

Brazilian Modernism: “Don’t forget I come from the tropics”

Oil Painting Class Sadie Murdoch



Tarsila do Amaral. Antropofagia, Oil on Canvas, 1929

Today we are going to head to South America, to look at Brazilian Modernist painting. We are going to look at the work of Tarsila do Amaral, Anita Catarina Malfatti, and Lasar Segall. But we are going to start, not with a painter but a sculptor.

Maria Martins was a Brazilian artist who made extraordinary bronze sculptures combining flowing organic forms with myths and monstrosity! Despite her prominent role in the Surrealist movement during the 1940s, she is relatively unknown outside Brazil. Martins exhibited her work internationally and was also the wife of the Brazilian Ambassador to the United States, which gave her certain freedoms. Here she is in her studio in New York:



Martins in her New York studio at Madison Avenue and 57th Street around 1946

She famously advised her critics: "Don't forget I come from the tropics". Here she is surrounded by some of her sculptures:



Martins' sculpture was rooted in Afro-Brazilian culture, particularly the myths and folklore of the Amazon Rainforest. Her work was a major force in Brazilian Modernism, in which artists, writers, and musicians explored the theory of cultural cannibalism put forth by Oswald de Andrade in his "Manifesto Antropófago" (Cannibalist Manifesto), first published in the May 1928 issue of *Revista de Antropofagia*. De Andrade challenged the dualities of 'civilization' versus 'barbarism', 'modern' versus 'primitive', and 'original' versus 'copy' that had informed the construction of Brazilian culture since the colonial era. De Andrade subversively appropriated the coloniser's idea of Brazil as a primitive or exotic place, full of "cannibals" and savages. He also refused to accept that Brazilian art forms would inevitably be a somewhat lacking copy of European culture. The use of the cannibal metaphor permitted Brazilian artists to transform their imposed colonial identities into an original (as opposed to dependent, or derivative) national culture. Martins sculpture often hinted at acts of incorporation and devouring with the tentacles and fang-like forms in her work.

So, Andrade's anthropophagist "devours" European Culture, adapting its strengths and incorporating them! Proclaiming Brazil to be a nation of 'cultural cannibals', he recast cannibalism as a positive cultural practice, that would lead to the creation of

MANIFESTO ANTROPOFAGO

Só a antropofagia nos une. Socialmente. Economicamente. Filosoficamente.

Única lei do mundo. Expressão mascarada de todos os individualismos, de todos os coletivismos. De todas as religiões. De todos os tratados de paz.

Tupy, or not tupy that is the question.

Contra toda as catecheses. E contra a mãe dos Gracchos.

Só me interessa o que não é meu. Lei do homem. Lei do antropofago.

Estamos fatigados de todos os maridos católicos suspeitosos postos em drama. Freud acabou com o enigma mulher e com outros mistos da psicologia impressa.

O que atropelava a verdade era a roupa, o impermeável entre o mundo interior e o mundo exterior. A reação contra o homem vestido. O cinema americano informa.

Filhos do sol, mãe dos viventes. Encontrados e amados fortemente, com toda a hipocrisia da sanidade, pelos imigrantes, pelos traficantes e pelos turistas. No país da cobra grande.

Fui porque nunca tivemos gramáticas, nem coleção de velhos vegetais. E nunca sabemos o que era urbano, suburbano, fronteiro e continental. Preguiçosos no mapa mundi do Brasil.

Uma consciência participante, uma rythmica religiosa.

Contra todos os importadores de consciência enlatada. A existência palpável da vida. E a mentalidade geológica para o Sr. Levy Bruhl estudar.

Queremos a revolução Carahiba. Maior que a revolução Francesa. A unificação de todas as revoltas efêmeras na direção do homem. Sem nós a Europa não teria sequer a sua

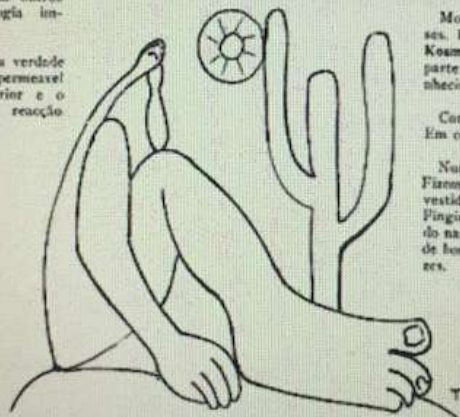
polve declaração dos direitos do homem.

