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# Brazilian modernist narrative, the making of São Paulo Museum of Modern Art MAM and its primary collection

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## Brazilian modernist narrative, the making of São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (MAM), and its primary collection<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract: Ongoing research about the Matarazzo collections, now belonging to MAC USP. The project started out through the critical reevaluation of the cataloging system of the Museum, and tackled the acquisitions of Italian works the couple Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho and Yolanda Penteado realised between 1946 and 1947, for the first nucleus of the collection of the former São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (MAM). The research dealt with their provenance, their relationship with Brazilian artistic milieu and the so-called “Rappel à l’Ordre”. They allowed us to reevaluate this term and the relationship between Margherita Sarfatti and the Novecento Italiano with Brazilian modernism.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Matarazzo Collections. Italian Modern Art. Margherita Sarfatti. São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (MAM). Brazilian Modernism.*

### A narrativa de arte moderna no Brasil, a formação do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM) e sua coleção inicial

**Resumo:** Pesquisa em andamento sobre as coleções Matarazzo, atualmente pertencentes ao acervo do MAC USP. O projeto começou com a reavaliação crítica da catalogação do acervo do museu, e abordou a aquisição de pinturas

1. Este artigo foi originalmente publicado, numa versão mais curta, em: Ulrich Grossmann e Petra Krutisch. *33rd Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art (CIHA)*. Nuremberg: Germanisches National Museum, 2013, vol. 1, pp. 86-90, resultante de comunicação apresentada no congresso do CIHA em 2012.

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italianas que o casal Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho e Yolanda Penteado realizou entre 1946 e 1947, para o núcleo inicial do acervo do antigo Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM). A pesquisa tratou da procedência das obras, sua relação com o meio artístico brasileiro e com o ambiente do chamado “Retorno à Ordem”. Elas nos permitiram reavaliar esse termo e a relação entre Margherita Sarfatti e o Novecento Italiano com o modernismo brasileiro.

**Palavras-chave:** Coleções Matarazzo. Arte Moderna Italiana. Margherita Sarfatti. Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo. Modernismo Brasileiro.

### MAC USP

The history of the Museum of Contemporary Art of the University of São Paulo (MAC USP) unfolds into two aspects that allow one to enter the narrative of modern and contemporary art in Brazil and reevaluate it in the light of new elements. The first one stems from the fact that MAC USP is a university museum, what has endowed it with an infrastructure of scholarly research.<sup>2</sup> The second one regards the connection of its institutional history to that of the former São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (MAM) and the São Paulo Biennial (FABRIS; OSORIO, 2008). The foundation of the Museum at the University, in April 1963, was the result of the separation between the former MAM and the São Paulo Biennial, the disappearance of MAM in the previous year, and the cession of its collection to the University. Such events, narrated by Brazilian historiography in a controversial and polemical tone, turned MAC USP into the owner of the most important collection of modern art in the country.

Its course in the University has turned it into a privileged site for the dissemination of modern and contemporary art, as well as a place for artistic exchange. As proposed by its first director, Walter Zanini, MAC USP was a “laboratory of experimentation,” and since 1964, by the elaboration of exhibition programs geared towards young artists, it continued to update its collection. Zanini was engaged in a two-fold duty: thinking about the museum in a retrospective way, through the collection received from the former MAM, by updating the research on the history of modern art in Brazil; and in a prospective

2. On the issue of considering MAC USP a university museum (and not a “museum at the university”), see Aracy Amaral, 2006, pp. 207-212.

way, while promoting the update of its collection, by assimilating the most relevant trends in contemporary art. This project, which remained asleep in the last two decades, is starting to be revised by the current director, Tadeu Chiarelli (2011), when MAC USP is being given a new venue, at Ibirapuera Park in São Paulo, which has presented itself as an opportunity for the research department to reevaluate the narrative of modern art projected by the museum.

