



**POPAU, POP, OR AN  
“AMERICAN WAY OF LIVING”?**  
AN INTRODUCTION TO ARACY AMARAL’S  
“FROM THE STAMPS TO THE BUBBLE”

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The writings of Aracy Amaral, an academic, critic, and curator active since the mid-1960s, are a vital reference for the study of art history in Brazil, and though they have been gathered in several collections in Portuguese, her publications have been vastly undertranslated into English.<sup>1</sup> After working as a freelance curator and critic in close contact with avant-garde artists from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro including Mira Schendel, Cildo Meireles, Hélio Oiticica, and Wesley Duke Lee, she was the director of São Paulo’s Pinacoteca between 1975 and 1979, and of the Contemporary Art Museum at the University of São Paulo (MAC-USP) from 1982 to 1986. Since 1988, Amaral has taught art history at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism at USP. Among her many articles and reviews covering 20th-century art in Brazil, the article translated here, titled “Dos carimbos à bolha” (“From the Stamps to the Bubble”), examines the effects of the 9th São Paulo Biennial (September 1967–January 1968), remembered to this day as the “Pop” Biennial, due to the remarkable number of participating Pop artists from the United States, whose work had not been seen before in Brazil. Amaral’s text addresses the adequacy of Pop as a taxonomy for

1 Among her most celebrated essay collections are *Arte e o meio artístico: Entre a feijoada e o x-burger* (São Paulo: Nobel, 1983, and São Paulo: Editora 34, 2013) and *Textos do Trópico de Capricórnio: Artigos e ensaios (1980–2005)* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2006).

Brazilian art in the 1960s. Laying out the plethora of factors—both local and imported—that converged into so-called Pop in Brazil, it exposes how the conflicted relationship between a “Brazilian reality” and an “American way of living” was threatening the development of a locally relevant artistic idiom. As such, this introduction seeks to provide the historical context needed to enable a contemporary reading of her text, in light of current debates over the expansion of canonical labels like Pop to non-Western locales.

Over the past fifteen years, a number of exhibitions in Brazil have used Pop to focus on the works of a selection of (predominantly male) artists produced in the mid-sixties; in particular, authors including Cacilda Texeira da Costa, Paulo Herkenhoff, Paulo Sérgio Duarte, and Sônia Salzstein have used this expanded notion of Pop to reflect on how a perceived Latin American collective consciousness was torn between the popular myths of Che versus Coca-Cola.<sup>2</sup> Most recently, the exhibitions *International Pop*, at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and *The World Goes Pop*, at London’s Tate Modern, have displayed works produced in the 1960s and early 1970s under the umbrella of Pop, to reflect on a shared moment of socio-political upheaval worldwide, engendered by sexual liberation, Cold War politics, the proliferation of the mass media, and consumer culture. While these perspectives have aided in the reconstruction of a history of the sixties, they have sometimes marginalized discussion about the very adequacy of this label—a discussion that a reading of Amaral’s text reopens today.

Published in the respected Sunday literary supplement of the São Paulo newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*, “From the Stamps to the Bubble” was written for an intellectual and informed readership, familiar with current cultural debates in Brazil. The text appeared for the first time in print in April 1968, just a few months after the closure of the 9th Biennial. Proving to be one of the most influential expositions

2 Among the most significant texts and volumes on Pop art in Brazil are *Arte de contradicções: Pop, realismo y política, Brasil-Argentina 1960: Fundación Proa, Julio–Septiembre 2012*, ed. Paulo Herkenhoff, Rodrigo Alonso, and Gonzalo Aguilar (Buenos Aires: PROA, 2012), exhibition catalog; Paulo Sérgio Duarte, *The '60s: Transformations of Art in Brazil* (Rio de Janeiro: Campos Gerais, 1998); *Aproximações do espírito Pop, 1963–1968*, ed. Cacilda Texeira da Costa (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna, 2003); and Sônia Salzstein, “Pop As a Crisis in the Public Sphere,” in *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 88–109. See also Paulo Herkenhoff, “Introduction,” in *Arte de contradicções*.

