

ESCALA Research Papers

NO. 1

*Southern Press: Prints from
Brazil, Paraguay and Chile*

Ian Dudley

ESCALA

ESCALA Research Papers are investigations into the works and artists in the Essex Collection of Art from Latin America. ESCALA commissions these papers from researchers who explore the Collection in conjunction with exhibitions, conferences and their own studies. We intend to commission ESCALA Research Papers regularly, publishing them in hard copy and making them available on our website.

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ISSN 2049-1085 (Print)

ISSN 2049-1093 (Online)

Number: 1

Title: *Southern Press: Prints from Brazil, Paraguay and Chile*

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Editor: Joanne Harwood with Valerie Fraser

Publisher: Essex Collection of Art from Latin America,

University of Essex, Colchester

Date: 2011

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Ian Dudley is the curator of *Southern Press*, Project Support Officer for the *Meeting Margins* research project and a PhD candidate in the School of Philosophy and Art History at the University of Essex. His thesis *Amerindian Landscapes and Bodies in Edward Goodall's 'Sketches in British Guiana', 1841–1844* investigates ethnographic representation in 19th century Guyana and is part of his broader interests in the art and history of northern Amazonia and its indigenous peoples.

Designer: Red Leader

Printer: Print Essex

Southern Press: Prints from Brazil, Paraguay and Chile

Printmaking is in the spotlight, there is no doubt. In the last few years, laymen and scholars have come to agree on the following phrase: "The best thing currently being done in Brazil is printmaking."

Ferreira Gullar, 'Artes Plásticas: Interview with Oswaldo Goeldi',
Jornal do Brasil, Sunday Supplement, 1.12.1957

Southern Press: Prints from Brazil, Paraguay and Chile features the works of thirteen printmakers made between 1930 and 1994, with a focus on the 1950s, 60s and 70s. While critic Ferreira Gullar's quotation refers to a specific moment in Brazil, it is indicative of the broader significance of printmaking in other interrelated artistic contexts in Paraguay, Chile and indeed throughout Latin America in the Cold War period. During this time, printmaking, (sometimes 'engraving', from the Spanish *grabado* and Portuguese *gravura*), formed a major part of art education, with printers teaching, studying and collaborating within public institutions and private studios. Printers enjoyed a correspondingly high prominence within national and international exhibition circuits, participating in events such as the São Paulo and Venice Biennials, as well as medium-specific events, such as the Latin American Print Biennial in San Juan, Puerto Rico. While printers naturally concerned themselves with questions related to the nature of printmaking itself, their use of abstraction or political subjects demonstrated an engagement with contemporary artistic debates beyond the medium itself. Despite this historical significance and its continued use by artists today, printmaking is often neglected by curators and art historians from Europe and North America in favour of practices perceived to be more 'avant-garde', such as geometric abstract painting and kinetic art, as well as conceptual and performance based practices. *Southern Press* seeks to assert the need to account for the role of printmaking within broader narratives that address art from Latin America.

The exhibition features works from the Essex Collection of Art from Latin America (ESCALA), which has particularly rich holdings of prints. The prints

employ a variety of techniques and styles and have been chosen based on the types of relationships between artists and their works currently being explored by *Meeting Margins: Transnational Art in Latin America and Europe 1950–1978*, a three year collaborative research project based in the Department of Art History and Theory at University of Essex and at TrAIN, the Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation at the University of the Arts London. The project focuses on artistic contacts, exchanges and collaborations within and between Latin American countries and Europe in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The printmakers in *Southern Press* not only worked in shared artistic and political contexts, but many were also closely associated, through education and exhibitions, with certain figures in particular playing key roles in linking different printmaking networks and traditions. These associations often led to overlapping styles and themes, although this is by no means always the case, as the stark contrasts between some of the works in *Southern Press* demonstrate. This research paper attempts to identify relationships between the selected artists and the points of convergence and divergence visible in the prints themselves.