A idade de ouro anunciada pela America. A idade de ouro. E todas as girls.

Filiação. O contacto com o Brasil Carahiba. Os Villeganhes print terre. Montaigne. O homem natural. Rousseau. Da Revolução Francesa ao Romantismo, à Revolução Bolchevista, à Revolução surrealista e ao barbaço technizado de Keyserling. Caminhamos.

Nunca fomos catechizados. Vivemos através de um direito soam-bulo. Fizemos Christo nascer na Bahia. Ou em Belém do Pará.

Mas nunca admitimos o nascimento da logica entre nós.



Desenho de Tarsila 1928 - De seu corpo, que figurará no seu próximo expozição de Junho no galeria Fernat, em Paris.

Contra o Padre Vieira. Autor do nosso primeiro empréstimo, para ganhar comissão. O rei analphabeta dissera-lhe: ponha isso no papel, mas sem muita labia. Fez-se o empréstimo. Gravou-se o atocar brasileiro. Vieira deixou o dinheiro em Portugal e nos trouxe a labia.

O espírito recusa-se a conceber o espírito sem corpo. O antropomorfismo. Necessidade da vacina antropofágica. Para o equilíbrio contra as religiões de meridiano. E as inquisições exteriores.

Só podemos atender ao mundo ocular.

Tinhamos a justiça codificação da vingança. A ciência codificação da Magia. Antropofagia. A transformação permanente do Tabu em totem.

Contra o mundo reversível e as idéas objectivadas. Cadsverizadas. O stop do pensamento que é dinamico. O individuo victima do systema. Fonte das injustiças classicas. Das injustiças romanticas. E o esquecimento das conquistas interiores.

Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros.

O instinto Carahiba.

Morte e vida das hypotheses. Da equação eu parte do Kosmos ao axioma Kosmos parte do eu. Subsistencia. Conhecimento. Antropofagia.

Contra as elites vegetares. Em comunicação com o solo.

Nunca fomos catechizados. Fianon foi Carnaval. O índio vestido de senador do Imperio. Fingindo de Pitt. Ou figurando nas operas de Alencar cheio de bons sentimentos portugueses.

Já tínhamos o communismo. Já tínhamos a lingua surrealista. A idade de ouro. Catiti Catiti. Imara Notiti. Notiti Imara. Ipejiti.

A magia e a vida. Tinhamos a relação e a distribuição dos bens phisicos, dos bens moraes, dos bens dignarios. E sabíamos transpor o mysterio e a morte com o auxilio de algumas formas grammaticaes.

Perguntei a um homem o que era o Direito. Elle me respondeu que era a garantia do exercicio da possibilidade. Esse homem chamava-se Galli Mathias. Comi-o.

Só não ha determinismo - onde ha misterio. Mas que temos nós com isso?

Continua na Pagina 7

Oswald de Andrade "Manifesto Antropófago", 1928

an authentically national expression. We can see parallels here with the murals and paintings of Mexican artists such as Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. These Central American artists also used European Modernist art to create their own personal and political meanings.

Remember Andre Breton and his love of Mexican culture? Well, he felt the same way about Brazilian Culture. He was pretty blown away by Martins' sculpture. Breton was the surrealist leader in Paris and in period after WWII, he thought that European civilisation had failed to prevent the rise of fascism and global conflict, and he

believed that it was 'non-western cultures', that now offered the hope of a meaningful future. Breton recalls here the enormous impact of encountering an exhibition of Martins work at the Valentine Gallery in New York:

"Maria's sculpture began to carry a whole legend on its shoulders, a legend that was nothing less than the Amazon itself. Sculpture garlanded, like the Amazon's own waters, with tropical creepers. This legend sang in those works of hers which I had



Maria Martins, wearing one of her sculptures as a brooch, 1940-50

the chance to see in New York in 1943 and admired so greatly. Just as it sang with all its immemorial voices man's passion from birth to death, re-created in symbols of unparalleled denseness by the Indian tribes which have succeeded each other along those treacherous banks. In her bronzes...Maria has succeeded marvellously in capturing at their primitive source not only anguish, temptation and fever, but also the sunrise, happiness and calm, and even occasionally pure delight; she is the emanation of all these things, all these wings and flowers. Maria owes nothing to the sculpture of the past or the present—she is far too sure, for that, of the *original* rhythm which is increasingly lacking in modern sculpture; she is prodigal with what the Amazon has given her—the overwhelming abundance of life.”