at the time, the Biennial attracted over 150,000 visitors that year. With representations from sixty-one countries (the highest numbers for the Biennial since its inception in 1951) and boasting record sales, the Pop Biennial catalyzed a crucial moment of reflection for Brazilian artists and critics alike about the relevance of this internationally influential style.<sup>3</sup>

The US showcased works by Edward Hopper and twenty-one New York-based Pop artists (including Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg). The participating European countries included France, Britain, Italy, Poland, and Switzerland, which exhibited works respectively by Baldacini Cesar, William Turnbull and Richard Smith (winner of the grand prize), Michelangelo Pistoletto, Tadeusz Kantor, and Peter Stämpfli, all of whom subscribed to figurative tendencies. The marked difference with the previous edition of the Biennial, where abstraction prevailed as an overarching trend (Vasarely and Burri had been awarded the grand prize in 1965), provoked widespread anticipation in the months leading up to the inauguration. This sentiment was spurred by Rauschenberg's award of the Golden Lion at the 1964 Venice Biennale: because his works challenged the supremacy of abstraction—especially of abstract expressionism in the US—Pop had become a fertile source of debate worldwide.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast, the local press widely criticized the Biennial's selection committee for the Brazilian representation. After a nationwide open call for participation, 390 artists were invited to exhibit, suggesting an apparent lack of selection criteria. Even Ciccillo Matarazzo Sobrinho, the Biennial's founder, who continued to hold the reins of

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3 For in-depth studies of the São Paulo Biennial, see *Cultural Anthropophagy: The 24th Bienal de São Paulo 1998*, ed. Pablo Lafuente and Lisette Lagnado (London: Afterall, 2015); Liliana Mendes, IX Bienal Notes, from *Pesquisa sobre Ciccillo Matarazzo: Parte 1* (Research on Ciccillo Matarazzo: Part 1) (Conducted September 1994 to October 1995), São Paulo Biennial Foundation, Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, São Paulo; Isobel Whitelegg, "The Bienal de São Paulo: Unseen/Undone (1969–1981)," *Afterall* online, no. 22 (Autumn/Winter 2009), [www.afterall.org/journal/issue.22/the.bienal.de.so.paulo.unseen.undone.19691981](http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.22/the.bienal.de.so.paulo.unseen.undone.19691981) (last accessed January 2015).

4 Herbert Pee, director of the Ulm Museum and commissioner of the German contribution to the Biennial, featuring the works of Rainer Kuchenmeister and Josua Reichert (respectively associated with "Informal New Figuration" and letterset printmaking), voiced his opposition to Pop Art, which he understood as a uniquely North American style, which ought to be rejected by other countries. "Bienal: Comissario alemão contra Pop," *Folha de São Paulo*, September 7, 1967.

the Biennial Foundation, commented, “It’s absurd! In the entirety of our modern art history 393 artists have never existed, even if those of a mediocre level are included.”<sup>5</sup>

In the months leading up to the Biennial, it seemed that the style set to prevail at this particular Biennial among the Brazilians was New Objectivity, a term derived from the pivotal exhibition of the same name (featuring many of the same artists) held earlier that year at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>6</sup> New Objectivity asserted a synthesis of the recent Brazilian formulations of Neo-Concretism, Popcreto, New Realism, and Magic Realism, yet—in a distinction clearly stated by Hélio Oiticica in the exhibition’s catalog—marked a separation from Pop, Op, Hard-Edge Abstraction, and Nouveau Réalisme.<sup>7</sup> One article in particular, published to coincide with the Biennial, provided “practical lessons in modern art” by singling out each movement represented in the show: Kinetic Art, Optical Chromatism, Pop, Expressionism, Surrealism, Realism, Neo-Realism, Geometric Art, Abstraction, Op, and New Objectivity.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, in an important preview dossier on the Biennial, José Geraldo Vieira chose to use Pop—and to a lesser degree Op—to describe most works from the USA, Brazil, and Western Europe. He observed how Pop (used as a blanket definition) demonstrated a “democratization of artistic processes” and a “dominance of ludic interaction,”<sup>9</sup> both attributes that formed bases for criticism of the Brazilian contingent. In the article translated here, Amaral also picks up on the “ludic element” in many works at the Biennial, criticizing them for promoting an “art for everyone available to everyone.” In a further text published in late 1967, she described the Biennial as a “nervous and feverish expression of the

