



Art in Brazil: a story at Pinacoteca de Sao Paulo

Dr. Valéria Piccoli Gabriel da Silva

Coordinator of the Research Group of Art History and Criticism

Pinacoteca do Estado de Sao Paulo

Keywords

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Abstract

The presentation takes as subject the working up and implementation of the exhibition project “Art in Brazil: a story at Pinacoteca de São Paulo”. It brings to discussion the process of preparing a show on a historical collection, approaching the subject from multiple viewpoints: the collaborative work of different departments in the museum, the creation of an art-historical narrative, the installation, educational proposals, texts and labels, among others.

In October 2011, the opening of the long term exhibition *Art in Brazil – a story at Pinacoteca de São Paulo*, which takes up the whole second floor of the building at Avenida Tiradentes with pieces from the Collection, marks a new stage in the centenary path of the museum. Its precedent exhibition at this space dated from 1998, right after the building restoration, and it remained open for the public until the end of 2010, playing an important role in the strengthening of the institution.

However, since its inauguration, the physical and conservation aspects of the second floor had been substantially damaged, resulting in a notable difference with regard to the

museum's floor designated for temporary exhibitions' appearance and level of maintenance. Considering that the collection is the institution's main asset – which should be faced as a focal point from which the museum organizes its activities – it was necessary to correct such unbalance, by applying the same excellence standard of the temporary expositions to the exhibition of Pinacoteca's Collection. The new proposal for the collection exhibition needed to contemplate, therefore, not only the constitution of another narrative for the distribution of the artworks but also a renovated physical space for the exhibit rooms and concerning the information enclosed on the wall texts and labels. The initiative aimed to state that Collection exhibition is the core of the museum, therefore it should be object to constant revision and multiple reading possibilities.

The purpose of this article is to present the elaboration process of this specific exhibition, which is the result of collaborative work organization initiated in 2008 by the Research Group of Art History and Criticism of Pinacoteca do Estado de Sao Paulo. The project was divided in a series of stages, which are described as follows.



The Pinacoteca's Collection exhibition, 2009

Pre-project: Work Methodology

In order to define the guidelines for the creation of the curatorial council, we chose to promote a broad evaluation of the Collection's exhibition, which was conducted by consulting its different audiences and users.

1. Evaluation of the previous exhibition

1.1. Testimonials of the Educational Initiatives Department's educators

Some meetings were organized with the educators who worked directly with groups of visitors in scheduled visits. They were invited to talk about their own experiences throughout the visits, both with school groups and spontaneous groups that participated in the several programs offered by the museum, such as PEPE (*Educational Program for Special Audiences*) and PISC (*Social and Cultural Inclusion Program*), among others. The educators' main requests related to the concept and the installation of the new exhibition were:

- Since the logic of the guided visits in Pinacoteca is based on a comparative principle, and it would be necessary to keep and increase the possibilities of comparison by using types of work with different techniques, dates and styles;
- It would be essential to offer to specific groups the possibility of recognizing their own cultural origins in the exposed work;
- They were facing major difficulties in walking with the visitors' groups through the very fragmented spaces: the new exhibition should maintain the rooms as open as possible;
- It was important to create more resting areas for the visitors;
- There was an unanimous complaint among the visitors regarding labels of identification of the artworks;
- Considering the accessibility for the physically impaired (wheelchair users) in the exhibition rooms' circulation and at the height of sculpture basis.

1.2. Testimonials of the exhibition rooms' assistants

The assistants who help the visiting audience in the Pinacoteca's exhibition rooms were invited to answer a questionnaire elaborated by the museologist Adriana Mortara

Almeida, consultant for the project of reformulating the Pinacoteca's Collection exhibition. The questions were formulated to collect these professionals' opinions about the exhibition regarding how the visitors circulate around the space and their behavior in the exhibition rooms. The questionnaire raised the following aspects:

- The most frequent questions of the audience the assistants hear are referred to the history of the building and the existence of supporting material, such as leaflets and maps;
- The most common complaints involved the conservation and the lack of maintenance in the rooms, as well as the lack of general signalization, pointing out to the need of physical improvements of the space;
- There were also complaints about the artworks' identification labels and the wall texts, which were considered to be very difficult to read;
- They stated that most visitors did not follow the route proposed by the exhibition and walked randomly, therefore not visiting all of the rooms part of the exhibition.

