Artl@s Bulletin

Volume 8
Issue 3 *Putting the Arts in their Place*

Article 3

2019

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Recommended Citation

Bohnenblust, Laura. "Tracing the Routes of Floating Exhibitions: A Fluid Cartography of Post-war Modernism around 1956." *Artl@s Bulletin* 8, no. 3 (2019): Article 3.

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source: https://doi.org/10.7892/boris.128013 | downloaded: 19.4.2024

Tracing the Routes of Floating Exhibitions: A Fluid Cartography of Post-war Modernism around 1956

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Abstract

This article discusses the phenomenon of floating art exhibitions based on the examples of the Argentinian *exposición flotante* and the Australian *Pacific Loan Exhibition* (both 1956). They manifested themselves at the same time as the "second wave of biennials" and can be interpreted as floating national pavilions. Through a spatial analysis of the routes taken across the open ocean, it is shown how the ships' movements form what can be understood as a 'negative map' of canonical art history, oriented around the North Atlantic. This cartographic approach reveals blind spots in art historical research and contributes to the creation of new narratives.

Résumé

Cet article traite du phénomène des expositions d'art flottant en prenant pour exemple *la exposición flotante* Argentine et de *Pacific Loan Exhibition* Australienne (les deux 1956). Ils se sont manifestés en même temps que la "deuxième vague de biennales" et peuvent être interprétés comme des pavillons nationaux flottants. L'analyse spatiale des itinéraires empruntés en haute mer montre comment les mouvements des bateaux forment ce que l'on peut interpréter comme une carte négative de l'histoire de l'art canonique, orientée autour de l'Atlantique Nord. Cette approche cartographique révèle des éléments manquant de l'histoire de l'art et contribue à la création de nouveaux narratifs.

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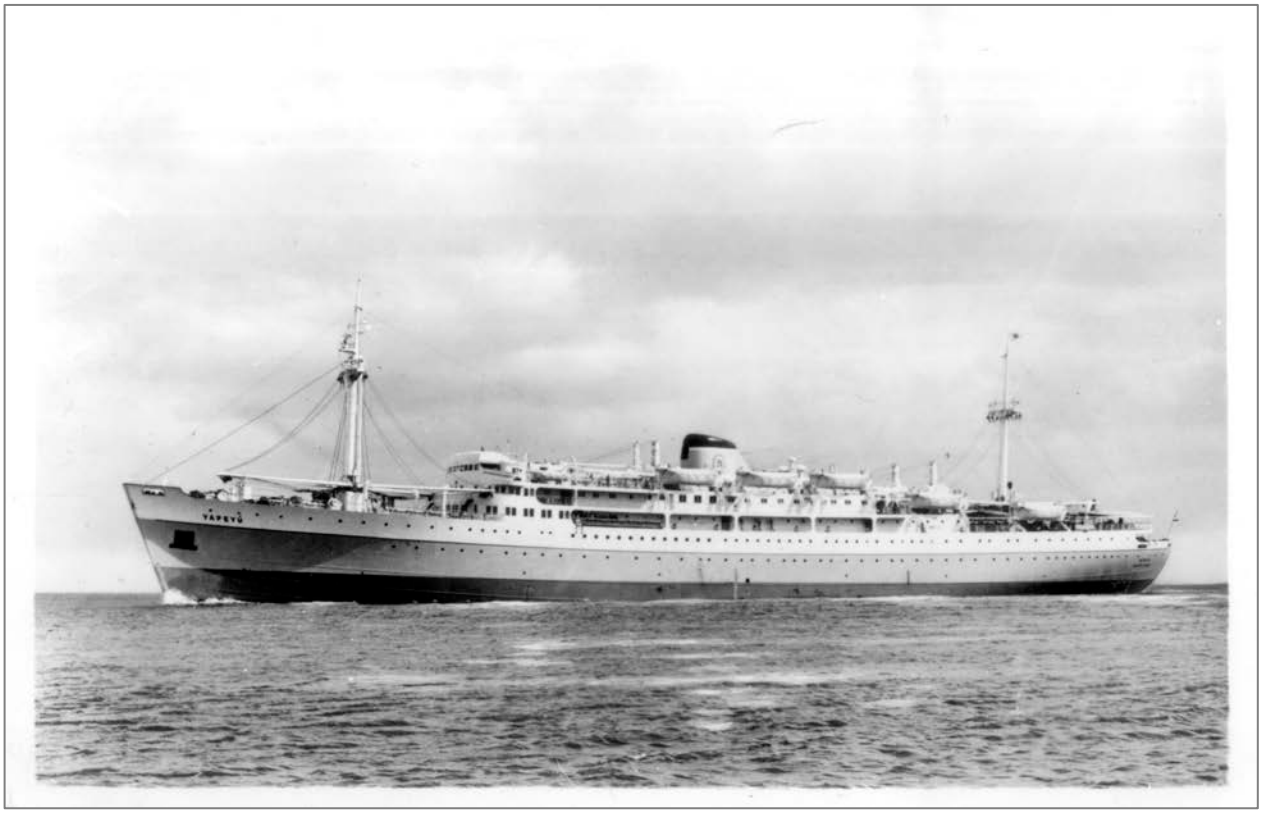


Figure. 1: *M/N Argentina "Yapeyú",* unknown photographer, ca. 1956, photo courtesy unknown, (historical postcard owned by the author).

Routes before Roots

34° 35′ 57″ S, 58° 22′ 17″ W, Port of Buenos Aires, Dock C, 28th of September 1956: The vessel *Yapeyú* puts to sea (Fig. 1). For the next six months the ship is going to be on the *Vuelta al Mundo* – a round-the-world-tour under the Argentine flag. On board is the first floating exhibition of Argentinian painters – *la primera exposición flotante de cincuenta pintores Argentinos.* From Rio de Janeiro to Cape Town, Cochin, Melbourne, Shanghai, Kobe and Honolulu (Map 1), the works of fifty contemporary artists will be presented under the auspices of the newly founded Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires.[1]

33° 51′ 30″ S, 151° 12′ 36″ E, Sydney Harbor, October 5., 1956: The steamboat *S.S.Orcades* of the Australian shipping company *Orient Line* leaves port for Auckland, Honolulu, Vancouver and San Francisco (Map 2). Here it is the so-called *Pacific Loan Exhibition*, in which 89 contemporary Australian paintings from the collection of the National Gallery of N.S.W, the National Gallery of Victoria as well as private collections are present.

