

## University art museums in Brazil: in search of new and old audiences

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### Resumo

Neste artigo os museus são discutidos enquanto elemento fundamental para estabelecer um elo de colaboração entre a universidade e a sociedade. Comparam-se números de visitantes em museus de arte universitários e não universitários, bem como os programas desenvolvidos pelos primeiros para atrair novos e velhos visitantes, dentro e fora da comunidade universitária. O texto apresenta igualmente uma descrição sumária dos museus de arte universitários no Brasil, suas funções e iniciativas para captação de novos públicos.

### Abstract

This article aims at comparing the number of visitors in Brazilian university and non-university museums of art. It will also try to explain the ways in which universities adopt in order to captivate new/old audiences inside and outside the university community. In addition, an overview of the Brazilian university art museum panorama, their functions and their problems in attracting new audiences is presented.

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### Introduction

Museums are institutions that should offer exhibits and other public programs to attract different audiences. The case of university museums is somewhat different because the university community is expected to be their main audience, with the non-university audience coming in second place. Therefore, what we usually call the 'old audience' in a university museum is the university community itself and the 'new audience' is the non-

university community. Nevertheless, in Brazil, this has not been the case for every university museum.

This paper discusses how university museums strive to increase their audiences, inside as well as outside the university community, by attracting school groups, teachers, elderly people etc. This discussion includes the importance that society in general places on university museum programs. University museums could be one of the links between universities and society as museums are

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also places for relaxation and informal learning.

The university is an institution that must be contemporary in outlook in order to respond to new social challenges. If not, it will become more and more isolated and might lose its *raison d'être*. Marcia Lord, the editor of *Museum International*, presented some arguments extracted from the report of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by Jacques Delors, concerning the pressures facing universities and therefore, their museums:

"Higher education is at one and the same time one of the driving forces of economic development and the focal point of learning in a society. It is both repository and creator of knowledge. Moreover, it is the principal instrument for passing on the accumulated experience, cultural and scientific, of humanity (...)"

"As autonomous centers for research and the creation of knowledge, universities can address some of the developmental issues facing society. They educate the intellectual and political leaders and company heads of tomorrow, as well as many of the teachers. In their social role, universities can use their autonomy in the service of debate on the great ethical and scientific issues facing the society of the future, and serve as links with the rest of the education system by providing further learning opportunities for adults and acting as a center for the study, enrichment and preservation of culture. There is increasing pressure on higher education to respond to social concerns, while the other precious and indispensable features of universities, their academic freedom and institutional autonomy, have also been the focus of attention. Those features, although no guarantee of excellence, are a prerequisite for it (...)"

"Thus, everyone should be able to count more or less directly on higher education for access to the common heritage of knowledge and the most recent findings. The university must accept a kind of moral contract with society in exchange for the resources assigned to it by society (...)"

"In addition to preparing large numbers of young people either for research or for specialized occupations, the university must continue to be the fountainhead at which the growing numbers of people who find in their own sense of curiosity a way of giving meaning to their lives may slake their thirst for knowledge. Culture should here be considered in its widest sense, ranging from the most mathematical of science to poetry, by way of all the fields of the mind and the imagination."

(LORD 2000: 3).

The Commission suggests that universities continue to form specialized professionals and be cultural centers for all society. Universities must participate in and provoke discussions about important social issues, promoting knowledge about these issues among the general public. The same applies to university museums.

## University art museums

To most people, the university art museum seems sheltered indeed, a tranquil garden in the groves of academe...

Brett Waller, 1980

There are many types of university museums – science, history, art etc. – and among all possibilities I have chosen to discuss art museums in this paper since I consider that there is no agreement about their functions and necessity. While science and history museums have a definite link with graduate and undergraduate courses taught at the university, university art museums seem to escape this function. University art museums could attract art students and professors, other university students and professors and also non-university audiences, if their collections, programs and location, are accessible and interesting.

There are different functions generally attributed to university art museums, ranging from 'decorative' places at the campus to higher education centers.

In the USA, many university art museums were created to exhibit original works of art to art students, and therefore collections are usually integrated in a History of Art Department. Their audiences are mainly university undergraduates and graduates. In 1942, Coleman emphasized that art collections were indispensable to higher education:

“Creditable museums are needed on every campus, in the fields of art and of biological and geological science, which are unneglectable in higher education, museum material is the only ground on which a large part of teaching and research can rest; and collections, together with fitting arrangements for their care and use, are essential. Other fields, especially history, make some use of museums; but art and natural science must have museums or there are bound to be gaps in the educational programs” (COLEMAN 1942: 3)<sup>1</sup>.

