
Latin American Art by and for Whom?

Questioning and Unresolvability at the Austin Symposium (1975)

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Over three days, October 27–29, 1975, the University of Texas (UT) hosted an international conference, *Speak Out! Charla! Bate-Papo!: A Symposium on Contemporary Art and Literature in Latin America* (fig. 1). More than fifty invited visual artists, writers, critics, scholars, and other cultural agents assembled in Austin. The organizers ran two tracks of panels, one for art and the other for literature, with a final roundtable integrating the parallel discussions. In the preceding decade, a constellation of novels and short stories by Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and others had captured the attention of readers in the Global North, the so-called Latin American Boom. These works were trumpeted by their publishers as highly original and formally inventive yet steeped in traditions of “universal” literature.¹ Visual artists in Latin America appeared to be on the cusp of a similar breakthrough by the 1970s. This development involved not only the artists and artworks, but also critical, discursive, and institutional frameworks and commercial circuits.²

The Austin Symposium, as it often referred to today, is remembered as a key moment in the emergence of modern and contemporary Latin American art as a field of scholarly and curatorial inquiry, distinct from the study of colonial and pre-Columbian art, architecture, and visual culture.³ In revisiting the symposium, however,

a complicated picture of the field emerges. Some conference participants considered whether a “boom” of Latin American art was actually happening, and whether this was a good thing (and for whom?). Other concerns also came to the foreground: the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, authoritarianism, and globalization (referred to as internationalism), which were rearranging not only social, political, and economic structures but also cultural formations. It is therefore not surprising that in addition to the stated theme of *questioning*, a parallel throughline emerged at the event: *unresolvability*. At the Austin Symposium, Latin American art was iterated as a field for continually and anxiously testing hypotheses and strategies for dwelling in this new “art world.”

The questioning extended to a fundamental one: what *is* Latin American art—does such a thing even exist? Have we perhaps granted the formation of the field of modern and contemporary Latin American art too much coherence, presumed it to be more consolidated than it actually was or could become? Do we accept and perhaps even abet the putative hegemony of US academe (and US imperialism) if we understand Latin American art as a more or less settled field with resolved parameters and objects of inquiry? To be sure, it is a story entangled in the history of Cold War–era area studies in the United States and, before that, Pan Americanism articulated from Washington, DC, most prominently by José Gómez Sicre of the Pan American Union (later renamed the Organization of American States). But to focus exclusively on politics and propaganda would be too reductive. Such a collapse ignores the strategic regionalisms (and

and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, *Resisting Categories: Latin American and/or Latino?* (Houston: International Center for the Arts of the Americas; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 595–97, 740–41; and Andrea Giunta, “América Latina en disputa: apuntes para una historiografía del arte latinoamericano,” paper presented at *Art Studies from Latin America*, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Oaxaca, February 1–5, 1996, www.esteticas.unam.mx/edartedal/PDF/Oaxaca/complets/giunta_oaxaca96.pdf.

1. John King, “The Boom of the Latin American Novel,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Latin American Novel*, ed. Efraín Kristal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 59–80.

2. See Taína B. Caragol-Barreto, “Boom and Dust: The Rise of Latin American and Latino Art in New York Exhibition Spaces and the Auction House Market, 1970s–1980s” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2013).

3. While the Austin Symposium is frequently mentioned in the literature, closer readings are more limited. For the latter, see José Luis de la Nuez Santana, “Un momento relevante en la historia de la crítica artística latinoamericana de la segunda mitad del siglo XX: el simposio de Austin (1975),” *Revista de historiografía* 33 (2020): 83–107; Fabiana Serviddio, *Arte y crítica en Latinoamérica durante los años setenta* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2012); Camila Maroja, “Framing Latin American Art: Artists, Critics, Institutions, and the Configuration of a Regional Identity” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2015), 55–68; Héctor Olea, Mari Carmen Ramírez,

