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Children's Art Exhibitions in Brazil: A Modern Badge for the New Man

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Abstract

In this article we analyze, within the context of the decades between 1940 and 1960, children's art exhibits as a strategy for asserting the importance of Art in educating and developing a child's personality, using newspaper articles, pictures, children's drawings, reports and other institutional documents as sources. The artistic vanguards of the early 20th century, advocates of the artist's self expression, and the acknowledgement – by Psychology and Pedagogy – of the specificities of being a child have resulted both in the defense of the child's freedom of artistic expression, and in a renewal of Art and education concepts of that period of time. As of the mid '40s, children's art caught UNESCO's attention because it represented potential integration and fraternity among people and the desire to build a new Man. Such exhibits acted as showcases for several ideas and justified the importance of children's art involving, in the Brazilian context, from governmental agencies to national newspapers and private companies. Aiming at inculcating an educational conduct based on assumptions such as the unrestricted freedom of children's creative spirit they had, as a contradiction, the censorship of themes considered unsuitable such as violence, and the need to follow a pre-defined esthetic standard.

Keywords: art teaching, history of art education, children's art, children's exhibitions, free expression

1. Introduction

The recognition of the specificities of the infantile condition by the fields of pedagogy and psychology, due to the advance of modernity throughout the nineteenth century, had as a consequence the renewal of the concepts of art and education in the period.

The need for change in educational systems, and the questioning of the adult view of the child, were all a concern of authors like the swedish educator Ellen Key, who published the work *The Children's Century*, in 1900. With a radically liberal orientation, Key stated that the school destroyed the pre-existing matter in the child, putting at risk the formation of his individuality [1]. On the other hand, from the first decades of the twentieth century, artistic avant-garde began to value, alongside primitive art, children's art as an example of artistic expression not yet contaminated by social conventions and academic prejudices [2].

The teaching of drawing as a preparation for labor in the industry, defended by currents linked to positivism and liberalism, had been questioned since the second half of the 19th century. Educators like the Englishman Ebenezer Cook, assisted by the psychologist James Sully, defended the importance of the imagination in the practice of drawing, in opposition to the hegemonic conception that saw in the discipline only as means of manual instruction and training of the eye and hand. In the work *Studies in Childhood*, Sully elaborated a theoretical explanation for the relationship between the infantile mind and its artistic production. Likewise, Thomas Ablett, founder of the Drawing Society (1888), defended drawing for its intrinsic values, and the act of drawing without proper pragmatic ends. For Ablett, the child should not be seen as part of an industrial gear, but as an individual capable of contributing more globally and effectively to society. He found desirable the development of the imagination, as well as the freedom in the choice of the themes and the expressiveness in children's drawings [3].

It is consensual among authors and researchers in children's art that the first experience of observing children who drew freely without any technical guidance was documented by Cizek in the 1880s. His conclusions would have generated the concept of self-expression and the teacher's interpretation as a spectator of the child's work, a guardian of his creative freedom. In his art school for children, created in 1897, the educator would have been the first to attribute pedagogical value to spontaneous child rearing. Cizek concluded that the child, under certain conditions, would be able to express himself in a personal and creative way, and that the artistic teaching methods previously adopted in the traditional school prevented the exercise of spontaneity and naive sensitivity. He also stated that the teacher should be a sensitive advisor, capable of guiding individual expression and innate creativity in the child. The rejection of the educational methods hitherto employed demonstrates the repudiation of the teacher as the center of the educational process, and demands a privileged and central place for the child within the school [4].

After the First World War, during the 1920s, the valorization of esthetic education was consolidated among European educators who saw art as an instrument of humanization and formation of a society free from violence and barbarism [5]. The proposition of art as an instrument for the construction of a new civilization had its best definition in the actions of Soviet constructivist artists and the Bauhaus school. According to Gooding [6], constructivism was based on the idea that after the catastrophe of recent wars and revolutions, art could play a relevant role in the construction of a new culture and civilization. Intending to functionally integrate art and society, artists such as Kandinsky, Tatlin, Malevitch, Rodtchenko, Gabo, and Pevsner, intended to functionally integrate art and society, aiming at the education of the masses and the aestheticization of the social environment. Assuming an almost messianic character, "they brought the new plastic order appropriate to the new social harmony. They spoke for the new world, for the new man" ([7] p. 16).