According to Coleman, the major audience of university museums should be university students<sup>2</sup>, and they are the ‘old audience’ expected in these museums. However, after some years, university museums in the USA seemed to have lost their university audience. In 1956, S. Borhegyi wrote about an “alarming problem faced by university museums”:

“The majority of the visitors are no longer students or campus personnel but are people from neighboring communities, high school and elementary students and out-of state visitors” (BORHEGYI 1956: 309).

Borhegyi suggested some strategies to attract the university community back to museums, then successfully applied in the Oklahoma University Museum (cf. article by Michael Mares in this issue).

Similarly, Brett Waller defended that university art museums must serve art historians (students and faculty), artists (students and faculty), students preparing for museum careers and students and scholars from the university (in this case, the University of Michigan). These people, whom he designated ‘active users’, constituted the minority of the museum’s total audience, while non-specialist visitors represented the majority. Nevertheless, this

minority audience should be uppermost in museum’s personnel’s minds when exhibition arrangements, selection of works of art and activities are planned (WALLER 1980).

In Great Britain, as in the USA, art collections were used to teach Art History, but not exclusively, as shown in these excerpts of texts from 1968 and 1992:

“But the academic study of fine art can never be the *raison d’être* of these collections or the measure of their value to the universities” (STANDING COMMITTEE ON MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES 1968: 10).

“Art collections such as those at Liverpool, Nottingham and Hull may be used for teaching purposes, but principally supply a cultural and aesthetic quality to university life” (WARHURST 1992: 97).

Most authors value university art collections and indicate that they should have a wider role in the university campus life. Although the university community is the expected audience to these museums, they may also be open to other people. School children and teachers, elderly people, minorities, and handicapped people are some examples of other audiences possibly interested in university art museums.

## **Brazilian university art museums**

In Brazil, university art museums were created due to private donations and without any particular link to the art courses. Indeed, in some cases this

<sup>1</sup> More than 30 years after, the same idea continues to give support to university art collections: “Unless we bring in the work of art as an original, we are bound to get into trouble and to stimulate generalizations, abstractions, and theoretical views that are unsound (...) Therefore the involvement of the students in the works of art is essential (...)” (Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann, quoted in ORTNER [1978: 519]).

<sup>2</sup> Coleman wrote: “Community service is not the business of a college or university museum, but circumstances often dictate some overstepping of this logic. (...) public service at expense of effective work with students would be wrong.” (COLEMAN, 1939: 174-5).

link was never developed until many years later. From the 92 art museums existing in Brazil<sup>3</sup>, 17 are integrated in universities. These are located in four out of the five Brazilian geopolitical areas (known as 'regions') mainly in the Northeast and Southeast. The latter, in which the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro are located, is the most populated and industrialized region. During my survey, I identified

and described 110 university museums. In table 1 some features of 17 university art museums are listed.

### The collections

The majority of Brazilian university art collections were based on private donations. A regional trend in forming collections of local artists and local popular

Museum	State / Region	Field	Number of objects	Opening year	Location	Undergraduate courses	Number of visitors
Museum of Sacred Art of Bahia (UFBA)	Bahia / NE	Sacred Art	2,000	1959	Downtown	Fine arts Museology*	.....
Regional Museum of Art (UEFS)	Bahia / NE	Modern Art	100	1985	Campus	History	1999: 1,693 2000: 2,808
Museum of Art of UFC – MAUC (UFC)	Ceará / NE	Contemporary Art	4,000	1961	Campus	Fashion	2000: 6,000
Assis Chateaubriand Art Museum – MAAC (UEPB)	Paraíba / NE	Art	462	1967	City Park	History	1995: 14,130
Museum of Popular Art (UFPB)	Paraíba / NE	Local Art	1,500	1978	Campus	Plastic Arts	.....
Pinacotheca (UFPB)	Paraíba / NE	Local Art	178	1987	Campus	Plastic Arts	Mean: 726
Museum of Seridó (UFRN)	R.Grande Norte / NE	Sacred Art / History	1,000	1968	Downtown	History	1999: 1,583 2000: 444
Museum of Art and Popular Culture (UFMT)	Mato Grosso / CO	Contemporary Art	260	1974	Campus	Art Education	2000: 9,000
Leopoldo Gotuzzo Art Museum (UFPE)	R.Grande Sul / S	Local Art	600	1996	Downtown	Fine Arts	.....
Museum of Brazilian Engraving (URCAMP)	R.Grande Sul / S	Brazilian Engraving	800	1977	Downtown	Plastic Arts	1998: 4,800
Gallery of Art University Space (UFES)	Espírito Santo / SE	Contemporary Art	617	1978	Campus	Fine Arts Plastic Arts	Mean: 6,000
Brasiliana Gallery (UFMG)	Minas Gerais / SE	Art	100	1966 and 2000	Downtown	Conservation Fine Arts *	New
D. João VI Museum (UFRJ)	Rio de Janeiro / SE	Art Teaching History	10,000 and 9,000 docum.	1979	Campus	Fine Arts *	Mean: 1,000
Museum of Contemporary Art – MAC (USP)	São Paulo / SE	Contemporary Art	8,000	1963	Campus and City Park	Plastic Arts *	1999: 162,850 2000: 64,904
Collection of Visual Arts – IEB (USP)	São Paulo / SE	Brazilian Art	2,500	1968	Campus	Plastic Arts * History	1997: 1,055 1998: 449
Museum of Brazilian Art.– MAB (FAAP)	São Paulo / SE	Brazilian Art	2,300	1961	Campus	Plastic Arts	1999: 82,500 2000: 35,353
UNICAMP Gallery of Art (UNICAMP)	São Paulo / SE	Contemporary Art	210	1984	Campus	Fine Arts *	1998: 5,200

