

BOOM TIME FOR BRAZIL

Who needs soccer when you've got fairs, galleries, and a flood of international collectors animating the country's art scene?

BY BARBARA POLLACK



Millions of soccer fans flooded Brazil in 2014 for the World Cup, but for the art world, the big story is that international collectors and artists are making their presence felt in this country's once-isolated contemporary-art scene. With the success of the São Paulo Biennial and ArtRio fair in September, soon to be bolstered by the more profitable SP-Arte fair opening in São Paulo this month, collectors from around the globe are finding reasons to go to Brazil.

A recent study conducted by Latitudes, an organization for the promotion of Brazilian galleries abroad, and ArtTactic, a market-research firm, found that 74 percent of international collectors surveyed either own or say they intend to buy the work of a Brazilian artist. American collectors needn't have traveled far to encounter Brazilian art in 2014—there were major U.S. retrospectives of Lygia Clark at the Museum of Modern Art, Adriana Varejão at the ICA Boston, Sebastião Salgado at the International Center for Photography, and Beatriz Milhazes at Pérez Art Museum Miami. Many U.S. galleries now represent at least one Brazilian artist, and Brazilian galleries are bringing works to the United States, especially to Art Basel Miami Beach, where 2014 saw some 17 Brazilian galleries in attendance, including pioneer Luisa Strina and powerhouse Mendes Wood DM.

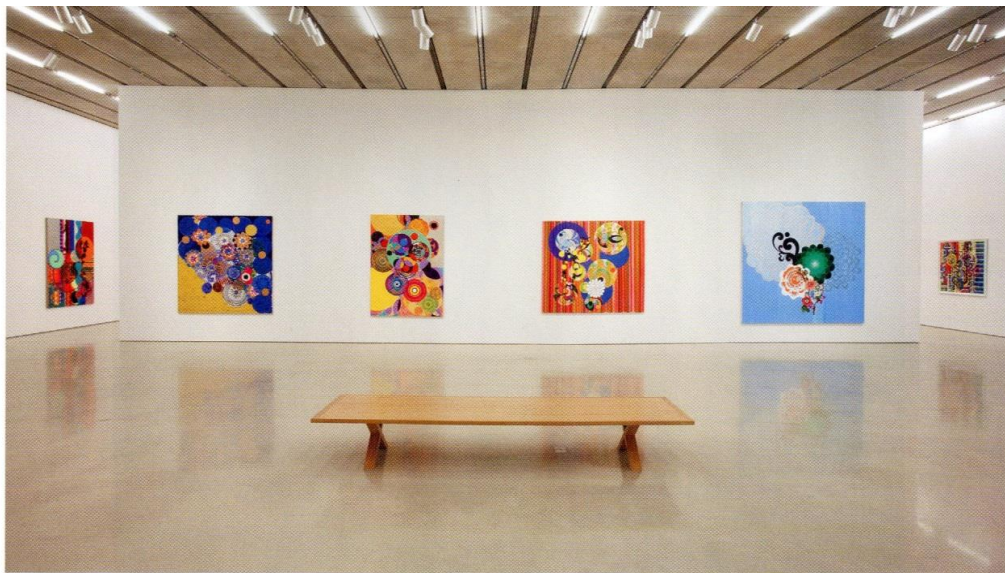
"In the last five years, I have seen the most exponential growth in the Brazilian market," said Sotheby's Latin

American-art specialist Axel Stein, who attributes this to the increased recognition of the historic impact of Brazilian artists on international contemporary art, going back to the Neo-Concretists of the 1960s, with artists such as Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Mira Schendel, and Lygia Pape. According to Stein, there is also strong interest in the Brazilian modernist Cândido Portinari. More recently, works by contemporary artists such as Milhazes, whose *Meu Limão* (2000) sold at Sotheby's New York in November 2012 for \$2.1 million, and Varejão, whose *Parede com Incisões a la Fontana II* (Wall with Incisions a la Fontana II), 2001, brought \$1.8 million at Christie's New York in 2011, have gleaned high prices.

"From my perspective, this is a market that is completely undervalued," Stein asserted, adding that while Brazilian buyers still make up 70 percent of sales of Brazilian art, international collectors are catching on, especially as they learn about the influence of Brazilian art on many movements in the United States and Europe. "This is why prices are going up, and the market is growing exponentially."

"When you compare Brazilian artists' prices to prices of U.S. or European artists, they are considerably less expensive," said New York art adviser and curator Simon Watson, who now spends half his time in São Paulo. "That means that a New York gallery could be working with a very solid mid-career Brazilian artist at only a

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fraction above a U.S. emerging artist, which means collectors can get involved without getting clubbed because they did not start 15 years ago."