5 Flávio de Aquino, “Os Milhões na Bienal,” in *Fatos Fotos*, no. 349, October 7, 1967.

6 The exhibition *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* was held at the MAM-RJ between the 6th and 30th of April, 1967. The Brazilian interpretation of New Objectivity was completely distinct from Weimar Germany’s *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Both the Biennial and *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* featured works by Antônio Dias, Rubens Gerchman, Hélio Oiticica, Marcello Nitsche, Gláuco Rodrigues, Nelson Leirner, and Geraldo de Barros, to name a few.

7 Hélio Oiticica, “Esquema geral da Nova Objetividade,” in *Nova Objetividade brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, April 1967), 4–18.

8 Anonymous, “Aprenda a chamar pelo nome certo as coisas desta Bienal” (Learn How to Call by Their Right Names the Works in This Biennial), *Jornal da Tarde*, São Paulo, September 30, 1967.

9 José Geraldo Vieira, “Pop Art da IX Bienal,” *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, September 17, 1967. The preview dossier as a whole included texts by Mário Schenberg, Décio Pignatari, Michel Ragon, Gillo Dorfles, and William C. Seitz.

lost artistic atmosphere of today's Brazil," lamenting a rampant lack of quality in craftsmanship.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, Flavio de Cavalho, the only Brazilian artist to be awarded a prize, criticized his peers (including the Americans) for lacking "any depth greater than the day to day," for producing works that looked like "children's toys."<sup>11</sup>

During the course of the Biennial, a further reaction from newspapers helped to coin a new terminology for addressing Brazilian artworks and to question Brazilian Pop's supposedly derivative affiliations. This was Mário Pedrosa's term "Popistas of Underdevelopment," which he used to define the works of Antônio Dias and Rubens Gerchman. These artists were among the foremost members of the Neo-Realist group, which was formed with the signing of a manifesto in 1965 in Rio; in 1967 they had also subscribed to Oiticica's near-comprehensive label "New Objectivity." Pedrosa resorted to a new definition to rethink Brazil's position in relation to US Pop. By juxtaposing "Pop" (seen as the cultural apogee of US capitalism) with "Underdevelopment" (the condition associated with Brazil's economic status), he addressed what he perceived as the basic incongruence between Brazilian Pop and US Pop: the latter aptly reflected the pervasiveness of an already established consumer culture; the former, meanwhile, reflected the effects of foreign investment and economic growth, and of Brazil's rapid transition toward that financial model.<sup>12</sup>

In a comparable vein, Pignatari used the term "Popau" (a combination of Pop and *Pau*, wood), in reference to the "Manifesto of Pau-Brasil Poetry" by the Brazilian poet and essayist Oswald de Andrade, published in March 1924.<sup>13</sup> The manifesto expressed a desire for Brazilian culture to be exported, like a crop of the native Pau-Brasil wood. Andrade suggested that Brazilian culture owed nothing to European influences, which should in turn be affected by Brazil. He wrote, for

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10 The "cause" referenced by Amaral in the article concerns the formulation of an educated and sophisticated Brazilian art, which could also act as a social tool. Aracy Amaral, "Arte sem educação e/ou o Brasil visto de fora" (Art without Education and/or Brazil Seen from the Outside), *Correio da Manhã*, São Paulo, September 27, 1967, accessed as press clipping, São Paulo Biennial Archives, 1967.

11 Flavio de Carvalho, quoted in "Unico brasileiro premiado na Bienal já andou nu pela rua," *Jornal do Brasil*, São Paulo, September 24, 1967.

12 Mário Pedrosa, "Do Pop americano ao sertanejo dias" (From American Pop to Sertanejo Dias), *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, October 29, 1967. *Sertanejo* is a Portuguese term that refers to a Brazilian equivalent of the cowboy at the western frontier.