1.3. Conversations about the Collection

A debate cycle between critics, historians and professionals who work at the museum field in Brazil was promoted aiming to get feedbacks on the former exhibition. These professionals were invited to pointing out and discuss the most and the less efficient issues regarding that Collection exhibition, as well as to answer specific questions that arose among the participants.

Some of the participants in the debate cycle about the Collection were Aracy Amaral and Maria Alice Milliet (former directors at Pinacoteca), Rodrigo Naves, Ronaldo Brito and Rafael Cardoso (art critics), Tadeu Chiarelli (director of MAC-USP), Paulo Garcez Marins (researcher at Museu Paulista) and Marcio Doctors (director of Fundação Cultural Eva Klabin). The most important aspects resulting from these statements were:

- Curatorial team: the pertinence of a Brazilian art history chronological narrative, emphasizing the history of the museum and its relationship with the city, due to the

absence of another art institution in São Paulo that would exhibit an overview of the Brazilian art; reduction of the number of exposed artworks and creation of more explicit relations between them.

- Strategies to activate the Collection: proposing systematic reviews of the Collection in temporary exhibits; promoting the juxtaposition of contemporary and historical pieces; creating reading rooms as a support to the historiographical route.
- Texts and labels: shorter and more objective texts; updated labels, with comments for the most significant pieces.
- Installment: creating a differentiated contemplation space; emphasizing the quality of the exhibition presentation as part of the visitor's aesthetic experience.
- Challenges: to amplify the commodatum contracts in order to cover the gaps of the Collection; to rupture with the schools' and movements' succession standard; to teach how to look and to improve the aesthetic experience.

1.4. Audience survey

A survey developed by the museologist Adriana Mortara Almeida was conducted with the museum's visitors. The purpose of the research was to have the visitors' opinions to contribute for the establishment of parameters to the changes that show themselves to be necessary for the improvement of the collection's exhibition, in order to approximate it more to the audience's expectations.

The survey was conducted with visitors who were 15 years-old or older and were not participating in guided visits or scheduled groups. The survey consisted on the reproduction of the route the visitor had taken inside the exhibition space, as well as the application of a questionnaire. The design of the routes, for instance, allowed verifying which points retained the most of the audience's attention, the most and the least observed art work, as well as the most visited and the less frequented rooms. The main issues raised in this process were:

- Most of the participants of the survey only visited the second floor once, and returning to the museum was stimulated mainly by temporary exhibitions;
- A general difficulty to understand the second floor exhibition as a continuous narrative;
- Difficulties with spatial orientation: visitors walked randomly through the space and did not know whether they had visited all of the rooms or not;
- Complaints about the extension of the wall texts and the lack of complete information in many of the labels;
- The permanence in a room was directly related to the existence or not of benches to sit down on.
- Visitors tended to avoid entering rooms with too many division panels;
- Complaints about lighting and height issues in some pieces;
- Most of them claimed to prefer a chronological route.

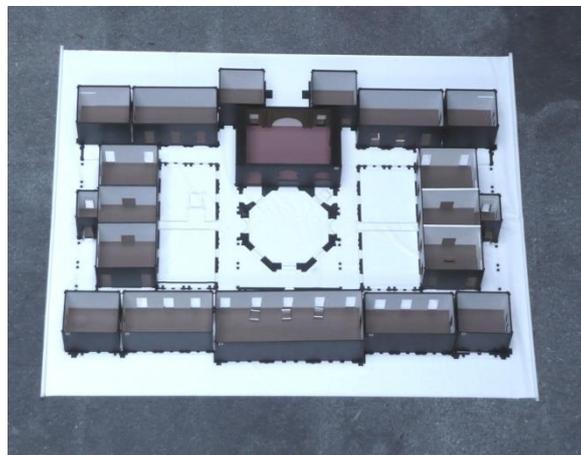
The data collected through the different surveys and testimonials were organized in a report and, afterwards, presented and discussed in events open to all staff, occurred at the Pinacoteca auditorium, on April 27 and 28, 2009. At that moment, a series of initiatives was collectively agreed .