You can sense the enthusiasm when visiting galleries in the Jardim and Vila Madalena neighborhoods of São Paulo. This is still a young scene, as is underscored by the Latitudes report, which found that more than 50 percent of the country's galleries (most of which are in São Paulo) were founded after 2000, with half of those opening for business after 2011. Once exclusively a domestic market, most galleries are now taking on international artists to appeal to young Brazilian collectors and are finding that foreign collectors regularly attend their shows year-round, not just when the Biennial opens.

Gallerist Luisa Strina, who has been in business since 1974, has seen enormous developments in the last ten years. "It has changed totally. It has become international. I sell mostly to foreign collectors outside Brazil. Now every gallery in Europe and the United States has to have a Brazilian artist," she said, noting that, when she first showed at Art Basel in 1990, business was almost nonexistent. At the same time, according to Strina, Brazilian collectors have become much more open to international contemporary art, owing to the success of the São Paulo Biennial. Founded in 1952, it is one of the oldest biennial expositions in the world, second only to Venice, but it became truly international in 1998 with Paulo Herkenhoff

as its curator. ArtRio opened the door further in 2010, attracting David Zwirner, Gagosian, and Pace galleries. SP-Arte, the more established fair, founded in 2005, followed suit, recently adding Marian Goodman, Zwirner, Michael Werner, and Stephen Friedman galleries. And White Cube opened a branch in São Paulo in 2012 and will exhibit German artist Anselm Kiefer in April during the fair.

The upcoming SP-Arte (April 9 through April 12) will be the biggest yet, with 142 galleries and special site-specific projects filling the 27,000 square meters of the Biennial Pavilion, designed by the legendary Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer. When it started ten years ago, there were only 49 galleries, all Latin American, attracting only 6,000 visitors. Now, many Brazilian galleries report that the fair is their main source of sales for the year.

"When I began, foreign dealers would say, 'I'm not coming because I don't believe Brazilians buy international art,' and they were right back then," said SP-Arte founder and director Fernanda Feitosa. "But now, with

PREVIOUS SPREAD The Biennial Pavilion in São Paulo, site of the upcoming 2015 SP-Arte fair. OPPOSITE Installation view of "Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948-1988" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (May 10-August 24, 2014). ABOVE "Beatriz Milhazes: Jardim Botânico," installation view, Pérez Art Museum Miami.

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the big growth of the economy, people are traveling more and going to every international art fair, so you see Brazilians starting collections at a younger age and looking at international art."

A controversial factor that limits sales of foreign art in Brazil is that of the value-added taxes, which add up to 40 to 50 percent on art imports after federal, state, and municipal taxes are included. ArtRio was the first fair to obtain a dispensation on local VAT and was soon followed by SP-Arte, bringing the total down to 21 percent. This is still a steep price for foreign galleries to pay when bringing international art to Brazil.

Still, the foreign galleries have drawn many more international collectors, who have only gained confidence in the Brazilian art market by exposure to the scene. "Of course, coming to Brazil you have a different feeling about our artists because you see them in context—in museums and in collectors' homes," said Feitosa, noting that this year visitors will be invited to view the collections of Credit Suisse investment-banking head José Olympio da Veiga Pereira and his wife Andrea, New York's Museum of Modern Art supporter Cleusa Garfinkel, and São Paulo experimental art space PIVÔ board members Camilla and Eduardo Barella, among others. Feitosa, whose husband is the former president of the São Paulo Biennial Foundation and current president of MASP, the São Paulo Museum of Art, will also open their home.

One collector who has made a trip to Brazil an essential stop on the art itinerary is mining magnate Bernardo de Mello Paz, whose Instituto Inhotim spreads over 5,000 acres, dwarfing any other notion of a sculpture park. Combining a nature conservancy with 24 pavilions devoted to individual contemporary artists, Instituto Inhotim takes more than a day to see.

"Bernardo Paz is a rich man, though maybe not by the standards of major art collecting today, but he had the desire and willingness to pour everything he had into this vision," said Allan Schwartzman, the lead curator of the project. "What we've done here would not have been possible in the United States," he said, pointing out that a combination of factors—inexpensive land, low construction costs, low fabrication costs—make the operation of Inhotim possible. More importantly, the park provides plenty of space for works that could not be accommodated in almost any urban center in the United States. Matthew Barney's pavilion, for example, is a geodesic dome, set in a eucalyptus forest, that houses a replica of

OPPOSITE Views of Instituto Inhotim. FOLLOWING SPREAD Matthew Barney, *De Lama Lâmina*, 2004–2009, installed at Instituto Inhotim.