### Critical Reevaluation and Revision of the Records of the MAC USP Collection

In 2008, we started out a research project the main aim of which was to reevaluate the procedures of registry of the MAC USP collection, and allow the updating of its records database, so as to provide the means for the publication of a new version of the general catalogue of the collection. The museum had previously had three opportunities to document its collection. The first general catalogue of the collection was published in 1973, by Walter Zanini, almost in an inventory format (ZANINI, 1973). *Perfil de um acervo*, organized by Aracy Amaral in 1988, while inventorying works that had entered the museum collection until 1987, sought to reevaluate the knowledge on the main works in the collection through a series of entries created with the collaboration of various researchers and authors (AMARAL, 1988).

The last general catalogue of our collection, organized by Ana Mae Barbosa in 1992, benefited mostly from the first record review of the collection, carried out from 1985 onwards, with the creation of our Registrar Section, when the basic documentation of the works was systematized in curatorial records for the first time (BARBOSA, 1992). After seventeen years, and on account of the fact that important sets of the collection had no published record, it was vital for us to rethink the procedures by which we were to publish and document our collection.

The reevaluation of the museum records was addressed taking into consideration the fact that this was not a neutral procedure, insofar as we were working with very distinctive categories, construed by paradigms very different from what one can understand by art. The collection of MAC USP was formed in a context that defines a watershed in art history. On the one hand, we have objects which conception is based on a set of modernist notions that define what we call modern art; on the other, a second set that emerged while confronting that former set of paradigms, testing the boundaries of the museum, which is what

we call contemporary art. Therefore, any criterion to be adopted to the description of our collections, in an apparently simple procedure – of the basic constitution of a records chart with technical information of the artworks – would require a deeper conceptual discussion.

Another issue that was raised regarding the records review and the reevaluation of the MAC USP collection has to do with its “gaps”. The expression is used here between inverted commas, because for Brazilian historiography, it derives from the fact that MAC USP has suffered, along the years, with a lack of understanding from the part of the university central administration of the importance of an acquisition policy (AMARAL, 2006; CHIARELLI, 2011). However, it seems to be a fruitful exercise to review such “gaps” by comparing them to the notion of discontinuity, as conceived by Michel Foucault (2008).

Foucault construed the critique to the history of mentalities by means of what historians of the Annales School called the “long duration,” and which, therefore, implied working with the notion of continuity. He proposed an interpretation of historiographical discourse that could encompass and deal with discontinuity, from the aporia of such discourse to work with such notion, at the same time that it was already given by the very object of study of the historian.

His argument proved quite relevant in the museum collection context, in which we have to constantly deal with discontinuity, while bringing to the surface what he called “white spaces” (FOUCAULT, 2008, p.17) left by narratives of art history. To work with a museum collection means, above all, to confront oneself constantly with its relation to its own territory, its local dimension, as well as reviewing the roles and places given to certain artworks and artists in different contexts.

In this sense, MAC USP modernist collections offer a fertile field to interpretation, for the very reason that they are “dated” (AMARAL, 2006, p.270). First of all, the modernist works in our collections were gathered in the very process of the making of a history of modern art, in which critics were formulating the terms while these creative procedures were also in the making, and artists and works chosen were still to be confronted with time.

MAC USP modernist collections must be reviewed in the light of São Paulo modernism and its relation to international context. The modernist project proposed here tried to establish a local model for the narrative of art history, as we will see. It is by elucidating such narrative that we will be able to rethink such collections and their role in the history of modern art in Brazil.

### Matarazzo Collections and the Records of the Former MAM

The cession of the collections of the former MAM to the University had been initiated by the donation of the so-called Collections Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho and Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho & Yolanda Penteado.<sup>3</sup> It is common for experts to consider the Matarazzo collections as private ones, which had no direct relation with the collection of the former MAM or the Brazilian artistic milieu, the donation of which to the University of São Paulo would have served as a pretext to force the cession of the collection of the former MAM to the University.

However, as we started out the research on the documentation of the first acquisitions of the Matarazzo couple, it became very clear that such works were part of the collection of the former MAM. They had been acquired with the sole purpose of constituting the stone mark nucleus of its collection, and during the 1950s, they were constantly exhibited as the museum primary collection, particularly in the case of the seventy-one Italian paintings acquired between 1946 and 1947, with which we have worked so far. Moreover, they helped us to establish the primary records of the collection of the former MAM.