13 Pau is usually translated as "wood" or "stick," yet it can also mean "penis," offering a satirical reading of the "Manifesto," as well as Decio Pignatari's neologism.

instance, that “Wagner is submerged before the Carnival lines of Botafogo,” and that “[Pau-Brazil is] the counterweight of native originality to neutralize academic conformity.”<sup>14</sup> The manifesto was also a precursor of the author’s 1928 “Anthropophagic Manifesto”—a key resource for Brazilian artists throughout the 20th century, which described Brazilian culture as cannibalistic, devouring, and digesting international styles and currents.<sup>15</sup> This second text built on the metaphor of culture as a material export, considering the concurrent effects of imported ideas and vernacular tradition. By coining the term “Popau,” Pignatari sought to establish how Pop could also fit such an import-export paradigm.<sup>16</sup> However, in the context of his article, the use of this terminology also betrays resentment toward a weakness or a lack of erudition among Brazilians: “If the Brazilian artists took the trouble to read at least the Oswald de Andrade manifestos—‘Pau Brazil’ and ‘Anthropophagic’—some day, surely, we could hope to have a strong and authentic Brazilian popau art. . . .”<sup>17</sup>

In response to the increasing associations made between Brazilian works and American Pop (which, as we have seen, often resulted in pejorative comments on Brazilian art), Rubens Gerchman stated in an interview in 1966:

It is time we put an end to this nonsensical perception that we have been influenced by US pop art. A few US pop artists such as Larry Rivers, Jasper Johns, Claes Oldenburg are important for us, indeed, in the sense that they revealed the potential use of new materials and subject matters; however, their influence has been exerted individually, not as a group or school. I have been to New York and have seen the “pop” they are doing there. I think it is poor, decadent even.<sup>18</sup>

14 Oswald de Andrade, “Manifesto of Pau Brazil Poetry,” translated by Stella M. de Sá Rego, *Latin American Literary Review* 14, no. 27, special issue on Brazilian Literature (Jan–Jun 1986), 184–87.

15 The most cited phrase from the “Anthropophagic Manifesto” is “Tupi or not Tupi: that is the question,” a tribute both to the Amazonian indigenous tribe that notoriously carries on cannibalistic traditions and to Hamlet’s iconic dilemma.

16 Decio Pignatari, “IX Antevisão e reparos” (IX Preview and Fixes), *Correio da Manhã*, São Paulo, September 7, 1967.

17 Original: “Se os artistas brasileiros se dessem ao trabalho de ler, pelo menos, os manifestos de Oswald de Andrade—Pau Brasil e Antropofografo—por certo poderíamos alimentar a esperança de têr-mos um dia uma fortissimo e autêntica arte popau brasileira. . . .” Ibid.

18 Rubens Gerchman, quoted in José Augusto Ribeiro, “The 1960s Brazilian Avant-Garde: Proposals and Opinions,” in Teixeira da Costa, *Aproximações do espírito pop*, 158.

Gerchman's words reflect what many artists and intellectuals felt toward Pop, which became the scapegoat for much of the criticism attracted by the Brazilian works at the Biennial.

Amaral's text, in fact, views artists' reliance on Pop-like techniques as the symptom of the Americanization of Brazilian culture, an association that was consolidated especially after the 9th Biennial. Nevertheless, while her peers focused on the superficial aesthetic influences of Pop, she delved deeper into the motivations behind such similarities, focusing on how artists were reacting to the Americanization of Brazilian culture, rather than on notions of artistic derivation. Amaral was aware that the US was one of the principal investors in Brazilian industry and infrastructure, and that it supported the military dictatorship in place in Brazil since 1964. A leitmotif in her writing from the period is the demand for a socially relevant art for which the tools provided by Pop seemed inadequate. Amaral noted a lack of artistic education and of "devotion to the cause" of developing a "true cultural base" for the country, a base that she believed the regime itself had the responsibility to produce by sponsoring university courses and especially by diminishing illiteracy (which stood at over 50% at the time).<sup>19</sup> In this context, "From the Stamps to the Bubble" perhaps anticipated the infamous extraconstitutional Institutional Act Number Five (AI-5) issued in December of that year. The AI-5 marked the entrenchment of state repression through legitimized forms of censorship, federal intervention in the running of public institutions such as universities and newspapers, and the abolition of habeas corpus. No form of political dissent was tolerated, and political prisoners were notoriously tortured and sometimes disappeared completely. As Claudia Calirman explains, Brazil after 1968 was a "changed nation, marked by disillusionment with traditional politics, rejection of the military regime, and disbelief in all forms of authoritarianism," entering the so-called *anos de chumbo*, or "years of lead," a six-year period of hostilities between left and right in dictatorship-era Brazil.<sup>20</sup>

