

Introduction

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The dossier “History Painting in the collection of the Museu Paulista”, part of the actions of the thematic project *Coletar, identificar, processar, difundir: o ciclo curatorial e a produção do conhecimento*², is a contemporary effort to expand studies concerning the artistic production focused on the representations of the past, considering its inescapable relevance to the formulation of social imaginary. Still largely neglected due to the disdain arising from the theoretical and critical postulates established by the avant-garde currents of the twentieth century, the history painting of the second part of the 1800s and the first decades of the twentieth century was made opaque in the great historiographical narratives about European art. Thus, the understanding of the developments of the neoclassical and romantic aspects of the first half of the nineteenth century lost its colors, which is why the works by David, Gérard, Gros, Gericault, and Delacroix, in the case of French history painting, remain notable.

However, the history painting produced from the second half of the 1800s slowly became the subject of encouraging studies, as well as curatorial policies in

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3. Cf. Bajou (2018).

4. Cf. Sérié (2014).

museums that have promoted both the acquisition of canvases and the restoration of collections previously buried in technical reserves. Proof of this is the remarkable effort of the Musée d'Orsay to reverse years of prevalence of interest in impressionist and post-impressionist paintings unrelated to history, which resulted in the restoration of historical paintings such as Auguste Glaize's giant canvas called *Les femmes gauloises: épisode de l'invasion romaine* (4.24 x 6.51 m). Completed in 1851, it remained wrapped up for over 150 years before its restoration in 2016, when it was finally put back on exhibition, which had not happened since the 1852 Art Exhibition. The same museum devoted itself to the acquisition and exhibition of historical paintings by pivotal artists of the French academic system, such as Alexandre Cabanel, underrepresented in the institutional collections, which led both to the purchase of his work *Le paradis perdu* (1867), in 2017, and the transfer of the *Thamar* (1875) canvas, after its stay in a deposit in Nice for about 90 years.

The gradual reversal of the little interest in history paintings has been gaining ground even in historical museums, where such works of art play a central role in the visual narratives formulated since the first half of the nineteenth century. *The Louis-Philippe et Versailles* exhibition,³ from 2018 to 2019, focused on the process of converting the greatest symbol of the Old Regime into a historical museum in 1837, in which history painting played a central role. The immense Battle Gallery, frequently overlooked by the public — and the official advertisement of the Palace of Versailles — in favor of the Mirror Gallery, was one of the central themes of this exhibition, which also dealt with the constitution of the Crusade Rooms, the Consulate and the Empire Rooms, the Crimea Rooms, and those dedicated to Africa, in which the *Prise de la Smalah d'Abd-el-Kader par le duc d'Aumale à Taguin, 16 May 1843*, by Horace Vernet (completed in 1845) is located, with its monumental dimensions of 4.89 x 21.70 m. In all these rooms, history paintings were the decisive instrument for constructing a visual narrative of French history, extending from the constitution of the Merovingian kingdom to the ultra-Mediterranean conquests. This narrative, whose main ambition was to resignify the palace and consecrate it to the memory of the shaping of the French nation, was still an instrument of national political reconciliation under the July Monarchy, which had brought together almost all the large-scale paintings commissioned or acquired by Napoleon, which came to inhabit the palace along with dozens of other works of art dedicated to celebrating “all the glory of France”.

This resurgence of interest in history painting in France is also verifiable in Pierre Sérié's referential work, which manifests its immense vitality in the second half of the nineteenth century,⁴ although historiography commonly allows room for the emergence of impressionism, a strongly independent commercial circuit for public