André Breton, “Maria,” in Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor, (New York: Icon Editions, Harper & Row, 1972), 319-320.

Back to painting! Tarsila de Aguiar do Amaral known as Tarsila do Amaral or Tarsila, was a leading Brazilian modernist painter. She was a member of the *Grupo dos Cinco*, a group of five Brazilian artists who led the modern art movement in Brazil.



Tarsila de Aguiar do Amaral portrait

Her work is influenced by European Surrealism, but we can also see traces of the Orphism of Sonia Delaunay, the Cubism of Fernand Leger, the Fauvism of Henri Matisse and the 'naive' paintings of Henri Rousseau. In Rousseau we find comparable representations of the 'Tropics', though he had never left the European continent and so they were really fantasies..!

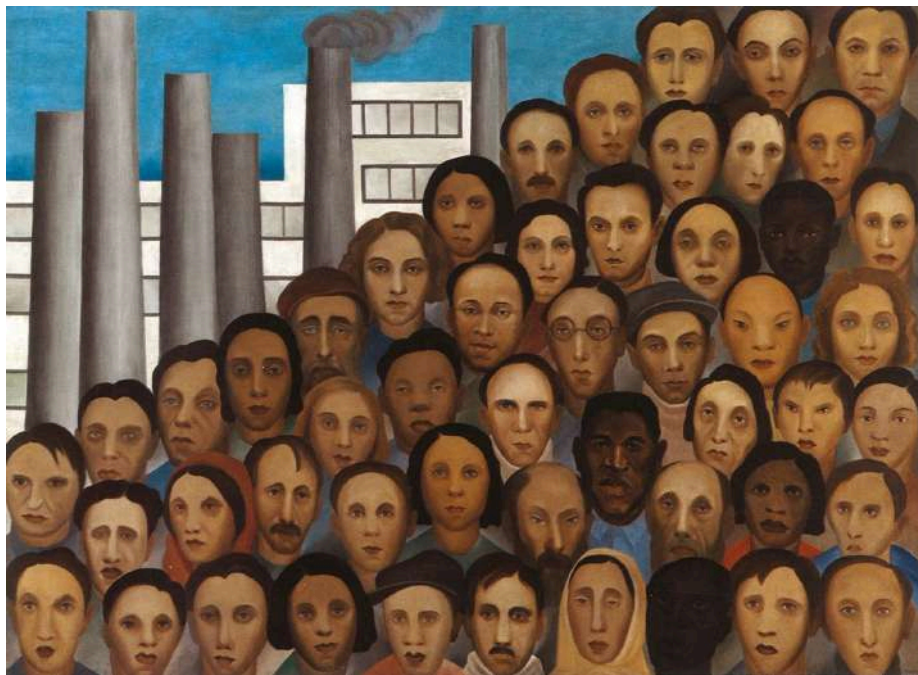


Tarsila do Amaral O Pescador - The Fisherman, Oil on Canvas, 1925

Themes that recur in modernist painting recur in Tarsila's work too - cities with their factories and railway stations, geometric forms and simplified flattened shapes and colours. Her work also demonstrates an understanding of the social and political concerns of many South American people and their everyday life.



Tarsila do Amaral, Carnaval em Madureira, Oil on Canvas, 1924



Tarsila do Amaral The Workers, Oil on Canvas, 1933

The Workers, a painting from later in Tarsila's career in 1933, shows this side to her work. The carnivalesque and utopian feel has gone and this painting must inevitably have been influenced by the global events of the 1930s, such as the Great Depression and the hardship that followed.

The work for which she is best known features figures and landscapes which morph and distort and are relatively simplified. Her oil paintings are almost like cartoons, such as her iconic work below (which also features as a line drawing in Anthropophagic Manifesto), and had a major influence on De Andrade and his ideas.



Tarsila do Amaral, Aboporu, Oil on Canvas, 1928

In these paintings, there are echoes of European art - of Edouard Manet's "Dejeuner sur L'herbe" - as the Brazilian artist's gaze 'devours' the iconic Europeans.

The other members of the Grupo dos Cinco were Menotti Del Picchia, Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade and Anita Catarina Malfatti.