Regardless of the criticism addressed toward many of the Brazilian works in the Biennial, artists were aware of the need to produce socially relevant, and above all intellectually accessible, art that would counter

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- 19 Amaral, "Arte sem educação"; Mario Schenberg, "Representação brasileira na IX Biennial de São Paulo," *Correio da Manhã*, São Paulo, September 27, 1967.
- 20 Claudia Calirman, *Brazilian Art under Dictatorship: Antonio Manuel, Artur Barrio, and Cildo Meireles* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 5.



what critic and poet Ferreira Gullar had described as an “aristocratic view that placed art at the margins of life and its problems”—a view that stemmed from the widely held perception that Brazil’s art scene was largely elitist and inaccessible to broader segments of the public.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, some critics, including Schenberg and Pedrosa, believed that many of the Biennial’s works—despite, or perhaps because of, their supposed lack of sophistication—were successful in engaging audience participation, from both adults and children. Pedrosa wrote that at the Biennial “art ceased to be that boring distant, albeit terribly respected, thing,” finally enabling “the population” to embrace it.<sup>22</sup> Schenberg, on the other hand, claimed that the Brazilian room was symptomatic of a generational shift; he saw advantages in young artists’ “lack of preparation” and “inexperience,” leading him to believe that “what is new is ultimately irreducible to what is *old*.”<sup>23</sup>

Amaral’s article similarly advocates the participatory approaches of artworks at the Biennial, and especially their use of participation to spread political messages. Among Amaral’s main examples are the

21 Gullar also questioned the quality and craftsmanship of the work on display and whether such international influences were interfering with the Brazilian artistic process. Amaral’s article, in fact, strengthens an association between Pop Art and a general will to disseminate the work of art to a broader portion of the public, reflecting on how artists were renegotiating the distribution and purpose of their works. This discussion was invariably paired with the omnipresent concern for imitation and derivativeness, which led her to expose the issue of Americanization, epitomized by Pop Art, in local artistic production. Ferreira Gullar, “Opinião 65,” *Revista Civilização Brasileira* 1, no. 4 (September 1965), 221–25.

22 Mário Pedrosa, “A Bienal e a participação do povo,” *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, October 8, 1967.

23 Schenberg, “A representação brasileira.”



collective works *Domingo das Bandeiras (Flag Sunday)* and *Carimbos (Stamps)*, which have seldom been examined in print.<sup>24</sup> *Flag Sunday* was presented in two phases. The first took place during the winter of 1967, when Nelson Leirner, Flávio Motta (a professor of art at the University of São Paulo), and his students (among them the young artist Marcello Nitsche) planned to distribute silkscreened flags or banners on the streets of São Paulo, as a democratizing gesture designed to rebel against the exclusive gallery and museum apparatus.<sup>25</sup> The police prematurely ended the street event by confiscating the banners and dispersing its participants, under the pretext that the artists did not have a sales permit (although the banners were not being sold, but freely distributed). Despite the hostility solicited by *Flag Sunday*, Leirner and Motta, with the added cooperation of Carlos Scliar, Oiticica, Carlos Vergara, Farnese de Andrade, Gerchman, Dias, and other Rio de Janeiro artists, were able to restage the event the following year. Cloaked by the clamor of the Rio Carnival, the artists gathered in the General Osorio Square on February 18, 1968. Each of the participating artists designed a flag, which together referenced a mixture of themes, including football (in the flags by Gerchman and Leirner), still life painting (Carlos Scliar), *cordel* literature<sup>26</sup> (Antônio Dias), and political resistance (Oiticica, Samuel Spiegl). Among the flags that circulated most widely was Oiticica's "Seja marginal, seja herói" ("Be an Outcast, Be a Hero").<sup>27</sup> In keeping with a method he had used in the past, Oiticica based his image on one he found in a newspaper of the thief Alcir Figueira da Silva, who decided to commit suicide rather than face arrest after a bank robbery (Oiticica had previously used newspaper images of victims of the armed forces, such as the bandit Cara de Cavalo, killed by the police under falsified circumstances). Figueira da

24 The Centro Municipal de Arte Hélio Oiticica restaged the event *Flag Sunday* on October 4, 2014, in the Tiradentes Square in Rio de Janeiro. The *Stamps* are held in the Roger Wright Collection in São Paulo and have never been re-exhibited outside of the collection.