This article focusses on ships as mobile stages of modern art after the Second World War. Ships have not only been means of transportation for artworks or travelling art professionals – they have also served as exhibition spaces in themselves. However, floating art exhibitions and their routes have received little attention in art historical research up to now. Although travelling exhibitions in general have been known for some time and similar mobile formats such as fairs have been

[1] This article takes up some of the arguments that I have formulated here: Laura Bohnenblust, "Flottieren und die Grenzen der Ordnungsstruktur: Die *exposición flotante* des Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (1956)," *kritische berichte* 46, no. 2 (2018): 74–84.

identified as precursors to the museum,[2] the phenomenon of floating exhibitions and their routes have hardly been examined.

There may be different causes for this, but there seem to be good reasons to assume that conventional approaches of art history and the tradition of art historiography itself, which for a long time have centered around and depended upon geographically and institutionally static benchmarks, are related to this lack of representation. On the one hand, the aspect of mobility in the arts has only recently been investigated.[3] In a neighboring discipline, the historian and cultural anthropologist James Clifford, with his collection of essays *Routes. Travel and Translation in the late twentieth Century* (1997), shaped an understanding of culture which is in constant motion. In Clifford's thinking, travelling and mobility are the essential starting points for every analysis of cultural history.[4] On the other hand, travelling exhibitions in general are a phenomenon that far exceeds the boundaries of a solely art historical perspective. Often factors outside the "artistic field"[5] are more decisive for their implementation. Questions related to geo- and cultural politics, geography, economies and tourism go hand in hand with the presentation of art in this special kind of transport.

The investigation of floating exhibitions is fertile exactly when it comes to critically questioning the processes of art historiography and to challenge the "grand narratives" by proposing alternative stories beyond the canon of modern art and its hegemonic centers and institutions. Moreover, the tracking of floating exhibitions opens up new questions in the sociology of the arts and their geopolitical interrelations, enabling their histories to be compared: To what extent do these maps visualize the connections and power structures of cultural-political relations in the art world after the Second World War? By tracing the routes of floating exhibitions beyond national and continental boundaries, it can be shown that the cartography of post-war modernism is far more dynamic than the canonical art historiography, focused on hegemonic centers, has been able to show. While New York was supposedly "stealing the idea of modern art" from Paris,[6] other actors of the art world where in a fluid process of negotiation and exchange.

"Janus-headed-art" on Board

"Rush to See Argentine Art", announced the newspaper *The Age* from Melbourne on December 7th, 1956.[7] The Australian press reported that "hundreds of art lovers" had already visited the exhibition of contemporary Argentinian paintings on the ship *Yapeyú*.[8] The cruise ship anchored in the port of Melbourne could be boarded via a gangway during the announced visiting hours. It presented itself as a museum with a banner saying: "1. Exposición Flotante de 50 pintores Argentinos. Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires"[9] This floating exhibition was actually the first activity of the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, which in 1956 had been recently founded by the initiative of its first director Rafael Squirru.[10] Since it wasn't until 1960 that the museum had a permanent building, the cruise ship, among various other locations, served as an exhibition venue in the early years of the institution then commonly called the "ghost museum".[11]

[2] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 2009).
[3] See for example: Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, eds., *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Christine Göttler and Mia M. Mochizuki, eds., *The Nomadic Object: The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious Art*. Intersections 53 (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Christian Kravagna, *Transmoderne: Eine Kunstgeschichte des Kontakts* (Berlin: b-books, 2017).
[4] James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1997).
[5] Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art : Genèse et structure du champ littéraire* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).
[6] Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983).
[7] Anonymous, "Rush to See Argentine Art," *The Age (Melbourne)*, December 7, 1956, 14, accessed July 28, 2018, https://www.newspapers.com/download/image/?id=1222300.
[8] Anonymous, "Rush to See Argentine Art".
[9] Anonymous, "Unpublished photograph," *TRIO Noticiero Turístico, Edición especial para los viajeros que realizan con TRIO "LA VUELTA AL MUNDO"* 9 (1956): 3. Private archive of Teresa Baratta, Buenos Aires.
[10] For more information about Rafael Squirru see: Eloisa Squirru, *Tan Rafael Squirru!* (Buenos Aires: El Elefante Blanco, 2008); Michael Gordon Wellen, "Pan-American Dreams: Art, Politics, and Museum-Making at the OAS, 1948–1976" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2012).
[11] For more information about the first years of the MAMBA (Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires) see: Augustina Bazterrica, "Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires: La Historia; Construcción de un universo cultural sincrético," in *Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires: Patrimonio*, ed. Laura Buccellato (Buenos Aires: Asociación Amigos del Museo de Arte Moderno, 2011), 13–44; Talía Bermejo, "De timonel a curador: Rafael Squirru y la creación de un Museo de Arte Moderno en

From bow to stern, oil paintings, water colors and sketches by 49 male and 4 female artists were exhibited in the passageways, in the public salons and in the cabins of the ship.[12] Regarding the exhibition concept and the chosen artists, the art historian Talía Bermejo noticed that they could be classified into two groups. The first group of artists were between forty and seventy years old and already well established at the time of the exhibition. During the 1920s and 1930s they belonged to the avant-garde in Argentina and their works were represented by galleries, had been incorporated in private and public collections and were exhibited in the public museums. This group was already the canon of Argentinian art, represented the established aesthetic values and was legitimized institutionally.[13] The second group of exhibited artists – as Bermejo mentions – consisted of mainly young artists who were confronted by a traditional art practice but searched for new modes of expression and were eager to be included in the distribution circuits of art, like for example Martha Boto who later made a name for herself with kinetic works.[14]

Interestingly, the Australian show on board the *S.S. Orcade*, which travelled to Auckland, Honolulu, Vancouver and San Francisco, had the same exhibition concept, showing a total of 42 artists from two different generations, as described in the exhibition catalogue:

> One group calls upon the past, not in a spirit of imitation, but in order to take from it those vital elements that can be adapted to the needs of our own time. Changed and altered, these qualities form a link with the past traditions while serving as scaffolding for new ideas. The second type of artist breaks almost completely with the past and seeks to devise an entirely new language of his own. They are explorers investigating an unknown land.[15]

This division into two artistic groups served to historicize contemporary art in a process of development, connecting the past tradition with the future and legitimizing the younger generation of artists as coming from this tradition. It was a common concept of exhibition making at that time,[16] but as in the case of the Argentinian and Australian exhibitions, it also served to emphasize the obvious links of the respective national art production to the tradition of modern art in Europe while simultaneously declaring an independent artistic reinvention.[17]

Both floating exhibitions were accompanied by an exhibition catalogue.[18] The words of introduction by the respective authorities of the local art scenes – the Australian surrealist painter and art critic James Gleeson and the director of the Museum of Modern Art in Buenos Aires Rafael Squirru – show astonishing similarities and are particularly interesting with regard to questions of national representation through art, as well as the definition of a contemporary aesthetic language and the references to art in Europe and its tradition.

