Art of the Americas placed in continental context

Museums from Buenos Aires to Toronto collaborate on an unprecedented scale as institutions broaden their horizons

CULTURAL EXCHANGES

New York. Curators across the Americas are collaborating on an unprecedented scale with exhibitions being co-organised by museums from Buenos Aires to Toronto, not just in Southern California where museums in Los Angeles have been working with South American partners on the Getty-funded Pacific Standard Time 2 show for 2017.

In New York, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) is due to open “Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1935-1985” in March (until 12 July). Sixty years ago the first MoMA survey of the Modern architecture of South America was organised by one Uruguayan curator, “Henry-Russell Hitchcock travelled for three weeks with a photographer,” says Barry Bergdoll, the professor of art history at Columbia University who is also an MoMA’s former head of architecture. This time Bergdoll has co-organised “Latin America in Construction” with curators from Argentina and Brazil, along with Patricia del Real, a MoMA curatorial assistant and architectural historian who has lived in Chile. The curators are being advised by an advisory committee from across Latin America.

“It’s not a coincidence that this is happening now,” says Holly Block, the director of the Bronx Museum of Art, who co-organised “Beyond the Supersquare” (until 11 January), about Modernist Latin American architecture’s influence on contemporary art, with the Colombia-born curator María Inés Rodríguez. “When countries do well economically, more exchange happens. It seems like every city in the US is trying to find a second city in Brazil,” Black says.

“The endless comparisons with Europe, means curators are asking new questions. There are ideological issues at stake—what are your dream projects?” The Terra took the idea to the AGO, which responded positively. Georgiana Uhlířská, the associate curator of Canadian art there, says that the exhibition is possible because of the Terra’s funding and because institutions are “looking outwards” across the Americas. Putting works, including familiar national icons, into a broader Pan-American context means curators are asking new questions. The endless comparisons with Europe, where “you’ll always be the provincial”, become irrelevant, she says.

Collectors with ties in North and South America, such as Patricia Phelps de Cisneros and Estrellita Brodsky, are giving unprecedented support to similar collaborations. Brodsky, who is an art historian, has endowed curatorial positions in Latin American art at MoMA and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. As US museums hire more Latin American specialists, these curators are promoting international collaboration from within.

In brief

Return of Wadsworth’s LeWitt

A mural by Sol LeWitt is returning to public view at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art for the first time in 15 years. The mural’s unveiling is part of a $33m renovation of the museum in Hartford, Connecticut, the first phase of which is due to open on 31 January. LeWitt’s Wall Drawing #352 (1960-61), right, anchors a new gallery devoted to the Hartford-born artist. The Wadsworth, one of the oldest public art museums in the US, has more work by LeWitt than any artist in its collection (around 270 pieces, including four wall drawings). The mural has been obscured since 1999, when the space was converted to offices. LeWitt originally conceived the mural for the city’s civic centre in 1960, but withdrew the commission after the city council asked him to alter the design following public complaints. The Wadsworth stepped up, raised funds to acquire the work and installed it on its second floor mezzanine the following year. J.H.

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A Centenary Survey of Major Works

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