Bauhaus, an outpost for the penetration of these ideologies into society, was the most effective constructivist practical experience of education for the new world, working in the areas of architecture, landscaping, urbanism, advertising, furniture, and utensil design. In the Bauhaus manifesto, Gropius (1883–1969) hoped to prepare the ground for a "new structure for the future", planning and building for a "new man". He thus intended to end the distinction between artist and craftsman, and believed that his students would follow up on his ideal of society [8].

Bauhaus teachers spoke out against traditional teaching practiced in schools, believing that the transformation of society would be conditioned to the renewal

of the methods used until then. Among them, Hungarian László Moholy-Nagy criticized, in 1939, educational methods aimed at specializing in certain areas, noting that “a human being is developed only by the crystallization of the sum total of his experiences” ([9] p. 344). The artist was based on the view of the child as a being that brought with him a spontaneous and creative energy. He believed that education should contribute to the formation of the “integral man”, emotionally and intellectually balanced, and capable of placing his individuality at the service of the community. The educators’ task would be to coordinate the development of “human powers” and, for that, to found the grounds of a balanced life already in the elementary school.

The stimulus to creativity was in the ideological foundations of the Bauhaus, which intended to reconstruct the unity of the artistic and cultural sphere destroyed by industrialization, using art as an instrument of cultural and social regeneration [10]. According to its members, the school should forget the transmission of information and start generating knowledge itself, making it clear that creation was the fundamental expression for artists engaged in the educational process. This argument would be fundamental for those who worked with the teaching of art in the following decades.

Renewable educational experiences, put into practice in countries like England, Russia and Germany, were hampered by the progression of totalitarian regimes and the advent of World War II, and in many cases were interrupted. Nevertheless, Bauhaus’ ideals of creating a better world would motivate Friedl Dicker-Brandeis (1898–1944), a former student of the Institution, to put them into practice in an extremely adverse situation. In the ghetto and concentration camp created by the Nazis in Terezin, the Czech city, children worked under their guidance [11], producing “pictorial narratives” that covered “past and future, hope and memory” in drawings showing “the barracks of the countryside, but there are also the seabed, the village bakery, the butterflies in the countryside, the bourgeois living room, the biblical landscape, clouds and stars over the reddish sky” [12]. Before being sent to Auschwitz with her students, where everyone would be executed, the artist hid thousands of drawings in two suitcases which, found later, had their contents revealed through the book *I Never Saw Another Butterfly*, by Hana Volavkova, published in 1964.

After World War II, the need to question educational processes is resumed, considering that a school isolated and independent of political systems would now not be enough to maintain peace. With the end of the war, the United Nations were created in October 1945 to replace the Society of Nations, and in November 1945, education ministers from the allied countries met in London with the aim of creating the United Nations for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO). When officialized a year later, it had 20 member states and brought into its constitution the confidence that the promotion of democratic principles of dignity, equality, and mutual respect between men would prevent another war of world proportions [13].

The UNESCO proposal added faith in education as a promoter of peace and the encouragement of regional artistic production as part of the ideal of respect for the differences of men in their cultures, revealing their creativity and spiritual experience. The understanding and acceptance of differences were considered of fundamental importance to avoid a new war, and the artistic manifestation, in its various forms, appeared in the discourse of the creators of UNESCO as an instrument to promote spiritual satisfaction and disseminate the culture of peoples.

