

English

## Paulo Silveira

### The presentation of a consolidated identity in *100 Years of Visual Arts at the Arts Institute at UFRGS: Three Essays*

Translated by Ana Carolina Azevedo

Like any urban center, the city of Porto Alegre has the satisfaction of praising its public or private establishments in which it takes pride, especially those that remain stubbornly resilient albeit the unpredictability of their conditions. Among these institutions, there are a few that deserve to be paid special attention, for they integrate that what we may consider a front line that promotes, at the same time, the participation in the construction of local identity and the effort of inclusion of its agents in the mobility of Brazilian cultural system. The offer of organized, successful and propagating knowledge and training makes it even more important.

Among the main venues to which the intellectuals and creative minds from its whereabouts dedicate their affection is the Arts Institute. The nostalgic ones, who are most zealous of their memories and less attentive to the modernization of designations, still call it Fine Arts Institute, a notorious authority in Music, Visual Arts and Drama schooling in Undergraduate and Graduate levels in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. Its face is its main building, the aged “*prédio do Belas-Artes*” [The Fine Arts Building], which has interestingly become a symbol for the everyday bystanders who know it. Many believe that in its facade advanced in years one may perceive the definitive image of its birth certificate. However, that is not likely. That is a symbolic assumption. The building is even older than it looks. We cannot peer into its body.

Its administration and most of its activities are allocated in the Arts Institute's main building, a centenary institution, established in 1908. Its administrative headquarters is comprised of a building that was finished in the beginning of the 40's and is nowadays a part of our urban memory. It has a ground floor and eight floors, and it is situated next to the east end of downtown Porto Alegre (a region which, along with its adjacencies, still preserves some important buildings regarding the city's history). The building is neighbor to other buildings aged more or less the same, spaced tightly in a moderately narrow pathway on a hill at Senhor dos Passos St. Because of its special urban situation and thanks to the search of

innovative solutions for the period, a group of teachers linked to the Architecture course (housed at the then-called Institute of Fine Arts, which would also house the first Urbanism course in Brazil) designed the building's vertical layout and modernist rectilinear façade, in an appropriate fashion to its time and unmindful of the past. The building's main block was built some time between 1941 and 1943, and completed between 1952 and 1953 with the construction of workshops with abundant natural lighting and the Pinacoteca's addition). Even though the main building and its annexed building (purchased in the 60's) are small-scale, the Institute, imbued with its symbolic value, may be considered the most important edification of its surroundings. The school aimed at meeting the expectations of becoming a “University of the Arts” after the war. A detailed survey of these origins can be found in the historical archive of the Arts Institute (located at UFRGS' Downtown Campus) or in the thesis *Origens do Instituto de Artes da UFRGS: etapas entre 1908-1962 e contribuições na constituição de expressões de autonomia no sistema de artes visuais do Rio Grande do Sul* [Origins of the Arts Institute at UFRGS: stages from the year 1908 to 1962 and contributions in the creation of expressions of autonomy in the Visual Arts of Rio Grande do Sul], written in 2002 by Ciro Simon, a previous Professor and Director of the Institute, for the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul's Graduate Program in History's coursework. In spite of this thesis, of several publications for decades afterwards and despite several records, a comprehensive publication for distribution was still lacking. Above all, one that could bring a larger quantity of illustrations of the production of artists linked directly or indirectly to the Arts Institute and its history. Since it is impossible to study art in the country's extreme south without understanding its unparalleled role and its relevance in the region at the same time, such publication is extremely urgent. Its uniqueness includes the confrontation between complimentary speeches and accusations of “conservatism of the academic environment,” sometimes maliciously hurled by resentful ones in denial, varying in intensity as per their period of occurrence in time. However, there remains no doubt that the Arts Institute (“IA”, as it is warm-heartedly called by students, teachers and technicians) is essential for the qualification of the arts in the State.

The portion of the community keen about Visual Arts is being very well serviced by the Arts Institute Centenary Program. The Program's target audience may find relevant information on the commemorative volume *100 anos de artes plásticas no Instituto de Artes da UFRGS: três ensaios* [100 Years of Fine Arts at the Arts

*Institute at UFRGS: Three Essays*], published by Editora da UFRGS in 2012 (264 pages, ISBN 978-85-386-180-7), written by professors Blanca Brites, Icleia Borsa Cattani, Maria Amélia Bulhões and Paulo Gomes, the latter having written the book's opening chapter, *Academismo e Modernismo: possíveis diálogos* [Academicism and Modernism: Possible Dialogues]. In his chapter, Gomes presents the regionalism and academicism in Rio Grande do Sul during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, the professors and the students, the creation of teaching activities, the academic theses needed from the end of the 30's for the admission of professors in the University of Porto Alegre, "giving art teaching a scholar aspect that, until then, wasn't even considered", p. 57) and other relevant aspects that are sometimes picturesque, but still reflect a critical eye.