In both cases, it is noticeable that the text is written in the first-person plural and notions like "for us"[19]

Buenos Aires," in *ANAIS DO XXXII COLÓQUIO COMITÊ BRASILEIRO DE HISTÓRIA DA ARTE: DIREÇÕES E SENTIDOS DA HISTÓRIA DA ARTE*, ed. Ana María Tavares Cavalcanti. Congress documents Universidade de Brasilia 2012 (Campinas: Comitê Brasileiro de História da Arte, 2013), 381–98; Bohnenblust, "Flottieren und die Grenzen der Ordnungsstruktur."; Sofía Dourron, "Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (1956–1960): Entre el Relato Institucional y la Modernización Cultural" (MA diss., Universidad Nacional de San Martín Buenos Aires, 2018); Andrea Giunta, *Avant-garde, Internationalism, and Politics; Argentine Art in the Sixties*, trans. Peter Kahn (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007). The early years of the MAMBA are also mentioned in dissertations dealing with the relations of the art scene in Latin America and the USA in the context of the Cold War: Beverly Adams, "Locating the International: Art of Argentina, Brazil, and the United States in the 1960s" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2000); Wellen, "Pan-American Dreams.".

[12] Rafael Squirru, ed., *Primera Exposición Flotante de Cincuenta Pintores Argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, 1956). Exhibition catalogue. Archivo Histórico, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires; Palmiro Trío, ed., *TRIO Noticiero Turístico* 18 (July 1956). Private archive of Teresa Baratta, Buenos Aires. The Australian newspaper *The Age* mentions that the floating art gallery showed 624 works by 53 prominent Argentine artists. Anonymous, "The 'Devil' Filmed on Luxury Cruise" *The Age (Melbourne)*, December, 6, 1956, 9, accessed July 28, 2018, https://www.newspapers.com/download/image/?id=1222293.

[13] Bermejo "De timonel a curador," 388.

[14] Bermejo, "De timonel a curador," 388.

[15] James Gleeson, "Foreword," in *Contemporary Australian Painting: Pacific Loan Exhibition*, ed. Orient Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. (Sydney: Shepherd Press, 1956), n.p.

[16] See for the concept of the first *documenta* Kassel in 1955, for example: Walter Grasskamp, "To Be Continued: Periodic Exhibitions (documenta, For Example)," *Tate Papers* 12 (2009):1–12. https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12.

[17] In the context of art theory formation in the United States of the 1950s, Peter J. Schneemann described the double-edged reference to European art tradition by the example of Abstract Expressionism. Peter J. Schneemann, *Von der Apologie zur Theoriebildung: Die Geschichtsschreibung des Abstrakten Expressionismus* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003).

[18] The catalogue of the *Pacific Loan exhibition* consists of the itinerary, short biographies of the 42 represented artists and some illustrations of the exhibited works in color and black and white, as well of an introduction by James Gleeson. On the cover page of the simpler Argentinian catalogue, a drawing by the painter and printmaker Lino Enea Spilimbergo, dated 1931, is visible. The following pages consist of the exhibition itinerary, a list of the represented artists, and a word of introduction in Spanish and in English by the poet and museum's director Rafael Squirru.

[19] Gleeson, "Foreword," n.p.

or "we"[20] can be read as written in the name of the nation rather than merely speaking for artistic groupings or aesthetic styles. In the framework of the two exhibition catalogues, art reflects contemporary history and thereby serves the constitution of a new self-understanding of national identity. According to Gleeson, the Australian artists are in charge of "creating a new kind of pictorial language that will explain and typify our own age."[21] At the same time, the belief of standing on the threshold of a new internationally (and artistically) connected future, in which Argentina will play an active part, is strongly expressed in Squirru's preface to the Argentinian catalogue through his use of the term "el hombre nuevo" – "the new man".[22]

The hopes and aspirations associated with the exhibitions, and reflected in the words of their curators, were expressed against the backdrop of an ambiguous relationship to Europe. How do these exhibitions of modern art relate to or differentiate themselves from the dominant Euromodernism?[23]

In his introduction, which is dedicated to the question of the definition of contemporary Australian art, Gleeson begins with a direct reference to Europe: "European art has never deified the past in the manner of the East. "[24] In contrast to this description of "western" art production, that supposedly would not have been preoccupied with the confrontation of its own history, Gleeson explains the art production in Australia as follows: "For us, Art is an organic thing […]. [It] takes its form from the pressures and tensions of History. It cannot be pinned down at its moments of apparent perfection; it must follow its destiny, and its nature changes constantly."[25] According to Gleeson, artistic creation in Australia cannot be evaluated according to the same criteria as in Europe. In the remaining introduction, however, it becomes clear that, following Gleeson, contemporary history and thus Australia's role in its global context is currently in a moment of change and this will be demonstrated by the presentation of the selected artworks.[26]

Squirru on the other hand addresses a mistaken distinction between the aesthetic expressions of European and Argentinian art, explaining that visitors to the exhibition will look in vain for folkloric pictorial motifs of Argentinian stereotypes such as the gaucho or "colorful indigenous". The viewer's expectations – anticipated by Squirru – of what 'Argentine art' should embody, would not be fulfilled. Instead, the "obvious" connection to the so-called "fathers of modernity" would be central:

> Muchos considerarán al ropaje del mayor número de los pintores argentinos derivado de una u otra escuela europea; algunos sonreirán ante el hecho obvio de la paternidad de Picasso, Klee o de Mondrian, buscarán afanosamente el toque folclórico y se sentirán defraudados ante la ausencia casi total de gauchos de amplio sombrero o bellas señoritas o indios pintorescos.[27]

The explicit rejection of folkloric motifs needs to be seen in the context of a long-lasting debate about "Argentine art" and its role in nation-building processes.[28] At the time of its formulation, this statement is also clearly to be understood as a refusal of the cultural values mainly represented during Peronism,[29] which was not expressed exclusively in the visual arts. The Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges for example, who was appointed new director of the National Library a

[20] Rafael Squirru, "Presentación / A Word of Introduction," in *Primera Exposición Flotante de Cincuenta Pintores Argentinos,* ed. Rafael Squirru (Buenos Aires: Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, 1956), n.p.
[21] Gleeson, "Foreword," n.p.
[22] Squirru, "Presentación," n.p. For a discussion of the term "hombre nuevo" in the context of the Cold War, see: Wellen, "Pan-American Dreams.".
[23] Christian Kravagna uses the term "Euromoderne" when he discusses their opposite "critical positions on the demarcations and exclusion mechanisms" of dominant Western modernity, Kravagna, *Transmoderne.*
[24] Gleeson, "Foreword," n.p.
[25] Gleeson, "Foreword," n.p. From today's perspective, it seems problematic that although the history of the nation is discussed, the reference to the indigenous population and its art production is completely ignored.
[26] Gleeson, "Foreword," n.p.
[27] "Many will consider the clothing of the better part of argentine painters as derived from one european school or another: some will sneer at the obvious fact that the paternity of Picasso, or that of Klee or Mondrian may be detected, they will eagerly look for the folkloric touch, and feel disappointed at the almost total absence of 'gauchos' in broad hats or beautiful 'señoritas' or colourful Indians." Squirru, "Presentación," n.p.
[28] This can, for example, be traced back prominently to Ricardo Roja's *La Restauración Nacionalista* (1909) or *Eurindia* (1924) as examined by art historian Marta Penhos: Marta Penhos "Nativos en el Salón. Artes plásticas e identidad en la primera mitad del siglo XX," in *Tras los pasos de la norma: Salones nacionales de bellas artes (1911-1989)*, ed. Marta Penhos, Diana Wechsler and Miguel A. Muñoz (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Jilguero, 1999), 111–162.
[29] However, Andrea Giunta shows that a stringent cultural-political program cannot simply be attributed to the Peronist government phase: Andrea Giunta, "Nacionales y populares: los salones del peronismo," in *Tras los pasos de la norma: Salones nacionales de bellas artes (1911-1989)*, ed. Marta Penhos, Diana Wechsler and Miguel A. Muñoz (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Jilguero, 1999), 153–190.

few months before Squirru became the director of the museum of modern art, and who shared the cultural section of the Argentinian newspaper *La Nación* with Squirru in the following years, also pleads for trust in an "artistic creation" that uses the "universe" as a source of inspiration.[30]

Both the Australian as well as the Argentinian exhibition have sought to formulate a definition of current art production that is dedicated to contributing to national identity formation, but at the same time demonstrates the connection to an international or universal scene of modern art.

> Australian Art, like that of most young countries today, is Janus-headed. One face turns inwards to observe and record those aspects of life and landscape that seem most significant to the contemporary eye, while the other is directed outwards in contemplation of that complex surge of International Art that has its source in Paris, London or New York.[31]

Both catalogues go hand in hand with a claim to validity and the right to occupy a place in the universal historiography of modern art. These exhibition practices serve as a basis for an attempt at inscribing Argentina's, respectively Australia's, artistic positions in the art history of modernity.

Floating Exhibition Pavilions on the High Seas

If we look at the intentions behind the organization of the two floating art exhibitions presented here, it becomes clear that alongside the presentation of art, many other factors were intertwined. The history of art cannot be separated from economic, cultural and geopolitical aspects and floating exhibitions in particular are thoroughly trans-disciplinary objects of investigation. It's hardly surprising, then, that the reasons for the implementation of the Australian and Argentinian floating art exhibitions in 1956 likewise cannot be primarily attributed to the art scene. The establishment of new trade relations was as important as striving for prestige with a luxury tourist offer. Tourism organizations were responsible for promoting the journey on which the artworks were sent, on board the Australian *S.S. Orcades* and the Argentinian *Barco Yapeyú.*

As the Australian newspaper *The Sydney Morning Herald* stated in its report on the show on board the *S. S. Orcades,* the main reason for the implementation of the *Pacific Loan Exhibition* was to make an important contribution to strengthening cultural relations between North America, New Zealand and Australia.[32] Accordingly, the managers of the *Orient Steam Navigation Co. Ltd.* placed one of its most modern and best equipped ships at the exhibition's disposal.[33] The duration of the journey was about one month, which was significantly shorter than the six-month excursion taken by the Argentinian ship. The destinations were also entirely within the Pacific region, as the focus was on strengthening relations between the aforementioned nations. The works exhibited on the *S.S. Orcades* were subsequently presented at the National Art Gallery in Sydney, while the ship served as floating accommodation during the Melbourne Summer Olympics. As can be seen from the acknowledgements in the Australian exhibition catalogue, in addition to art institutions, internationally linked social groups such as the *Australian-Canadian Association* or *The Pacific Area Travel Association* – a membership association working to promote the responsible development of travel and tourism in the Pacific region – were involved in the execution.[34] The historical photographs of the opening show the captain of the *S.S. Orcades*, J. Birch, with the curator of the exhibition James Gleeson in front of one of his paintings, as a symbolic gesture of cooperation between merchant navy and the visual arts (Fig. 2).[35]

[30] Jorge Luis Borges, "El escritor Argentino y la tradición," in *Obras completas* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2011), 550–57.
[31] Gleeson, "Foreword," n.p.
[32] Anonymous, "'Floating' Exhibition Of Australian Art," *The Sydney Morning Herlad*, October 3, 1956, 4, accessed July 31, 2018, https://www.newspapers.com/image/123436342.
[33] Gleeson, "Foreword," n.p.
[34] Anonymous, "Acknowledgements," in *Contemporary Australian Painting: Pacific Loan Exhibition*, ed. Orient Steam Navigation Co. Ltd. (Sydney: Shepherd Press, 1956), n.p.
[35] The details of the image in the National Archives of Australia do not mention the name of the lady who is also depicted in the photograph.