2. A second floor model

The idealization of the new Collection exhibition was thought to be a collaborative process since the beginning, involving the team of curators and also professionals from other museum's departments. Therefore, it was necessary to use an adequate project instrument to enable the whole team to visualize the proposals and, therefore, subsidize group discussions. It was decided to manufacture a physical model of the exhibition rooms and miniatures of the selected artwork.

For the execution of the model, a partnership was established between Pinacoteca and the Laboratory of Automation and Prototyping for Architecture and Construction (LAPAC) at the Unicamp School of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Urbanism. Pinacoteca was in charge of providing the resources to buy the materials that would be used in the model, while Unicamp offered the laboratory equipment, as well as the necessary work force to develop the project.

In a project coordinated by Prof. Dr. Gabriela Celani, the model was manufactured in a 1:25 scale, occupying an area of approximately 2 x 3 meters. For the logistics of transportation and dismantling, it was executed in separate modules that were placed on top of a tarpaulin, where the general floor plant was printed on. The walls of the model were painted with magnetic paint, and there were also miniatures of about 800 pieces of the collection that were pre-selected to compose the new exhibition.



Model of the Pinacoteca's second floor – Edifício Luz (building) manufactured by
LAPAC-Unicamp

3. Constitution of the Working Group

From May 2009, a Working Group (WG) was constituted to develop the Collection exhibition project and it involved representatives of the following departments: Documentary Management, Educational Initiatives, Conservation and Restoration, Installment and Assemblage, Communication and Documentation and Memory, besides the museum's curators and directors. During a semester, the WG got together every two weeks to validate the exhibition's conceptual proposals, plan educational activities involving the Collection, Discuss the repairs to be done and the furniture necessary to the exhibition, among other subjects concerning the realization of the project.

Definition of the Curatorial Team

The team created for the new distribution of the Collection was based on some presuppositions, as follows:

1. Since Pinacoteca will have a third building destined to the exhibition of its contemporary art collection, it was decided to divide the historical collection between the buildings of Luz and Estação, in a way that the former would host the artworks from the colonial period and the early decades of the 20th century, and the latter, from the Modernism to the 1950s.
2. Considering that in São Paulo there is no other art museum that offers the audience a general view of the Brazilian art history, and that the Pinacoteca's Collection would enable the fulfillment of this purpose, it was decided for a chronological criteria to the exhibition; and so the rooms would be organized around relevant themes for the understanding of this matter. The temporal limits adopted for the exhibition at the main building are basically defined by the collection of colonial art until 1930, since the 1931 Art Salon is the academic limit between Fine Art and Modern Art.

3. Even though architecturally there are six different access points to the Pinacoteca's second floor, it was decided to create a circular narrative path through the rooms. The visitors can start the visit in any room of their choice, and visual communication will inform them that there is a circuit to follow.
4. The audience survey indicated the need to create new facts in the Collection's exhibition that could encourage the visitors to go back. In that way, the four corner rooms were destined to temporary exhibits that, being changed every six to eight months, would work as comments on the Collection, be them small monographic exhibitions, a selection of art on paper, or proposed dialogues proposed from contemporary work. Some of the already developed exhibitions are: *Viajantes contemporâneos* (contemporary travellers), *O nu além das academias* (the nude beyond the academy), *Vistas do Brasil* (Brazilian views), *Antonio Parreiras*, among others.
5. The audience survey also demonstrated requests for resting spaces throughout the exhibition route. The rooms accessed through the walkways were transformed into resting and reading rooms, being used also by the Educational Initiatives' activities. They will also be used as an access to the porches, which will stay open.
6. The tendency of the visitors to walk randomly through the exhibition, without being aware of the route to be followed, was solved with an adequate visual communication project, as well as by the creation of maps and or the visitors.
7. The access to the new exhibition is now made by the atrium Joseph Safra, an architectural reference at Pinacoteca, since it is the only one that is immediately recognized by the visitors. Besides, because of its dimensions, groups can gather there, which is a determining factor concerning the Educational Initiatives' activities.
8. With regard to the installment, the proposal was to avoid the old "fine art" exhibition standard, which recommends the accumulation of paints in the rooms by fixating them at different heights. On the other hand, it was proposed the use of map collection's specific furniture in some rooms, allowing, in that way, the inclusion of a large number of artworks on paper in the exhibition (watercolor painting, drawings, engraving).
9. Even though it is comprehensive, the collection of Pinacoteca presents several gaps. The establishment of long-term commodatums with other institutions solved the most significant ones.