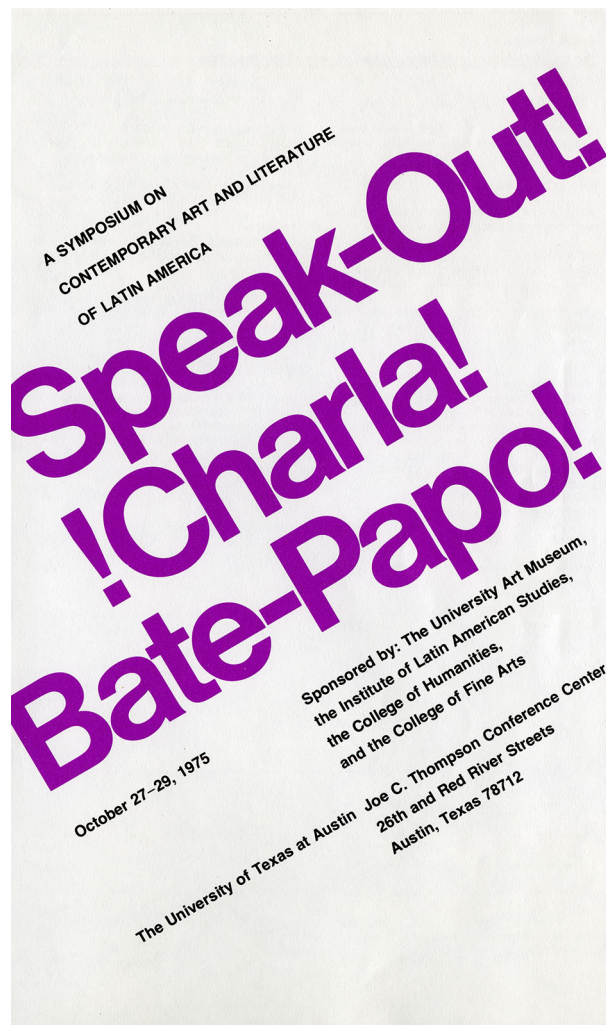


FIGURE 1. Program, *Speak-Out! Charla! Bate-Papo! A Symposium of Contemporary Art and Literature of Latin America*, 1975. Stanton Loomis Catlin Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections, The University of Texas at Austin

essentialisms) mobilized throughout the Americas, and elides the agency of countless thinkers and makers that brought a multitude of interests to the table that undermine a Cold War framing of the field.⁴

The ideological and sociopolitical exigencies of the 1970s and their afterlives produced a field with marked blind spots. The emergent network of Latin American art

consisted of largely light-skinned mestizo cosmopolitan elites who reproduced their individual and class interests, situating themselves as near-exclusive producers and consumers of high culture. The not accidental result of this process was the centering of whiteness and the marginalization of Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people and their artistic and critical repertoires and archives. As Tatiana Flores recently argued in this journal, “Latin America as a construct is Eurocentric to the degree that its conceptual boundaries perniciously exclude African diaspora spaces.”⁵

4. While Latin American studies was significantly shaped by the US government (and private organizations such as the Ford and Carnegie Foundations), the post-World War II traffic in the idea of Latin America was a transnational affair. See Claire Fox, *Making Art Panamerican: Cultural Policy and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Ronald H. Chilcote, “The Cold War and the Transformation of Latin American Studies in the United States,” *Latin American Perspectives* 45, no. 4 (2018): 6–41.

5. Tatiana Flores, “Latinidad Is Cancelled’: Confronting an Anti-Black Construct,” *Latin American and Latinx Visual Culture* 3, no. 3 (2021): 59. See also Arlene Dávila, *Latinx Art: Artists, Markets, Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

As a field, we continue to suffer from and reckon with these exclusions and the material injustices of racism, sexism, and classism.

Strictly speaking, the racial, ethnic, and cultural heterogeneity of the region—even within individual countries—makes the idea of a coherent regional art an impossibility. Yet as art critic Jorge Alberto Manrique argued in 1978, “This fiction has been created and maintained for so long that it has come to have the shape of reality.”⁶ In the introduction to their anthology of writings on the categories of Latin America and Latinx, Héctor Olea, Mari Carmen Ramírez, and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto write, “Going beyond issues of nomenclature or identity . . . Latin American and Latino art constitute an *intellectual* field . . . with its own laws, agents, and intrinsic dynamics.”⁷ Historian Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, in his critical examination of the “enduring” idea of Latin America, argues that the concept can be useful in thinking beyond national frames.⁸ The very concept of Latin America can compel important questions about art and art history that refuse to divorce the visual from the social.

In reexamining the Austin Symposium, we looked to the conference proceedings, planning and publicity documents, reviews, and other writings to delve into the many discussions that were taking place at the time and swirled around the event. We also listened to the event’s audio recordings, little examined by scholars, which revealed its interrogative nature, including the fine-tuning of arguments and interstitial comments by speakers and the questions and other reactions from the audience that indicate not much about modern and contemporary Latin American art was resolved. What is known is that by the mid-1970s a transnational network of artists and critics was embroiled in a debate about artistic and cultural identity, and the Austin Symposium was a vital forum for this multidisciplinary, self-reflexive, and unstable—and, as

6. “Pero una ficción y sostenida tanto, que ha llegado a tener una forma de realidad.” Jorge Alberto Manrique, “Invención del arte latinoamericano,” paper presented at the Primer Encuentro Iberoamericano de Críticos del Arte y Artistas Plásticos, Caracas, June 18–27, 1978, reproduced in Documents of Latin American and Latino Art, International Center for the Arts of the Americas, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (hereafter ICAA Documents), <https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/815432>. Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the authors.

7. Héctor Olea, Mari Carmen Ramírez, and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, “Resisting Categories,” in Olea, Ramírez, and Ybarra-Frausto, *Resisting Categories*, 43. Emphasis in the original.

8. Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 168.

we will see, marginalizing and exclusionary—practice of art history and criticism.

QUESTIONS

The Austin Symposium was co-organized by Donald Goodall, director of UT’s University Art Museum (now the Blanton Museum of Art), and Rodolfo Cardona, chair of the Spanish and Portuguese department at UT and a scholar of peninsular literature and translation.⁹ Damián Bayón, a visiting professor at UT starting in 1973 and a crucial voice in shaping the study of modern and contemporary Latin American art, also played a leading role. Bayón served as the intermediary between the university and the staff at *Plural*, the Mexico City–based cultural magazine founded by Octavio Paz and a cosponsor of the conference. He collaborated with his friend Kazuya Sakai, managing editor of *Plural* (as well as an artist), on organizing one of three exhibitions that were presented at the symposium, *12 Latin American Artists Today/12 artistas latinoamericanos de hoy*. (The two other exhibitions were monographic, focusing on Édgar Negret and Alejandro Otero.) The group show featured artists from Latin America and those who migrated there—though only men, and only painters and sculptors working in conservative abstract and figurative styles relative to the contemporaneous conceptual and performance practices happening in the region and elsewhere.¹⁰ Following the symposium, Bayón would go on to edit a widely circulated proceedings of the conference.¹¹