Figure 2: The captain of the Orient Line *S.S. Orcades* J. Birch together with the curator of the Australian *Pacific Loan Exhibition* James Gleeson, in front of Gleesons painting 'Triptych-Tristan', SS Orcades, Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia, NAA: A1200, L21504.

The inauguration of the Argentinian floating exhibition took place in the harbor of Buenos Aires two days before its departure. The Argentinian lifestyle magazine *El Hogar* published some photographs of the social event in its "Coctel-session" (Fig. 3). The invited guests, including for example the famous actress Mirtha Legrand, indicate that it must have been an upper-class social event. International politics in the form of cultural diplomacy played a crucial part as well, since the Japanese ambassador and his wife were present.[36] The passenger list includes the name of Elena Faggionato de Frondizi, the wife of Arturo Frondizi, who became the president of Argentina in 1958.[37]

The International Tourism Organization *TRIO*, led by the Italian immigrant Palmiro Trío, was in charge of the entire organization. *TRIO* chartered the cruise ship *Yapeyú* from Argentina's shipping company *Ultramar* and was responsible for the whole implementation of a special luxury journey for about 250 people of the Argentinian social upper class.[38] The idea was actually to make a *Vuelta al Mundo* – a voyage around the world on the

[36] Anonymous, "Coctel," *El Hogar* 2447 (1956): 110. Hemeroteca Revistas, Biblioteca del Congreso de la Nación, Buenos Aires.
[37] Unpublished passenger list, *Barco Yapeyú*, September 1956. Private archive of Teresa Baratta, Buenos Aires.
[38] Unpublished documents, Argentina Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Intermedios, Buenos Aires, 1956.

COCTEL

A bordo del buque "Yapeyú" se realizó el cóctel inaugural de la primera exposición flotante de cincuenta pintores argentinos que dará la vuelta al mundo. La muestra, que agrupa lo más representativo de la pintura de nuestro país, ha sido auspiciada por el Museo de Arte Moderno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires.

El Dr. Rafael Squirru, director del Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, se dirige a la concurrencia.

En una mesa, Leonor P. de Gómez Cadre, Estela Cordiviola, Dora M. de Gómez Bas, María S. de Menasché, Alberto López Polo, Augusto Mario Delfino (h.) y Marcelo Menasché.

Fotos Elto

El doctor Aníbal Lezama y las actrices Diana Ingro y Mirtha Legrand conversan animadamente sobre la exposición.

Oscar Puiggrós, secretario de Cultura de la Municipalidad de esta capital, declara inaugurada la muestra.

El embajador de Japón, señor Takajiro Inoue, y su esposa visitaron también la muestra.

Figure 3: "Coctel", magazine clipping, *El Hogar*, Nr. 2447, 1956, 110. Image courtesy of the Biblioteca del Congreso de la Nación Argentina, Hemeroteca (direccionhemeroteca@gmail.com)

straightest route possible. Visits to a Zulu Reserve in South Africa, the Olympic Games in Melbourne or Disneyland in California were on the agenda. It was not primarily the presentation of Argentinian art that influenced the itinerary.[39] The route taken is of particular interest for geopolitical reasons. In announcing the trip, *TRIO* argued that young people nowadays no longer wish to travel to Europe but dream of unknown destinations:

> Muchos jóvenes que van a embarcarse por primera vez, nos dicen: 'mucho más que Europa nos interesan las islas de Pacifico, los países orientales, lo realmente desconocido'. La juventud de hoy no es tan frívola como la creemos; sueña menos con Paris que con Java y Singapur.[40]

The establishment of new political and cultural relations, which were not oriented towards Europe, seemed to have been decisive for the choice of these routes after the Second World War. Economic interests and the global negotiation of international relations played a pivotal role in the organization of both floating exhibitions. The art that was presented served as a representation of the respective nation.

The phenomenon of floating exhibitions can be traced back at least to the 19th century, where it has its origin in the context of imperialism and industrial capitalism. These exhibitions were not exclusively dedicated to art, but to the presentation of national goods and craftsmanship abroad, foremost aiming to develop new trade relations. So-

[39] Another activity from the field of culture on board of the ship was the shooting of a film. *El Diablo de Viaje* (*The Devil on Holiday*) was to be realized as an Argentinian-Italian co-production. For previously unknown reasons, however, the shooting was not completed. Unpublished documents, Private archive of Teresa Baratta, Buenos Aires.

[40] "Many young people who will embark for the first time tell us: 'much more than in Europe we are interested in the Pacific Islands, the eastern countries, the really unknown'. Today's youth is not as frivolous as we think; they dream less of Paris than of Java and Singapore.", Anonymous, "La 'Vuelta Al Mundo' será un viaje inolvidable," *TRIO Noticiero Turístico* 17 (May/June 1956): 1. Private archive of Teresa Baratta, Buenos Aires.

called floating trade exhibitions were often financed by the state and sailed from city port to city port, showcasing the technical advances and industrial progress of the respective national production.[41] In 1889, for example, the London *Morning Post* wrote about the latest economic developments in the German Empire, referring to floating exhibitions and noting that their aim lay not only in transporting various products of German industry to distant places, but also in offering potential customers abroad the opportunity to personally inspect the trading goods.[42] The port of Buenos Aires for example, was an access point for several floating exhibitions, as a collection of old photographs in the National Archive of Argentina in Buenos Aires proves.[43] In May 1924, the floating exhibition on board of the *Nave Italia* presented products ranging from the automobile industry to weaponry to wrought iron objects, marble tables and wooden handicrafts. In addition, the Italian ship had a section devoted to sculptures, paintings and prints (Fig. 4). These exhibitions presented national "achievements" and established trade relations, all dedicated to the greater good of a nation's prestige, its economic growth and social prosperity.[44]

The presentations on board steamships show clear parallels with the manner of national representation at World Fairs where a state is represented through the exhibition of national goods – whether it is local handicrafts, the latest technological instruments or art – in a particular national pavilion.[45] It is therefore possible to interpret the exhibition ships as national pavilions floating on the high seas. The ship as a metaphor and symbol of state sovereignty has a long tradition, as media theorist Bernhard Siegert demonstrates.[46] In the case of exhibition vessels, the ship does not merely remain a metaphor but acts as a concrete site of national representation.