In Brazil, Oswaldo Goeldi (1895-1961) and Lívio Abramo (1903-1992) are acknowledged as the most important and influential exponents of printmaking, particularly the woodcut. Goeldi's *Peixaria* (Fishmarket) is the earliest work in the exhibition, dating from around 1930 and displays the direct and economical style for which he became known through magazine and book illustrations from the 1920s. Abramo's 1955 series of five prints based on Fyodor Dostoyevsky's short story *White Nights*, demonstrates the mix of technical refinement and emotional intensity that characterized his oeuvre. The important link between printmaking and literature is an aspect in many of the works of printmakers featured in *Southern Press*. Goeldi had himself illustrated translations of Dostoyevsky as well as books by Brazilian writers such as Raul Bopp, and both his and Abramo's styles drew on the illustrative tradition of Brazilian popular literature (literatura de cordel or 'string literature'). Others have either illustrated literary works or taken inspiration from them, such as the Chilean printmakers Nemesio Antúnez (1918-1993), Santos Chávez Alister Carinao (1934-2001) and Carlos Hermosilla (1905-1991), himself a poet.

Goeldi and Abramo exemplify a tradition of expressive figuration in Brazilian modernism, through which they represented scenes of everyday life, the

working classes, as well as the existential dilemmas of individuals caught in the confusion of the modern world. Both were influenced by artists associated with European Expressionism, such as Alfred Kubin in Goeldi's case, with whom the artist corresponded during his life, while Abramo was deeply struck by the politically committed prints of Käthe Kollwitz, whose works he saw in São Paulo in the late 1920s. Kollwitz's pupil Axl Leskoschek fled to Brazil during the Second World War, where he taught a number of artists who were later associated with the emergence and consolidation of abstraction there in the 1950s, including the painter Ivan Serpa and printmakers such as Edith Behring and Fayga Ostrower (1920-2001).

The social preoccupations that Goeldi's and Abramo's prints shared with Kollwitz, likewise reflected firm political beliefs formed in opposition to the rise of Fascism in the 1920s and 30s. Abramo was an active trade unionist and member of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) along with friend and influential critic Mario Pedrosa, who shared his admiration for Kollwitz (and the fate of being expelled from the PCB for Trotskyist sympathies). Pedrosa was among important critics, including Ferreira Gullar and Mario Faustino, based at *O Jornal do Brasil*, who wrote articles such as the one quoted at the beginning of this paper, recognising the importance of printmaking as an artistic medium in the late 1950s. That decade saw Goeldi and Abramo gain major national and international recognition: Goeldi won the Grand Prize for Printing at the first São Paulo Biennial in 1951 in which Abramo had a dedicated room. At the 1953 edition Goeldi was honored with a dedicated room and Abramo with the Prize for the Best National Engraver, while each made four appearances at the Venice Biennial between 1950 and 1958. Their works were also exhibited in many other countries including Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, France and Japan.

The 1950s also saw the emergence of a new generation of Brazilian printmakers including Fayga Ostrower, along with Rossini Perez (born 1932), Anna Letycia (born 1929) and Antonio Henrique Amaral (born 1935), all featured in *Southern Press*. They quickly gained national and international exposure, appearing in numerous group and solo exhibitions throughout the 50s, 60s and 70s, including the São Paulo and Venice Biennials, as well as biennials in Caracas, Mexico City, Santiago, San Juan, Liubiana, Paris and Bradford. All had been taught by one or more of Brazil's leading printers, including the wood

engravers already mentioned (Goeldi, Abramo, and Leskoschek), as well as metal engravers such as Carlos Oswald and Iberê Camargo (1914-1994), and most of the new generation soon became teachers in their own right.

Relationships formed around the studios where printmaking was taught and studied are often, although not always, visible in the works themselves. Nevertheless education was vital to the popularity of printmaking during the period and provides an important basis for tracing relations between many of the printers featured in *Southern Press*. Camargo was taught metal printing by Austrian Hans Steiner, before teaching the same discipline himself at the Instituto Municipal de Belas-Artes in Rio de Janeiro from 1953. Camargo's pupils included Letycia and Perez, both of whom had also studied under Goeldi at the Escolinha de Arte do Brasil, where he had taught since 1952. Metal engraving was regarded by many as offering more possibilities for experimentation than wood and except for Amaral all of the newer generation came to concentrate on this type of printmaking. Camargo's 1973 print *Figura IV* (Figure IV) typifies the more abstract tendencies that Brazilian metal engravers pursued from the mid-1950s onwards, as visible in Ostrower's 1967 untitled lithograph, Perez's *Torção no quadrado* (Twist on a Square) of 1975, and two later works by Letycia, *Composição mista* (Mixed Composition) of 1992, and an untitled aquatint of 1994.