25 This form of antagonism toward the market was being voiced in São Paulo by Leirner, who along with Wesley Duke Lee and Geraldo de Barros had recently opened REX Gallery & Sons. The artists waged war against an art system that—according to them—lacked in exhibition platforms, publications, and bold critics, which in turn impeded the development of a young avant-garde and the formation of an effective collection of Brazilian national art. See "Warning: It Is War," *Rex Time*, no. 1, São Paulo, June 3, 1966. For a thorough analysis of the REX phenomenon, see Fernanda Lopes, *A experiência Rex: "Éramos o time do rei"* (São Paulo: Alameda, 2009).

26 *Cordels*, which literally means "strings," are brief stories or poems illustrated by woodcut prints, usually sold cheaply in markets and squares in northeastern Brazil.

27 In Portuguese, *marginal* has the double meanings of "outcast" and "marginal."

Silva's story was little remembered because it did not receive much attention from the media. Yet it was precisely this "marginality" that, for Oiticica, underscored how the media could only draw attention to a fraction of the crimes perpetrated by officials during that difficult time, and thus the extent to which the regime instilled fear in people's minds. With a similar polemical tone, Anna Maria Maiolino presented a flag with the words "Alta tensão" ("High Tension"); Cláudio Tozzi, a remastered image of Che Guevara.<sup>28</sup> As the banners were put on display, the Banda de Ipanema and the Mangueira Samba School joined the event, merging the demonstration with the carnival celebrations.

The following week, Scliar united the artists once again, this time to sell their banners at bargain prices, between 40 and 60 *cruzeiros novos* (the equivalent of USD 12–18 at the time).<sup>29</sup> Members of the public were invited to write comments about the banners and to deposit these in urns that, by resembling ballot boxes, were also symbols for democracy. The whole event was designed to approach as broad an audience as possible and to sensitize it to the potential of art to mobilize the public. Scliar devised the urn system as the last phase of *Flag Sunday*, seeking to encourage the public to examine what the flags stood for. Moreover, the act of placing opinions into an urn sealed a critical connection with Brazil's dictatorship, which did not permit democratic elections.

The second collective work referenced by Amaral is *Stamps*, a series of thirteen giant rubber-stamps (approximately A4 in size), each one designed by a different artist, including Acácio Assunção, Geraldo de Barros, Luís Gonzaga, Carmela Gross, Mário Gruber, Flávio Imperio, Renina Katz, Leirner, Motta, Nitsche, Samuel Szpigel, Caciporé Torres, and Tozzi. The stamps were exhibited at the IV Salão de Arte Moderna do Distrito Federal, in the Teatro Nacional Cláudio Santoro in Brasília, where the artists distributed to the public sheets of paper printed with the rubber stamps. Each stamp reflected its author's particular style, which resulted in a heterogeneous series. Tozzi reproduced the image of one of his previous works of a *chopp* (a draft beer)

28 Paulo Roberto de Oliveira Reis, *Exposições de arte—Vanguarda e política entre os anos 1965 e 1970* (PhD diss., Federal University of Paraná, Curitiba, Brazil, 2005), 172.

29 Mariana Filgueiras, "Mostra resgata bandeiras originais de Oiticica, Scliar e Vergara e refaz 'happening' histórico de 1968," *O Globo*, Rio de Janeiro, October 3, 2014, <http://oglobo.globo.com/cultura/artes-visuais/mostra-resgata-bandeiras-originais-de-oiticica-scliar-vergara-refaz-happening-historico-de-1968-14117672>.