An eclectic group of people attended the Austin Symposium: artists and writers, critics and historians, dealers and cultural brokers, diplomats and other government officials.¹² Invited speakers included Juan Acha, Aracy Amaral, Dore Ashton, José Luis Cuevas, Manuel

9. The symposium was part of an annual arts festival at UT. Its primary sponsors were the Institute of Latin American Studies, led by economist William Glade, the College of the Humanities, and the College of the Fine Arts. Glade increased the original budget to pay for invitees from South America. Letter from Donald Goodall to Barbara Duncan, July 25, 1975, Box 22, Folder 3, Barbara Doyle Duncan Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin (hereafter Benson Collection).

10. Florencia Bazzano, “Latin American Art at the University of Texas at Austin: The University Art Museum,” in *Art Museums of Latin America: Structuring Representation*, ed. Michelle Greet and Gina McDaniel Tarver (New York: Routledge, 2018), 187–88.

11. Damián Bayón, ed., *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad* (Caracas: Monte Ávila Editores, 1977).

12. Out-of-town Participants list, Box 88, Folder 11, Stanton Loomis Catlin Papers, Benson Collection.

Felguérez, Leonel Góngora, Jorge Alberto Manrique, Alejandro Otero, Carlos Rodríguez Saavedra, Fernando de Szyszlo, and Marta Traba. Although most of the speakers were from outside the United States, the majority came from places with established art scenes and cultural bureaucracies: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. The speakers' position papers and discussions excerpted in Bayón's conference proceedings have served as the primary historical documentation of the conference. There were also attendees who did not deliver a paper but were invited to take part in the formal and informal discussions. They included Jacqueline Barnitz, Stanton Catlin, Barbara Duncan, Fernando Gamboa, Jacinto Quirarte, and Rufino Tamayo. There were also "observers" such as Rita Eder, an emerging scholar at the time. Attendees based at UT included faculty and students, including Terence Greider and Rolando Briseño. Absent among those invited were the faculty and students of the University's Center for Mexican American Studies, including Gilberto Cárdenas, an avid collector of Latinx art, who began teaching at UT in 1975.¹³ Though it was established in 1970, the Center and Latin Americanists on campus had few formal collaborations—a widespread condition in the US academic system that continues to this day.

Before arriving in Austin, Bayón had organized major conferences for UNESCO. The first took place in Quito (1970) and the second in Mexico City (1974), with both emphasizing relations between artistic and regional cultural identity. The participant lists of these conferences overlapped with the Austin Symposium.¹⁴ Even at this early moment, there was an emergent elite that could afford to attend such far-flung events.¹⁵ The Austin Symposium can be understood as a continuation of conversations already taking place among a network of artists, critics, and other agents; what was new was the North American public university context and its particular matrix of cultural patronage and politics.¹⁶

13. Invitees: Panelists, Discussants, Observers list, Box 88, Folder 11, Catlin Papers, Benson Collection.

14. Namely Acha, Amaral, Barnitz, Manrique, Rodríguez Saavedra, and Traba.

15. Fabiana Serviddio emphasizes that to theorize art in this period depended on the ability to travel to exhibitions and colloquia beyond one's immediate scene, both to stay informed and to influence. Serviddio, *Arte y crítica*.

16. The most recent major academic conference in the United States with a focus on Latin American art had been organized in 1966 on the occasion of the exhibition *Art of Latin America since Independence*,

At the symposium, Gamboa, then director of the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City, announced an exhibition network that would link his institution to the museum at UT and institutions in Bogotá, Caracas, and Rio de Janeiro.¹⁷ The plan never came to fruition, but it spoke of desires for regional traffic in art from Latin America. Austin was seemingly an unlikely hub for this network, with limited connectivity to centers of art commerce and display in the United States or the wider Americas. Perhaps a shadow co-organizer of the conference, and without a doubt a lightning rod during the event, was Barbara Duncan. The New York-based collector and curator had a close working relationship with Goodall and would eventually donate more than two hundred works of art that would become the core of the university's Latin American permanent collection.

The organizers cast the Austin Symposium as the result of an extended intellectual process that was manifestly international and dialogical.¹⁸ Most crucially, Goodall and Cardona sent a questionnaire to all the invited speakers in advance and their written responses were circulated to the audience (fig. 2). As comparative literature scholar Lori Cole has shown, questionnaires—which can yield instability as much as consensus—were frequently deployed by modernist journals that had circulated between the Americas and Europe since the early twentieth century. They were instruments to assess the currency of ideas and categories, including Latin American art.¹⁹ Goodall and Cardona asked the following:

1. Does present-day Latin American art exist as a distinct expression? If it does, on what terms?
2. Can an artist produce independently of foreign interests?
3. What operative models does the Latin American artist have at his [*sic*] disposal: international currents, indigenous movements, or other resources?

1800–1965, organized by the Yale University Art Gallery and the University of Texas Art Museum, and cocurated by Stanton Catlin and Terence Greider.