Education, for the newly created UNESCO, was conceived as an antidote to racism and nationalism, present at the origin of the second world conflict, and had a

broad sense of promoting understanding through the mutual acceptance of cultural differences. The Organization's plan for world peace included not only activities in the area of education, but of science and culture. Art, even though at first with a poorly defined role, was cited not only in its erudite form, being understood from the perspective of cultural identification that also included popular art, which opened the way for the valorization of children's drawing and other forms of popular demonstrations. Children's graphics, produced without any restrictions, started to be interpreted at that moment as a revealing manifestation of the child's individuality and an authentic testimony of his regional culture. Through these images, it was believed that it was possible to stimulate the exchange between different cultures without the intermediation of written language.

Edwin Ziegfeld, a professor at Columbia University, USA, linked to UNESCO, argued that contact with art would be able to instrumentalize children to deal with the problems of the 20th century, contributing to them becoming emotionally mature adults. Creative activities would have as basic characteristics individuality and integration, essential qualities to live in a world with permanent tension caused by conflicts and the Cold War, and where mechanization and technological advancement prevent the full development of the self. Through that, the individual would be able to see his relations with the world more clearly: "Art knows no national or racial boundaries. Children who are educated in close contact with the artistic forms of other countries are less inclined to create barriers against cultural exchange when they grow up. The United Nations are doing their best to encourage this spirit of mutual art education. International competitions and exhibition exchanges are two of the most popular methods employed" [14].

The decade following the end of World War II demonstrated that even after the repetition of great conflict, the ideal of the decisive role of art as a civilizing and social transforming instrument would still remain alive among artists, intellectuals, and educators. The child, a symbol of a state of purity, would be the raw material for the construction of a world without wars, a new beginning after the failure of the adult world. For that, it should be heard and protected so that it could develop in a balanced way. Expressions previously used, such as "children's drawing", "children's graphic language", or "children's graphics", fell out of use, and, from the 1940s, children's creations with drawing, painting, and modeling started to receive the common designation of child art.

Resulting from the ideas of intellectuals, educators, and artists, the exhibitions were seen as essential strategies for the consolidation of children's art, as a manifestation endowed with esthetic attributes and for the institution of its educational value. For them, the spectators' confrontation with the children's drawings and paintings was the best way to disseminate the ideas that credited art with a transforming power of individuals, capable of contributing to the formation of a better human being. The strong impression these images made on specialists and on the general public was more effective than the verbal defense or the presentation of projects, theoretical texts, or reports of experiences.

2. The first children's art exhibitions

Art teaching experiences are often characterized by an exhibition at the end of work, a moment of pleasure and fulfillment for the participants and advertising to the teacher, to their school, and to the methodology adopted. In general, the practice of

exposing child artworks as evidence of educational methods has as one of its origins the great universal exhibitions held since the middle of the 19th century. Initially designed to show the progress of modernization and the products of the industry, they were organized based on didactic, normative and civilizing intentions, and achieved great repercussions in their time. First carried out by countries such as England, France, and the United States, they were soon imitated by others like Brazil, giving prestige to education as a sign of modernity, and spreading proposals in this area, which included didactic materials, pedagogical methods, and different levels of teaching [15].

The first major international exhibition took place in the city of London in 1851, followed by others in several European and American cities. Spectacular shows on the triumph of capitalism, such exhibitions were organized by representations of the participating countries, resulting in a comparative process between the most and the least developed. Subjected to a detailed categorization, the exposed objects were evaluated by a judging committee and competed for awards.

Brazil, in addition to being represented at international exhibitions, also endeavored to organize national events, demonstrating the desire to present the country as civilized. This effort resulted in a series of publications, such as catalogs, regulations, magazines, books about the country, albums, commemorative editions, and reports, also yielding articles in newspapers and magazines of the time. In the sections dealing with education, students' work was displayed alongside administrative documents, school buildings and furniture, teaching materials and lesson plans for teachers.

Deriving from the experience of universal exhibitions, specific events focused on educational issues started to be organized. The First Pedagogical Exhibition, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1883, is a good example of this type of initiative, revealing the interest of intellectuals and educators in the renewal of teaching. In addition to national institutions, European and American exhibitors were invited to submit proposals for each level of education. The invitation to the exhibition listed the objects that could be shown, which also included the students' production, together with the explanation of the adopted methods [16].