The tradition of national pavilions arose in the context of the competitive nature of the highly capitalistic world exhibitions of the nineteenth century, which were a model for the first international art exhibition: the Biennale in Venice, established in 1895. In the Venetian Giardini, little buildings were erected to structure the exhibition area spatially.[47] The national pavilions – or at least the spatial subdivision according to nations – became the binding element and a characteristic of major international art exhibitions. In the first half of the 20th century, however, the national pavilions in the Giardini of the Venice Biennale were primarily reserved for Central Europe and North America – for those nations that are geographically located around the North Atlantic. Australia did not construct its pavilion in the Biennale-Giardini until 1988. Only since 1993, Argentina has had its own space for national presentation at the Arsenale site – the second venue of the Venice Biennale. At least in the case of Argentina it can be proven on the basis of unpublished material in the Biennale archive that negotiations to build a national pavilion had been ongoing since 1923.[48]

[41] This information consists on the basis of several historical newspaper articles. See for example:
Anonymous, "A Floating Exhibition," *The Standard*, August 16, 1898, 2, accessed July 31, 2018, https://www.newspapers.com/image/409670431/; Anonymous, "Floating Exhibitions," *The Morning Post*, April 23, 1889, 2, accessed July 31, 2018, https://www.newspapers.com/download/image/409959313; Anonymous, "Floating Fair Will Encircle the Globe," *The Inter Ocean*, October 16, 1905, accessed July 31, 2018, https://www.newspapers.com/image/35010631.
[42] Anonymous, "Floating Exhibitions," *The Morning Post*, April 23, 1889, 2, accessed July 31, 2018, https://www.newspapers.com/image/409959313.
[43] Unpublished photographs, Argentina Archivo General de la Nación Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos, Buenos Aires (Puertos, Relaciones exteriores, exposiciones de productos). The following floating exhibitions were recorded: May 1924: *Nave Italia*; March 1931: *British Trade Exhibition*; April 1936: *exposición flotante de productos finlandeses*; September 1956: Franco's *exposición flotante de la artesanía Española* on the *Ciudad de Toledo*.
[44] As Laura Moure Cecchini demonstrates in the example of the *Nave Italia*, this kind of national representation occurred in a problematic fascist context. Laura Moure Cecchini, "The Nave Italia and the Politics of Latinità: Art, Commerce, and Cultural Colonization in the Early Days of Facism," *Italian Studies* (2016): 1–30.
[45] Alexander C.T Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in "Fin-de-Siècle" Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
[46] The ship as the symbol of the state is for example prominently featured in heraldry, for which Sydney and Buenos Aires are good examples. Bernhard Siegert, "Kastel, Linie, Schwarm: Medien des Seekriegs zwischen Repräsentation und Rauschen," in *Das Meer, der Tausch und die Grenzen der Repräsentation*, ed. Hannah Baader and Gerhard Wolf (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2010), 413–34; Bernhard Siegert, "Arche, Wasser-Palast oder City Afloat: Die politische Topik des Schiffs zwischen Recht und Ökonomie," in *Konfigurationen: Gebrauchsweisen des Raums*, ed. Anna Echterhölter and Iris Därmann (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2013),117–37.
[47] On the phenomenon of national pavilions, see for example: Beat Wyss, *Bilder von der Globalisierung: Die Weltausstellung von Paris 1889* (Berlin: Insel, 2010).
[48] Unpublished telegram: Martin Noel to Anonymous, 15.07.1923: "(…) Autorizzami riservare terreno convenuto Commendatore Bazzoni per erigere padiglione segue lettra salute ossebvisamente = Martin Noel president." ASAC, Archivo Storico delle Arti Contemporanee, Venecia. The correspondence from the Venice Biennale Archive contradicts art historian and curator Rodrigo Alonso, who argues in his publication on Argentina's representation at the Venice Biennale that the low participation was due to a lack of interest in the building of a national pavilion. Alonso Rodrigo, *Berni y las representaciones argentinas en la Bienal de Venecia* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Amalia Lacroze de Fortabat, 2013).

Figure 4: Art exhibition on board of the *Nave Italia*, Port of Buenos Aires, 1924, unknown photographer. Image courtesy of the Archivo General de la Nación Argentina, Dpto. Doc. Fotográficos, INV: 161511.

In their investigations of major international exhibitions, the art historians Antony Gardner and Charles Green convincingly critique the fact that the history of the Biennials is based on a "worldview" that is "grounded in the metropoles and cultural economies that hug the North Atlantic Ocean."[49] They therefore undertake an analysis of those exhibitions and cultural histories that contribute to the reappraisal of a previously underrepresented global art history, based on theories of the global South.[50] After the Second World War and under the sign of a new world order, new initiatives were launched in the field of cultural relations that did not focus solely on the North Atlantic region. The biennials examined by Gardener and Green were founded by actors who shared the "experiences of decolonization and an insistence on independence from the Russian–American binary of the Cold War."[51]

Interestingly, the Argentinian *exposición flotante* and the Australian floating exhibition coincide with the so-called "second wave of biennials" at the beginning of the 1950s as described by Gardner and Green.[52] 1956 in general marked a time of special

[49] Antony Gardner and Charles Green, "Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global," *Third Text* 27, no. 4 (2013): 443.
[50] Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 101.
[51] Gardner and Green focus on the *Biennale de la Méditerranée* in Alexandria (1955) and the *Biennale Grafike* in Ljubliana (1960) and refer to the so-called *Bandung Conference* which took place in the Indonesian capital Bandung in April 1955. As the beginning of the alliance of the 'non-aligned' nations it is seen as the "birth of the Third World" as a "critical geopolitical entity." One year later, the UNESCO General Conference took place in New Delhi as a result of the Bandung Accords. As Gardner and Green describe, it was inter alia on the agenda of this conference that the "newly described Third World dedicated itself to promoting alternative routes of cultural as well as commercial exchange from those focused on the First and Second Worlds." Gardner and Green, "Biennials of the South," 446.
[52] Green and Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta*, 10.

historical relevance for both Argentina and Australia. Along the lines of social and cultural policy programs, a certain optimism or euphoria can be observed in the way these nations referred to their economic and cultural position on the global stage. One month after the floating exhibition, in November 1956, the Summer Olympics took place in Melbourne, being the first Olympics held in the Southern Hemisphere and outside Europe or North America. This led to worldwide attention on 'down under'.