17. Bazzano, "Latin American Art," 188.

18. In his introductory remarks, Goodall stated that the questions were arrived at after a year and a half of discussion, including during trips to five Latin American countries, and that Bayón and Sakai synthesized the questions into the "skeleton" inserted in the program. Tape 1, 30:35–31:08 min, PHNTAPE 694, Benson Collection.

19. Lori Cole, *Surveying the Avant-Garde: Questions on Modernism, Art, and the Americas in Transatlantic Magazines* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018).

SPEAK-OUT, CHARLA, BATE-PAPO

A SYMPOSIUM ON CONTEMPORARY ART AND LITERATURE OF LATIN AMERICA

Art Issues

1. Does present day Latin American art exist as a distinct expression? If it does, on what terms?
2. Can an artist produce independently of foreign interests?
3. What operative models does the Latin American artist have at his disposal: international currents, indigenous movements, or other resources?
4. To what extent do Latin American artists respond to their immediate circumstances: community, plastic resources, and others?
5. Does the universal complaint about a lack of a truly professional art criticism in the Latin American countries compel the artist to seek a feedback elsewhere?

Literature Issues

1. Literary criticism: its present status in Latin America.
2. The function of Latin American literature as criticism.

FIGURE 2. Flyer, *Speak-Out! Charla! Bate-Papo! A Symposium of Contemporary Art and Literature of Latin America*, 1975. Stanton Loomis Catlin Papers, Benson Latin American Collection, LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections, The University of Texas at Austin

4. To what extent do artists respond to their immediate circumstances: community, plastic resources, and others?
5. Does the universal complaint about a lack of truly professional art criticism in the Latin American countries compel the artist to seek feedback elsewhere?²⁰

These can be thought of as the symposium's research questions. As such, they reveal some of the organizers' suppositions, biases, and objectives in hosting the event.

Goodall and Cardona (and Bayón and Sakai) were interested in the ways artists from Latin America navigated the world as cultural agents. Their cosmopolitan status was assumed, and this "world" was limited to Western Europe and the Americas. The first question, asking whether Latin American art exists, situates the Austin event among other international gatherings in the period that considered the contours of modern and contemporary Latin American art. The fact that the second, third, and fourth questions asked about artistic autonomy and cultural models suggests the organizers did not see these issues as devoid of power dynamics. The final question regarding criticism, its tone somewhat patronizing, spoke to a desire among some artists for a more robust reception of their work but also helped justify an international critical apparatus that could further validate the Latin American art concept.

Marta Traba offered one of the most polemical analyses at the Austin Symposium. The highly mobile Argentine critic, then living in Venezuela, answered the organizers' first question in her written response partially capitalized and underlined: "The objective answer to the question, 'Does Latin American art exist as a distinct expression?', would be to assert: We DO NOT EXIST as a distinct artistic expression or even as artistic expression outside the limits of our continent."²¹ Much of her argument revolved around recognizing the cultural occupation of the hemisphere yet preserving artistic autonomy from the homogenizing forces of consumerism in global capitalism. Her notion of "culture of resistance," which was committed to art as visual and political representation, if taken to its logical conclusion, proposed some bloc or solidarity, though not necessarily Latin America, and denounced Europe and the United States for

20. Flyer, Box 88, Folder 11, Catlin Papers, Benson Collection.

21. Marta Traba, position paper, p. 1, Box 88, Folder 11, Catlin Papers, Benson Collection.

masquerading as the universal culture. Traba's enemy was avant-gardism, which she regarded as "terrorism" and saw creeping into Latin American artistic self-definition, reiterating and ratifying the centrality of Paris and New York. The context for Traba's charged rhetoric was not only US-backed violence in the region, including in the authoritarian regimes in Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, and Uruguay, but also her 1973 book, *Dos décadas vulnerables en las artes plásticas latinoamericanas, 1950–1970*, which was referenced several times during the symposium.²² The book subverted the valorization of internationalism and proposed that artists in nations occupying so-called closed zones and less oriented to Europe and the United States were the most socially and artistically radical of the region.

Juan Acha, the Peruvian critic based in Mexico, was explicitly ambivalent toward Latin American art. The concept existed or not depending on who deployed it and their circumstances. In Acha's mind, this entailed not just artists but all those "who reflect on, spread, and consume art."²³ In his review in *Plural* of *12 Latin American Artists Today/12 artistas latinoamericanos de hoy*, the critic expressed some wariness about the curators' "hackneyed and old . . . concern for the existence of a distinguishable Latin American art."²⁴ Yet he also noticed close formal and stylistic aspects of the works on display that suggest a family resemblance, which was shaped by what he called a "mestizo psychology." Acha calls attention to simultaneous and tangled processes of naturalization, coloniality, and conceit (a ledger of contradictions that can rarely be reconciled). He goes on to argue that highly original contemporary art in Latin America is not inherently Latin American, but its "syntaxes, semantics, and pragmatics" are, in their new-ness, "Latin American-izable" by critics and historians.²⁵ For Acha, this is not necessarily a bad thing, but an opportunity to more closely link individual aesthetics to social meaning and transformation, although not in any predetermined or constant way.

22. Marta Traba, *Dos décadas vulnerables en las artes plásticas latinoamericanas, 1950–1970* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1973).

