Led by a Franco-Brazilian team of scholars in the humanities, social sciences, arts and literatures, this joint research project is developing a digital platform for Transatlantic Cultural History to be published in four languages. In a series of essays exploring cultural relations between Europe, Africa, and the Americas, it presents a connected history of the Atlantic space since the 18th century, highlighting the cultural dynamics of the Atlantic region and its crucial role in the contemporary process of globalization.

Visual Arts

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South Atlantic - North Atlantic - Africa - Europe - Caribbean - South America - North America

The Atlantic Space Within Globalization - The Consolidation of Mass Cultures - The Steam Atlantic - Atlantic Revolutions and Colonialism

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In the field of visual arts, the study of transatlantic exchange has seen recent growth in the elaboration of ideas whose main aim is the rewriting of a modern and contemporary art history that remains deeply marked by a western-culture-centric and modernist narrative. This narrative posits European fine arts movements as the exclusive basis for the canon, and European avant-garde movements from 1875 to 1930 as the only source of formal experimentation. As in other areas, the adoption of a transatlantic perspective emphasizes the multilateral flow of influence on forms and representations, individual and collective paths, material and intellectual exchanges. This perspective allows for a more complex and nuanced vision of the circulation of artistic innovation. Traditional representations tying centers (or artistic capitals) and margins (or zones of influence and/or expansion) are upended by recent research projects, undertaken from the point of view of a dynamic history of the arts developed simultaneously in Europe (Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel at l'École Normale Supérieure of Paris and then at the University of Geneva), in the United States (Catherine Dossin at Purdue University, Daniel Quiles at the Art Institute of Chicago, Michele Greet at George Mason University, among others), and also in Brazil (Ana Paula Cavalcanti Simioni at the University of São Paolo), to mention only a few examples.

Through the lens of transnational exchanges we are invited to contemplate the importance of meetings and interactions, of cultural transfer in every direction, of identity claims for diasporas (described by Stuart Hall) and continents (from the pan-Americanism of Jose Gómez Sicre to the “Latin-American” images promoted by the Mexican Council of photography), the phenomena of appropriation and multiracialism, all of which unfold across various spaces (between two institutions, two cities, two cultural areas) and various timeframes (the time of an event like a Universal Exposition, retrospective exhibit, biennial exhibit, or art fair, but also moment of teaching in schools, workshops or artist’s residencies, as well as the experience of expatriation for economic, political or cultural reasons). We are hence concerned with the study of what travels, on a material level: artists (who are born here, educated there, and exhibit their works elsewhere), works (created here, sold there, and indefinitely conserved in a museum, either on view or hidden in storage), but also mediators in human form (art critics, art dealers, gallery owners, art lovers and collectors) and in non-human form (periodicals, reproductions, correspondences).

The intangible dimension of this circulation of art is equally important, with a strong interest in the dynamic evolution of forms, tastes, and sensitivities through the lens of intercultural contact. What displacement, “translocation” (Bénédicte Savoy), does for art is at the very heart of these research projects that question the relationships of dominance between cultural areas, but also between receptive phenomena, multiracialism and reappropriation of displaced objects or individuals. The integration

of artists into cultural microcosms distinct from that where they grew up or were educated (for example, as studied by Elisa Capdevila and Michelle Greet, North and South Americans settled in Paris at various time periods) or that of a work of art in a new public space (the Statue of Liberty at the entrance to New York Harbor, but also so-called “primitive” art in Paris, or even gestural abstractions in São Paolo) form distinctive case studies.

Through observation of dynamics, in terms of models and counter-models, of Ancients and Moderns, but also of the competing logic of nationalism and cosmopolitanism/internationalism, and the effects of convergence and divergence (appropriations and rejections, transnational affinities), the transatlantic history of artistic exchange is in constant dialogue with geography, sociology and anthropology. It examines cultural phenomena and takes into account the importance of economic, technical and political determinations to their emergence and development. What is at stake is to gain a deeper understanding of the construction and erosion of artistic hegemonies (old Europe’s Academies in the 18th century, the poles of formal innovation in the 19th century, the domination of New York after 1940), from which different spaces of production, mediation, and reception of the arts emerge. Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (following Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann’s lead) advocates, therefore, for a “spatial history of art” in her project “Artl@s” founded in 2009. Thus appears a more global history of visual arts in the late modern period, which is attentive to multilateral exchange (between Europe, the Americas, Africa) and thus able to enrich scholarship considerably by decentering its gaze.

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