In addition to the museum record charts that had been rescued by MAC USP Registrar Section in 1985, we have found at least three other documents that belong to the records of the works of the former MAM. The first is a fifteen-page-long typed list of the works bought between 1946 and 1947, with their basic technical information. The others are two versions of an inventory book, the first one being a card index, which was organized according to the following criteria:

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3. Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho or Ciccillo Matarazzo (1898-1977) grew into a very rich family of Italian-born entrepreneurs, who had established themselves by the end of the 19th century in Brazil. By the mid-1930s, he founded his own company, the Metalúrgica Matarazzo, and from the 1940s, started building his identity as a great patron of the arts, engaging in the creation of various institutions to foster modern art in the country. In 1947, he married Yolanda de Ataliba Nogueira Penteado (1903-1983). Heir of a rich family of São Paulo coffee producers, she was a key figure in the legitimation of Ciccillo as a representative of Paulista elite and patron of the arts. Her relationship with Brazilian artistic milieu came from her family bonds, especially through her aunt, Olívia Guedes Penteado (1872-1934) – collector and promoter of modern art in São Paulo, who had been hostess of a modernist salon that would give birth to the Sociedade Pró-Arte Moderna (SPAM – Society Pro-Modern Art), in 1932.

- a) on the first level, there was a division between foreign and Brazilian works;
- b) on the second level, they were organized by medium: painting, sculpture, and print;
- c) on the third level, they were organized in alphabetical order, according to the artists' last names.

The second version of this inventory book, also organized as a card index, had two volumes, the first being for works in painting and sculpture; and the second, for works on paper, and still maintaining an internal division between foreign and Brazilian works.

As for the term “print” in such context, it was used for any kind of work on paper. Such categories by medium were the same used in the sessions of the Venice Biennale, from its origins, and thus, in those of the São Paulo Biennial, at least in its first decade of existence. The awards granted at those exhibitions followed those categories. It also is worth mentioning that MoMA in New York had its curatorial, conservation, and records infrastructure organized following those categories, with its historical departments of painting and sculpture, and prints and drawings – still operating today as such. To a certain extent, MAC USP preserved this same infrastructure, if we think that our conservation laboratories and storage rooms follow those categories.

MAM inventory books and record charts respect the system of the first typed list registering the works (even if out of alphabetical order by artist's surname) acquired by the Matarazzo couple between 1946 and 1947, as MAM inventory number was created from it. A major element is describing the works based on their medium and their nationality, i.e., the separation between the FOREIGN collection and the BRAZILIAN collection. The inventory numbers are thus indexed:

- PE = Pintura Estrangeira [Foreign Painting]
- PB = Pintura Brasileira [Brazilian Painting]
- EE = Escultura Estrangeira [Foreign Sculpture]
- EB = Escultura Brasileira [Brazilian Sculpture]
- GE = Gravura Estrangeira (for any kind of work on paper) [Foreign Print]
- GB = Gravura Brasileira (idem) [Brazilian Print]

The cession of these works to USP generated another inventory number for them, which emphasized the origin of the donation of the work and the history of its cession to MAC USP. Albeit very frequent in record proceedings, such system underlined the division between the Matarazzo collections and the so-called MAM collection.

The set of Italian paintings acquired between 1946 and 1947 revealed a double interpretation of these objects, the juxtaposition of their provenance, and the survival of the separation between what Brazilian historiography had always considered international art (or “foreign”) and what was Brazilian art. Their inventory numbers, first at the former MAM and then at MAC USP, reflect two layers of categories given to describe these objects: at former MAM, their description by medium seemed key in their understanding, defining the paradigms by which they should be considered art; at MAC USP, their belonging to a larger set of works (the donation) imbued them with an extra element and allowed them to be seen *in relation* to other works in different media and by different artists. So, if the *context* for the description of our Gino Severinis, Ardengo Sofficis, Giorgio Morandis of the Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho Collection, at the former MAM, was *painting*, at MAC USP, they were necessarily engaged in one and the same history and took us to another moment, which was the history of their reception and the relationship between the Italian artistic milieu and São Paulo modernism.