23. Juan Acha, position paper, Box 22, Folder 3, Duncan Papers, Benson Collection, n.p.

24. "Hay otro aspecto que desearíamos enfocar en esta ocasión, no obstante ser manido y viejo: las constantes que presentan los expositores los diferencian de las otras latitudes y, por ende, pueden tipificarlos como latinoamericanos." Juan Acha, "Comentarios sobre la exposición 'Plural' en Austin," *Plural* 52, no. 1 (January 1976): 80.

25. "En buena cuenta, muchas de nuestras creaciones artísticas actuales no poseen rasgos latinoamericanos, sino sintaxis, semánticas y pragmáticas nuevas que – por nuevas – son latinoamericanizables." Acha, "Comentarios," 81.

Aracy Amaral, the pioneering Brazilian art historian and museum director, was the most complete in addressing the questionnaire, dwelling on the ambiguity of Latin American art and identification. Amaral saw a lack of coherence and a propensity for contradiction as worth embracing. Indeed, she indulges in strategic essentialism when she writes, “Since we are Latin Americans, we do not fear incoherence or contradictions, but are used to them, for among them our life experience grows and develops.” Amaral also observed a “growing, embryonic Latin American culture,” a by-product of modernization and cultural occupation of the continent.²⁶ Citing a lecture in São Paulo the week before the symposium in Austin by Eduardo Galeano, author of the stridently anti-colonial history *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (1970), Amaral noted that in the face of world systems and webs of dependency, a continually emergent and intellectually slippery Latin American art might escape the grasp and co-opting of late capitalism.

The symposium speakers from Latin America were sensitive to a North American university serving as their host. Neither the US government’s history nor its actions in the Americas at the time were lost on the participants. However, this is not where their critique stopped, with several taking a more ambivalent position in subsequent mentions of the conference. The second line of Amaral’s position paper frankly asserted, “Latin American art exists as a distinct expression as far as a Latin American group, assembled together in an American University in the presence of North American specialists, exchanges ideas in English.”²⁷ Like Traba, she underscores that despite the participation of Latin American artists and critics, the category of Latin American art is articulated *from* the United States at the symposium. Amaral also doubts the intended trilingualism of the event, noting the disparity of power implicit in staging a discussion with the use of English as the lingua franca. However, Amaral suggests that boycotting such conversations would be to willfully ignore the reality of these dynamics. Moreover, she was deeply committed to Latin American voices as a bulwark against persistent Eurocentrism in Brazilian art institutions. A few months later, Amaral wrote a review of the symposium in Rio de Janeiro’s *Vida das Artes* that saw the dynamic differently. She wrote, “What must be stressed is

26. Aracy Amaral, position paper, pp. 1–2, Box 22, Folder 3, Duncan Papers, Benson Collection.

27. Amaral, position paper, 1.

that it was a Latin American meeting in which the North American specialists seem to have operated more as observers of the effervescence of the problems of a continent in expansion.”²⁸ Speaking to a presumably Brazilian audience, Amaral now located agency among the participants from Latin America, and tempered (but did not purge entirely) the performativity of the event.

Writing in 1979, Rita Eder, like Amaral, offered a complex assessment of the symposia of the 1970s. Eder noted pointedly that the discussions were not “gestated” in a US university, mentioning the numerous intellectual dialogues held in Latin America. She continued, “No matter how possible it may be to criticize these events (given that in some cases the organizers take advantage and use them as displays of power), they have nonetheless fulfilled the function of posing questions and provoking new responses. This renewed introspection has focused discussion on the need to formulate adequate tools to permit a more complex analysis of this thing we call ‘Latin American art.’”²⁹ For Eder, the future of the field lay in harnessing the sociocultural and thus interdisciplinary nature of art made in Latin America.

Ultimately, the questions posed in Austin allowed for a Latin American art but also not, while probing for some sort of naming or categorization. The questionnaire, and its engagements by symposium’s speakers and audience, tells less about what Latin American art might be and more about a historical and critical moment of self-conscious reorientation and way finding. Perhaps we can read the questions and conference as a space for assessing the “anxiety about what it meant to be international”—about how cultures exist, and coexist, in the world.³⁰

MEDIATIONS

Part of the reason for the prominence of the Austin Symposium in art debates of the 1970s and the historiography of Latin American art is the event’s abundant archives. With many high-profile attendees, organizers of

28. “Mas nesse simpósio o que deve ser ressaltado é que se tratou de encontro latino-americano, no qual os especialistas norte-americanos parecem ter operado mais como observadores da efervescência da problemática de um continente em expansão.” Aracy Amaral, “Do simpósio de Austin,” *Vida das artes* 2, no. 1 (January–February 1976): 11.

29. Rita Eder, “Why a Latin American Art?” *Journal: Southern California Art Magazine* 25 (December 1979): 62–65, ICAA Documents, <https://icaa.mfah.org/s/en/item/1061782>.