Both Perez and Letycia taught in the Ateliê de Gravura at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Rio de Janeiro (MAM/RJ), an important state-of-the-art printing studio which opened in 1959 under the direction of Edith Behring, and which became particularly associated with abstract experimentation in metal. Behring had learnt printing under Oswald and Leskoschek at the Fundação Getúlio Vargas, before traveling to Paris between 1953 and 1957. Here she was among a number of Brazilians, including Niomar Monis Sodré, studying metal printing in the studio of Johnny Friedlaender. Sodré was a driving force behind the development of MAM/RJ in the 1950s and was responsible both for inviting Behring to set up its print facility on her return to Brazil in 1957, and for commissioning Friedlaender to give the inaugural lessons during the first four months of the studio's opening. This coincided with his participation in the 1959 São Paulo Biennial. Behring and Perez worked as Friedlaender's assistants and took over teaching after his departure. Letycia later succeeded Perez after he won a scholarship to study lithography at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, Holland.

Friedlaender's appointment was controversial and was opposed by many leading printmakers and critics inside Brazil, including Goeldi and Camargo, with strong exchanges on the subject appearing in the pages of *O Jornal Do Brasil*. In an interview with Gullar in 1957, Goeldi criticized the influence of foreign printers such as Friedlaender and Stanley William Hayter, whose Parisian-based studios attracted artists from around the world. In Goeldi's opinion, Friedlaender and Hayter practiced a vacant style of abstract technical experimentation in metal, which he accused them of "vomiting" over their students. Goeldi felt that Brazil had its own distinctive print language and that there were plenty of Brazilian printmakers perfectly suited to the MAM/RJ job. Goeldi's distaste for abstraction was already evident in his strong criticism of Ostrower's first exhibition of abstract prints at Rio's Ministry of Education building in 1954 and must be understood within the broader debates concerning the emergence of abstraction in Brazilian art that took place during the 1950s.

Despite the opposition of Goeldi and others, the MAM/RJ studio was oversubscribed when it opened. Apart from Behring, Perez and Letyrcia, many important artists passed through its doors as teachers and students, including Marília Rodriguez (born 1937), a former pupil of Goeldi's at the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes (ENBA), Maria Bonomi (born 1935), a student of Abramo's at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM/SP), as well as Anna Bella Geiger, José Assumpção, and Walter Marquez. The studio also received students from neighbouring countries including Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Peru. The MAM/RJ studio closed in 1969 after Behring and Letyrcia left following disagreements with the influential critic and curator Frederico Moraes, who had taken over the pedagogical wing of MAM/RJ. Moraes considered printmaking a minor and outdated activity in comparison to the conceptual and performance-based tendencies exemplified by artists such as Antônio Manoel, Lygia Clarke and Hélio Oiticica, whom he championed.

Abramo maintained a more balanced opinion of the Friedlaender affair, perhaps based on his own transnational experiences and the greater value he placed on the role of teaching within the formation of printmakers, whereas Goeldi thought students should learn through their own experience. Abramo himself had worked in Hayter's Atelier 17 during a trip to Paris between 1951 and 1953 and in 1957, the year the Friedlaender contro-versy erupted, Abramo

founded the Julián de la Herrería Print Workshop in Asunción, with the support of the Brazilian government. The workshop was attended by leading Para-guayan artists including Olga Blinder (1821-2008), Lotte Schulz (born 1925), both included in *Southern Press*, as well as Edith Jiménez (1918-2004).