It is worth going back to the separation between foreign and Brazilian works, as it seems to have been a conceptual display through which these objects were seen by Brazilian historiography. Its persistence is quite remarkable, and the general catalogues of MAC USP, which tried to construe any kind of discourse to the museum’s collection, are those that actually make use of this separation (ZANINI, 1973, pp.293-451; AMARAL, 1988). Such an organization should be analyzed in the light of other elements that seem relevant in the context of the making of this collection.

First of all, the very moment of our modernist formation was in the context of the affirmation of a national identity, in-between the two World Wars, which characterized the so-called “Return to Order” period in Europe. This, of course, was marked by the rejection of any kind of internationalism and transnational artistic experiences, as it also meant the banning of the avant-garde in certain territories. We only have to think about some examples of exhibitions and institutions which fostered modern art in Europe, in those days, and how they

tackled that issue. The Venice Biennale itself, following the system of universal exhibitions, contributed to the affirmation of national identities, since it was organized by country pavilions. Furthermore, and especially in the case of the Venice Biennale, the awards in the categories of painting, sculpture and print (in Italian, *bianco nero*”) were also divided between national and international awards – model to be adopted by the São Paulo Biennial in the 1950s.

Even after World War II, when there was a revival of the early 20th-century avant-garde for the very reason of their being international, these experiences are shown in the framework of the country pavilion, in the big international modern art shows. In the case of the Venice Biennale, so as to redeem Italy from the fascist years, from 1948 onwards, there was a systematic program of exhibitions of the avant-garde movements. Such is the case of the retrospective shows of French *Pontillisme* and Italian *Divisionismo* at the Venice Biennale of 1952. The works of each current was presented side by side, so as to allow one to perceive the specificities of one and the other (PALLUCCHINI, 1952, pp. XVIII-XXIII; VALSECCHI, 1952, pp. 390-394). The São Paulo Biennial followed that trend, when negotiating important shows of avant-garde groups through the participating countries, in the 1950s.

These elements thus reveal that there was a model concerned with the formation of modern collections that would have been more engaged with the notions of modern art in circulation during the 1930s and ’40s, which was not so alien to the Brazilian artistic milieu, as Brazilian historiography would claim.

Without having reached the full analysis of all Matarazzo acquisitions, we can already revise some elements of the history of the São Paulo former MAM. Brazilian historiography claims the model of the North-American MoMA as the one that has served as the basis for the foundation of both modern art museums in Brazil (in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro). However, the set of acquisitions already studied and the institutional culture that was to operate in the management of the former MAM in São Paulo seem to be more connected to the European context – more precisely, the Italian one – than the North-American context.

### Italian Paintings in the Matarazzo Collections

We shall now concentrate in the first set of paintings acquired by Matarazzo in Italy, between 1946 and 1947. From the records review of this first set, it resulted in the acquisition of seventy-one works by Matarazzo, in Roman and

Milanese galleries, or directly from Italian artists or collectors. Brazilian historiography that sought to tackle such acquisitions points Italian art critic Margherita Sarfatti (1880-1961) as a consultant for the Matarazzo couple (FABRIS; OSORIO, 2008).

Margherita Grassini Sarfatti was a journalist and art critic, from a prominent Venetian Jewish family. In 1902, after marrying lawyer Cesare Sarfatti, she moved to Milan, where she was to join a group of socialist intellectuals and artists, and collaborate with newspaper *Avanti!*, in which she would be responsible for an art critique column from 1909 on. In 1912, she met Benito Mussolini, with whom she engaged in a love affair that would last until 1933. As an art critic, her role in the creation of the Novecento group in 1922 is vital. In 1924, she was to dedicate herself to write Mussolini's biography, *Dux*. The following year would mark the reformulation of the Novecento group, now designated as Novecento Italiano, when she and other members of the group signed the *Manifesto degli Intelletuali Fascisti*. With the alliance between Mussolini and Hitler, and the publication of Racial Laws in Italy, in 1938, Sarfatti left her country. Between 1939 and 1947, she lived in exile between Argentina and Uruguay (GUTMAN, 2006). Little is known about her activities in South America, and her links with its artistic milieu.<sup>4</sup> In Argentina, such relations have started to be studied, especially concerning the context of the exhibition of the Novecento Italiano group, in Buenos Aires, in 1930.