30. Lori Cole, “How Do You Imagine Latin America?: Questioning Latin American Art and Identity in Print,” *The Global South* 7, no. 2 (2014): 111.

the Austin Symposium aspired to deliver a highly scripted event. Papers were solicited and circulated in advance. During the panels, questions and comments were initially submitted in written form to facilitate translation. There was even a head of protocol who gave a speech at the start. The formality of the event was largely reproduced in the conference proceedings edited by Bayón, *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad* (1977), in conjunction with a publisher in Caracas with an extensive distribution network in the Spanish-speaking Americas.³¹ In addition, the speakers' position papers have been anthologized in multiple contexts, and the Mexico City-based periodical *Artes visuales* organized an issue in response to the symposium that included new texts by participants as well as several pioneers of the field absent in Austin, among them Mário Pedrosa and Jorge Romero Brest.³²

Bayón's proceedings have come to be regarded as the definitive recounting of the conference. His compilation broadly portrays an intellectual exchange of Latin American intellectuals hosted, witnessed, and occasionally interrupted by North Americans. The recordings, however, document quite a different affair, one more than worthy of the combative language participants deployed. Moving back and forth between historical registers of the written and the recorded audio allows us to gain a sense of the interpersonal dynamics and social structures that informed the discussions and would help to shape a nascent field. As Ramírez has noted, the Latin American art symposia from the 1970s are remarkable for the "degree of political radicalization."³³ Contemporary theorizations of neocolonialism and dependency possessed considerable currency in Austin. (There is back and forth between Traba and Bayón on actors and agency with regard to world system and dependency theories.)³⁴ However, the recordings from Austin also confront us with sexism, elitism, and the pervasive marginalization of

31. Bayón, *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad*.

32. Juan Acha, *Ensayos y ponencias latinoamericanistas* (Caracas: Ediciones GAN, 1984), 155–58; Emma Araújo de Vallejo, ed., *Marta Traba* (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial, 1984), 331–33; Aracy Amaral, *Arte e meio artístico: entre a feijoada e o x-burguer, 1961–1981* (Sao Paulo: Nobel, 1982), 226–31; *Artes visuales*, no. 10 (April–June 1976). As noted by the editors, *Resisting Categories* includes edited versions of texts by Acha, Amaral, and Traba that combine their spoken remarks (in the Bayón proceedings) and their position papers (which circulated in English translation). Olea, Ramírez, and Ybarra-Frausto, *Resisting Categories*, 740–53.

33. Mari Carmen Ramírez, "Longing and Belonging," in Olea, Ramírez, and Ybarra-Frausto, *Resisting Categories*, 595.

34. Bayón, *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad*, 47–50.

Black, Indigenous, and Latinx perspectives and contributions, demonstrating that the progressive rhetoric coexisted with prejudice, and we should not confuse the deployment of critical language with actual transformation. We can hear the indignation of speakers at several heated moments, as gender, racial, linguistic, and geopolitical power differentials are expressed in a multitude of ways. While the legacy of colonialism was discussed, the colonality of knowledge production, field building, and collegiality was not.

More than two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the recordings of the symposium preserve the still familiar, but now distant sonic experience of an academic conference. The rise and fall of a muddle of voices before and after sessions, the whoosh of papers shuffling, whispers of moderators to speak more slowly or to shift closer to the microphone, the creak of chairs as sessions stretch on, and modulations of applause and laughter—and in one case, hissing—give some indication of what speaker or idea had swayed the audience. The black-and-white photographs of the symposium, some published in the student newspaper and by Amaral and Bayón, show the large, wood-paneled auditorium equipped with an audio system that allowed for simultaneous translation and a seeming endless number of microphones (fig. 3).³⁵ The speakers, in groups and singularly, appear to be confident—mostly happy, sometimes annoyed—intellectual and artistic pioneers with headphones worn or casually held up over one ear, occasionally with a cigarette in hand. Also vivid in the recordings are the distinct accents and cadences of the participants and the performative, aggrandizing habits of academe, with the most lavish praise reserved for the "maestros" and senior men in attendance as well as patrons of the event.

Above all, the recordings reveal disagreements and other interpersonal dynamics stripped by Bayón out of the proceedings. US organizers, participants, audience members, and UT Austin students, some from varied Latin American national origins, repeatedly insisted on simplistic, essentialized framings of the subject matter that by the third and final day wear on several participants from Latin America and at least one from the United States. These expressions of irritation go only partially registered by Bayón. Certain comments by Duncan and Grieder smack of benevolent cultural imperialism, and

35. "Panel on Latin Criticism Opens Arts Symposium," *The Daily Texan*, October 28, 1975.



FIGURE 3. Photographs of the Austin Symposium, October 29, 1975. Visible: Juan Acha, Aracy Amaral, Damián Bayón, Rita Eder, Leonel Góngora, among others. Archives of the Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin (photographs by Mike Musson)

Bayón records the sharp retorts to each.³⁶ By contrast, absent is Goodall imploring the panelists to get to it and explain what is Latin American about Latin American art, and entreating Rufino Tamayo to explain what is Mexican about him.³⁷ The trilingualism of the event is also put into question. One of the Brazilian speakers, Amaral, spoke in Spanish, and it is unclear how consistently the contributions in Portuguese by the other Brazilians, Afonso Romano de Sant'Anna and José Mindlin (speakers) and Frederico Morais (audience member) were translated.

Other edits seem innocuous enough. Gone are introductory remarks on the first day that stretched for almost a half hour.³⁸ But these introductions, all by men, delineated a masculinist space, with florid welcomes to honored guests: Gamboa, Gómez Sicre, Paz (present via a representative), and Tamayo, along with Duncan. The discussions that followed focused on male artists and writers, with Jorge Luis Borges such a ubiquitous reference that it became a running joke among the speakers.

