

Art, Science and Technology from the South  
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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to spread knowledge and preserve the memory of Latin American artists who have contributed to the experience of the relationships between art, science and technology in the subcontinent. Early example of an artist working with new material, technologies and themes, represents a quintessential understanding of culture. Some of these artistic experiments started as early as the late 40's when Gyula Kosice (1924-2016) for the first time in 1946 used neon lights as a medium of an artwork. Few years later he proposed a project on hydro-spatial cities for the outer space. On looping back at these artworks and the amazing ideas they embodied, we wonder why they were not quoted or mentioned in any textbook on art that has since been published in the mainstream of the art world.

## INTRODUCTION

As a whole, the research focusses on the precursors of art, science and technology from Rio Grande to Patagonia. In the mid-twentieth century many artists were directing their research towards abstraction and optical illusionism, Victor Vasarely<sup>1</sup> the French-Hungarian artist was a great influence on some young creators who later embraced not only abstraction and op art but also kinetic art (Julio Le Parc, Matilde Pérez), digital art (Waldemar Cordeiro, Manuel Felguerez) or the New Media (Martha Menujín and Rubén Santantonín, David Lamelas<sup>2</sup>, Roberto Jacoby, Margarita Paksa), including multimedia (Loraine Pinto, and Francesco Mariotti). Perhaps a more detailed analysis should be made of Gyula Kosice's lumino kinetic works since he first started exploring the possibility of using neon lights as a media. This was way back in 1946. Later he embraced hydro kinetic pieces proposing ambitious spatial urbanistic cities. Kosice was also the

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<sup>1</sup> Vasarely had an important exhibition at the *Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes* in Buenos Aires in 1958.

<sup>2</sup> The events were developed at the *Instituto Torcuato Di Tella* in Buenos Aires under the name of *Experiencias* between 1967 and 1968.

head of two important initiatives originated in Argentina, one was the *Arturo Magazine* (1944) and two years later the drafting of the *Madí Manifesto*.<sup>3</sup>

The new artistic forms explored by some of those artists may have come to our memories if we had studied or visited exhibitions in this part of the world. Some of those artists are also well known internationally: more surprisingly only few of those artists seemed to have enjoyed recognition not only in Latin America but also in the international sphere. Even if they were known in Europe or the United States, most of the books that trace the history of *New Media* or Art and Technology never mention their names.

Gyula Kosice is just one interesting example from Argentina where an important group of artists raised - as early as in the forties and fifties - the exploration of new technologies into the continent. Argentinian artists kept searching and only three years after the *Experiments in Art and Technology*, or E.A.T. (founded 1966), by Robert Rauschenberg in the United States, the art critic and director of the Instituto di Tella, Jorge Romero Brest, planned the transformation of the *Centro de Artes Visuales* into a technological lab of information and communications (Katzenstein, 2007).

Romero Brest<sup>4</sup> was one among the most important art critics who promoted the the Argentinian avant-garde while in Brazil Julio Plaza and Walter Zanini were boosting artists from that region.

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<sup>3</sup> The Madí Manifesto was link to the *Movimiento Concreto* and specially plead for invention. It may be important to mention that also the *Manifiesto Estridentista* by the Mexican poet Manuel Maples Arce published in December 1921 a a second part in 1923, were appealing for a radical avandgardism.

<sup>4</sup> In 1964 who was the director the Di Tella Institute invited Clement Greenberg and Pierre Restany as members of the jury for the annual price. Greenberg \_as Andrea Giunta states in *Escritos de Vanguardia. Arte Argentino de los años '60\_* believed that the art in Buenos Aires reminded him the provincial art of NY in the 1930's. P. 83

In Chile, Gonzalo Mezza created the first digital artwork in his show *Exposición Restrospectiva Santiago Punto Cero* in 1983. Let us not forget that Carlos Martinolla and Nahum Joel were the precursors of the use of technology in Chile and as early as in 1960, with the *Abstractoscopio Cromatico* presented at *Feria de Artes Plásticas* which was organized aside of the *Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes* in Santiago.

### The Challenge

Perhaps the most important challenge for the DALA project is to spread the knowledge of the founders and precursors of art, science and technology in the region. Now in the age of the Technologies of Information and Communication, when young generations have difficulties to concentrate for some few minutes in a class session, the challenge is to connect with them in an innovative way without taking too much time. Some questions in class on how to gather, store and spread data were discussed and then offered to advanced students in bachelors degree, so they could develop some applications like web site games and the use social media to connect with a goal audience. The plan was also to design a course that focuses specially on history and development of art, science and technology since its early manifestations in the 1940's, in this part of the world.