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an uprooted tree in the grip of a tractor. The installation, his contribution to a Carnival parade, was created as a commentary on deforestation. Inhotim's latest commission is a pavilion for artist R. H. Quaytman, the plans for which (including the artist's paintings) were exhibited at Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York in December.

"There is a wonderful and rich history of collecting in Brazil, a country where there are probably more contemporary artists than in most European capitals," said Schwartzman, adding, "It is a very sophisticated, well-informed core of collectors, who at the same time have their own unique way of approaching acquisitions."

For foreign collectors trying to get a grasp on this rapidly growing art scene, a good place to start is Galeria Fortes Vilaça, which represents Varejão, Milhazes, Ernesto Neto, Iran do Espírito Santo, Jac Leirner, and Rivane Neuenschwander, among many other leading contemporary artists. "Brazilian artists have broken out of the Latin American label and are in dialogue with international contemporary art," said gallery partner Alexandre Gabriel. "I don't feel like I am working in the center. We still feel we are on the periphery. But more and more, we are becoming part of an international itinerary." Mendes Wood DM, founded in 2010 by the partners Pedro Mendes, Matthew Wood, and Felipe Dmab, is the place to find a practical collision between international and Brazilian artists. Combining four adjoining buildings, a recent exhibition brought together Brazilian sculptor Tunga with an installation by Lawrence Weiner. In their warehouse annex space in an industrial pocket of São Paulo, Mendes Wood DM exhibited the works of young Brazilian artist Paulo Nazareth, inspired by his endurance walks through Africa and Latin America.

Video artist Thiago Rocha Pitta is a direct beneficiary of the internationalization of the Brazilian art scene, exhibiting through March 22 at Boesky East on New York's Lower East Side, following a successful showing at Galeria Millan in São Paulo. Unlike earlier generations of Brazilian artists who focused on abstraction or Brazilian exoticism, Rocha Pitta pursues more universal sites, filming landscapes devoid of people. For his work at Boesky, he recorded the sound and sights of a desert in Argentina.

Perhaps the most international of Brazil's art stars is Vik Muniz, who, despite his success in the United States, spends two-thirds of his time in Rio de Janeiro. Often engaged in projects that interact with and benefit those living in the city's poorest neighborhoods, the favelas, he is currently involved in building Escola do Vidigal, a school of technology for young children in the neighborhood of Vidigal. "I have a beautiful house in Rio, but I spend most of my days in Vidigal," he said in an interview by phone.

"People have stigmatized the favela for too long, and I think we have an opportunity here to reverse that."

Muniz, who grew up in a São Paulo slum before moving to the United States in 1983 (with money he received as payment for being the victim of an accidental shooting), has his own perspective on changes in the Brazilian art scene. "I am very influenced by the American and European art of my time, but I am a Brazilian person, which gives me a special way of looking at the world," he said, noting that his most recent show in Brazil was at Nara Roesler in fall 2014. Nara Roesler has branches in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. (Muniz is also represented by Sikkema Jenkins in New York.) "Today, older Brazilian art, like Oiticica, can bring millions of dollars, but we need exposure for new Brazilian talent. You have to be expensive enough for people to acknowledge it, but when art becomes expensive to the point of exclusivity, it makes it hard for young contemporary artists."

Younger galleries are also finding it hard to compete in the new internationalized Brazilian market. "It is really a small group of foreign collectors, and we try to show international artists, but local collectors haven't supported them," said Juliana Freire of Emma Thomas gallery, which seemed more like an art collective when it started eight years ago, but has since grown into a well-respected gallery, thriving along with the careers of its 15 artists. It has now established itself in an open-plan gallery space in the Jardim's designed to attract not just established collectors but also people simply curious about art.

Thirty-five-year-old sculptor Lucas Simões was the gallery's breakout artist at the last SP-Arte and is now its top artist in number of sales, although his works go for a modest \$4,000 to \$15,000. "We are trying to open the space to new collectors, because, frankly, the market in São Paulo is too small for all the galleries that have opened in the past five years," said Freire, adding, "We need to have more people from abroad curious to know what is happening here."

But for a veteran like Strina, there is no limit in sight for the Brazilian art market.

"I think it will grow very big," she said. "For the moment we only have a market in São Paulo, but this market is starting to spread to Rio, to the north, and to the south. And there will be a market for every kind of art: primary market, secondary market, primitive, contemporary, and modern." ■

OPPOSITE: Thiago Rocha Pitta, still from the video series *Temporal maps of a non sedimented land*, 2015.

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