Bayón also omitted the protests at being interrupted mounted by Amaral and Traba, two of the four female participants listed in the program among a total of seventeen in the art-focused sessions.³⁹ Both had pointed exchanges with Sakai, including a moment where Amaral cited the UN-designated International Women's Year in 1975 as she spoke past her time limit.⁴⁰ On the final day, Traba targeted Goodall, calling him out in the audience, and stating that it took what she called a "miracle" for her to be able to attend the conference from Caracas, and yet her contributions had been severely limited. She concluded, "I ask, for my final intervention . . . five minutes. If not, I prefer not to intervene."⁴¹ Bayón did include what followed: alongside her compliments to Amaral,

36. Bayón, *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad*, 99–102, 104–5, 114, 117–20, 129, 134, 139–40, 144–45.

37. Tape 17, 24:00–25:15 min, PHNTAPE 694, Benson Collection.

38. Tape 1, 12:30–31:08 min and Tape 2, 0:15–6:00 min, PHNTAPE 694, Benson Collection.

39. On the literature side, the sole female participant, Argentine scholar Sylvia Molloy, was included in the program but did not attend the symposium.

40. Tape 16, 26:17–29:29 min; Tape 17, 10:49–12:21 min; Tape 18, 11:50–12:02 min, PHNTAPE 694, Benson Collection.

41. "En atención al milagro que pudo ser usted consiguiendo que las autoridades de su país me dejaran entrar en Estados Unidos, exactamente catorce días, desde el 26 de octubre hasta el 10 de noviembre, y en atención a que vine de desde Caracas y que he a podido tener cuatro intervenciones, una de tres minutos, y tres de dos minutos. Lo que quiero pedirle, para dar como punto final mis intervenciones, es que usted me concede, así excepcionalmente, cinco minutos. Si no, prefiero no intervenir." Tape 22, 13:13–15:16 min, PHNTAPE 694, Benson Collection.

Cuevas, and others, Traba issued a full-voiced critique of the conference as a whole, including for its exclusions, namely of Gómez Sicre, who was not given a speaking role. Moreover, she drilled down on the ideological gaslighting underway in the event: rather than a frank acknowledgment of the neocolonial conditions of contemporary society—in which Europe and the United States force dependency on Latin America—the symposium organizers chose to "camouflage" this reality. Instead, they proposed the premise that Latin America is a region "economically underdeveloped, but culturally developed (which is the equivalent of saying that we have people blighted by hunger and ignorance while our intellectuals are 'enlightened' by French trends and North American pragmatism)."⁴²

Bayón reproduced the comments by two audience members, Jacinto Quirarte, an art history professor at UT San Antonio, and Rolando Briseño, then a UT Austin undergraduate student earning a studio degree after completing one in art history, who lamented the exclusion of Chicanos from the symposium.⁴³ Quirarte noted that many of the issues of ambiguity described by Latin American artists are shared by Mexican Americans. On the final day of the event, Briseño remarked: "I want to say to Donald Goodall and the other people who are the directors of this symposium that I deeply resent that the Chicanos were left out again, as usual, out [sic] of something that they have the right to be into because we are *latinoamericanos* also."⁴⁴ Though Goodall felt compelled to address at length and take responsibility for the conspicuous lack of any Cuban specialists at the event, no one took up the challenge issued by Quirarte and Briseño.⁴⁵ What the recordings do reveal is the applause in the room after each spoke, accompanied by a comment by someone near a microphone that Chicano art could be the focus of the next "mesa," and Sakai foreclosing further discussion by

42. "Somos un continente subdesarrollado económicamente, pero desarrollado culturalmente (lo que equivale a decir que tenemos pueblos idiotizados por el hambre y la ignorancia e intelectuales esclarecidos por las corrientes francesas y el pragmatismo norteamericano)." Bayón, *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad*, 105–6.

43. Bayón, 91, 144–45.

44. Tape 26, 23:40–24:00 min, PHNTAPE 694, Benson Collection. Bayón alters Briseño's word choices when translating his words into Spanish, most significantly shifting "deeply resent" to "lamento profundamente," in the proceedings. Bayón, *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad*, 145. Also see Cary Cordova, "Oral History Interview with Rolando Briseño," March 16–26, 2004, Archives of American Art, www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-rolando-briseo-12193#transcript.

45. Bayón, *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad*, 87.

saying that Chicano art falls outside the focus of the event.⁴⁶

If Latinx art and artists were a named omission thanks to Quirarte and Briseño, discussions of racialization and racism within Latin America were largely absent or highly coded. In her prepared remarks, Traba proposed, “The day we can say calmly and without fear, ‘We are Latin Americans,’ thus asserting a human and cultural category that does not exclude the defiant nuance of the famous ‘black is beautiful,’ we will have some chance of projecting our existence outside of the continent.”⁴⁷ The comments are brief and ambiguous, and she ultimately decided against speaking them. As much as this may be a gesture of inspiration and solidarity with the Black civil rights movement in the United States, given the ethnic composition of the participants and audience Traba’s reflection gestures more clearly toward a field that has consistently centered whiteness while deploying Black people as exotic or militant passersby.