### The project

During the course there were two important projects constructed by the students.

The projects were:

*Dalatinamerica* develop by Angelica Arriaga, Adrian Saldaña and Angel Montiel: their work is an Interactive visualization that shows the names and countries of the artists and where they were born, the most interesting part of the project is that at the time the viewer is interacting with the piece, it sends a Twitter message with the name and a short biography of the artist that the participant is viewing. The piece will be explained by the students during the presentation of artists and artworks.

Another project is *Latin American Women Artists* and it was develop by Ana Lourdes Macias, Gabriela Gonzalez, Victor Soto, Rene Valderrama and Rogelio Zavala. The students involved in the project decided to explore the history of women artists from the LatAm region, something that was almost unknown for all of them. If Latin American artists have been excluded from the main western discourse of art, women's exclusion is even more disastrous for history. However, all along during the development of art and technology, women had been present in the production of artworks in which few names had gained wider recognition and unfortunately some others faded in oblivion.

Here are some few names:

Martha Minujin, Margarita Paksa, Martha Boto or Maria Luz Gil and Lea Lublin, from Argentina. In México, names like Lorrain Pinto and Pola Weiss - the last one artist was the precursor of video art and video dance but had not found a place in the mainstream new media history. No better situation incurred for Matilde Perez a Kinetic artist from Chile or Teresa Burga from Perú. Feliza Bursztyn (Colombia 1933-1982).

Francesco Mariotti (Switzerland 1943-). Jesús Rafael Soto (Venezuela 1923-2005), Carlos Cruz Diez (Venezuela 1923-). Juan Downey (Chile 1940-1993). Rafael Hastings (Peru ). Gyula Kosice (Argentina ) Luis Ferando Benedit (Argentina ), Enrique Castro Cid (Chile ) Victor Grippo (Argentina ), David Lamelas (Argentina )

Nowadays some women artists from LatAm had gain international appreciation, such is the case with Giselle Beigelman, Analivia Cordeiro, Regina Silveira, Rejane Cantoni and Anna Bella Gieger to mention just a few.

### The institutions and projects

In most of countries from Mexico to Argentina there are some databases that avoid to start the references site from the scratch. There are ones that are part of a public institution and those that are hosted by private ones. In Argentina it seems that *Telefonica* used to have a database on Argentinian artists; however we could not confirm that information, in the case of Brazil, the *Itaú Cultural* has a database named *Enciclopédia*, and Chile has the *Mediateca Libre* which may not be considered as a Data Base but it contains lots of information on digital and electronic artists of the region, the site is owned by the *Bienial de Artes Mediales*. In Mexico *Transitio* also has a database on Art, science and technology and in Uruguay the internet artist Brian MacKern has created an important project on Latin American *Net Art*. We may remember the quote by Charles Babbage *Errors using inadequate data are less than those using no data at all*.

The sources of information. Databases

Roy Rosenzweig an American art historian and founder of the *Center for History and New Media* analyzes Wikipedia as a source of historical information in his article *Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past* (2006). In his text he states the pros and cons of the use of the website as a source of relevant information, especially as a tool for reliable historical information. In case of DALA, we came to the conclusion that Wikipedia will be also an important way to standardize and keep the information of past events and particularly of artists from and in Latin America that has been quintessential for the understanding of the evolution of art and technology. The task may not be easy to achieve because some of those names may not be in any database and some of which are, may not even have entries in the Spanish version of the Wikipedia, which in many cases is the first source of information that appears at the time of navigating the web. As an example, we can exemplify with three emblematic artists of Latin America, the three of them were pioneers in their respective countries. Julio Le Parc (b. 1928), Abraham Palatnik (b. 1928) and Manuel Felguerez (b. 1928). The three male artists have an entry in Wiki; for Le Parc and Felguerez information is extensive but perhaps not enough to describe their achievements, notably in the area of focus of DALA. The entry for Abraham Palatnik is poor and needs to be extended and updated.

Those were the cases for male artists, but now if we focus on women artists, the case is even worse in the sense that in many cases, they have not even an entry in Wikipedia or if they have it is quite short. Such is the case for for Lorraine Pinto

(without entry), Pola Weiss (very limited information) or Matilde Perez from Chile, Analivia Cordeiro (Brazil) and perhaps lastly the only one of that generation who has a more extensive information is Martha Minujin.

## Conclusion

It is not a matter of information available in libraries or printed publications, in the XXI century and the digital age, but the challenge is to unify the data on artists from all over Latin America not only to keep the memory of a living culture alive but also to preserve the achievements of its rich past. Unifying and standardizing such information may be the key to spread the knowledge now available for only few scholars and specialized personnel.