Blinder was an important figure in the development of modernism in Paraguayan art in the 1950s and was also influential within arts education. She founded a number of important artistic and cultural institutions including the Escolina de Arte de Asunción, set up in 1959 with Augusto Rodriguez. Schulz also contributed to the consolidation of modernist practices in the country and later worked as director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Asunción. Both artists exhibited nationally and internationally from the 1950s onwards, participating regularly in important biennials in São Paulo, Santiago, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Medellín, Cali, and Montevideo, to name just a few.

The concentration on specifically local subject matter and the technical intricacy found in Blinder's woodcuts *Lavandera* (Washerwomen) and *Ñanduti III*, (Lace III), both from 1961, very much embody the spirit of Abramo's own work, as does the exploration of the textural possibilities of woodcut evident in Schulz's *Acuático* (Aquatic) and *Familia* (Family), both from 1960. The associations Abramo formed in Asunción also led to Paraguayan students attending the Estúdio Gravura in São Paulo, another important studio founded by him in 1960 together with Maria Bonomi, a former student. Abramo himself eventually moved to Paraguay in 1962 where he became director of the Centro de Estudos Brasileiros and a tireless promoter of Paraguayan culture.

Abramo was by no means the only Brazilian engaged in the export of print knowledge to neighboring countries. In 1960 Camargo taught in Montevideo, where his 1955 treaty on printing, *A Gravura*, was published in Spanish, prior to its publication in Portuguese in 1975. In 1960, Perez taught at the Instituto Brasil-Bolivia in La Paz, and at the Escuela de Bellas Artes in Lima, while Letycia taught at the Pontífica Universidad Católica in Santiago, and the Fundación Guayasamin in Quito, in 1961.

Nemesio Antúnez was another key promoter of printmaking. Antúnez previously studied with Hayter in New York in the late 1940s before working in his Atelier 17 in Paris from 1950-53, where he probably came into contact with Abramo. In 1953 Antúnez returned to Chile and founded his own print

studio, Taller 99, in Santiago, which quickly became a leading centre of print production and learning. *Camas en el cielo/Metamorfosis del sueño* (Beds in the Sky/Dream Metamorphosis) is a late work from 1993, and part of *Trazos en el abismo* (Traces in the Abyss), a series in which Taller 99 artists and poet Raúl Bruna created prints and poems simultaneously. The project exemplified the collaborative ethos defining the studio since its foundation and is a further example of the strong links printmaking enjoyed with literature.

The poetic exploration of dream, memory and the imagination was a recurrent concern for Antúnez, and also informed the work other artists associated with his studio such as Santos Chávez Alister Carinao (henceforth Chávez). *Siguiendo un astro* (Following a Star), like much of Chávez's work, may draw on the artist's indigenous Mapuche heritage. The 1968 linocut features a number of motifs that could be associated with Mapuche creation mythology, including Kuyén, the spirit of the moon. Chávez had joined Taller 99 at Antúnez's invitation in 1961, where he worked as an assistant to Delia Del Carril (1885-1989) and was a contemporary of other important printmakers who came through the studio, including Jaime Cruz (born 1934), Dionora Doudchitsky and Eduardo Vilches (born 1932).

During the 1990s Chávez illustrated the first translation into the Mapuche language of the poetry of Pablo Neruda, who had formerly been married to Chávez's Taller 99 colleague Delia Del Carril. Neruda was a friend of Carlos Hermosilla and the subject of his woodcut portrait, *Retrato de Pablo Neruda* (Portrait of Pablo Neruda). Hermosilla was another influential printer and poet based near to Valparaíso. He taught printing at the Escuela de Bellas Artes de Viña del Mar from 1939, and was an important figure in the development of printmaking in the area, contributing to the formation of the Grupo de Grabadores de Viña del Mar in 1947, and organising print exhibitions such as the first Salón de Grabadores de Chile at the Sala del Ministerio de Educación in Santiago.

Neruda was a committed communist and this woodcut was among a series of portraits of leftwing icons, including Bertold Brecht and Che Guevara, which Hermosilla made in 1973. This was the year of Neruda's death from cancer, which occurred just days after the US-backed military coup in which the army violently overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende, with whom Neruda had collaborated. After winning the

Nobel Prize in 1971, Neruda was invited by Allende to read his poetry at the Estadio Nacional in front of 70,000 people. The sombre mood of the portrayal perhaps reflects both personal loss and the tragic coincidence of the national icon's death with one of the darkest moments in Chilean history.