When identification with a racialized community did occur at the symposium, it did not guarantee that an attendee’s assessment corresponded with social justice and cultural autonomy aims. Tamayo, who claimed Zapotec heritage, drew criticism, including from Peruvian scholar Rodríguez Saavedra, for his assertion that Mexico, with its official championing of the Indigenous, was the one true Latin American country, while the others were populated by European transplants.⁴⁸ *Mestizaje*, the seventy-six-year-old artist asserted, had proven to be the solution to the problem of postcolonial identity, and only Mexican participants were in the position to question “imported models” from Europe and the United States. Tamayo’s comments were a more brazen articulation of the inherent elitism of *indigenismo* promoted by many Latin American intellectuals and nations that obscured the complexities of indigeneity.

If the audio recordings offer a supplemental archive of the Austin Symposium, foregrounding inequity and discordance among the participants, details about its setting add further texture to its analysis. As mentioned, Austin was an unlikely hub for Latin American art, and the spaces where the panels, shared meals, and other encounters took place were not insignificant to the conversations.

46. Tape 18, 17:04–17:20 min, PHNTAPE 694, Benson Collection.

47. Traba, position paper, 5.

48. Bayón, *El artista latinoamericano y su identidad*, 91–94; Tape 18, 17:33–23:10 min, PHNTAPE 694, Benson Collection. We thank Mary K. Coffey for her insights on Tamayo’s comments.

The symposium took place at the Joe C. Thompson Conference Center, a new Brutalist slab (1970, architects J. Herschel Fisher and Pat Y. Spillman, Dallas) that was part of an early 1970s building boom at UT. The center was distant from the core of the university campus, with its confection of Spanish Revival buildings and Confederate statues, and the Humanities Center (now the Harry Ransom Center), where the accompanying exhibitions of Latin American art were on view. Instead, looming over the location were the recently inaugurated Sid Richardson Hall and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library (both 1971, Gordon Bunshaft for Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, New York). It likely did not go without comments by the participants that this last building—ten stories tall and largely windowless—was dedicated to a US administration that backed the Brazilian military coup in 1964. There certainly was discussion, during question-and-answer sessions, of Augusto Pinochet and the US backing of repression in the region. It seems possible that attendees also noticed the proximity to the austere, low-lying hall that contained not only one of the oldest Institutes of Latin American Studies in the country, established with US government support in 1940, but also the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs. Set on an elevated pavilion that marked the eastern edge of the university’s campus, the complex, designed by Bunshaft, served as the modernist counterpoint to the traditionalist west campus. The rectilinear edifices crafted a technocratic image of the academy’s role in the twentieth century, in which university expertise and foreign policy were intertwined to secure a US-dominated world order. The Bunshaft buildings arguably supplemented the earlier vision of the state and its flagship university as a capital of the forever confederacy.⁴⁹ Buoyed by an oil economy and a recent native-born president, UT in the 1970s was seen as a hub from which the United States would project power south of the border. At the same time, the surrounding town was semirural, with hardly an urban core. Imperial Washington or New York it was not, which may help explain the lack of polemics specifically voiced against UT as an institution during the symposium.

Out-of-town participants were put up at the Villa Capri Motor Hotel, across the street from the conference

49. For an insightful analysis of UT, which was founded in 1883, as a neoconfederate university via its built environments, see Edmund T. Gordon’s “Racial Geography Tour” (<http://racialgeographytour.org/>).

center. The Villa Capri was the epitome of 1960s modernist motel architecture. Along with two pools and abundant (no doubt excessive for some) air conditioning, it made a case for postwar “good life” as conjured by US capitalism. A city guide provided to symposium attendees encouraged them to explore the university’s cultural offerings and Austin’s nightlife.⁵⁰ Ted Nugent was playing at Armadillo World Headquarters, or they could opt to check out other venues, described variously as “redneck chic,” “hard-core country,” and “Mexican country.” Nightly parties—some referenced jokingly during the conference—seem to have endeared the visitors to the UT students. Austin likely provided some with a culture shock, while others may have encountered the legacy of Texas’s shameful history of racism, xenophobia, and vigilantism.

Cross-cultural connection, and its failure, is messy and full of unexpected challenges and opportunities. One of the best ways to understand what happened during the Austin Symposium—the exchanges, the frustrations, the layers of performativity on the part of organizers and attendees during and following the event—is to go back and listen to the voices themselves and consider the spaces they occupied. Not to find a truer story, but to try to honor the embodied experience of the participants, more expansively situate the rhetorical polemics, and acknowledge the unsettled and exclusionary nature of the field. For our part, questioning and the unresolvability intrinsic to responses proffered by Acha, Amaral, Briseño,

Quirarte, Traba, and others are cores of the symposium we would like to recuperate.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our sincere thanks to journal editors Emily Engel and Charlene Villaseñor Black and to Libby Hruska for insightful feedback and suggestions. We warmly thank our colleagues at University of Texas: D. Ryan Lynch and Dylan Joy (Benson Latin American Collection), Florencia Bazzano and Shelby Lakins (Blanton Museum of Art), Stephanie Malmros (Briscoe Center for American History), and Beth Dodd and Nancy Sparrow (Alexander Architectural Archives) for research assistance, as well as Ryan and Florencia for exchanging ideas.

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50. Night Entertainment list, Box 88, Folder 11, Catlin Papers, Benson Collection.