The model of holding exhibitions as evidence of the modern teaching methods migrated to the interior of schools, spreading especially between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century. Rosa Fátima de Souza [16], when analyzing the implementation of graduated school in the state of São Paulo, emphasized the importance of school exhibitions, alongside the exams and closing parties of the school year. These events, a source of pride for teachers, students and families, had the function of making public the activities developed in educational institutions, representing an opportunity for not only the family, but also for the general population, to become aware of the quality of work done there by teachers and students, as well as their care, skill, effort, commitment, and dedication. For the author, school exhibitions explain the multiple ways in which the primary school built its institutional identity and extended its pedagogy to the wider society. Nevertheless, the adoption of parameters of excellence based on the idea of care generated distortions, as all schools wanted to show the best, even if they were not able to do so. In many cases, they simply opted not to do such shows, for fear of the principal and teachers of presenting poorly done works. In others, the exhibitions were nothing more than staging, presenting works by teachers or parents as being done by students.

The rigidity of the parameters for the judgment of child production and the suspicion that they were not always the authors of the works were grounds for criticism by educators identified with the renewing movements for education in the first decades

of the 20th century. For them, the exhibition of child artistic works should serve to show not the excellence of execution, but the spontaneity of children's expression and their development process. Using the same strategy as their predecessors, these educators sought, with the exhibitions, to publicize very different ideas. In the case of children's art, more than exposing the technical skill or precociousness of the participants, the exhibitions became the very discourse of sustaining a concept: the child had a natural propensity to manifest themselves through the arts and this practice should be encouraged, as it would bring benefits to their psychological and social development.

It is said that, after Franz Cizek's experiments at the end of the 19th century, the German educator Georg Kerschensteiner would have organized an exhibition of children's drawings in 1902, being the first international exhibition of children's art held in France in 1922 [17].

On one hand, school exhibitions are rooted in the idea of bringing progress and civilization to the public, and on the other, exhibitions of children's drawings with a modern orientation can also be related to the expository traditions of the art field, in view of the transit of information among educators, pedagogues, psychologists, and artists. It was the visit to such an exhibition that motivated the English educator Marion Richardson to continue investing in the direction of teaching of art with a renewing tendency, which would become exemplary. Organized by the art critic Roger Fry, the Exhibition of Children's Drawings, which took place in 1917 at Omega Workshops, featured drawings made by kids, children of artists. The event impressed the educator, triggering the consequent exchange of ideas and experiences between the two professionals. Fry did not agree with art teaching methods in the school context, as they did not respect child spontaneity in the different stages of child development. From then on, Richardson started to use the exhibitions as a strategy for the dissemination of her teaching methods [18].

Cizek also used the resources of exhibitions to disseminate his methods, such as those held in Cologne (1914) and Munich (1920), in Montreux (1923), in the Netherlands (1920 and 1924), and in Vienna (1929). There is also the registration of an exhibition, which would have traveled through Great Britain (1921 and 1924), as well as a participation in the Exhibition of Applied Arts in Paris (1925). Similar exhibitions also circulated in North America (1924–1929) and South Africa (1934) [4].

In England, Barclay-Russel, an educator who had served as a missionary in Africa, started in 1936 a project that focused on artistic production for children and teenagers, giving rise to a collection of thousands of examples of drawings and paintings made by them. He was the founder of the New Society of Teachers in Art, which was transformed in 1940 into the Society for Education in Art. In association with Richardson, he organized in 1938 a large children's art show at County Hall, in London. His intention to found a Research Center designed to prove "the indispensable value in a healthy society of genuine creativity encouraged in childhood" ended up not being realized due to the war situation in which Europe found itself ([3] p. 45).