Table 1 – Brazilian University Art Museums ordered by regions.

Notes: Big differences between the number of visitors from one year to the other was probably caused by the museum closing due to strikes or to the renovation of museum's buildings and exhibitions.

(\*) These universities have also post-graduation courses in Arts or Visual Arts.

Legend: U= University; F=Federal; E=State; USP=University of São Paulo; UNICAMP=University of Campinas.

<sup>3</sup> There are about 826 museums in Brazil. Data collected by the Commission of Cultural Heritage of the University of São Paulo (CPC/USP).

art objects was observed, something that seems more feasible considering the typical lack of funds.

The collections favor Brazilian artists, with the exception of: a) museums with works dating back to the colonial period of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, e.g. the D. João VI Museum and the Museum of Sacred Art; b) museums created by Assis Chateaubriand's regional museums project, e.g. the Assis Chateaubriand Art Museum of UEPB, the Brasiliana Gallery, and the Regional Museum of Art; and c) the Museum of Contemporary Art of USP, which received a national and international collection of modern and contemporary art.

Recently created museums, especially Art Galleries, have collections formed by works donated by local artists and frequently present temporary exhibitions. The exception is the Brasiliana Gallery, the original collection of which is eclectic and includes works created by foreign artists. Its contemporary art, however, consists of works from Minas Gerais' artists donated by the local community. The Museum of Sacred Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Collection of Visual Arts own the only collections

considered of both national and international importance. The Assis Chateaubriand Art Museum collection is unique in the region where it is located, i.e. the countryside of Northeast Brazil.

#### The audiences

As far as audiences are concerned, a comparative study was done between the number of visitors of university and non-university museums from the city of São Paulo (cf. table 2). There are three university art museums in São Paulo: the Museum of Brazilian Art (MAB/FAAP), the Museum of Contemporary Art (MAC/USP) and the Collection of Visual Arts (IEB/USP). Only the latter receives fewer visitors than the other city art museums— the Pinacotheca of São Paulo State, the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo (MAM/SP) and the Lasar Segall Museum (MLS).

The Armando Álvares Penteado Foundation (FAAP) is a private institution that provides higher education courses in humanities and engineering. Besides the Museum of Brazilian Art, they also have a theatre opened for the general public. The differences among

Year	MAB/FAAP	MAC/USP	IEB/USP	Pinacotheca	MAM/SP	MLS
1997	13,055	103,939	1,055	51,599	97,240	9,144
1998	27,379	111,000	449	135,535	142,491	9,610
1999	82,549	125,859	--	162,850	172,109	12,076
2000	35,358	64,904	--	94,414	301,958	8,085

Table 2 –Visitor numbers of art museums of São Paulo city (1997-2000).

Notes:

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MAC/USP) is scattered through three different buildings. The MAC was founded in 1963 but only in 1992 a specific building was built in the campus. This building suffered adaptation works in 2000. Its collection has been maintained in borrowed places and part of it continues in the third floor of the Bienal building in Ibirapuera Park. Every time there is a big show in Bienal building, MAC-Ibirapuera has to close the doors for long periods, as it has happened during the last 4 years. From 1999 to 2001, MAC has a contract with FIESP Cultural Center to present its collection at their site, at Avenida Paulista, located downtown.

The Brazilian Studies Institute (IEB) exhibition rooms were closed for works in 1999 and 2000.

