

# The Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro, Maria Martins and the institutionalization of modern art in Brazil<sup>I</sup>

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the formative period of the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro (1948-1958). It examines documentation from that time, exploring the political, social and cultural relations that involved the construction of its headquarters and the genesis of its collection. In this context, it considers the presence of Maria Martins in this institutional process.

**Keywords:** *Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro. Provisional headquarters. Maria Martins. Collection.*

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This paper examines the history of the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro, MAM Rio) in the period in which it was hosted at the Ministério da Educação e Saúde building (the Ministry of Education and Health building, nowadays Palácio Capanema). Our research focused on periodicals published by the museum from 1952 on, which contained statutes, bulletins, work catalogues, activity reports, among further content related to the institution's functioning during this formative period of its collection, in addition to news clippings about MAM Rio published as far back as 1949. We also analyzed Maria Martins' participation in this institutional process, considering her relevance to the composition of MAM Rio's collection.

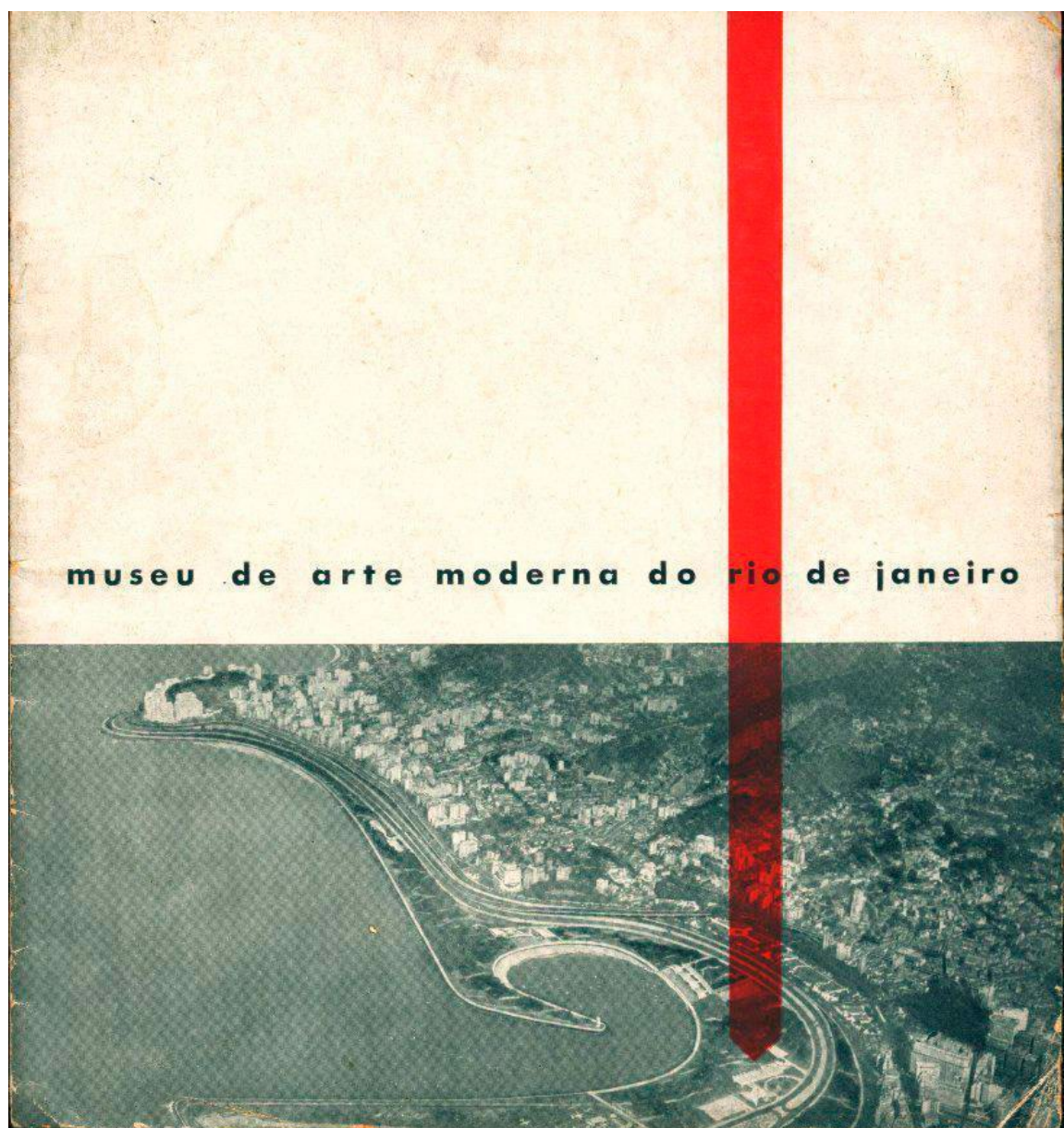


Figure 1  
Cover of the catalogue  
for MAM Rio Collection  
Exhibition, 1958. Pagi-  
nation: Tuni Murtinho  
Cliché: Latt Mayer  
S.A. Source: MAM  
Rio Archive. Uniden-  
tified photographer

The current paper, as well as *O acervo do Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro: a produção experimental e Cildo Meireles* (“The collection of the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro: experimental production and Cildo Meireles”), was developed out of a collective investigation which brought together four studies on MAM Rio’s collection. The text by Daniele Machado and Stefania Paiva analyzes the trajectory of the museum after the 1978 fire, a moment of rupture between MAM Rio and the avant-garde, which left a historical lacuna in the institution. Among the reconstruction initiatives related to the historical interruption of 1978, is the project *Aquisições Essenciais* (“Essential Acquisitions”), a group of works acquired in 2001 that includes *Marulho* (“Sounding Sea”), by Cildo Meireles. Thus, the joint reading of these papers about these two moments of the *carioca* institution contributes to the creation of a panorama on the institutionalization of Brazilian art.

The cultural project of the institutionalization of modern art in Brazil has, as its milestones, the foundation of the museums of modern art and of the São Paulo Biennial, at the end of the 1940s and start of the 1950s. It’s possible to identify in this project a tendency towards personalization, as is the case with MAM Rio, whose foundation is frequently interpreted as an individual dispute between Niomar Muniz Sodré and Raymundo Castro Maya. In this sense, observing the activities of Maria Martins can help one understand how other agents also took part in this process and its functioning in a network. The articulations that involved the conception and materialization of this modern project were guided by prominent figures of the so-called Brazilian intellectual, political, economic, and cultural elite<sup>1</sup>. This collective endeavour, however, did not eliminate the inherent vices of the patrimonialism of the Brazilian elite and its difficulty to understand “the fundamental distinction between the private and public realms” (HOLANDA, 1995, p. 145)<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the elite’s engagement in the project, the general public still showed resistance towards the acceptance of modern art. Clear examples of that

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1 Some of those figures included Raymundo Castro Maya, Niomar Moniz Sodré, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, Yolanda Penteado, Mário Pedrosa, Assis Chateaubriand, Lúcio Costa, Ivan Serpa, Alberto da Veiga Guignard, Maria Martins, Juscelino Kubitschek, Gustavo Capanema, Oscar Niemeyer, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Jayme Maurício, Paulo Bittencourt, among others.