However, an exhibition held in the 1940s was perhaps the most fruitful among European, North American, and Brazilian educators and artists. An invitation by the British Council to Herbert Read during World War II sparked his interest in children's art. The proposal was to bring together British works of art that would go on a traveling show through neutral countries, but as transporting them across the Atlantic would be a risk in time of war, they opted for a show of art by children from several British schools [19]. This project created the bridge between Read and the work of Barclay-Russel, who saw the thinker as his ideal advocate. These works had been

carried out after the English educational reforms, which intended to renew concepts based on applied psychology. The presentation text, written by Herbert Read, pointed out some factors as of relevance for the recognition of children's art as an esthetic experience: the appreciation of primitive art and the revolutionary development of modern art, as well as the performance, in England, of educators dedicated to the defense of the insertion of art in the school curriculum. He was also keen to point out that, although produced during the most intense period of Nazi bombing, very few drawings had war as their theme.

Starting in England, the British Council Exhibition of British Children's Drawings circulated in countries such as the United States, Canada, Brazil, and Australia. A few years later, this same exhibition would travel the world, arousing the interest not only of educators, but also of the European artistic milieu. The director of Château d'Antibes, an institution on the south coast of France, recalls that he received the exhibition organized by the British Council in 1945, which was visited by Pablo Picasso [20].

The contact with the artistic works of those children made Read dedicate himself, in the following years, to the study of children's creativity, producing works that became essential for educators in various parts of the world, such as *Education through art* (1943), *The education of free men* (1944) and *Culture and education in a world order* (1948), among various others. Read believed that greater understanding and peaceful coexistence between peoples would have its roots in the integral development of personality through education, and so the art of the child would be the guideline of this philosophy: the heroic task of education would be to prevent the child from losing contact with his roots and cultural values by manifesting himself symbolically [20].

The developments of this exhibition on Brazilian lands will be discussed next.

3. Children's art exhibitions in Brazil: showcases of a new way of seeing art education

The actions relating to art education in Brazil, aimed at children, date back to the first decades of the 20th century. Historiography points to experiences carried out by modern artists and intellectuals such as Anita Malfatti and Mário de Andrade who, in the 1920s, developed educational projects aimed at the child's artistic expression. The appreciation of the role of art was also present in the educational scene linked to the New School Movement, especially in the reforms undertaken in some Brazilian states based on the dialog with the ideas of John Dewey [21]. Although sporadic, some children's art exhibitions had already been held since this period, like the exhibition of Japanese children held in 1928 in Rio de Janeiro. In 1933, an exhibition was held in São Paulo at the Club of Modern Artists – CAM, within the Mentally ill and children's week [22].

The English children's exhibition, organized in 1941 by the British Council, is considered a milestone in the Brazilian cultural and educational scene and a motivating factor for projects subsequently undertaken in other regions of Brazil. The exhibition opened in Rio de Janeiro in October 1941 at the National Museum of Fine Arts, having subsequently circulated through the states of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Paraná. The event was hailed by the press and educators "as a demonstration of confidence in the future from a war-torn country" [23]. Intellectuals, journalists, artists, and teachers visited the show, being impressed by the quality and expressiveness of the works. Brazilian artist Augusto Rodrigues was one of these visitors, along with a group of

artists and educators who were already meeting to discuss the relationship between art and education. The appreciation of the exhibition aroused in many professionals the certainty that Brazilian children, if stimulated, would also be able to produce works of comparable quality.

In the exhibition catalog, Read presents his ideas for the first time in Brazil, according to which the child would be endowed with an innate creative potential and ancestral purity, not needing any interference from the adult world to manifest the “universal characteristics of the human soul, not yet spoiled by social conventions and academic prejudices” [24]. Perhaps more surprising to those who witnessed the 1941 exhibition was his claim that the current teaching prevented the development of children’s personality. The objective of these new methods would be to achieve “the child’s pleasure”, allowing the activity to become “instinctive”, requiring a new attitude from the teacher, which would become an incentive for the artistic potential to be explored by the child, creating an atmosphere that would induce her to “externalize the rich and lively fantasy that is in her mind” [24].