The works bought in Italy form a panorama of Italian modern art between 1920s and '40s, in which the Novecento Italiano seems to dominate the scene – if we take into consideration that such trend is defined by a figurative art for which the notion of realism signifies the reinterpretation of certain elements of a so-called classic tradition. But if the term Novecento Italiano had been created by Margherita Sarfatti to designate the new currents that she would call *classicità moderna*, it soon took a new, more official dimension, in the context of a systematic policy of promotion of Italian modern art, representing the fascist regime abroad. From 1927, a series of exhibitions in various European capitals –

4. For the Matarazzo acquisitions and Sarfatti's involvement with them, see Françoise Liffra, 2009, p. 713 and Phillip Cannistraro & Brian Sullivan, 1993, p. 531. Even so, this episode is doomed to confusion, when the authors take the former MAM for MASP (São Paulo Museum of Art, founded by media businessman Assis Chateaubriand, in 1947).

beginning with Paris – engaged in the popularization of Italian art and artists of the period, resulting in the acquisition of works for public collections in those countries.

The period dominated by the notion of Italian modern art as Sarfatti defined it ended precisely with the exhibition «Novecento Italiano» in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1930. Although it did not travel to Brazil, it certainly allowed Margherita Sarfatti to visit the country for the first time, and make the first official contacts with Brazilian intellectuals and artists. Before arriving in Buenos Aires, she stayed in the country for about fifteen days, when she visited Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and some colonial cities in the state of Minas Gerais.<sup>5</sup>

But already in the mid-1920s, it is possible to trace the presence of some Brazilian artists in the Milanese context and in the group around Margherita Sarfatti. This is the case of Hugo Adami (who participated in the I Mostra del Novecento Italiano, at Palazzo della Permanente in Milan, in 1926) and Paulo Rossi Osir (graduated from the Accademia Brera in the 1910s, and who came back to Milan in 1927). When returning to Brazil in the mid-1930s, Rossi Osir identified a style of similar values with that of Sarfatti's group, in a group of painters that shared studios in the so-called Santa Helena Building, in the heart of São Paulo, in 1934, and that had the participation of Italian immigrated artists such as Fulvio Pennacchi. The exhibition of works of these artists at the so-called Salão de Maio [May Salon] in 1937 was noticed and reviewed by critics Mário de Andrade and Sérgio Milliet.<sup>6</sup> Milliet used a typical terminology of Italian art critique of the 1930s while defining Santa Helena Group (MAGALHÃES, 2010). In the first review written by Mário de Andrade, he named them «Família Artística Paulista», from a suggestion given by Paulo Rossi Osir, who saw them as the

5. On her visit to Brazil, see for instance Conhecida escritora italiana chegou ao Rio, a bordo do 'Conte Verde'. In: *Correio da Manhã*, August 21, 1930 – Fond Margherita Sarfatti, Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Italy.

6. Mário Raul de Moraes Andrade (1893-1945) is the most prominent modernist Brazilian critic, one of the leaders of the Semana de Arte Moderna [Modern Art Week] in 1922, in São Paulo, and whose critique has served as the foundation of the history of modern art in Brazil. Sérgio Milliet da Costa e Silva (1898-1966) was, with de Andrade, also a prominent modernist critic, and key in the creation of the former MAM and other initiatives to fostering modern art.