In the case of Lasar Segall Museum (MLS), the visitor numbers represent only permanent exhibition visitors and do not include other activities and programs in the museum.

the number of visitors in the four-year period considered can be explained by the powerful attraction of temporary exhibitions not based on their own collections. Exhibitions built around their own collections were always the less visited ones. We may also conclude that the MAB audience consists mainly of external visitors<sup>4</sup>, in spite of the fact that the University offers a Fine Arts course. Officially a formal program involving the students and the museum does not exist and art professors do not often take the initiative of visiting the collection with their students.

If the numbers of visitors were to be estimated according to the excellence of collections, we would expect that MAC and IEB (USP) should have more visitors. However, IEB has fewer visitors because it is a research institute rather than a museum and the staff is more concerned with collection-based research than exhibiting the collection. The Visual Arts Collection is important for the study of the Brazilian Modernism Movement and part of it is in the permanent exhibit. However, the most visited section of IEB continues to be its library, which is uniquely equipped for the study of several fields of Brazilian culture. Opening hours also do not help much, as it is only opened during afternoons from Tuesday to Friday.

MAC has the best national and international modern and contemporary art collection in Brazil. The University of São Paulo has an Art course since 1970 and graduate Art courses since 1973 but there isn't any formal link between the museum and the Art Department of the School of Communication and Arts. University students are a minority of MAC's audience which is formed by a majority of elementary and secondary school groups. In the last two years the

number of school groups visits has increased due to the policy of guided tours at FIESP Cultural Center exhibitions (cf. table 3).

Year	General public	Groups	Total
1997	100,307	3,632 (3.4%)	103,939
1998	107,083	3,917 (3.5%)	111,000
1999	103,970	21,889 (17.4%)	125,859
2000	51,607	13,297 (20.5%)	64,904

Table 3 - Audience to MAC (1997-2000).

When accepting what is known today as the MAC collection, the University of São Paulo did not take into account neither specialized staff to take care of it nor any specific building to host it. Nevertheless, USP apparently felt that they could handle the collection. In USP, like in other Brazilian universities, collections have been accepted without much consideration for the consequences as far as conservation and care are concerned. Clearly, universities do not value the collections as they should and usually invest little money in conservation. If USP and other Brazilian universities would give more importance and financial and human resources to their museums, they would create a privileged *locus* to communicate with society, which demands a quick answer to its needs of educational and cultural programs. USP and other Brazilian universities should give more attention and spend more money to improve their museums, which could be a privileged locus to make links with society.

<sup>4</sup> For example, an Ancient Egypt Collection from the Louvre was presented in 2001, attracting thousands of visitors daily.

### Public programs

All 17 Brazilian university art museums offer activities to the general public. Some museums, however, are so inaccessible – hard to find in the campus, with limited opening hours and limited transportation facilities – that they in practice can be considered to be closed. This is the case of the Visual Arts Collection of IEB/USP and the D. João VI Museum of UFRJ<sup>5</sup>, resulting in a small number of visitors. These are usually regular visitors with specific interests, already familiar with both the collections and the museums' locations.

### *Exhibitions*

Exhibitions constitute the main public service offered by these museums. Exhibitions may display the museums' own collections or objects on loan, the latter usually through temporary exhibitions. As seen above, some of the Brazilian university art museums have a small number of objects in their collections, usually displayed in temporary exhibitions. The Brazilian Art Museum (MAB/FAAP) is known for producing exhibitions devoted to famous and/or controversial artists, attracting a large number of visitors. Other museums prefer to promote local art, presenting local artists, such as the UNICAMP Gallery and the Museum of Art and Popular Culture. In both cases the institutions target non-university audiences, similar to any other art museum.

### *Courses*

University art museums and galleries offer courses to the general public. The content of these courses is

specialized and of technical nature, including engraving, painting or embroidery arts. Frequently, the courses are given by external artists and specialists, instead of museum staff. Courses for elementary and secondary teachers are also offered, mainly given by museum staff. The exception is the Museum of Contemporary Art that has a group of teachers and professors in its staff, offering undergraduate and graduate courses.

I found that education promoted by Brazilian university art museums is mainly for the broad community and not for higher education students. In other countries there are many university art museums that promote higher education courses, like in Manchester, UK:

"At Manchester University the Whitworth Art Gallery is used annually for students of the post-graduate Art Gallery and Museum Studies diploma course for learning the process of mounting a major art exhibition in co-operation with staff of the gallery and a professional designer. There are many instances where university museum staff who are fully engaged in a curatorial role lecture to students as part of the curriculum of academic courses" (WARHURST 1992: 98).

Museum courses could be one way to attract new audiences to the exhibitions and other public programs if they were systematically offered within the specific profile of the museum collection and research. In Brazil, university students are the 'new' audience and non-university community the 'old' audience for almost all university museums.