2 (Our translation). The original text: *distinção fundamental entre os domínios do privado e do público*.

resistance are the episodes of the rejection of Lasar Segall's exhibition<sup>3</sup> at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes (MNBA) and the closing of the Grupo Guignard exhibition<sup>4</sup>, both in 1943. Public taste, in general, was closely linked to traditional standards of art. Thus, besides overcoming the structural and financial impediments to the institutionalization of art, it was also necessary to foster an educational programme that could eliminate the "lack of culture [which] generated academicism" (BARATA, 1952, p. 9)<sup>5</sup>. For this reason, the creation of exhibition spaces that focused on modern art became an urgent need for its wide popularization and for audience formation.

MAM Rio's first official exhibition, *Pintura Europeia Contemporânea* ("Contemporary European Painting"), happened in 1949 and presented works by the so-called Paris School. The exhibition took place at the museum's first address, then the 16th floor of the Banco Boavista headquarters building, in downtown Rio de Janeiro. The exhibition brought together works from private collections<sup>6</sup>. In the same year, the inaugural exhibition at MAM SP took place, titled *Do Figurativismo ao Abstracionismo* ("From Figurativism to Abstractionism").

According to Anna Paola Baptista<sup>7</sup>, MAM Rio's choice for the School of Paris possibly had to do with the influence and predilection of the group of intellectuals close to Castro Maya (such as Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade and Josias Leal), who ceded part of their private collections to the event. These collections had been formed from purchases in auctions outside of Brazil, in solidly structured art markets, very different from the fledgling national market. This experience of acting on the international market demonstrates these collectors' understanding of the importance of the legitimization and valuation of a work of art. In this way, the project of institutionalizing

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3 An exhibition promoted by the Ministério da Educação e Saúde at MNBA. See: SIQUEIRA, Vera Beatriz. *Cálculo da Expressão*. Oswaldo Goeldi, Lasar Segall and Iberê Camargo. São Paulo: Imprensa Oficial – SP (IMESP), 2010. (exhibition catalogue). *Diário Carioca*, Rio de Janeiro, p. 6. 22 July 1944.

4 See: A EXPOSIÇÃO de Guignard na ENBA. *A Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, p. 3. 30 October 1943.

5 (Our translation). The original text: *estado de incultura [que] gerou o academicismo*.

6 According to an article published in *Correio da Manhã* on 21 January 1949, p. 12, artworks from the following collections were part of the exhibition: Borges da Fonseca Collection, Niomar Muniz Sodré Collection, Josias Leão Collection, Roberto Marinho Collection, Sra. R. A. Lacroze Collection, and Marques Rabelo Collection. The show presented two works from the museum's own collection: a painting by Yves Tanguy (donated by Nelson Rockefeller) and a gouache on paper by Joan Miró (donated by Borges da Fonseca).

7 Head of technical divisions at the Castro Maya Museums (IPHAN).

modern art in Brazil can be considered from the point of view of the private interest in the valuation of collections which might eventually be showcased in an official modern art museum, such as in the case of MAM Rio.

The engagement of the *carioca* and *paulista* elites in the project of modernizing society – of which the institutionalization of art is a part – was influenced by Nelson Rockefeller and by the models applied in the creation of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. The constitution of these institutional spaces strengthened the potential of the symbols of progress necessary for building a new society. The network of relations that was established for the undertaking of this project in Brazil also counted on the input of Maria Martins, whose actions can be understood from two starting points: her access to the international artistic scene and her presence at Itamaraty (the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) as Brazilian ambassadress to the United States (between 1939 and 1947) and in Europe (from 1931 to 1938, and from 1948 to 1950).

In this way, her presence in New York<sup>8</sup> strengthened Brazilian ties with Rockefeller and MoMA. In 1941 the American museum added Martins' sculpture *Cristo* ("Christ") to its collection, which was purchased by Rockefeller and on display at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington. In 1943, the MoMA collection received the painting *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942-43) by Piet Mondrian as a donation from Maria<sup>9</sup>. During the period in which she lived in New York, she was part of a group of artists based in the city, which included André Breton, Michel Tapié, Yves Tanguy, and Marcel Duchamp. The presence of these artists contributed to the city becoming an artistic hub in the aftermath of Second World War migration and the process of transference of the hegemonic centre of art from Paris to the USA.

Maria Martins returned to Brazil in 1950 and from 1952 on, entered MAM Rio's Deliberation Council, being listed as advisor until the 1959 bulletin, the last one that was analyzed by this research. It was up to the council to elect the executive director and to decide on all the activities of the museum,

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8 Although the Brazilian embassy was in Washington, Maria Martins kept a studio in New York during the period in which she lived in the US (from 1939 to 1947).

9 This was Mondrian's first work that entered the North American collection. It was acquired by Maria Martins at the group exhibition *Maria: new sculptures - Mondrian: new paintings*, which took place at the Valentine Gallery in New York in 1943.



including the purchase and disposal of works<sup>10</sup>. According to Ana Arruda Callado<sup>11</sup>, Niomar Muniz Sodré's entry to the organization was due to Maria:

In 1951, the decision of the group [of founders] was to pass the direction of MAM to Maria Martins, mainly because of her cultural contacts abroad. Instead of accepting, she convinced Raymundo Castro Maya that it was best to entrust Niomar and Paulo Bittencourt with the project (CALLADO, 2004, p. 140)<sup>12</sup>.



Figure 2  
Juscelino Kubistchek,  
Maria Martins, and  
Niomar Muniz Sodré  
in front of a sculpture  
by the artist at her  
retrospective exhibition  
of 1956. Photograph  
published in MAM  
Rio Bulletin nº 15, in  
1957. Source: MAM  
Rio Archive. Unk-  
nown photographer

10 Among the names that constantly appear as members of the Deliberation Council at MAM Rio in the analyzed documents (1948 to 1959), one finds: Raymundo Castro Maya, Gustavo Capanema, Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade, Juscelino Kubistchek, Roberto Marinho, Carlos Flexa Ribeiro, Aníbal Machado, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, Assis Chateaubriand, and Walter Moreira Salles.