The creation of an “atmosphere”, suggested by the Read method, seems to have been relevant in the following experiences developed in Brazil, which started from the assumption that the traditional school environment was not the most suitable for the development of creative activity. It was not just the teacher’s attitude that should change: it was necessary to change the physical space itself. Tables, chairs, introducing new functions, and instruments, and creating an identification in no way close to the old school. The adequacy of the classroom space to the child’s dimensions was already found in the proposal of the Italian educator Maria Montessori. However, the practice of drawing she adopted was limited to an exercise of muscular coordination in preparation for writing. Its application was restricted to geometric figures filled with colored pencils in a predetermined way Montessori believed that her method would result in greater coordination of movements, which would be essential for the production of “harmonious” drawings [25].

For Read, the main objective of the British Council was to provide proof of the “vitality and hope” that the British had not abandoned even in the face of the misfortune of war: “The children who made these drawings and paintings will be adults in a post-war world. And we believe that the sense of beauty and the attitude of love for life, expressed in the childhood of these men of the future, will flourish in a world that is forever free from tyranny and odious wars of conquest” [24].

In the project of Herbert Read, ex-combatant of World War I and now a staunch pacifist, children, “men of the future”, would have a fundamental role in the maintenance of peace in the post-war period, with the renewal of the school and its methods the main way to achieve this goal, and creativity the main factor for the free personality of these men. To the disbelief in the capacity of the old methods was added the belief in the infantile capacity to create without the need for models of the adult world. The teacher’s behavior would thus be fundamental for the child to develop in freedom. Dissatisfaction with the methods adopted until then by the “common school” would be a repeated argument among those responsible for the art schools put into practice in Brazil.

This exhibition may have contributed decisively to the emergence of experiences of art schools for Brazilian children and of children’s art exhibitions, serving as a model. The most well-known and influential of these experiences, later named *Escolinha de Arte do Brasil* – EAB (Little Art School of Brazil), began its activities in 1947, in Rio de Janeiro, at the initiative of Augusto Rodrigues and the American painter Margareth Spencer, and would become a reference for similar institutions that

emerged later in the country. According to Rodrigues himself, the name chosen for the institution was used at the beginning by the children who attended the meetings to differentiate this environment from that of the regular school, being definitely adopted when the need for a name was felt: "one was the school where They were going to learn, the other where They were going to experience, expand, project themselves" ([26] p. 39).

Rodrigues' testimonies highlight the importance of the English exhibition in the idealization of the project of his art school. It is also present in the declarations of that period the certainty that the school did not offer the adequate space for the artistic expression of the child, nor was it prepared to understand the importance of art for childhood.

In 1948, another event reinforced the initiatives of Brazilian artists and educators committed to a new interpretation of children's art. Drawings by Brazilian children had been sent to Italy to participate in the International Exhibition of Children's Art promoted by the Pedagogical Center of Milan. However, the Brazilian representation was refused in full by the organizing committee, which claimed not to have found a free, spontaneous, and natural view there. They also claimed to be "evident that in each of them there was the finger of the adult, parent or teacher, looking for the 'copy drawing', the 'well done' drawing, the demonstration of precocity, the stereotyped 'good taste' ([23] for. 31). In this type of event, the teacher's participation was reconsidered, rejecting erudite artistic training or traditional and technical knowledge of plastic language, in exchange for the preservation of an idealized vision of the child's graphic manifestation, seen as possessing qualities that should be encouraged.

The impact of the refusal of Brazilian representation favored the establishment of the recently created *Escolinha de Arte* by Augusto Rodrigues in Rio de Janeiro and also the appearance of other initiatives to promote children's art in the following years.

The circulation of children's works for exhibitions, started in Brazil by Herbert Read, has become a current practice, involving institutions in Brazil and abroad. Through the images produced by children from all corners of the world, the idea that artistic expression is inherent to the individual took strength, constituting evidence, on the visual plane, of the ideals defended by modern educators interested in art.

