

FLETCHER, Valerie J. *Crosscurrents of Modernism: Four Latin American Pioneers: Diego Rivera. Joaquín Torres-García. Wilfredo Lam, Matta.* Washington, D.C.: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in association with the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992. English and Spanish text. Color plates. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. 295p.

This work is the catalog of an exhibition held in the summer of 1992 at the Hirshhorn Museum. The purpose of the exhibition was to show that "from the mid-1910s through the 1940s a number of Latin Americans not only assimilated but also actively confronted and altered vanguard European aesthetics to suit their own cultural vision". Thus, they are examined not only as pioneer modernists but innovators who transformed European-originated styles into a cross-culturally diverse content anticipating international modernism.

There are generational and stylistic differences between the artists selected. The Mexican, Diego Rivera, and the Uruguayan, Joaquín Torres-García, are the earliest representatives of crosscultural modernism. The former is defined in terms of his Cubist style and Mexican nationalist themes; the latter as a geometric formalist unconcerned with a local focus for such an aesthetic. The latter representatives are the Cuban, Wilfredo Lam, and the Chilean, Roberto Matta. Both are Surrealists, the former inculcating themes of *santería* into his work, the latter indifferent to local themes.

The thesis which this work presents is not difficult to accept, indeed has even become commonplace. The cross-fertilization of Western European and Latin American modernist

aesthetics which occurred in the first half of this century contributed to the emergence of the international modernist style in the latter half. What is more original, and convincing, in this work is its assertion that the Latin American role was not as a passive recipient of aesthetics but as an active contributor and transformer of them.

What is most unfortunate in this book and the exhibition it reflects is that it purports to prove its thesis in relation to Latin America when in reality it represents only Spanish America. Brazil is ignored. This *vacuum* is greatly to the disadvantage of the thesis presented .

Rivera's echo in the renowned Cândido Portinari is not heard. The transformation of the curvilinear Cubism of Fernand Léger into Brazilian landscapes by Tarsila do Amaral is unobserved. The spare formalism of Vicente do Rego Monteiro, concentrating on themes of the Brazilian Northeast, is not seen. The stark, early abstractionism which Lasar Segall applied to life in Rio de Janeiro does not appear.

Consequently, the influence which these artists had in the development of Brazilian abstract expressionists, such as Antônio Bandeira or Ivan Serpa, exceptional representatives of the international modernist style, is not traced. Worse, by ignoring Brazil in this thesis, an observer must wonder why the most extraordinary plastic manifestation of international modernism in Latin America, the architecture, landscape design, and sculpture of Brasília, even occurred in that country.

An exhibition more to be recommended for its breadth and inclusiveness on the above theme was the Museum of Modern Art's *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, in the summer of 1993 (catalog compiled by Waldo Rasmussen), very powerfully showing the extent and weight of Brazil's role in Latin American modernism. The Hirshhorn work is adequate in its insight about cross-cultural modernist transformations in Spanish America. It falls short, however, in representing them for Latin America and, therefore, its own thesis.

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