11 Author of the biography of the artist, published by Editora Gryphus in 2004.

12 (Our translation). The original text: *Em 1951, a decisão do grupo [de fundadores] era passar a direção do MAM para Maria Martins, principalmente por seus contatos culturais no exterior. Ela, em vez de aceitar, convenceu Raymundo Castro Maya que era melhor entregar o projeto a Niomar e Paulo Bittencourt.*

1952 was a year of big changes at MAM Rio and this coincided with the arrival of Maria Martins at the council. Niomar Muniz Sodré took the position of executive director and the museum was moved from the Banco Boavista building to its temporary headquarters at the Palácio Capanema, on Rua da Imprensa, in downtown Rio. The museum occupied the pilotis area of the building, which received a special adaptation project by Oscar Niemeyer, approved by Lúcio Costa at SPHAN<sup>13</sup>, to host the museum temporarily. The project consisted of closing off the spaces between the pilotis with a wooden structure that turned it into an exhibition space. MAM Rio occupied that space for six years, from January 1952 to January 1958, when it was transferred to Bloco Escola (“School Block”), the first building to be erected at its proper headquarters at Aterro do Flamengo. In an interview with the newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, Castro Maya spoke about the strategy of temporarily occupying the Palácio Capanema:

It will be an absolutely temporary headquarters, so everything will be made out of wood. But it will allow the museum to communicate its activities, which is an excellent point in itself. And, by arousing interest, we will manage to get partners and, in doing so, we will move forward (MAYA, 1951, p.5).<sup>14</sup>

The receptivity to the social and artistic transformations inherent to the modern can be understood as part of the temporary character MAM Rio established for itself in its first decade, until its move to Aterro do Flamengo. Such openness is related to the precarity of its temporary headquarters, to the difficulties posed to the formation of a collection, and to the establishment of alternative models for a museum – models that were different from the traditional ones for ancient art whose primary mission was the preservation of the past.

All of this effort, however, has a clearly defined purpose: to pose conditions on the continuity of culture in a period of deep changes. The relationship between transition and continuity is fundamental. Modernity

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13 SPHAN, or the Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (National Artistic and Historical Heritage Service) was the first name of the federal division responsible for the conservation of Brazilian cultural heritage. Nowadays it is called IPHAN, or Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (Institute of National Historical and Artistic Heritage). For further information, see: <<http://portal.iphan.gov.br/dicionarioPatrimonioCultural/detalhes/61/servico-do-patrimonio-historico-e-artistico-nacional-sphan-1937-1946>>.

14 (Our translation). The original text: *Será uma sede absolutamente provisória. Por isso, tudo será feito em madeira. Mas permitirá divulgar as atividades do museu, já que é um ponto excelente. E, despertando interesse, conseguiremos sócios e, tendo sócios, iremos para frente.*

doesn't become a social and cultural value unless it establishes this ambiguous relationship of continuity with a past it intends to deny (SIQUEIRA, 1999, p. 142)<sup>15</sup>.

MAM Rio's main objective wasn't the formation of a collection, "where the word Museum means something other than to just preserve" (BO BARDI, 1960, p. 130)<sup>16</sup>. Its objectives were more akin to a modern civilization project, with an educational programme aimed at the public and referring to current production and young artists, seeking to develop "a panoramic view of the art of our time" (AQUINO, 1953, p.7)<sup>17</sup>. In accordance with other enterprises of the kind in the world – MoMA, Rome's Galeria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna<sup>18</sup>, and the Musée d'Arte Moderne de Paris – highlighting temporary exhibitions, loaning works, and legitimizing new works were all relevant points for the project of the museum. The defense of a museum without a collection was also present in the debate on what would constitute a modern museum. The desire to establish an innovative space focused on working with recent art, and characterized the ambiguity of a project which intended to be part of the development of the avant-garde from inside the museum – considering that the primordial feature of the avant-garde is to be ahead of its time and, therefore, outside of institutions, to be incorporated by them at a later time.

### The constitution of the MAM Rio collection

On the occasion of the inauguration of the MAM Rio temporary headquarters at Palácio Capanema in 1952, the first list of works in the collection was published: it contained 34 works (21 oil paintings, 1 woodcut, 8 works on paper – Indian ink, watercolour, and gouache – and 4 bronze sculptures).

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15 (Our translation). The original text: *Todo esse esforço, contudo, tem uma finalidade claramente definida: ressaltar a continuidade da cultura num período de grave transição. A relação entre transitoriedade e continuidade é fundamental. A modernidade não se converte em valor cultural e social a não ser quando estabelece essa ambígua relação de continuidade com um passado que pretende negar.*

16 (Our translation). The original text: *onde a palavra Museu tem outra significação da de somente conservar.*

17 (Our translation). The original text: *uma visão panorâmica da arte do nosso tempo.*

18 According to Vera Beatriz Siqueira, the Castro Maya library kept a bibliography about the theme of the creation of modern art museums, including Palma Bucarelli's text on the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, in Rome (SIQUEIRA, 1999, p.143).



Among the artists, the majority was French<sup>19</sup> – 15 – in contrast with 5 Brazilians<sup>20</sup>.

Within the genre classification presented in the catalogue, painting appears in larger numbers on all the lists. If we consider the proportion of purchased paintings to those donated, the preference for French artists remains stable until the last official list published by the institution, in 1966, before the fire of 1978. The issue of the donation of works produced by author artists was raised by critics in their analyses of the collection.

<b>Progress of the entry of paintings in the MAM Rio collection organized by artist nationality</b>			
	<b>1952</b>	<b>1953</b>	<b>1966</b>
Argentina	0	0	9
Austria	0	0	1
Belgium	1	2	3
Bolivia	0	0	4
Brazil	4	14	126
Chile	0	1	3
China	0	0	1
Cuba	0	0	2
Czechoslovakia	1	1	3
England	0	1	3
France	11	15	39
Germany	0	0	7
Greece	0	0	2
Haiti	0	0	2
Israel	0	0	1
Italy	2	2	31
Japan	0	0	5
Mexico	0	1	8
Panama	0	0	1
Pakistan	0	0	2
Poland	0	0	1
Portugal	0	0	4
Romania	0	1	1
Russia	0	0	4
Spain	1	5	15
Switzerland	0	2	3
Uruguay	0	0	5
USA	1	8	11
Yugoslavia	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>299</b>

Figure 3  
Source: Developed by  
the authors (2021)

19 Bores, Couturier, Dubuffet, Duval, Guignebert, Léger, Lhote, Marchant, Mathieu, Metzinger, Patrix, Tanguy, Valtat. Giacometti is listed as French and was not considered in our count. Léger is the artist with the most works in the collection, with three works, donated by Nelson Rockefeller, Oscar Niemeyer, and Josias Leão.