Brazilian version of the «Famiglia Artistica Milanese» – expression borrowed from the exhibitions organized by fascist trade unions in Italy.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the set of works bought in Italy for the former MAM bears a strait relation to São Paulo artistic milieu of the 1930s, and appears as a product of the exchanges that had been established in between the wars among modern Brazilian and Italian artists and critics. More precisely, it seems to have been conceived, even in immediate post-war context, taking as a reference Italian modern art private collections, which promotion was assured by a cultural policy undertaken by the minister of National Education in Italy, Giuseppe Bottai, from 1939 on (BOTTAI, 1939). This policy might be construed as a second phase of promotion of Italian modern art by the fascist regime – the first being marked by the Italian exhibitions abroad.

In addition to the names, the works chosen for the Matarazzo Collections seem to reverberate this Italian modern art, for they seem to have been deliberately bought taking as guideline works and artists shown in official and international exhibitions organized and supported by the fascist regime. It is also noticeable the similarities of such works and others of the same artists that one could see, in those days, in prestigious Italian private collections, as in the case of the art dealer Vittorio Barbaroux, from Milan, the art dealer Carlo Cardazzo, from Venice, and men from the Italian industrial and business elite, whose activities as patrons of the arts actually helped out public collections in their country.

At least seven paintings of the Matarazzo Collection come from the Carlo Cardazzo Collection. Cardazzo began to buy more systematically from 1931 onwards, when he became friends with painter Giuseppe Cesetti (FANTONI, 1996; BARBERO, 2008). He then gathered a remarkable collection with the help of Cesetti, who frequently acted as mediator. He was later to be awarded two prizes through the program created by Minister Giuseppe Bottai in 1941.<sup>8</sup>

Cardazzo's collection is one of the various private collections to be shown at the Galleria d'Arte di Roma, between 1940 and 1942, such as the collection

7. For an analysis of the relations between the Santa Helena Group and the Novecento Italiano, see Tadeu Chiarelli, 1995.

8. In the exhibition of private collections at Cortina d'Ampezzo and in the Galleria d'Arte di Roma. See Danka Giacon, 2005. The exhibition of his collection at the Galleria d'Arte di Roma was praised by Italian critique, and resulted in the publication of many articles and reviews. See, for instance, Attilio Crespi, 1941.

of lawyer Rino Valdameri.<sup>9</sup> The Galleria d'Arte di Roma had been created by the Sindacato Fascista degli Artisti [the national artists' fascist union] in 1930 and its first artistic director had been Pietro Maria Bardi.<sup>10</sup> Its aim was to promote Italian modern art through a program of exhibitions.

A very important element to be discussed in the Matarazzo collections, as well as the context that they reflect, is what exactly is understood by Novecento Italiano. If Sarfatti had conceived a project of an artistic movement that would have characterized the New Italy and become the official art of the fascist regime, what happened was something else. From 1930s on, with the last exhibition organized by her in Buenos Aires, and after an intense campaign in various European cities, her project started to be attacked by the highest fascist elite. Sarfatti quickly lost terrain, first by being dismissed as an art critic from Mussolini's newspaper, and slowly her participation in exhibition organization committees and all activities of the regime was denied. She ended up being totally silenced in Italy, and this period culminated with her exile between Montevideo and Buenos Aires, and her engagement in the Matarazzo acquisitions.

At the same time, and in the context of the creation of the official exhibition of the fascist regime, the Quadriennale di Roma, as well as in the shows promoted from 1929 on by Italy abroad, the term Novecento Italiano seems to be used to designate the new Italian art, but in a much broader sense, which would include, for instance, the participation of the aerofuturists (of whom Filippo Martinetti continued to be the spokesman). In other words, what Margherita Sarfatti had conceived as Novecento Italiano was a structured-based painting, of very balanced composition, and that would, in any case, reflect this new painting long-

9. Also praised by the newspapers when opened in 1942. MAC USP "La Maddalena" (1929) by Piero Marussig, exhibited in this context, was to be chosen to illustrate an album of a panorama of Italian modern art, organized by the famous Galleria Il Milione. See Vittorio Barbaroux & Giampietro Giani, 1940, ill. 86.