### *Other public programs*

Music concerts, conferences, and even libraries that are opened to the general public may bring visitors to

<sup>5</sup> The D. João VI Museum is on the second floor of the Chancery Building of UFRJ and nowadays we need an authorization to visit it. The Visual Arts Collection of IEB is open from Tuesday to Friday from 2 to 5 PM.

the museum. University museums normally organise conferences and seminars for specialised audiences. All these events may bring more people to the museum. The challenge is to convert them into frequent visitors. This strategy works well if there is continuous offer of good and apprehensible exhibitions and activities.

The production of interesting exhibitions targeting both the academic audience and the general public has always been described as a challenge by museum professionals. According to Alma Wittlin:

"A compromise between a students' gallery and an exhibition for the general public is bound to end in failure. The student approaches the exhibits with a body of information and with a definite aim in mind; what the exhibition presents to him is but a supplement to an already more or less defined pattern of meaning. To the general public, however, the pattern, both of contents and form, is to be supplied by the exhibition, a complete experience which presupposes on the part of the spectator nothing but common sense. Any attempt at combining the two contradictory kinds of display, must leave part of either of the implied functions unfulfilled."<sup>6</sup>

Museums succeeded to surpass this difficulty by developing different kind of programs, and having a special design project to respond to the needs of different audiences. The great challenge is to attract new audiences and convert them into frequent visitors without losing old audiences. For example, the policy of presenting huge temporary exhibitions, as implemented by the Brazilian Art Museum of FAAP, results in a temporary increase of audience without the development of frequent visitors. Depending on the exhibit theme and importance of the displayed objects, people will come to the museum, but they will not necessarily come back again.

Among university art museums, few have good

permanent exhibits that may attract frequent visitors. In the Northeast, the Assis Chateaubriand Art Museum is an exception because even with a small collection, the museum is unique in the Northeast Region. In São Paulo, the Museum of Contemporary Art, after almost 40 years of existence, has just remodelled the permanent exhibition, displaying part of its modern and contemporary art collections, and offering the possibility for the visitors to repeat the visit.

There are many ways to attract new audiences to a museum: good permanent exhibitions, temporary exhibits, music concerts, conferences, guided visits. It is likely to be the continuous and systematic work, however, which will guarantee the return of public.

#### *Systematic activities for new audiences*

During my research I found some examples of this systematic work aimed at increasing audiences.

The Museum of Art of the Federal University of Ceará (MAUC/UFC) is promoting an art workshop both for university students and employees. The workshop intends to produce, after periodical meetings, a collective work of art. Simultaneously, several workshop participants are working as trainees or volunteers in the museum, providing schools guided visits and taking care of the Museum's Internet site.

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MAC/USP) maintains a permanent programme that includes an exhibition and workshop especially designed for handicapped people and another for 4 to 10 year old children and their teachers. The museum also offers a year-long programme for senior citizens. As part of the

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<sup>6</sup> A. Wittlin, quoted in SEVD (1971: 180).

intellectual accessibility programme, the museum provides several courses on modern and contemporary art history, on art appreciation and interpretation, semester courses on drawing and workshops for the community and the general public, and a special elementary teacher's training programme. MAC/USP also attempts to attract new audiences among students, professors and employees who spend the whole day in the campus. The Museum's Education and Cultural Action Division has therefore prepared, in 1999, 2000 and 2001, several activities for freshmen who were invited to interpret, look up information at the museum's Internet site, draw and discuss previously chosen works of art. MAC also intends to invite each school for a visit and provide specially designed activities for teachers, staff and students. The museum is also preparing 30 minutes gallery talks given by staff on Fridays at lunch hour, in an effort to attract visitors of the museum's restaurant (ALMEIDA & MARTINS 2000).

The Leopoldo Gotuzzo Art Museum (MALG/UFPel) began providing courses to the university

community<sup>7</sup> and offering its facilities to host the art courses of the Art Department. The Museum also develops undergraduate training programmes in order to foster a better relationship with the Humanities departments and therefore attract new audiences from these fields. However, Brazilian university art museums still lack a clear policy for attracting audiences – stating the target audience before developing programmes to attract them. First of all, museums should know who are their old and new audiences. Nowadays society is pressing universities to respond to community needs. Museums are institutions that could be the link between university and society, offering motivating and apprehensible educational and cultural public programmes.

The constitution of UMAC will surely bring new ideas and exchange of important experiences that will help Brazilian university museums find new ways to satisfy the demands of society.

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<sup>7</sup> For example: Art History, Image Interpretation, History-art-architecture of Pelotas city, among others.

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