20 Maria Martins, Portinari, Di Cavalcanti, Guignard e Segall.

Types of acquisition of paintings by nationality according to data from the 1966 list				
	Purchase	Donated by author	Donated by third parties	Unspecified
Argentina	2	3	4	0
Austria	0	1	0	0
Belgium	3	0	0	0
Bolivia	0	0	3	1
Brazil	11	83	29	2
Chile	1	2	0	0
China	1	0	0	0
Cuba	0	0	2	0
Czechoslovakia	3	0	0	0
France	21	6	13	0
Germany	5	0	1	1
Greece	0	2	0	0
Haiti	2	0	0	0
England	2	1	0	0
Israel	1	0	0	0
Italy	10	17	4	0
Japan	1	2	2	0
Mexico	6	0	2	0
Panama	0	1	0	0
Pakistan	0	2	0	0
Poland	0	0	1	0
Portugal	1	1	2	0
Romania	1	0	0	0
Russia	3	0	0	1
Spain	7	4	3	1
Switzerland	3	0	0	0
Uruguay	2	0	3	0
U.S.A.	7	2	2	0
Yugoslavia	0	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>6</b>

Figure 4  
Source: Developed by  
the authors (2021)

The target audience of the periodicals produced by MAM Rio were their business partners. They circulated through offset printing with catalogues of works<sup>21</sup>, statutes<sup>22</sup>, and bulletins<sup>23</sup>, containing activity reports, news clippings, and lists of business partners. In the published texts, there was no consensus about tendencies and influences to be pursued in the formation of the Museum's collection. However, the issues linked to these criteria were discussed. The 1953 bulletins reproduced critical texts by Mário Pedrosa, Antonio Bento, and Walter Zanini about the constitution of the Museum collection and the collections it was made up of.

Pedrosa, in his analysis, approached the issue of acquisition criteria, for him, in a museum "no question is more decisive than the formation of the

21 This research project analyzed the catalogues published in 1952, 1953, 1954, 1956, 1957, 1958 and 1966.

22 The statutes of 1948, 1953 and 1959 were consulted for this research project.

23 Analyzed bulletins: 1952 (1 to 3); 1953 (4 to 11); 1954 (12); 1955 (13); 1956 (14); 1957 (15); 1958 (16) and 1959 (17).

collections” (PEDROSA, 1953, p. 13)<sup>24</sup>. He also discussed the importance of the option of specialization in artistic schools on account of the impossibility of a totalizing collection. On the issue of donations, he emphasized that they couldn’t be incorporated into the museum based solely on taste or friendship, and questioned the donation by the authors themselves. Pedrosa referred to the MAM Rio sculpture collection as the best in Brazil at that moment, mentioning Laurens, Arp, Brancusi, Giacometti, and Max Bill, and omitted Maria Martins’s works. In general terms, he chose *Cabeça Cubista* (“Cubist Head”)<sup>25</sup> by Pablo Picasso as the best work in the collection. The importance of this painting would also be pointed out by Antônio Bento, who chose it as the central work of the whole collection. *Cabeça Cubista* is one of the works destroyed in the 1978 fire.

Antônio Bento, in his assessment of the formation of the collection, also identified issues with the management of acquisitions and donations. He mentioned that the formation of collections should have “cultural objectives, because museum collections differ substantially from amateur collections, cultivated as the amateurs may be”, and emphasized the importance of a “programme of acquisitions” (BENTO, 1953, p. 14)<sup>26</sup>.

Walter Zanini, agreeing with Pedrosa and Bento, acknowledged the lack of cohesion in the selection of artworks for the collection, which he characterized as an “ensemble that’s still too improvised” (ZANINI, 1953, p. 10)<sup>27</sup> due to their origins in random donations and the personal taste of the benefactors.

The acquisition of the sculpture *Mademoiselle Pogany* (“Miss Pogany”) (1920), by Brancusi<sup>28</sup>, involved an important intermediation by Maria Martins for the MAM Rio collection of sculptures in 1951. She narrated the

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24 (Our translation). The original text: *nenhum ponto é mais decisivo que a formação das coleções.*

25 Pablo Picasso, *Cabeça Cubista*, 1909. MAM Rio Collection - Absent/Fire. Donated by Companhia Grupo Sul América and Lar Brasileiro.

26 (Our translation). The original text: *objetivos culturais, pois as coleções de museus diferem substancialmente das coleções de amadores, por mais cultos que estes sejam” e enfatizou a importância de um “programa de aquisições”.*

27 (Our translation). The original text: *conjunto ainda por demais improvisado.*

28 Constantin Brancusi, *Mlle. Pogany II* (1920). Donation by Stella and Roberto Marinho. The acquisition system was financed by benefactors. Brancusi’s sculpture appears on the lists as a donation from the Marinho couple, in a purchase intermediated by Maria Martins and Niomar Muniz Sodré.



Figure 5  
*Cabeça Cubista* by  
Picasso, observed by  
England's Minister of  
Commerce. Photogra-  
ph published in MAM  
Rio Bulletin no. 17, in  
1959. Source: MAM  
Rio Archive Unknown  
photographer

episode in her column<sup>29</sup> in the newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, in 1967. The knowledge of this episode allows us to understand the environment of proximity and the informal system of negotiation and acquisition of works through Maria Martins.

In 1951, then already an old friend [of Constantin Brancusi], I invited Niomar Bittencourt for a visit to his studio and to meet him in person. [...] We talked a lot. Niomar told him of the dream he had: the materialization of the Museu de Arte Moderna, in Rio, then going through a rough start. Niomar left triumphantly, taking with him the portrait of *Mademoiselle Pogany*, from 1920, one of the artist's most important works, because it was one of the first works produced after the transformation in his style, with the simplification of lines (MARTINS, 1967, p.1)<sup>30</sup>.

29 Maria Martins contributed to *Correio da Manhã* from 1967 to 1968 with a column titled *Poeira da vida* ("Dust of life"). In this column she wrote about periods of her life and commented on society, from the artistic to the political milieu.

30 (Our translation). The original text: *Em 1951, já então sua velha amiga [de Constantin Brancusi], convidei Niomar Bittencourt para uma visita a seu atelier e para conhecê-lo pessoalmente. [...] Conversamos muito. Niomar contou-lhe de seu sonho: a realização do Museu de Arte Moderna, no Rio, então apenas em um início difícil. Niomar saiu triunfante, levando o retrato de Mademoiselle Pogany, de 1920, uma das obras mais importantes do artista, porque das primeiras realizadas após a transformação de seu estilo com a simplificação das linhas.*

Among the art galleries present on the acquisitions list in this first formative phase of MAM Rio's collection, one could consider Sidney Janis Gallery and Betty Parsons Gallery, both from New York. The first of the two opened in 1948 and became known for representing some important avant-garde artists from that generation and having organized exhibitions of Marcel Duchamp and Piet Mondrian in the 1940s and 1950s. The purchase of *Cabeça Cubista* by Pablo Picasso happened in that gallery in 1952. It's possible to identify, in the correspondence between Duchamp and Maria Martins, the exchange of information about contacts and exhibitions in galleries in Paris and New York. The Betty Parsons Gallery became known for launching and dealing in big names linked to abstract expressionism. The acquisition, for MAM Rio's collection, of the paintings *Nº4-A* (1947) by Mark Rothko, and *Good Friday* (1951) by Theodoros Stamos, took place in that gallery in 1952. The presence of Maria Martins in New York's artistic scene in that period is a strong indication that she could have intermediated these purchases. The fact that Nelson Rockefeller made donations to MAM Rio of works by Motherwell, Pollock, and Tanguy, who were part of Maria Martins' circle of friends, corroborates the hypothesis that the artist had some part in choosing the artworks and artists that were incorporated in the *carioca* museum.