10. One of the main educational strategies implemented in the new exhibition was the insertion of “relating artwork” in some rooms throughout the route. These pieces, which are chronologically and/or stylistically different from the ones exposed, aim at amplifying the discursive and interpretative potential of the pieces, thus complementing the narrative proposed in the exhibition.

The artistic-historical narrative is constituted of a sequence of thematic rooms organized in a chronological succession, which appears in two main thematic axis. On one hand, there is the formation of a visual imaginary about Brazil, considering the contribution of the foreign travelers in the 19th century, as well as the issues resulting from the Independence and the Republic with regard to establishing a national identity and the Brazilian Art, and that also marked the first generation of modernists. On the other, there is the formation of an art system in the country – teaching, production, market, critics and museum – that began with the arrival of the Artistic French Mission, and the creation of the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts and the program of artistic residency, the taste for art and collections unfoldings, both public and private, that is part of the origin of museums and patrimony processes of visual and symbolic culture. The route through the exhibition rooms proposes the following themes: colonial tradition; traveling artists; the creation of the Academy; the Academy at the end of the century; The academic teaching; The kinds of painting; the gender painting; From the collections to the museum; São Paulo imaginary; The national character in art.

Implementation of the new exhibition

The Pinacoteca Luz’s second floor was closed for public visitation in December, 2010, and a set of approximately 30 artworks was gathered in one of the first floors exhibition rooms as a small exhibition called Collection Highlights. In the ten following months, the carpets were removed and a new pavement was installed, which contributed not only to the completion and appearance of the rooms, but especially to the improvement

of the acoustic conditions inside the galleries and the museum *per se*. New walls/panels were built in order to increase the linear meters for the artwork display and to emphasize a gallery-like aspect in the rooms, which also gained a new lighting project. At the same time, the Conservation and Restoration Department worked hard in cleaning and restoring all the works that would integrate the new exhibition.



View of the new Pinacoteca's Collection exhibition, 2011

The new configuration of the Collection's exhibition was complemented by the creation of a new visual identity, which aimed not only to provide a better guidance for the audience, but also a better articulation between the several spaces inside the museum, by regulating wall texts, labels, orientations and general information. The graphic pieces that were created – visitor's guide and a map of the museum – as well as the whole textual content of the exhibition – wall texts and labels – were presented in Portuguese, English and Spanish, in order to allow the communication with the foreign audience, which is increasing at Pinacoteca. The development of an audioguide and a sign guide was also part of the project, adapted for visitors with hearing impairment.

It is important to point out that this project's implementation was fully accomplished with funds from the State of São Paulo Government, by means of the State Secretary of Culture, as well as with endowments obtained from *Fundo de Interesses Difusos* (FID), of the State Secretariat of Justice and Defense of Citizenship.



When analyzed in the context of the institutional mission of Pinacoteca, the exhibition **Art in Brazil: a story at Pinacoteca de São Paulo** is in accordance with the intention to provide the visitors with a qualified experience concerning their relationship with the exposed work. Besides, it constitutes a dialogue space with the museum *per se*. By interpreting the peculiarities of the Brazilian process, the exhibition does not aim at being conclusive, since we all recognized that the exhibited artworks are open to new readings and interpretations. What the exhibition states, first of all, is the deep belief in the specificity of the experience provided by the artistic object and by being in the museum. This is a time to observe, learn and imagine.