According to Rodrigues ([26] p. 87), the exhibitions represented a landmark of unity that connected the experiences of art education in the world. This showcase of modern ideas for art in children's life gave credibility to the projects carried out, making the art schools respected. The exchange took place in two ways: Brazilian institutions received exhibitions from abroad and, in turn, received invitations to participate in this type of event abroad.

Following the example of the English children's art exhibition, *Escolinha de Arte do Brasil* invested, since its foundation, in this kind of exchange. In 1950, Rodrigues received an exhibition of works by Argentine children who participated in the *Children's Painters Clubs*, entities attended by about 700 young people and directed by Esteban Ocaña. The Institution also organized exhibitions of Brazilian children in Mexico, Great Britain, Japan, France, Chile, Italy, Argentina, Netherlands, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Paraguay, China Korea, Austria, Venezuela, Philippines, India, Yugoslavia, Germany, and El Salvador. These events were accompanied with explanatory leaflets on the Brazilian experience, on the bases of the work developed and on the methods of selecting the works [23]. In 1953, the III National Exhibition of Children's Art, organized by Augusto Rodrigues and promoted by the Ministry of Education and Culture, brought together 1,500 works by children from all over Brazil [27].

Children's exhibitions have multiplied since the end of the 1950s, giving visibility to promoting institutions and government agencies, which justified them by the benefits that children's artistic expression could bring to the child's education. On June 21st, 1961, *Folha de São Paulo* announced the opening of its 1st Children's Art Salon. According to the article, this initiative sought to "encompass the artistic expression of children in all fields, through their creative spontaneity, in addition to providing the São Paulo child with more appropriate means of transmitting their natural inclinations and instilling a sense of responsibility more clearly in the collective consciousness, making it turn with more accuracy to the problem of child orientation" [28]. The exhibitions of child art productions made this child and their needs visible, now seen as a problem for the community that needs to be awakened to find solutions.

According to the newspaper, 1,300,000 children enrolled in the project, a success that was due to the efforts of the state government – which, "in order to face the child phenomenon more rationally and humanely", understood "the educational strength of the Salon" –, the Regional Teaching Precincts, whose enthusiastic principals and teachers "enlivened" the young artists, and the Head of Primary Education, coordinator of regional works. This articulated work made the *Folha de São Paulo* initiative, associated with the Year of the Child, expand its action, with the participation of children from all over the state.

The Salon, which distributed prizes to the children selected by the jury, was not limited to drawing and painting, but also included modalities such as guitar, harmonica, poetry, and declamation, among others. Among the winners were boys and girls between eight and eleven years of age, a range considered most suitable for truly creative artistic manifestations [28].

The jury, composed of art critics from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, directors of art galleries, visual artists, writers and jurors of the VI São Paulo Biennial, had the objective of not rewarding works, but "analyzing what, for his bad esthetic taste would have been perhaps more of an adult responsibility than a childly one" [28]. In their statements, the judges often contradicted themselves, minimizing the fact that the event had a clear objective of rewarding the best works, even if according to a specific view on children's art that favored a "free" demonstration. Seeking to minimize the weight of the classification and award criteria, its members recommended that, for the next events, children should ignore the fact they were drawing or painting for a competition, which would avoid "psychological, moral, and pedagogical losses" [28].

The receptivity and popularity of this type of exhibition seems to have been quite large. Four months after the São Paulo Children's Art Salon, held from October 23 to 31, 1961, the 1st Carioca Children's Art Salon took place in Rio de Janeiro, sponsored by the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil* [29].

However, already in January 1962, *Folha de São Paulo* would announce the promotion of a new salon now nationwide, the I National Salon of Children's Art. However, already in January 1962, *Folha de São Paulo* would announce the promotion of a new salon now nationwide, the I National Salon of Children's Art. The event had great repercussions, being supported by newspapers in various states. The works in the area of fine arts for the competition should be carried out during class hours. The theme should be free, of the student's own inspiration, without any guidance from the teacher, excluding political and administrative themes, graphic crests, maps, and caricatures alluding to historical characters or facts. The works should have dimensions of 30 cm x 40 cm. Drawings should be done in pencil or pen and paintings with a brush and paints. In modeling, the work should be done in ceramic, stone or wood.