In addition to advising on the intermediation of acquisitions, Maria Martins donated a painting by Dubuffet<sup>31</sup> to MAM Rio, and her husband, Carlos Martins, donated two sculptures by Lipchitz<sup>32</sup>. In 1952, the artist offered two of her own sculptures to the collection: *O Impossível* ("The Impossible", bronze, 1945), and *O oitavo véu* ("The eighth veil", bronze, 1949). Nowadays only *O Impossível* is in the collection. This research found no data on the disposal of *O oitavo véu*. The sculptures by Lipchitz and Brancusi remain in the collection, but the painting by Dubuffet was lost in the 1978 fire.

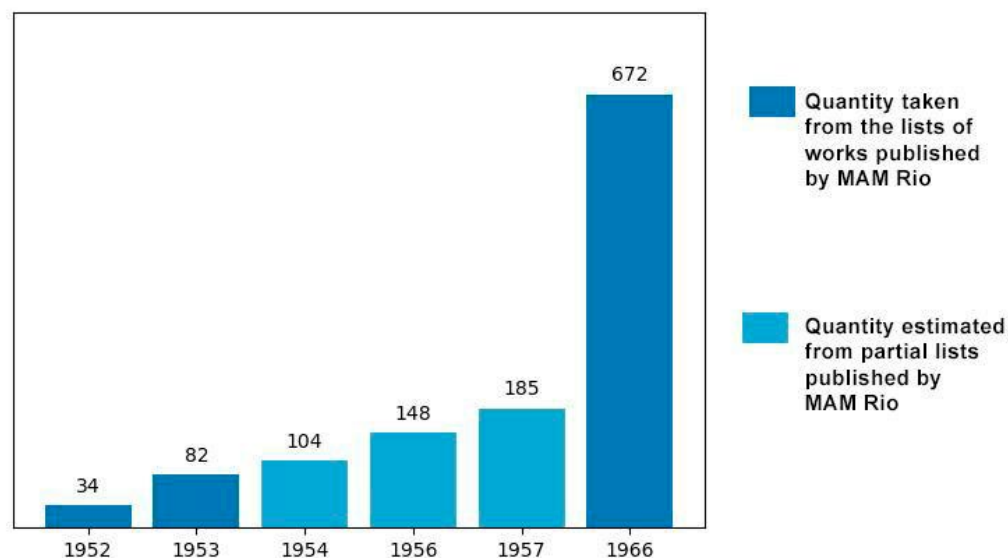
In these early years, MAM Rio published only two complete lists of works from its collection (1952 and 1953). The 1953 list indicates a significant increase in the collection: from 34 to 82 works (53 paintings, 13 sculptures, and 16 works on paper – prints, gouache, Indian ink). The list shows that 35 works were donated, 17 of them by the authors themselves.

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31 Jean Dubuffet, *Retrato de Antonin Artaud* ("Portrait of Antonin Artaud"), 1947. Donated in 1952.

32 Jacques Lipchitz (Lithuania, 1891 - Italy, 1973) taught Maria Martins the bronze sculpting technique she used in her works. Works donated to MAM Rio in 1956: *Pastorale* ("Pastoral", bronze, 1933-34) and *Enlèvement de L'Europe* ("Abduction of Europe", bronze, 1938).

Figure 6  
Progress of the quantity of artworks in MAM Rio's collection organized according to the lists published by the museum from 1952 to 1966. Source: Developed by the authors (2021)



In the years of 1954, 1956, and 1957, the museum only published partial lists of its collections, presenting in them the latest works in the collection. These lists also correspond to the artworks introduced in the annual museum collection exhibition, which took place regularly between January and March. The exhibition space among the pilotis of the Ministério da Educação building was small and had no space to present the total collection nor to keep a permanent exhibition. One may surmise from the pattern of approximately 30 artworks on the partial lists, that that was the amount of works that would fit in the space.

Figure 7  
View of the exhibition space at MAM Rio's temporary headquarters during a public conference. Photograph published in Bulletin no. 15, 1957  
Source: MAM Rio Archive. Unknown photographer





As Castro Maya specified in his interview for *Correio da Manhã*, having an abundance of visitors was an important goal for the museum. The public count was registered in periodic bulletins. Bulletin no. 8 from 1953 included a clipping from *O Globo* newspaper that announced the visit of 73.000 people in 16 months of museum activity at the Palácio Capanema location. Bulletin no. 14 from 1956 announced that, in the previous year, the museum had received 1.142 new registrations of paying members, totaling 3.159 of such members. In 1958, the publication of the catalogue of the collection exhibition and of the inauguration of the new headquarters mentioned 6.000 members. That year, the museum announced that an income of 5 million and 710 thousand cruzeiros was generated by paying members.