*Stamps, 1967. 13 rubber and wood stamps, by Geraldo de Barros, Nelson Leirner, Flávio Imperio, Acácio Assunção, Caciporé Torres, Renina Katz, Flávio Motta, Carmela Gross, Mário Gruber, Cláudio Tozzi, Marcello Nitsche, Samuel Szpigel, and Luís Gonzaga. Image courtesy of the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo.*

with the slogan “I drink chopp, she thinks about marriage,” and Gonzaga presented a new elaboration of Warhol’s “Do It Yourself” paintings, perhaps commenting on critics’ persistent focus on technique—one of the most substantial sources of criticism of Brazil’s room at the São Paulo Biennial.<sup>30</sup> The work shows a feminine hand holding a dropper filled with liquid (meant to be colored red), the drops of which almost resemble spermatozoids. On the stamp’s side are instructions on how to fill in each section of the picture, with each number corresponding to a color. The image initially appears innocuous. However, should the spectator choose to engage with it and follow the instructions on how to color it, the red background and the few green and blue details would greatly enhance the image’s effect. Another stamp by Nitsche referenced political issues by presenting the footprint of a military boot, while Gross’s depicted a raised closed fist, a gesture symbolic of protest and mass mobilization.

30 These critiques include Amaral, “Arte sem educação,” and Schenberg, “A representação brasileira,” both in *Correio da Manhã* for September 27, 1967. Both articles lament a lack of quality in the manufacture of the works on display, which often seemed amateurish, particularly in comparison with the production quality of many foreign works.

*Stamps* and *Flag Sunday* had similar objectives: both were meant to be open and available to a wide public. The artists' collaborations in the production of these works strengthened the notion of an "art for everyone, available to everyone," as described by Amaral in her article: a democratizing gesture that still allowed each artist to maintain a unique visual language, uncompromised. Amaral's objective in focusing on these works, however, was not only to show how they reached out to wider audiences, but also to criticize the efficacy of their political messages. By using the phrase "art for everyone, available to everyone," she commented on the commonplace value of the artworks, on their lack of sophistication, and on their inability to produce any lasting effects—comparable to "bric-a-brac," "children's toys," and "Shanghai Town," all definitions used in the press.<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Buchloh, writing on the similar conjunction of Pop and participation in works by Andy Warhol, uses the expression "infantilized interaction" to describe the techniques Warhol used in his *Tango* and *Foxtrot* paintings, which presented simplified diagrams of the dances' steps. Buchloh claims that the mode of programmed aesthetic participation these encouraged degraded it "to the level of absolute farce,"<sup>32</sup> a statement that finds its counterpart in Amaral's notion of "art for everyone, available to everyone."

Placed as a counterpoint to *Stamps* and *Flag Sunday*, Nitsche's work *Bolha* (*Bubble*) earned Amaral's unreserved praise, which was particularly remarkable given that Nitsche was only twenty-six when "From the Stamps to the Bubble" was written. While at university he worked as an engraver, and he only became drawn to painting in the mid-sixties, under the growing influence of the Neo-Figurative movement and the aesthetics of Pop Art. Following the military coup, Nitsche's practice became increasingly sensitive to military and political themes, including the Vietnam War and the economic bond between Brazil and the United States that sustained the former's dictatorship. In 1966–67 he gravitated toward the REX Gallery,<sup>33</sup> where he

31 Flavio de Carvalho, quoted in "Unico brasileiro premiado na Bienal"; Pedrosa, "A Bienal a participação do povo."

32 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art: 1956–1966," in *Andy Warhol*, ed. Annette Michelson, *October Files 2* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 13–14.

33 Leirner, Lee, and de Barros founded REX Gallery & Sons in 1966. The gallery quickly became a point of reference for young artists, who were given the opportunity to exhibit their works and participate in the gallery's programming, which included lectures, film series, and the publication of a quarterly bulletin.

participated in a group show alongside other young talents. With some of the REX artists and his peers, Nitsche also collaborated in the realizations of *Stamps* and *Flag Sunday*. The time spent alongside the REX artists greatly informed his later output, especially in terms of spectator participation and the construction of environments (core concerns of REX founders Lee, Leirner, and de Barros). In 1967 Nitsche participated in the New Brazilian Objectivity exhibition at Rio's Museum of Modern Art and in the 9th Biennial, exhibiting, among other works,



Marcello Nitsche. *Bubble*, 1968. Mixed media installation, dimensions variable. Photograph of the artist with Aracy Amaral in the Pavilhão Cicillo Matarazzo, São Paulo, during the 10th São Paulo Biennial, 1969. Image courtesy of the Arquivo Histórico Wanda Swarc/Fundação de São Paulo. Photographer unknown.