commissioning, and the emphasis of the decadence of the academic system. Sérié demonstrates how, due to the clashes between Neoclassicism and Romanticism, the tensions that crossed the production of history paintings in the first half of the nineteenth century renewed in the following decades because of the shock generated by Gustave Moreau's refreshing and anticlassical ideas in the face of Cabanel's or Bouguereau's rafaelian artistic expression, as well as the progressive emergence of mural decorative painting as a way of renewing the representations of the past, which removed the primacy of visual support for discourses about the past from immense canvases. Addressing the Hungarian production of the second half of the nineteenth century, Zsuzsanna Tóth reinforces this conviction of the vitality of history painting in the period, due to the numerous commissions from history painters such as Bertalan Székely, Viktor Madarász, and Gyula Benczúr.⁵ Such a demand to produce artwork that promoted national consciousness was strongly associated with the struggles for political autonomy, which eventually resulted in the establishment of the dual monarchy with the Austrians, in 1867, and the consecration of Budapest as the other Habsburg capital. The celebrated Mihály Munkácsy could be considered the culmination of this intense production of Hungarian artists, having been both a pinnacle of the Magyar nationalist evocation, as in his *Honfoglalás* (Hungarian Conquest of 1893) canvas, which adorns the Budapest Parliament as the author (non-Austrian) of the painting *Apotheose der Renaissance* (1890's Apotheosis of the Renaissance), located on the main staircase of the Kunsthistorisches Museum of the old rival capital, the Austrian and Germanic Vienna.

Micah Joseph Christensen also points out how the production of history painting in Spain maintained its vigor in the second half of the 1800s,⁶ a period in which public commissions gradually competed with a private market, also devoted to the consumption of academic works. The great cycle of exhibitions that took place in Mexico during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, called *Los pinceles de la historia*, was concluded in 2003 with the exhibition *La fabricación del Estado, 1864-1910*, which also highlighted the intense production of history paintings of academic strand during the second half of the nineteenth century, unleashed under the Maximilian of Habsburg's Empire and extending under the Restored Republic and under the Porfiriato. This production, however, remains poorly recognized given the ever-remembered representations of the past generated by Rivera, Siqueiros, and Orozco's modern Mexican muralism.

Reflection on history painting in Brazil has sought to demonstrate how, despite the pettiness of imperial patronage, the expansion of this production since the implementation of history painting teaching by the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts is progressive. Complementary training trips to Europe connected our painters to the

5. Cf. Tóth (2012).

6. Cf. Christensen (2016).

7. Cf. Squeff (2012).

8. Cf. Coli (1994).

9. Cf. Meneses (1990a); Chiarelli (1998); Mattos (1999a); Makino (2003); and Brefe (2005).

aforementioned clashes and renovations, the appropriation and creation practices that governed academy training, and the throbbing of memorial public commissioning in the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe, as well as to the disappointment of the return and effort of several of these former painters to stimulate an official demand, which would meet its end in the state of São Paulo. It is also a historiographical challenge that clashes against the disregard of the modernist critical canon, which traditionally considers history painting as an earlier stage of an effectively national painting, although, as stressed by Leticia Squeff, the debate of a “Brazilian School” was clearly raised since 1879, and even by Gonzaga Duque in *A arte brasileira*, in 1888.⁷

The spreading of reflections on the production of history painting in Brazil during the second half of the 19th century certainly had an inflection with the works of Jorge Coli, especially from his habilitation thesis on Victor Meirelles.⁸ In it, Coli highlighted the need to study national academic production within its referential systems and artistic models, so that the appropriation and recreation practices performed by Brazilian artists concerning French and Italian painters could be perceived, one example is the network of references he created involving the *Batalha dos Guararapes* (1879). His comparison between Meirelles's *Primeira missa no Brasil* (1861); and Horace Vernet's *Première messe en Kabylie* (1854), which belongs to the Musée Cantonal des Beaux Arts of Lausanne, marked an epoch, both by highlighting the immediate approximations, as for the approach to their differences, which distinguished and qualified Meirelles' creation. Such a relational perspective, which can refer to both European models and to those linked to the Academy in Rio de Janeiro, reinstates the production of historical painting in its formation and production circuits, allowing the comprehension of the historicity of an artistic strand doomed by the modernist critique of mere copy and, therefore, to the memorial ostracism.