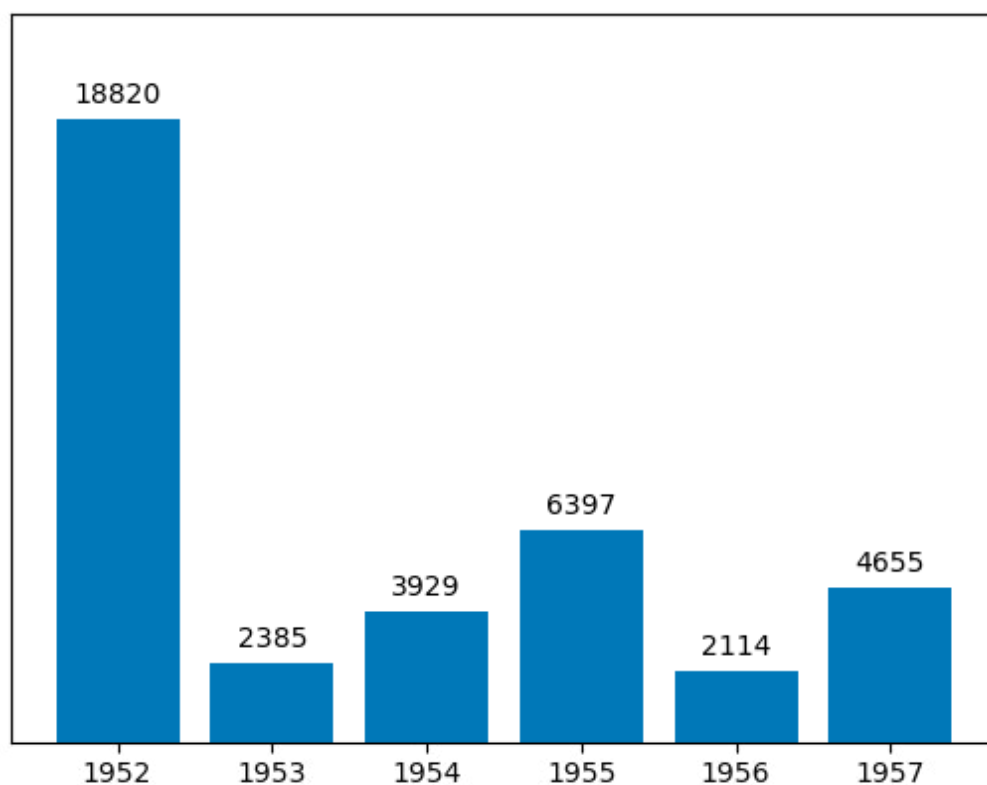


Figure 8  
Public visits of the permanent collection exhibitions at the temporary MAM Rio headquarters from 1952 to 1957. Chart assembled using the numbers of visitors published in the MAM Rio bulletins. Source: developed by the authors (2021)

Part of the same modern institutional project, MAM Rio and the São Paulo Biennial were partner institutions. Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho was part of the MAM Rio Deliberation Council from 1952 onwards. The collaboration between the two institutions can be detected in the constitution of MAM Rio's collection from the acquisition prizes offered by the museum to the winners of the Biennial. The presence of Maria Martins can also be noted in this synergy. She worked as a consultant for the organization and for the selection of artists and countries of the First Biennial, which took place in 1951. Together with Yolanda Penteado, she became involved in an

expedition to foreign countries<sup>33</sup> with the purpose of establishing contacts and extending invitations to take part in the new international art exhibition, which used the Venice Biennial as its model. The first exhibition of the MAM Rio collection, in 1952, also presented the winning artworks of the First Biennial and was a huge success with the public (18.820 visitors).

MAM Rio published only two critical texts in the collected lists of artworks from its collection. The first one was by Mário Barata for the 1952 catalogue. The second text, by Flávio de Aquino, was published in the 1953 catalogue. From that year on, the catalogue was published without texts. Both texts presented a historical and didactic approach towards modern art, making clear the difficulties of constituting a collection and thus justifying the lack of cohesion in the collection. Barata made the effort of elaborating on what should be the character of a modern art museum, whereas Aquino, while mentioning the difficulties in forming a modern collection, focused on a historical appreciation of art:

Nowadays, even in permanent collections, one uses a rotation system for some pieces in order to renew and diversify the interest of the visit. To this end, one can loan works, including from private collectors, as is the case with the Paris Museum of Modern Art. Moreover, one can notice that certain small museums are already organized without permanent exhibitions. Regarding modern art museums, temporary exhibitions constitute the specific instrument for current work, since there is a great diversity and quantity of production, without one knowing, with absolute certainty, all that one should purchase (BARATA, 1952, p. 13)<sup>34</sup>.

In 1953, the museum published eight bulletins (issues 4 to 11). If one considers the selection of the published content in comparison with the news clippings of the time, it is possible to detect certain prioritized subjects. The main agenda of that year was the bill that went through the Chamber of Deputies and that proposed the release of funds for the construction of

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33 The trip included stops in Italy, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France, Japan, Canada, and the USA.

34 (Our translation). The original text: *Hoje em dia, mesmo nas coleções permanentes, utiliza-se o rodízio de algumas peças a fim de renovar e variar o interesse da visita. Para esse fim, podem ser usados empréstimos, inclusive de particulares, como ocorre no Museu de Arte Moderna de Paris. Além disso, pode-se notar que certos pequenos museus já são organizados sem exposições permanentes. Em relação aos museus de arte moderna, as exposições temporárias constituem o instrumento específico de trabalho vivo, pois há grande diversidade e quantidade de produção, sem que se possa saber, com certeza absoluta, tudo que se deve comprar.*

a definitive headquarters for the museum. From 1954 onwards, with the approval of the budget, until the move to the new building, the museum published only one bulletin per year, in abridged versions and without reproductions of news clippings.

### **A project for MAM**

Based on this analysis, one can conclude that the main objective of the project of instituting MAM Rio in the 1950s was to build its own headquarters. Political networking went under way; deputy Jorge Lacerda, linked to UDN<sup>35</sup>, was a key figure in the process and became part of the Deliberation Council from 1956 on. Rio de Janeiro, then the Federal District, donated the land through its City Hall, and the Chamber of Deputies provided the 10 million cruzeiros needed to start the construction of the building in Aterro do Flamengo. Such public money concessions characterize MAM Rio as a public-private institution.

The understanding of an educational necessity should not be deemed a random strategy. The political decision regarding the liberation of public funds met opposition of parliamentarians opposed to funding the museum to the detriment of Brazilian social problems. A fierce debate on this issue appeared in the press and was reproduced in the museum bulletins. The argument in favour of art was strengthened by attaching its educational role to the cause. From a conceptual point of view, one can perceive the influence of Gestalt principles in the project for the museum, present in German schools such as Bauhaus or the Ulm School<sup>36</sup>, as well as the importance of applied arts and design, considering the period of intense industrialization which Brazil was going through.