Chile was one of an increasing number of countries throughout South and Central America to fall under dictatorship during the Cold War period. The climate of violence and repression that followed such events provoked strong responses by artists, many of whom went into exile. After he left Chile in 1973, Antúnez painted a series of dark images in response to the ongoing violent repression in his country. He was later followed into exile by Chávez in 1977. Mario Pedrosa himself had to leave Chile in 1973, to where he had fled in 1970 from Brazil to escape the increasingly repressive military dictatorship that had been in power there since 1964. During his time in Chile, Pedrosa had been among the founders of the Museo de la Solidaridad, an international art collection based on donations, that was set up in support of Allende's government.

Another Brazilian to leave his country in the 1970s was Antonio Henrique Amaral, who lived in New York from 1972-1981. His earlier album of woodcuts *O meu e o seu* is a reaction to this politically critical and emotionally charged period in Brazilian and world history. The prints in *O meu e o seu* were first exhibited in 1967 when they were launched as a book with an introduction by Ferreira Gullar. The seven woodcuts satirize and denounce the physical and psychological violence that, in Amaral's view, characterised the exercise of local and global power at that time, although the prints also reflect on the position of the individual and the potential value or triviality of private concern and anxiety in the face of overwhelming events.

O meu e o seu is a clear demonstration of the potential power of the woodcut at a time when the relevance of printmaking as a whole was being challenged in Brazil and beyond by the increasing shift among artists, critics and curators toward experimental conceptual practices. Interestingly, those qualities that made Amaral's prints so relevant and modern: the directness of style and his social concern, clearly owe a debt to the older and less fashionable tradition of expressive figuration practiced by Goeldi and Abramo, discussed at the beginning of this paper. Abramo was, of course, Amaral's former teacher at MAM/SP in the late 1950s.

According to Anna Letyia, Goeldi repeatedly said that “engraving is that which is engraved”. This simple definition, while logically correct, perhaps belies not only the immense possibilities open to printmakers, but the complexity of relationships, contexts, and contestations that were the backdrop to the flourishing culture of printmaking in the twentieth century. *Southern Press* and its accompanying texts are an attempt to explore some of these complexities.

Ian Dudley, August 2011

¹ This research paper refers to artists in the Essex Collection of Art from Latin America not included in *Southern Press*. ESCALA artists are distinguished in this text by the inclusion of their birth and death dates.

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Southern Press: Prints from Brazil, Paraguay and Chile is the first in the series of ESCALA Research Papers and has been produced for the exhibition of the same name at firstsite in Colchester.

The exhibition is open from 25 September 2011 to 22 January 2012 and is free.

Artists in *Southern Press*

Abramo, Lívio
Amaral, Antonio Henrique
Antunéz, Nemesio
Blinder, Olga
Camargo, Iberê
Chávez Alister Carinao, Santos
Goeldi, Osvaldo
Hermosilla, Carlos
Letycia, Anna
Ostrower, Fayga
Perez, Rossini
Schulz, Lotte

Curator: Ian Dudley

Curatorial support: Joanne Harwood, ESCALA Director

Exhibition organisation: Sarah Demelo, ESCALA Collections Assistant

Technical support: James Barnard with Phil Gardner

Acknowledgements:

ESCALA would like to thank the following colleagues at the University of Essex: Rachel Earle, Valerie Fraser, Vanessa Potter and Nigel South and at firstsite: Michelle Cotton, Laura Earley, Kate Hawkins, Hannah Morrison, Janet Spence, Kath Wood and Wayne Warner.

Ian Dudley would like to thank Joanne Harwood and Sarah Demelo at ESCALA and Valerie Fraser, Michael Asbury, Isobel Whitelegg and María Inigo Clavo; researchers and colleagues from the *Meeting Margins* project.

Image opposite: Olga Blinder, *Lavandera*, 1961, woodcut on paper, 51 x 45 cm, © Olga Blinder. Image © ESCALA

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and enjoyment of art from Latin America
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