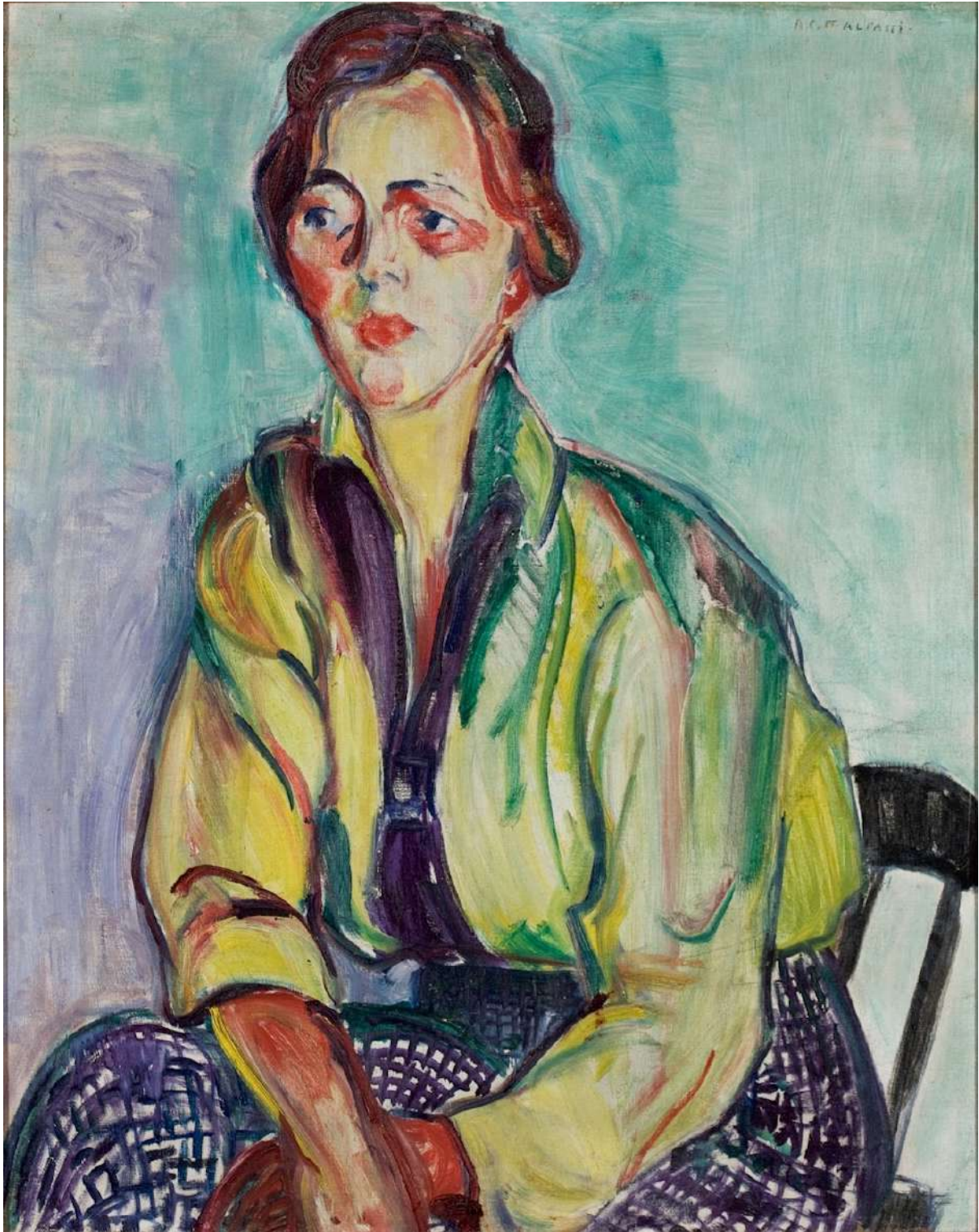
Anita Catarina Malfatti, portrait 1912.

Malfatti was heralded as the first Brazilian artist to introduce European and American forms of Modernism to Brazil. Her solo exhibition in Sao Paulo, from 1917–1918, was controversial at the time; her expressionist style and subject were revolutionary for the rather conservative patrons and owners of museums and galleries. Yet now the work seems fairly conventional portraits, landscapes etc, in a Northern European expressionist style. Malfatti's exhibited her work during the Week of Modern Art (Semana de Arte Moderna) in 1922, where she and the Group of Five changed the face of modern art in Brazil.



Anita Catarina Malfatti. Portrait of Mario de Andrade, Oil on canvas 1922.