10. Pietro Maria Bardi (1900-1999) was a journalist, gallerist and art critic. In 1946, he arrived in Brazil bringing two exhibitions of Italian art (Old Masters and modern art) in what seems to have been a post-war program of cultural affairs between Italy and Brazil, in the framework of an Italian-Latin American Committee. He was then invited to stay and help Brazilian media businessman Assis Chateaubriand to create MASP. Bardi had already travelled to South America in 1933, to foster the exhibition of MIAR architecture, in Buenos Aires.

lasting relation with Paris as a major center of modernist ideas, even with avant-garde. For her, actually, the most important thing was the quality of the works, which could be retraced by the very relation of these artists with artistic tradition.

The Matarazzo collections have some affinities with collections of Italian art donated to France in the 1930s (FRAIXE, 2010). Such donations were inaugurated by the exhibition “22 Artistes Italiens”, at the Gallery Georges Bernheim, in the summer of 1932, which resulted in the official donation by Milanese businessman Carlo Frua de Angeli of twelve paintings to the collections of the Musée des Écoles Étrangères Contemporaines (Jeu de Paume), in collaboration with gallerist and collector Vittorio Barbaroux (GEORGE, 1932). The Italian gallery in the museum, which was to be opened by the end of the year, had a Novecento group of works (Funi, Borra, Marussig, Sironi), and a group of the so-called Italiani di Parigi (such as Campigli, De Chirico, De Pisis and Tozzi).

This donation seems to have opened a decade of activities of cultural exchanges between France and Italy, which focus was the debate around a common Latin root. Such debate was supported by the paradiplomatic organ Comité France-Italie. Created on the eve of World War I, and put to sleep, the Comité France-Italie reopened its activities in 1929 to favor the cultural approach between the two countries. They allowed to measure the role of the committee in the new cultural policy, and also to see how the notion of “latinité” was put to a test in a larger scale in the visual arts domain (FRAIXE, 2010).

Apart from the similarities of such Italian modern art collections, a common ground between Brazil, France and Italy seems to be built through the notion of classic art of Latin roots, which revives the great tradition of Italian Renaissance art in the origin of modern art. In this framework the same networks acted in the three countries, and gave rise to fruitful artistic exchanges still to be studied.

In addition to this, the Matarazzo acquisitions seem to follow the development of artists collected, as well as the updating of the trends in Italian modern art. For instance, works by artists Aligi Sassu and Renato Guttuso, of the Corrente group, were bought. The same updating is noticed when considering the works of the same artist in the collection, such as Felice Casorati and Mario Sironi. From Sironi, there is a Novecento painting, “I Pescatori” (1924), and his experimentation on mural painting and an approach to a more expressionistic language in “Invocazione” (1946). The original concept of Novecento Italiano, for Margherita Sarfatti, is jeopardized when there is a strong presence also of the artists of the so-called Scuola Romana, such as Mario Maffai and Scipione.

It is worth mentioning here the one painting that reflects the very core of Sarfatti’s concept – at the same time very different of what the artist would do in the 1930s, although very much appreciated by Milanese collectors: “L’Indovina” (1924) by Achille Funi, which is very close to one of his paintings that belonged to the collection of Sarfatti herself, “Donna velata” (1922). (MAGALHÃES, 2011)

The influence of Sarfatti and her notion of Novecento italiano in the Brazilian artistic milieu must be reconsidered in the light of such new evidence. The making of the first nucleus of the former MAM collection seems to be more connected to the context of private collectionism in Italy, during the 1930s and early 1940s, and how they depicted a policy of promotion of Italian modern art. Moreover, such collection was gathered in a context in which diplomatic and political agendas were in action to legitimate a narrative of modern art so as to give support to the discourse of modernization (in the case of Brazil) and liberal democratic societies as a model for the Western World. This bears an apparent contradiction still to be studied.

Another apparent contradiction is the fact that it was this collection of paintings, realized in the framework of the reevaluation of Realism and some elements of classic tradition, that established the criteria of documentation and records of the former MAM entire collection – which still dealt with categories created in the context of *Beaux Arts*, also reproduced in the major showcases of modern art during the 1950s.

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