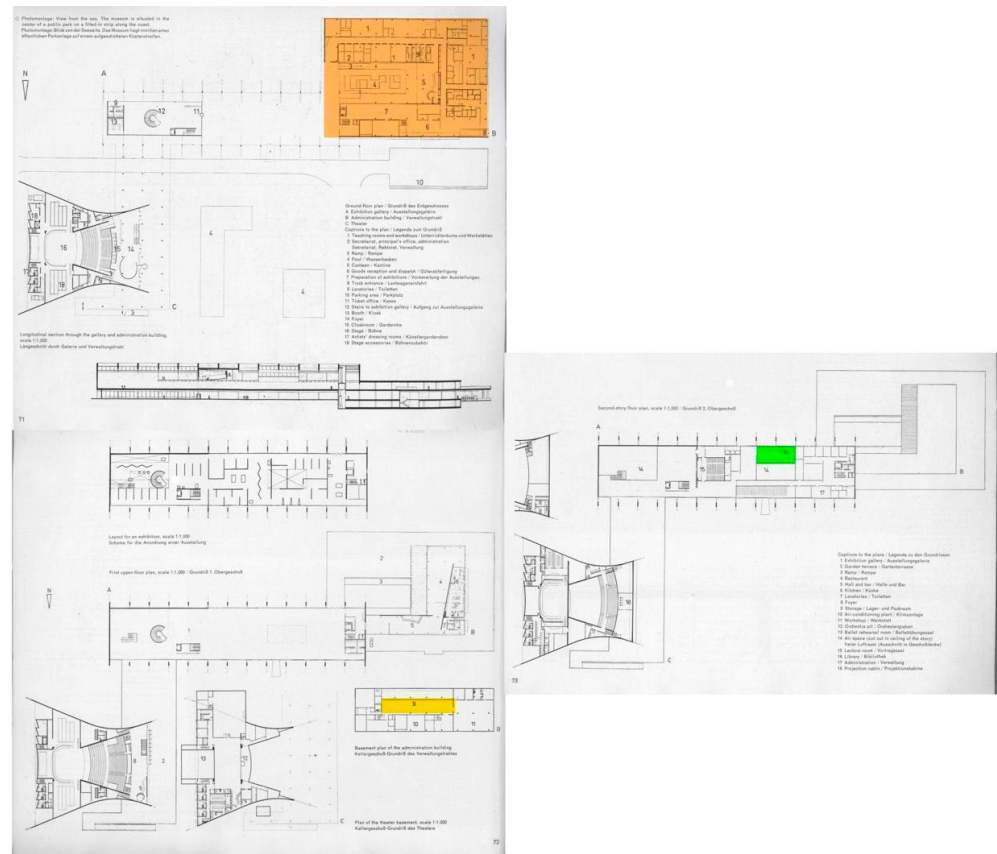
MAM Rio's educational programme offered the following courses: free studio painting for adults and children with Ivan Serpa; structural drawing and composition with Santa Rosa; composition and critical analysis with Fayga Ostrower; practical and theoretical drawing and painting with Décio Vieira; and initiations and orientations with Zélia Salgado; among others. Conferences presented by MAM Rio expressed the eclectic character of the

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35 União Democrática Nacional ("National Democratic Union", UDN) was a Brazilian political party founded in 1945, it had conservative tendencies.

36 Some evidence of the influence of these German schools on MAM Rio are the Max Bill conferences in 1953; Walter Gropius' visit to Rio de Janeiro in 1954, and Mies van der Rohe's visit in 1957; the Ulm School of Design exhibition in 1956.

Figure 9  
Building plans of  
the commissioned  
project by the cre-  
ators of MAM Rio  
Highlights: in orange  
- Bloco Escola area,  
the first building to be  
built; in green - tech-  
nical depository for  
paintings installed next  
to the administration,  
on the second floor; in  
yellow - underground  
technical depository  
for sculptures  
(our highlight)  
Source: wikiarquitectura.com



institution. Examples include Mário Pedrosa (*A arte de nosso tempo*, “The art of our times”), Mário Schenberg (*Uma fase da pintura de Volpi*, “A phase in Volpi’s painting”); Santa Rosa (*Portinari*); Jean Casseu (*L’art moderne est-il un monstre?*, “Is modern art a monster?”); Sanson Flexor (*L’art abstrait et l’affirmation de l’homme nouveau*, “Abstract art and the affirmation of the new man”); among others.

The pluralistic and modernist features that are present in the institutional project for MAM Rio can be observed in the architectural and landscaping project commissioned to Affonso Eduardo Reidy and Roberto Burle Marx. The architectural complex included the construction of a theatre, a library, a cinema, a cinematheque, restaurants, a bookstore, a school, auditoriums, in addition to the exhibition spaces. The option of starting the construction of the headquarters with the Bloco Escola signaled the priority given to the project as an educational space. Looking at the commissioned project, one can notice how little importance was given to reserving space for technical depositories.

The budgetary precarity that Brazilian museums faced is a concrete fact, affecting both the formation of collections and their preservation. Financial difficulties imposed voluntary work on the museum's collaborators, which justified the absence of technical personnel in their constituent teams. In the 1948 statute, the board list presented a technical staff divided by departments: painting, sculpture, architecture, music, theatre, and cinema<sup>37</sup>. From 1952 on, such technical criteria disappeared from the museum's board. The importance of conservation practices, however, was not unknown.

In 1955, the Ministry of Education installed a commission to verify the conditions of preservation of the MNBA collection and asked Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade<sup>38</sup> to monitor the process. The final report by the commission identified the "lack of conditions for the proper conservation and restoration of the collection by the museum" (MACHADO, 2009, p. 94)<sup>39</sup>. A study was undertaken in order to bring the technical depositories and the spaces dedicated to the conservation of the collection up to standard, in accordance with the international norms of the time. This episode shows us how conservation and preservation practices were a well-known factor at that time.

According to the statutes and bulletins published in the first years of MAM Rio, conservation, in the sense of preservation, was not among the topics of the objectives for the creation of the museum. This fact can be understood as a lack of centrality in the formation of a collection for the museum's institutional project. In the constituent team of MAM Rio, the name of Maria Barreto stands out. According to Fernanda Machado Tozzo<sup>40</sup>, Barreto had been on the list of conservators at the MNBA since the 1940s (MACHADO, 2009, p. 89). Maria Barreto appeared on the board list of MAM Rio in 1948 and also as a conservator on the staff list of 1952. In the catalogue published by MAM Rio in 1953, her name was substituted by Aloysio Ferreira de Salles in the position of conservator. In the following publication, in which one

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37 Painting: Cândido Portinari; Sculpture: Bruno Giorgi; Architecture: Alcides de Rocha Miranda; Music: Luís Heitor Corrêa de Azevedo; Theatre: Tomás Santa Rosa Junior; Cinema: Roberto Luís Assumpção de Araújo.

38 Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade was a fundamental character to the institution of MAM Rio, and along with Castro Maya had been present in the developmental phase of the project since the mid 1940s. He was part of the board of directors of SPHAN since its foundation in 1937 and remained in that position for thirty years.

39 (Our translation). The original text: *falta de condições do museu para a adequada conservação e restauração do acervo*.

40 A specialist and consultant for the preservation and restoration of modern and contemporary art.

finds the museum's constituent team of 1956, the position of conservator disappears, and Maria Barreto stops appearing at all, in any position. Mario Barata, who was part of the MNBA staff as conservator, mentions the termination of that position in his column in the *Diário de Notícias*.

A concrete fact that caused general wonder was the recent termination of the only technical position on the museum board: the position of conservator. The selection made for the permanent collection – partial, weak, and devoid of any criteria – also complicated the task which the Museum set itself to accomplish (BARATA, 1953, p. 5)<sup>41</sup>.

This research didn't find any registration of the storage site of the collection during the period in which the museum was installed in its temporary headquarters. According to Machado, the collection was possibly stored somewhere in the Palácio Capanema, or at then executive director Niomar Muiz Sodré's house (MACHADO, 2009, p. 114)<sup>42</sup>, or with collectors and enthusiastic collaborators of the Museum (MACHADO, 2009, p. 131). It's possible to perceive this practice of normalization of precarity as a symptom of the personal character of the management of the museum, which persisted until the 1978 fire.

