Pop artists from North and South America: Robert Rauschenberg, "Retroactive III," 1963, MCA Collection; Claudio Tozzi, "Repressão" (Repression), 1968, MASP Collection; Andy Warhol, "Jackie Frieze," 1964, MCA Collection; and from the MASP Collection, Teresinha Soares, "Morra usando as legítimas alpargatas" (Die Wearing the Legitimate Espadrille), 1968, from the artist's Vietnam series.

Other highlights from the MCA Chicago in the exhibition are René Magritte's stunning surrealist canvas "Les merveilles de la nature" (The Wonders of Nature, 1953); Louise Bourgeois' Egyptian-inspired black marble sculpture, "The She-Fox" (1985); Cindy Sherman, donned in red, in a 1984 self-portrait, and Félix Gonzalez-Torres' "Untitled (The End)," from his 1990 series. This work, an example of relational art, is made up of a 22-by-71-by-56-cm pile of thick white paper, with a black framed print for visitors to take away and create their own artwork. The idea is explored by the brilliant conceptual idiom of this gay Cuban-born American visual artist, who dies at age thirty-eight in 1996.

With 50/50 male and female artists, the gender-balanced group from the American museum also displays Latin American-born artists Wifredo Lam and Roberto Matta, and South-African Marlene Dumas. This exhibition is a good opportunity to admire exceptional works by artists rarely exhibited in Brazil, like Syrian-born Marwan and Swiss Miriam Cahn, as well as outstanding American female artists, such as Sherrie Levine, Gladys Nilsson, Christina Ramberg, and surrealists Gertrude Abercrombie and Dorothea Tanning.

The works of the well-known North American museum are installed alongside memorable late-nineteenth and early twentieth century French paintings that make the name of the MASP Collection: Modigliani, Monet, Degas, Manet, Matisse, Picasso, Cézanne, Gauguin, etc.; luminaries from the Italian Renaissance like Raphael and Botticelli; Brazilians Portinari, Di Cavalcanti, Anita Malfatti, José Antonio da Silva, Lygia Clark, Tarsila do Amaral, Anna Maria Maiolino, Rosana Paulino, Dora Longo Bahia, Emanuel Araujo and even Beaux Arts style Victor Meirelles' canvas "Moema" (1866), surely the most sensual reclining female nude in nineteenth century Brazilian art. The sexy tableau must have served as inspiration for the Guerrilla Girls work on view, "Do Women have to be Naked to get in to the Museum of Art of São Paulo?," produced in 2007 when the New York City feminist collective performed at the MASP. The museum, with 11,000 pieces, still has a low number of women artists in its collection, like ninety-nine percent of Brazilian art institutions.

This significant North/South cultural swap continues in June 2020 when MASP will send to MCA Chicago "Lina Bo Bardi: Habitat." In the exhibition, the MASP Collection is displayed in the Italian-Brazilian architect's radical easels made of a pane of glass supported by a concrete cube, which was designed in 1968 for the museum's Paulista avenue headquarter, also designed by Bo Bardi.

We spoke to MASP assistant curator Olivia Ardui about the exhibition.

Tell us about the MASP's permanent exhibition "Picture Gallery in Transformation," presented in partnership with the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

This partnership was an opportunity to bring works by eminent artists linked to pop art—such as Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg—or artists that emerged in the 1980's in the United States and would become known as Pictures Generation, namely Cindy Sherman and Sherrie Levine. Among the eighteen works of the MCA Chicago are also some historical gaps in MASP's collection, among them René Magritte, Wifredo Lam and Roberto Matta. Other works were selected because of their close dialogue with the curatorial guidelines of the museum, such as the Afro-Atlantic Histories— that resonate with the works by Kerry James Marshall and Marlene Dumas.

What should the visitor have in mind when observing the MCA's works, most of them from the second half of the twentieth century, shown alongside the MASP's collection, which is based in the Italian and French schools with names such as Raphael, Ingres, van Gogh, Cézanne, Renoir, Monet and Picasso?

The artworks in "Picture Gallery in Transformation" are displayed in glass easels designed by Lina Bo Bardi, arranged in rows in an ample space, with no divisions, and in a reverse chronological order, from contemporary art to the old masters. As the eighteen works of the MCA Chicago showcased in our permanent collection are posterior to the mid-twentieth century, they are mainly displayed next to works of MASP's collection from the same time frame. However, at the beginning of the exhibition, we disregarded the chronology and placed side by side a canvas by Forrest Bess (1911-1977), "Dedication to van Gogh" (1946), an artist Bess greatly admired, and "A Walk at Twilight" (1889–90) by van Gogh (1853-1890), painted near van Gogh's death, to render a striking dialogue between the two.

In 2018, MASP took the first step towards establishing a partnership with the Tate in London. What were the six works sent by that museum? And what did the MASP send the Tate in return?

Since it was inaugurated, MASP has always developed international partnerships on different levels – involving research, loans, travelling exhibitions, among others.

In 2018, MASP started a program within the exhibition “Picture Gallery in Transformation.” In the perspective of an ever-changing exhibition, the museum is to showcase a selection of works by partner institutions to dialogue with its own collection, for a period of nine months. In “Picture Gallery in Transformation: Tate at MASP,” the following works were selected: Gwen John, “Dorelia in a Black Dress,” circa 1903–04; L.S. Lowry, “Coming Out of School,” 1927; Sylvia Sleigh, “The Bride (Lawrence Alloway),” 1949; Francis Bacon, “Seated Figure,” 1961; Ibrahim El-Salahi, “They Always Appear,” 1964; and Francis Newton Souza, “Head of a Man,” 1965.

In June 2020, continuing the cultural exchange, MASP will send works from its collection to the MCA. What is the concept of this specific MASP selection?

In the context of the exhibition “Lina Bo Bardi: Habitat,” some works from MASP’s collection are to be shown at the MCA Chicago in her glass easels. The idea is to suggest the experience of the visitor in the MASP’s second floor and invite them to walk through the gallery in the midst of some of the museum’s highlights. The selection of works will include pieces from the Italian Renaissance, Impressionism, Brazilian modernism and self-taught artists, among others.

What can you tell us about the reception of the works of MCA Chicago by the Brazilian public?

The Brazilian audience is very receptive to this program and constantly looking for the “visiting works” in the gallery. With that in mind, a map of the exhibition indicating the works of the MCA Chicago is available to the public, as well as a pocket guide with short texts and images of the works.

Picture Gallery in Transformation, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago at MASP

Through December 30
Museum of Art of São Paulo