The late musealization of history painting in Brazil — a country that did not house a museum intended for works for public exhibition throughout imperial times — makes it a subject of great interest in studies on the republican period. Thus, the collection of the Museu Paulista is a privileged set of works for the expansion of research on history painting in the country. The institution was the destination not only of canvases pre-existing its opening in 1895, such as the famous *Independência ou Morte* (1888); but of many others acquired by the Republican authorities for the expansion of the History Section, even of those commissioned for decoration of the building, already under the management of Afonso Taunay (1917-1945), comprising the most ambitious visual narrative project of São Paulo at that time.⁹ While Taunay's management never commissioned large-scale canvases, it mobilized

artists native from the city and the state of Rio de Janeiro, and from other countries, to adorn empty wall spaces since the building was completed in 1890. Such a process, analogous to what Sérié points out to the expansion of decorative painting in France, is, however, contrary to the consecration of Munkácsy in Vienna. If there the old capital was the main destination of artists from Hungary and the emerging Budapest; here it was the artists of the Old Court Academy, such as Henrique Bernardelli and Amoedo, who collaborated on the exalting narrative in the thriving and still provincial coffee-growing capital under the First Republic.

With his approach to Benedito Calixto's canvas *Fundação de São Vicente* (1900); Ulpiano Toledo Bezerra de Meneses inaugurated a series of studies focused on this history painting collection. In keeping with the complex game of formal oppositions managed by the painter, Meneses stressed the need to understand a historical painting not only as a form but as an expression of the idea of the past — in this case, the political conciliation that underlies the urban experience. Such expression will gain an even wider imaginary dimension, due to its insertion in the context of a museum. Solange Ferraz de Lima and Vânia Carneiro de Carvalho reflected on the paintings that represented city streets commissioned by Taunay to be exhibited at the Museum; at first, merely representations of urban landscapes. The authors demonstrated how these paintings underwent many interventions concerning the photographs on which the painters relied, to build a correct visualization of the city's past and, therefore, its history.¹⁰ Buildings, sidewalks, and passers-by had to be represented according to a decorum based on the ambitions of Afonso Taunay, who imagined a more bourgeois city than the photographs indicated. This decorating character that presided over history painting, usually intended for celebration, civic or religious pedagogy, was extensively examined in Claudia Valladão de Mattos's studies on *Independência ou Morte* and in those focused on the representations of *bandeirantes* by Maraliz Christo and Ana Claudia Brefe, in which Taunay's interference was once again very present.¹¹ I have also focused on the formulation of *bandeirante* iconography, through the approach of canvases and sculptures acquired for the Museu Paulista, under the management of both Hermann von Ihering and Afonso Taunay, in which practices of appropriation of the King's model of corporeal representation established by Hyacinthe Rigaud for the exaltation of these sertanistas took place.¹²

Oseias Singh Junior reclaimed, in pioneering methodology, Almeida Junior's critical fortune of *Partida da Monção* (1897), as well as tried to understand this and other paintings by the artist in the transit of French models from the 1880s, in an arch extending from Leon Lhermitte to Puvis de Chavannes.¹³ Also considering the relationships between the production of history painting, the painting of customs and

10. Cf. Lima; Carvalho (1993).

11. Cf. Mattos (1999b); Christo (2002) and Brefe (2005).

12. Cf. Marins (2007).

13. Cf. Singh Junior (2004).

14. Cf. Pitta (2013).

15. Cf. Alves (2003).

16. Cf. Simioni (2008; 2013; 2018).

the French Realism and Naturalism present in Almeida Junior's paintings, Fernanda Pitta studied the same canvas, besides trying to understand the politics of paintings acquisition in its connections with São Paulo's political and intellectual personalities, especially Cesário Motta Junior, thoughts of the time.¹⁴ Caleb Faria Alves placed an attentive eye on Benedito Calixto's progressive approach to the Museu Paulista, whose works went from offered to commissioned from the early years of the twentieth century on, a situation that would guarantee his position as a history painter, and on the opening opportunities for other public buildings, such as the Santos Stock Exchange.¹⁵

Methodological issues regarding gender approaches were also present in the study of the Museum's history paintings, as in Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simioni's approach to Domenico Failutti's portrait of Empress Leopoldina (1922), whose mother figure in everything opposes Georgina de Albuquerque's *Sessão do Conselho de Estado*, both of 1922, since then belonging to the Museu Histórico Nacional, which portrays her as a leader.¹⁶