In the column in which Barata mentioned the termination of the position of conservator, he also harshly criticized what he called "rich folks' games" as management strategy for the museum. He emphasized that the museum should have "educational functions" and "constructive purposes" and could not serve a "personal adventure" or "artistic group"<sup>43</sup>. In this way, one can observe the problem that lurks around the management of public assets in a patrimonialist patriarchal society such as Brazilian society, where "the hegemony of personal whims finds its natural habitat in closed-off cliques that are highly inaccessible to an impersonal order" (HOLANDA, 1995, p. 146)<sup>44</sup>.

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41 (Our translation). The original text: *Um fato concreto que causou estranheza geral foi o da recente extinção do único cargo técnico da diretoria do museu: o de conservador. A seleção feita para o acervo permanente – parcial, fraca e desprovida de qualquer critério – também dificultou a tarefa a que o Museu se propôs a realizar.*

42 Sodré was then executive director of the Museum. According to the testimony Heloisa Lustosa gave to Fernanda Machado, MAM Rio documents were still stored at Niomar Muniz Sodré's house until the 1980s and were lost in another fire that happened there.

43 (Our translation). The original text: *"jogo de grã-finos"; "funções educativas"; "propósitos construtivos"; "aventura pessoal"; "grupo artístico".*

44 (Our translation). The original text: *o predomínio de vontades particulares encontra seu ambiente*



In 1958, when MAM Rio was transferred to Bloco Escola, the opening exhibition, showing part of the permanent collection, included 63 foreign works (43 paintings, 7 works on paper – prints, gouache, watercolour, pastels – and 13 sculptures). The reason for the absence of Brazilian artists<sup>45</sup> from the inaugural show at the new headquarters was the loan of the collection to the *Arte Moderno en Brasil* (“Modern Art in Brazil”) exhibition, which travelled to Argentina, Chile, and Peru. Among the activities valued by MAM Rio’s management in those initial years, was the organization of international exhibitions in Latin America, in the USA, and in Europe, with the objective of propagating Brazilian art abroad. Those initiatives happened with institutional support and logistic help from Itamaraty.

### **MAM Rio and the transformations of its time**

The great characteristic transformations of the twentieth century laid a fertile ground for the modern project in Brazil. Industrialization created growth of urban areas in a country that was no longer predominantly rural. Brazilian modern architecture benefited from this scenario and became an international reference. The development of mass communication and migrations due to the two world wars are also relevant elements in this scenario. The development of modern art is inherent to this conjuncture.

When one observes MAM Rio’s formative process, the option of installing the museum in temporary headquarters as part of this movement is understandable. In this environment of extensive social and political transformation, art didn’t shy away from its role. The discussions of the multiple possibilities of what the modern would be were on the agenda, and the institutionalization of art was part of this process of change. The irregularity of the modernization of Brazil and its utopian project can be perceived in the contradictions expressed in the relationship between an artistic avant-garde, the elite – who seized this modern project for themselves – and

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*próprio em círculos fechados e pouco acessíveis a uma ordenação impessoal.*

45 According to the lists published by the museum up to 1957, the collection held works by the following Brazilian artists: Abraham Palatinik, Ahmés de Paula Machado, Alberto da Veiga Guignard, Alfredo Ceschiatti, Cândido Portinari, Cícero Dias, Darel Valença Lins, Dea de Campos Lemos, Elisa Martins da Silveira, Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, Enrico Bianco, Fabio Barbosa da Silva, Fayga Ostrower, Felícia Leiner, Firmino Saldanha, Flávio de Carvalho, Heitor dos Prazeres, Henrique Oswald, Inimá J. de Paula, Ione Saldanha, Ismael Nery, Ivan Serpa, Lasar Segall, Lúcia Clark, Livio Abramo, Lula Cardoso Ayres, Margaret Spence, Maria Leontina, Maria Martins, Mario Cravo Junior, Oswaldo Goeldi, Pedro Correia de Araujo, Percy Lau, Poty Lazzarotto, Sansão Castello Branco, Sílvia Meyer, Vera Bocayuva Cunha, Yllen Kerr, and Zélia Salgado.

the state, who acted as a financing partner of those wishes. As theorized by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1995) in his concept of the “cordial man”<sup>46</sup>, promiscuity between public and private spheres, a defining characteristic of the management of collective goods in Brazilian society, remains to be overcome until this day.

The institutional choice of prioritizing the educational project at the expense of the formation of the collection was part of the ambiguity of the modern experience, which had the task of breaking with the past to move towards the new, but needed to affirm tradition in order for culture to get stronger and move forward. This cultural heritage was confirmed by valuing teaching and learning based on knowledge that had historically been created and shared.

The presence of Maria Martins in the management of the early years of MAM Rio and her collaboration in the formation of its collection point toward the collective character of this institutional endeavor, which involved the participation of artists, critics, journalists, intellectuals, architects, and politicians, and reinforces the ambivalence of this modern project. Even while facing all these problems, it counted on the indispensable cooperation of this group of agents for its materialization.

Even though building a collection wasn't the final objective of the MAM Rio project and without having a clear conceptual orientation for the formation of its collection, it nonetheless took shape. According to the survey of the lists published during the years in which the museum occupied the temporary headquarters in Palácio Capanema, the collection reached 185 works. In 1966, it had 299 paintings, 64 drawings, 16 collages, 3 tapestries, 2 ceramics, 50 sculptures, and 232 prints, a total of 672 artworks by fundamental artists such as Picasso, Klee, Kandinsky, Matisse, Arp, Dalí, Miró, Léger, Lhote, Dubuffet, Magritte, Bill, Magnelli, Tanguy, Pollock, Rothko, Rivera, Brancusi, Giacometti, and Brauer, among others, not mentioning the Brazilian artists. Among purchases and donations by patrons and artists, the formation of a collection was collateral to the project for the museum. More than 80% of this collection was lost in the terrible fire that struck the museum in 1978.

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46 (Our translation). The original text: *homem cordial*.

The uncertainties about the legitimization of art produced in the present, in the institution of a museum for which the conservation of art consecrated by time wasn't a main principle, were part of the formative challenges met by modern art museums and also by MAM Rio. The defense of a space inherently different from traditional museums that made possible the propagation of modern art – with temporary exhibitions, the introduction of new artists and tendencies, art courses, and educational programmes for the audience – used as its strategy the priority of constructing a headquarters building of its own. The architectural and landscaping project by Affonso Eduardo Reidy and Burle Marx symbolized this modern civilizational project. The analysis of this initial formative period of MAM Rio can help one think about the politics of collection formation and about the importance of public art collections for the maintenance of studies on art and the understanding of our history.

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