When we look at the work now, we can see the influence of Cubism, of German Expressionism, particular Oskar Kokoshka and the Die Brücke movement, and also of Fauvism. Fauvism.. we'll come to that another time, but they were known as the Wild Beasts ..!



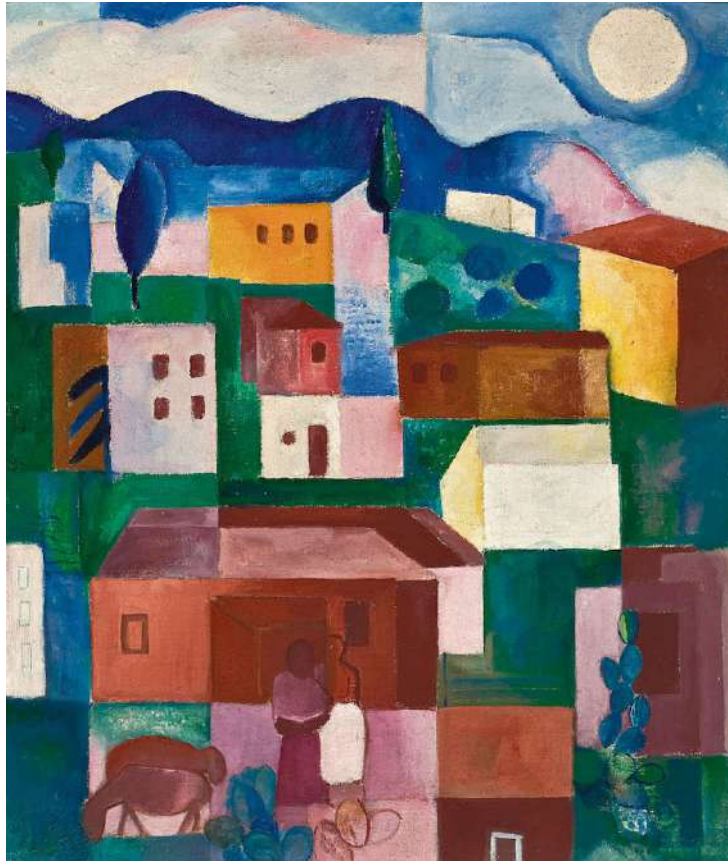
The student. Malfatti, Oil on Canvas, 1915-1916

Lasar Segall was a Lithuanian Jewish and Brazilian painter, engraver and sculptor. Segall's work demonstrates the influence of European Art but like Malfatti he adapted Cubism and expressionism in inventive new ways. His most significant themes were depictions of human suffering, war, persecution and prostitution.



Lasar Segall, portrait, 1929

Though Segall was a Russian citizen, he moved back to Brazil in 1923. Upon his return he obtained Brazilian citizenship, and while in Brazil, his paintings were influenced heavily by harsh social realities of urban and rural life. The red light' areas of the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the rainforests, plantations and farms of Brazil's countryside, and the people – those who lived in the favelas and those who worked the land. Malfatti and other Brazilian artists also influenced Segall's subject matter.



Lasar Segall Paisagem_Brasileir, oil on canvas



Lasar Segall Interior of Poor People oil on canvas, 1921

and strengthened his Cubist form. His portrayal of prostitutes, his depiction of human suffering, as well as his formal experiments meant that his artwork became controversial. He and other artists organised a pro Modernist event known as the Modern art week or the Semana de Arte Moderna in 1922 in Sao Paulo.



Lasar Segall oil on canvas



Lasar Segall The Emigrants, bronze.

The Week marked the start of Brazilian Modernism; it coalesced and defined the movement and introduced it to Brazilian society at large. The week-long event included Segall's work, as well as Anita Malfatti's. Performances and other art forms were conducted at the event - due to the radical nature of some of their poems and music, the artists were booed and pelted by the audience..!



Poster for Semana de Arte Moderna in 1922 in São Paulo



Lasar Segal Museum in São Paulo

Now there is a Museum in São Paulo dedicated to Lasar Segall's work.

In some ways, the painter who has the most original vision was Tarsila. Her work remains compelling and astonishing to this day, and has influenced the 1950s Neo Concrete movement in Brazil, the Tropicália movement of the 1960s, and the more contemporary art of collaborative group Assume Vivid Astro Focus. You can see more of their work here:

<https://www.assumevividaastrofocus.com/>

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/helio-oiticica-7730/story-helio-oiticica-and-tropicalia-movement>