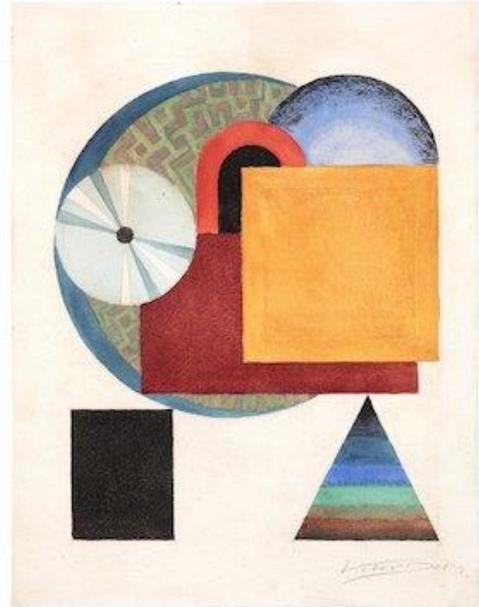


Belgium-Argentina Transatlantic Modernisms, 1910 - 1958



Mu.ZEE
12.2.2022 – 12.06.2022

What do Belgium and Argentina have in common? More than you might suspect! This astonishing story is told through these extraordinary exhibitions that explore the artistic ties between Belgium and Argentina from 1910 through 1958. It focuses on an artist network comprising three individuals who were either directly or indirectly in contact with one another. The exhibition concerns the Belgian-Argentinian artist, **Julio Payro**, who developed a lifelong friendship with Paul Delvaux, the Belgian artist, **Victor Delhez**, who emigrated to Argentina after the death of his parents, and the Argentinian lawyer, **Ignacio Pirovano**, friend of Vantongerloo and collector of his works. This is an unprecedented, unique narrative that includes masterful pieces by Belgium and Argentina's modernist elite, among others including Victor Delhez, Frans Masereel, Marthe Donas, Paul Delvaux, Georges Vantongerloo, Anne Bonnet, Jo Delahaut and Alejandro Xul Solar, Emilio Pettoruti, Raquel Forner, Tomas Maldonado, Victor Magariños, and Juan Del Prete.

When it comes to visual culture and aesthetics, they never paid much mind to borders and boundaries. Instead, exchange and 'nomadism' are essential characteristics of human culture. The artistic ties between Belgium and Argentina from around 1910 to 1958 can't be summed up using the traditional art-historical approach focussed on the artist's 'life and work'. It has to do with historical exhibitions, literary connections and (often less well-known) artists with hybrid profiles that have been erased from the canon or reduced to mere footnotes. To see how this interdependence plays out, political and economic motives need to be addressed, in

addition to the artistic side of things. And that is precisely the objective of this KU Leuven research project.

A lopsided scale

The majority of Belgian art exhibitions in Buenos Aires were commercial ventures and/or a means of cultural diplomacy, such as Belgium's participation in the international exhibition in celebration of the centenary of Argentina's independence in 1910 or the many *Arte Belga* exhibitions at the Witcomb Gallery organised by the Belgian-American art dealer and artist, Frederic Marie Vermorcken from around 1912 to 1933. The relationship was a lopsided one: Argentinian art, which in Europe primarily fell under the label of 'Latin American art', was largely brushed aside in Belgium. Argentina's participation in the Brussels World Fair (Expo 58) was a (late) move in the other direction.

The Mu.ZEE exhibition on transatlantic modernisms meshes with the transcultural exhibition policy that the museum has promoted in recent years. The cultural dynamic in the era of 1910 to 1958 between both countries opened opportunities to put geo-temporal aspects of modern art history in a different light. That includes the importance of the international circulation of magazines, the impact of collectors and dealers on art history, processes of canon formation, international promotion of art, cultural diplomacy and the global development of modern art. The exhibition, which is the outcome of a research project, contextualises art and artists in an international network that problematises the idea of centre and margins, without denying power relations.

Vantongerloo in Buenos Aires

To preserve the overview, the Mu.Zee exhibition will primarily focus on the artist network of three individuals who were either directly or indirectly in contact with one another.

Julio Payró (1899-1971) was the son of writer and journalist, Roberto Payró, who moved with his family to Brussels in 1909. He studied at the Brussels Academy, was a member of the local art collective in Uccle and developed a lifelong friendship with Paul Delvaux. When he returned to Argentina in 1923, he became one of the most influential art critics and art historians in the country and established the first Argentinian art history chair. Belgium always retained a prominent place in his professional (artistic) activities. For example, he met Joaquín Torres García in Brussels, the Uruguayan artist who, in collaboration with the Belgian Michel Seuphor, played a leading role in founding the Parisian Constructivist art group – *Cercle et Carré* – and in the development of abstract art in Latin America, and Argentina in particular. Payró's art criticism also juxtaposes Belgian and Argentine art, which introduces fascinating perspectives on the significance of transnational contacts, the circulation of texts and the modern art critic in general.

Victor Delhez (1902-1985), a Belgian artist mainly known for his wood engravings, emigrated to Argentina after the tragic death of both his parents in 1925. He made a place for himself in the local avant-garde, exhibited and published experimental photographic work, and travelled around the region (Bolivia and Chile). He finally settled in Mendoza (Argentina). His outlandish, nightmarish woodcut series, such as *A Thousand and One Argentinian Nights*, *Architecture and Homesickness*, *Dance of the Dead* and his illustrations for Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* left a deep impression on social realist artists such as Antonio Berni. While in Latin America, he corresponded with Michel Seuphor, his former comrade in the avant-garde magazine *Het*

Overzicht. Seuphor called him 'le Flamand d'Argentine' (the Argentinian Fleming) and paid ample attention to Delhez's recommendations concerning Latin America when he wrote the first global history of abstract art in 1949.

Ignacio Pirovano (1909-1980) was a lawyer, painter, director of the museum of the decorative arts (1937-1955), *and* a good friend and patron of the Belgian artist Georges Vantongerloo, one of the most highly esteemed abstract artists of the time. He bequeathed eight Vantongerloo masterpieces to the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (MAMBA). Pirovano's efforts resulted in the tremendous impact of Vantongerloos' theories and art on the work of several Argentinian artists, including Victor Magariños with his cosmological pieces, Lidy Prati, Tomas Maldonado, Migual Angel Vidal and Eduardo McEntyre.

Ostend in Argentina

The city of Ostend acquires a symbolic meaning in this project. In 1912, a Belgian and an Italian founded 'Ostend, pearl of the Atlantic coast', a sister city of the Belgian seaside resort, 360 kilometres from the Argentinian capital, Buenos Aires. While the hope was to convince hundreds of Belgian families to move to this new Ostend (and with them, Belgian art and culture), the project remained an anecdotal footnote in the annals of both countries' histories. These transatlantic stories and networks have hardly made any impression at all on the history books. Mu.ZEE feels that the time is ripe to rehabilitate and refresh art history. To this end, it considers it its mission to make room for this type of new research and introduce a wider audience to a different, more global art history.

The curators of the exhibition: Juan Cruz Andrada, Adriaan Gonnissen, Laurens Dhaenens and Emma Driesprong.

Trans-Atlantic modernisms: an exhibition on art and cultural mediators between Belgium and Argentina ca. 1910-1958. From 12.2.2022 to 12.06.2022 at Mu.ZEE, in Ostend.

Contact

Colette Castermans – colette.castermans@muzee.be
32 (0)473 53 38 15 – 32 (0)59 56 45 89