*Mata Mosca (Fly Swatter)*, an extra-large papier-mâché hand holding a swatter.

*Bubble*, the concluding work in Amaral's article, represents a moment of culmination and rupture in Nitsche's artistic trajectory. Departing from ideas about environments and the intelligibility of artistic language, Nitsche developed a new proposition: a large inflatable fabric balloon that was slowly inflated each hour by a machine. Filled with air, *Bubble* almost completely occupied the exhibition space, forcing viewers to press against the gallery walls. For Amaral, this work encapsulated a vigorous paradigm shift, as Nitsche succeeded in eliciting a physical sensation equivalent to that produced by the government's systematic oppression. *Bubble* was not an isolated commentary: Maiolino's flag with the slogan "High Tension," distributed during *Flag Sunday*, highlighted the same notion of tension and danger caused by the regime's control over the media and information, and often over people's very homes and telephones. While Maiolino's was a visual stimulus for the viewer to perceive and then react against the sense of oppression the image referred to, Nitsche's work invariably produced this feeling in the spectator's own body, in this way pushing further the notion of participation and accessibility.

Instead of accepting simplified definitions, Amaral clearly identified the many differing attributes of the works produced at the time—ranging from ludic, to environmental and participatory—and how young artists shared some of Pop's stratagems to reach the goal of broader audience participation. Conversely, Nitsche's *Bubble*, although informed by such international aesthetics, was more successful in conveying, through the universal language of physical sensation, the desired call for political awakening. In other words, while *Flag Sunday* and *Stamps* attempted to reach wider audiences, and also confronted issues connected to politics, the ways they employed participation failed to sustain an emotional response, according to Amaral, and consequently to incite lasting reflection in the viewer. Nitsche's work, by contrast, was championed for assimilating foreign tendencies within Brazilian culture. Although many artists were averse to any affiliation with Pop (as was shown by umbrella terms such as New Objectivity), Amaral identified Pop as an important aspect of their work and central to her critique. This is not to say that she was critical of artists' use of Pop strategies per se; she instead slated their failure to fully appropriate

such strategies and make them relevant within a Brazilian context—as, Amaral argued, Nitsche’s *Bubble* was successful in doing.

In light of contemporary debates on the expansion of Pop as a global category, Amaral’s article sheds light on the motives that led so many artists to employ the accessible, albeit sometimes unsophisticated, language of the mass media to incite spectator participation. Her argument confronts the influence of US Pop, examining how the similar social conditions that inspired its rise in the United States (and elsewhere) were emerging in Brazil, as a consequence of the decade’s socio-economic transformations. Amaral stressed how artists found themselves in the difficult position of having to negotiate vernacular Brazilian culture, and how they succeeded to differing degrees—made evident by the all-encompassing and chaotic Brazilian contribution to the 9th Biennial. The definition of Pop Art in Brazil that emerges from her considerations is based on the additional terminologies of the ludic, the participatory, and the environmental, all of which are connected by the common objective to involve a larger number of spectators in the pursuit of making art universally accessible. Also thanks to the experimentalism inspired by Pop, Nitsche’s *Bubble* demonstrates the fruits of this extenuating process of reinvention. Buchloh interprets Warhol’s works as the mockery of what he terms a “bodily synecdoche”: “a heroic tradition of twentieth-century avant-garde practice that would instigate active identification of the reader/viewer with the representation and replace the passive contemplative mode of aesthetic experience by an activating participatory mode.”<sup>34</sup> Buchloh thinks that Warhol’s use of “infantilized participation” was too similar to advertising’s capacity to turn participation into consumption. *Bubble*, by contrast, relinquished its ties to commercial culture to suggest how Pop, at least in this case, was assimilated into a voracious bodily synecdoche, perhaps the definitive accomplishment of Pop in Brazil.

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34 Buchloh, “One-Dimensional Art,” 13.