What we noticed is that the institution, albeit maintaining a severe and strongly fluent hierarchical structure, did not feature any cooperative management project, at least not until the late 50's. If that prevented an effective progress in terms of a libertarian thought, in the sense of proposing an art school that stimulated the free manifestation of individuality, at least – and most certainly thanks to its strength – it made room for the consolidation and permanence of the Institute in its most crucially problematic times, such as its annexation by the University of Porto Alegre and, soon thereafter, its following separation. (p. 72).

In the chapter *Apontamentos sobre construções visuais* [Notes on Visual Constructions], Brites aims at pointing out the Institute's role as "the deployer of creative powers" in "the training and legitimation of visual production" in the State. The author recalls the Pan-American Art Salon in 1958 and its historical context, along with the Institute's, drawing comparisons between artists and situations, reaching as far as the presentation of the Salon of Visual Arts at UFRGS, which happened four times since the early 70's.

The Salons kept the same schedule (Selection Committee, Exhibition of Selected Artwork and Awards-giving), but they did not only showcase the artistic production of the period, but, above all, by displaying the various faces of the oldest art teaching institution in the State, they functioned as thermometers for the period. (p. 116).

Cattani and Bulhões share the authorship of *Experiências de ruptura nas artes visuais* [Disruptive Experiences in Visual Arts], seeking to elaborate a comprehensive panorama of the recent years. Here, too, the approach style is based on the enumeration of artists, their circles and contributions regarding the system to which they belong, this time increasing the approach to engagements as languages advance. Certainly, its main highlight is the authors' acknowledgment of the deep significance of the creation of a

Graduate Program in Visual Arts, with which they keep professional ties. In fact, regarding the incrementation of the State's contemporary artistic training, nothing compares to the theoretical and visual quality provided by PPGAV's professors and former alumni, zealous for the relations with other programs in the country and constantly attentive to international academic opportunities. The former situation showcased the non-traditional as an exception; the present one, however, displays different hues than that.

Modernity would begin suffering its most significant changes in the 80's, for – as aforementioned – its arrival had been late here, and it had already been filtered and neutralized by a market and consumers who were after more traditional ways of expression. The local art system was changed significantly as it tried to keep up to date with the updating of the international movements from that decade, and most of these changes came from the Arts Institute itself (p. 122).

In the end, the book still offers a most welcome chronology of the Institute, elaborated by Gomes, covering of 1908 to 2010, the year of implementation of the Bachelor's degree in history of art, with the already established courses of Bachelor and master's degree in Visual Arts, would complete the full occupation of the classrooms of the MI in three shifts. The chronology also features a list of professors who taught at the Department of Visual Arts (or the department that preceded it) and their dates of entrance and exit, from 1908 to 2010. The publishers finish their job with the English versions of all essays.

The volume was thoroughly welcomed and enjoyed a wide acceptance in its introducing at the beginning of the school year of 2013. Printed in horizontal format (24x20) and efficiently, clearly, securely and fairly organized by Mário Röhnelt. Visually, it remains as sober as ever, balancing its contents between texts and (many) pictures. Many indeed – more than 150 images, all printed in color, except for historical documental photographs, including scenes from some events. The visual production of most artist teachers is represented. We say "most" because, unfortunately, we were not able to publish all of them – but what is missing may be completed in the future, in a possible second edition. The Arts Institute has an ongoing editorial production and new publications shall come in the wake of the daily life from the beginning of this second centenary.

English

## REFERENCE

BRITES, Blanca; CATTANI, Icleia Borsa; BULHÕES, Maria Amélia; GOMES, Paulo. 100 anos de artes plásticas no Instituto de Artes da UFRGS: três ensaios. [*100 Years of Fine Arts at the Arts Institute at UFRGS: Three Essays.*] Porto Alegre: Editora da UFRGS, 2012.

## CAPTIONS OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The images in this article can be viewed in the version in Portuguese.

Figure 1. Jury members of *I Exhibition of Fine Art of Rio Grande do Sul*, 1939: from left to right, Luiz Maristany de Trias, Ernani Days Correa, and João Fahrion

Figure 2. Fernando Corona, logo of the IBA, 1958 (fiftieth anniversary)

Figure 3. Cover and spread of *100 anos de artes plásticas no Instituto de Artes da UFRGS: três ensaios*, 2012

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