This dossier presents new studies that, fed by many of the methodologies highlighted here, expand the knowledge and approach of paintings that are as much well-known due to their exhaustive reproduction as they have not been satisfactorily studied. Carlos Lima Junior and Pedro Nery write an article in partnership, addressing two moments of the Noble Hall of the Museu Paulista, famous for hosting the canvas *Independência ou Morte*. The same room, however, welcomed many other paintings, which took place in two opposite phases as to the narrative of São Paulo and national history, including the meanings of Independence. In its first part, the article presents the hypothesis that the paintings *Caipira picando fumo* (1893), and *Amolação interrompida* (1894), which belonged to the Museu Paulista collection until 1905, made a *pendant* with Pedro Américo's canvas, creating a synergy with the representation from the people from São Paulo who witnessed the Scream [of independence], portrayed in *Independência ou Morte*. In its second part, the article presents the inversion of this narrative towards the prevalence of national characters linked to the future of the nation, through the commissioning of Independence episodes and proclamations from painters Oscar Pereira da Silva and Domenico Failutti.

In his article, Eduardo Polidori turns to the canvas *Fundação de São Vicente* (1900), by Benedito Calixto, to understand the meanings of its commissioning by the elites of the coast of São Paulo that made up the 4th Centenary of the Discovery of Brazil Commemorative Society. It was a screen that, after all, referred to an event that had occurred in 1532, and not in 1500. The tumultuous definitive transfer to the Museu Paulista's collection, once Calixto had not been paid the agreed value

for the painting, and the reasons that led to his choice to figure in exhibitions during the von Ihering and Taunay administrations are also explored by Polidori, which offers exciting hypotheses both for their juxtaposition to geological collections and for their association with cartography and historical portraits.

Michelli Cristine Scapol Monteiro approached another canvas about urban origins — Oscar Pereira da Silva's *Fundação de São Paulo* (1907). Inspired, as the author demonstrates, by Meirelles' *Primeira missa no Brasil*, the canvas was painted by Pereira da Silva as a bet to broaden his influence in the circle of renowned artists of the flourishing coffee-growing metropolis. Representing a faith-mediated reconciliation between Brazilian indigenous and settlers, the canvas was rejected at first by Jorge Tibiriçá Piratininga, then President of the State, who was committed to advancing the coffee-growing border in the west of the state. In addition, the canvas was considered troubling by the director of the Museu Paulista, von Ihering, who was quite intolerant towards the indigenous resistance. Contrary to official interpretations, Monteiro reveals that the canvas was acquired by the Pinacoteca do Estado and not by the Museu Paulista, which eventually received the canvas by transfer only in 1929, despite Afonso Taunay's little appreciation for it and its Jesuit theme. The author also unveils different forms of social appropriation of the canvas after its transfer to the Museu Paulista, an institution that certainly favored its understanding as a legitimate image of the city's founding, thus able to be monumentally reproduced, especially before the fourth centenary of São Paulo, celebrated in 1954.

The final article in this dossier is signed by Ana Paula Nascimento, a piece dedicated to José Wasth Rodrigues' set of paintings arranged in the Museum's peristyle and aimed at the representation of those who Afonso Taunay considered as the protagonists of the occupation process of Portuguese America: king Dom João III; Martim Afonso de Souza, the donee of the captaincy of São Vicente (both of 1932), indigenous chief Tibiriçá and his son-in-law, and the Portuguese João Ramalho (completed in 1934), the latter accompanied by his son and grandson. Triggered by the fourth centenary of São Vicente (celebrated in 1932), the commissioning of these works allowed Taunay to establish the beginning of his historical narrative, which would be completed in the Noble Hall with the canvas *Independência ou Morte* and the paintings commissioned for the 1922 celebrations, object of the first article of this dossier.

These studies derived in their entirety from research conducted at the masters and post-doctoral internships at the Universidade de São Paulo. They materialize an institutional effort to converge methodologies, theoretical contributions, and a great commitment to documentary research to understand history painting in the Museu

Paulista in a multifaceted and attentive manner concerning the curatorial circuit of works of art in a historical museum. Therefore, production, acquisition, exhibition, and diffusion are axes by which it is possible to perceive not only the creative relationship of paintings with their pictorial models but also with the training of artists, the not always placid demands of the commissioners, the interactions with historiographical debates that guide choices of representation, their agency in rooms where semantics depend on the expographic arrangements and juxtapositions, as well as the fascinating and infinite practices of appropriation of musealized paintings, ways in which the imagery that we must challenge was, and still is, developed.

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