One year before the *exposición flotante*, in September 1955, president Juan Perón – and with him the Peronist state system – was overthrown by the self-described *Revolución Libertadora*. The new political agenda was characterized by modernization and internationalization. The aim was to present a modern and internationally competitive Argentina to the world – both economically and culturally. The founding of the Museo de Arte Moderno took place in this context. For the new government, the establishment of a new public museum was a welcome opportunity to demonstrate its rejection of the Peronist regime, since the founding document of the museum states that one of the aims of the *Revolución Libertadora* was to rebuild the "cultural organizations devastated by the dictatorship".[53] As art historian Andrea Giunta explains, this change was welcomed by many intellectuals and artists.[54] In these years of 'developmentalism' (*desarollismo*) the actors of the Argentinian cultural scene, according to Giunta, were guided by a great deal of optimism: the shift of the world's most important cultural metropolis from Paris to New York, described in detail in Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (1983),[55] could – at least from Argentina's perspective – also have led to Buenos Aires becoming the next art capital of the world.[56]

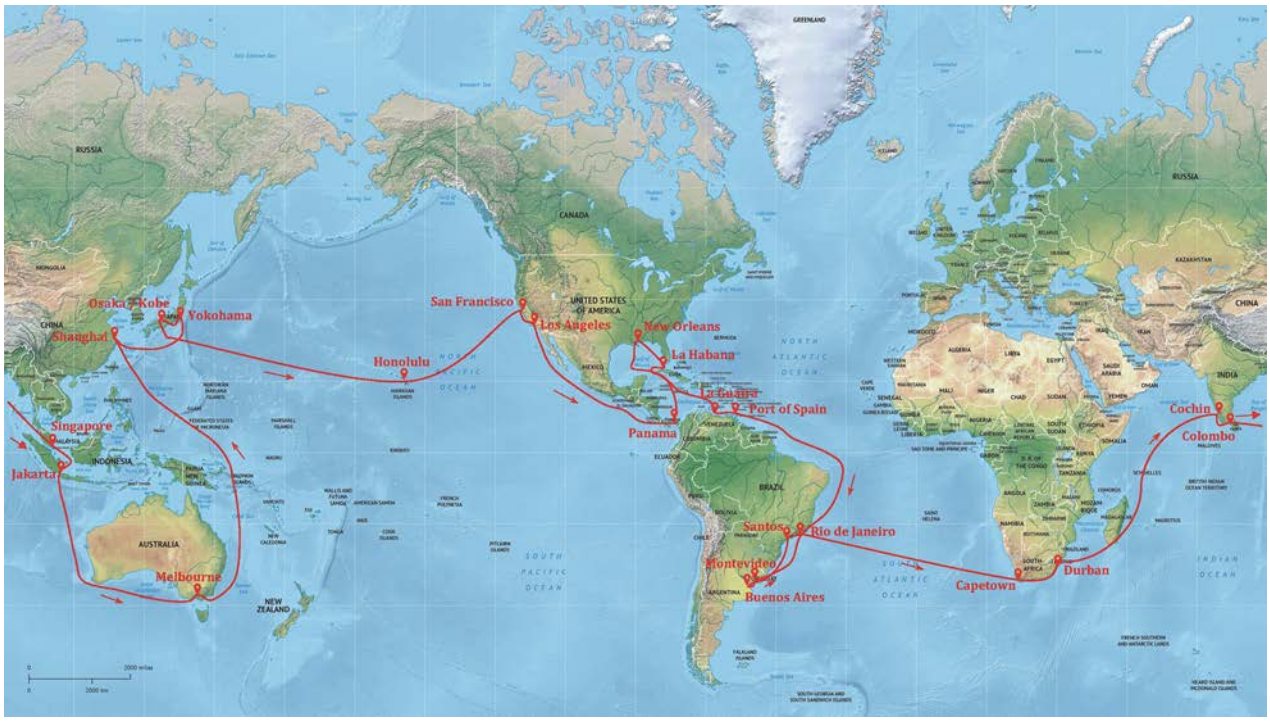
The floating exhibitions on the high seas cannot be understood in the sense of an international exhibition that unites different national representations in one place, as is the case, for example, on the exhibition grounds of the Biennale in Venice. Rather, one element is adopted and functions as a floating national pavilion, thus bridging distances both on physical and metaphorical levels. This comparison supports the hypothesis of art historian Beverly Adams, who without concrete reference to the Venice Biennale describes the *exposición flotante* as a sort of "ersatz national pavilion."[57] While in the Giardini of the Venice Biennale processes of territorialization and spatial negotiations for the construction of national pavilions took place, neither Australia nor Argentina were involved, the oceans provided free exhibition space for floating, non-static national pavilions.

Geographer Philip E. Steinberg argues convincingly in *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (2001) that in the era of industrial capitalism the ocean was idealized as an "empty space" that "was fought over not as a space to be possessed, but to be controlled, a special space within world-society but outside the territorial states that comprised its paradigmatic spatial structure."[58] Despite the undeniable diversity of interests that played a part in the realization of the floating exhibitions, from an art historical point of view its realization can be understood as a strategy to put what Gleeson calls "the antipodes" – the centers of the southern hemisphere – on the art world map.[59]

Negative Maps of the "Grand Narrative"

Referring to the initial question, to what extent the maps of the floating exhibitions visualize connections and power structures of cultural-political relations in the art world after the Second World War, I propose to undertake a spatial analysis, focusing on the oceans instead of the

[53] *Decreto n° 3527/56 de la creacion del museo de arte moderno de Buenos Aires*, April 11, 1956, Archivo Histórico, Museo de Arte Modeno de Buenos Aires.
[54] Giunta, *Avant-garde*.
[55] Guilbaut, "How New York stole the Idea of Modern Art.".
[56] Andrea Giunta, "Argentina in the World: Internationalist Nationalism in the Art of the 1960s," in *Images of Power: Iconography, Culture and the State in Latin America*, ed. Jens Andermann and William Rowe (New York: berghahn, 2005), 145–61, here 149.
[57] Adams, "Locating the International," 103.
[58] Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 109.
[59] The art historian Beverly Adams convincingly describes this goal with regard to the Argentinian *exposición flotante.* Adams, "Locating the International," 104.



Map 1: Route of the *Primera Exposición flotante de cincuenta pintores Argentinos* on the *M/N Argentina "Yapeyú"*, 1956/57, Base Map: One Stop Map (Map of World political shaded relief Mercator America centered).

continents. First and foremost, one omission is conspicuous: The North Atlantic – and thus the west coast of Europe and the east coast of North America – are not navigated to by the exhibition vessels. As the title of the Australian *Pacific Loan Exhibition* already indicates, the Pacific Ocean and thus the cities to be connected through this ocean are marked on the map (Map 2): Sydney in Australia, Auckland in New Zealand, Honolulu, Vancouver in Canada and San Francisco in the United States. These five destinations are connected by lines that can be geometrically described as almost two triangles, with Honolulu as the pivot point. In the case of the map of the Argentinian *exposición flotante* (Map 1), a line encompassing the entire globe leads from the South Atlantic across the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean and then connects the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. In total 21 different destinations were navigated to such as Capetown, Durban, Colombo, Jakarta and Shanghai. As previously discussed, touristic intentions, the establishment of new trade ties or the goal to strengthen south-south cultural and political relations were decisive for the choice of these routes.

In both cases, port cities are interconnected which in the world view of that time were not regarded as important cultural centers. [60] They were rather understood as "provincial" or "peripheral."[61] With regard to power structures, the maps can be interpreted as a kind of negative map of the "grand narrative" of post-war modern art history.[62] The canon of modern art was concentrated in the North Atlantic region. The center of modern art production shifted from Paris to New York, across

[60] It is also significant that the ships headed for the US but only called at ports along the west coast. They did not navigate the east coast and its center New York. In the understanding of the art world at that time, the US American cities on the west coast, such as Los Angeles, were also regarded as "provincial", overshadowed by New York and hardly perceived as important centers, as it is argued in the foreword to the exhibition catalogue *Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles Art 1945–1980*. Rebecca Peabody et. al., eds., "Shifting the Standard: Reappraising Art in Los Angeles," in *Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles Art 1945–1980* (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2011), 1.

[61] For a more recent discussion of a much debated discourse, see for example Heater Barker and Charles Green, "The Provincialism Problem: Terry Smith and Centre-Periphery Art History," *Journal of Art Historiography* 3 (December 2010): 1–17.

[62] For the term "Grand Narrative" and its concept, see Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "The Global History of Art and the Challenge of the Grand Narrative," *Artl@s Bulletin* 6, no. 1 (2017): Article 9.

Map 2: Route of the *Pacific Loan Exhibition* on the *Orient Line S.S. Orcades*, 1956, Base Map: One Stop Map (Map of World political shaded relief Mercator America centered).

the North Atlantic,[63] and exhibitions organized by established institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York were crucial for the formation of the "canon".[64] On the grounds of major international exhibitions such as the Venice Biennial or the first *documenta* in Kassel, the superpowers enacted territorialization processes to ensure their national representation.

However, in other regions – or more precisely on other oceans – alternative narratives can be found, concerning other actors, who, back then received too little attention in the global art world and were subsequently overlooked in an art historiography oriented towards the North Atlantic. Precisely because the ocean was understood as an "empty space",[65] it offered the possibility of being productive as an alternative exhibition area.[66] It is also the oceans on whose surface circulations manifest themselves. Attention to circulations offers in the words of a convincing research perspective, the possibility to "provide a fertile ground for critical, theoretical, and interpretative considerations of a global history of art."[67]

The acknowledgement of this leads to a heightened awareness of blind spots in the research field.[68] Mapping in this specific case does also visualize research desiderata because it is highly probable that further data can be found along the routes. Last

[63] Catherine Dossin, *The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940–1980s: A Geopolitics of Western Art Worlds* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Guilbaut, "How New York stole the Idea of Modern Art.".
[64] See for example, Gregor Langfeld and Tessel Bauduin, eds., "The Canonisation of Modernism: Exhibition Strategies in the 20th and 21st Century," *Journal of Art Historiography* 19 (2018); Miriam Oesterreich and Kristian Handberg, "Alter-canons and Alter-gardes: Formations and Reformations of Art Historical Canons in Contemporary Exhibitions; The Case of Latin American and Eastern European Art," *Journal of Art Historiography* 19 (2018), n.p.
[65] Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean,* 109.
[66] This does not mean that in the case of other actors in the art scenes discussed, there was no interest in making national art production visible in Europe. The influential Argentinian art critic Jorge Romero Brest, for example, initiated exhibitions such as *Acht argentijnse abstracten* at the Stedeljik Museum in Amsterdam (1953). Interestingly, the very concrete artists that Romero Brest promoted were not represented in the floating exhibition. Art historian Andrea Giunta explains this absence due to organizational reasons, see Giunta, *Avant-garde,* 68. I would argue, however, that the choice of the artists on the ship is due to the museum director Raffael Squirru's concept of 'modern art', which differed from that of Romero Brest. It is therefore also to be understood as having been an alternative way of exhibition-making within the national art scene.
[67] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin, and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Introduction: Reintroducing Circulations: Historiography and the Project of Global Art History," *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 1. In their research, the authors refer to Fernand Braudel, who also followed the routes of ships and thus provided the basic approaches of a global history.
[68] According to Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, who points out some methodical possibilities for the dismantling of the center-periphery dichotomy of art history, it is important to examine other spaces of art historical research: "Focusing on the same places prevents us from knowing what happens elsewhere. It obscures what circulates […] between these so-called peripheries, independently from the centre." Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Privincializing Paris: The Center-Periphery Narrative of Modern Art in Light of Quantitative and Transnational Approaches," *Artl@s Bulletin* 4, no. 1 (2015): Article 4.

but not least, the resulting maps can be read as possible 'road maps' for joint art historical research that crosses national, continental, linguistic and disciplinary boundaries. Tracing the routes of floating exhibitions can be understood as a current and future contribution to a fluid process of cartography in the arts in order to contribute to the creation of new art histories.