The regulation also provided for a trial according to the following categories: from four to six years, from seven to eight years, and from nine to twelve years of age [30].

At the award ceremonies in the various cities where the event took place, an excerpt written by Augusto Rodrigues was read: "Each child brings in himself his world of art and creation. In children we are all spontaneous artists, but later, squeezed by the rules and disciplines invented by those who lost their childhood, we are living, shopkeepers and bankers, captains of industry and carpenters, boring, big people, anyway. This compression is what makes us lose the courage to like a vague color, to feel a risk and a shape, which apparently do not mean anything. Escolinha de Arte tries to give children the courage of that love permanently" [31].

The reference to the child's spontaneity and the limits that prevent the development of sensitivity sounds contradictory in an event that establishes so many rules and that subjects the children's work to a selection process and to awards awarded by a jury according to esthetic criteria. This contradiction demonstrates that the idea of children's art as a free expression and above comparisons with classical art coexisted with exhibition practices that rewarded and ranked in a certain order of excellence. Perhaps it demonstrated that the now popular children's art would be subject to interpretations produced not only by educators, but also by other agents guided by different interests: newspapers, companies, and the parents themselves, hoping to see their children recognized as "child painters".

However, there was not always complete agreement between the organization of these events and the institutions invited to participate, regarding the type of work to be sent within the great framework of free expression, or spontaneous expression. In 1959, the artist and professor Guido Viaro, director of the Centro Juvenil de Artes Plásticas, a Paraná institution created in 1953, publicly criticized the guidance of the Department of Extra-curricular Education in Guanabara, which had asked the Paraná Department of Education and Culture to send from drawings and paintings made by children from primary schools in Paraná to participate in an exhibition of spontaneous painting, recommending that the themes be preferably regional. Viaro argued that the proposal was contradictory, since child production does not recognize regionalist barriers [32]. Nevertheless, Paraná, through the Youth Center for Plastic Arts and School Groups, participated in the aforementioned exhibition, having works selected for participation in an international exhibition, in which Brazil ranked first.

Other states in the country have also undertaken similar initiatives at the regional level, some involving exchanges with other states or countries. The Youth Center for Plastic Arts had fifty works by its students sent to be exhibited in Chicago in 1955, also during the same period, exchanging with cities such as Belo Horizonte, Fortaleza, Recife, and Porto Alegre. In 1958, the Rio Grande do Sul Museum of Art, in a similar initiative, received an exhibition of German children's art [33–34].

The Dutch Children's Drawing and Painting Exhibition, held in Curitiba in 1959, was sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Culture in collaboration with the Embassy of the Netherlands. Considering that the presence of art in school is an enriching factor for the individual, the presentation text of the exhibition emphasizes the importance of the "esthetic formation of the child" and the "creative act in the development of the human being". Then, remember that the act of creating is more important than the work done, as it will be the one that will bring the greatest benefits to the child's development. Since the need for expression "is inherent in every individual", what can be seen in the exhibition is "expression in its pure form, which comes to the surface through stimuli and methods in which respect for children's personality is always present." [35]. The child, immersed in an "atmosphere of freedom", would have

the possibility to “normally” overcome the successive stages of his development, which would free the teacher from the “tension” characteristic of academic art education: “But if, on the one hand, the teacher frees themselves from coercive norms, they are left with a more subtle and complex task – they are led to the effort of observing the child more deeply and of being able to discover and fully develop the innate capacity of each of his disciples. Evidently, this type of education does not aim at the well-endowed supposed nor does it intend to train artists, but, above all, it seeks to teach the values and disciplines essential to the full intellectual, affective and social development of the individual, within the community” [35].

The author of the text states that what is presented is “expression in pure form” and that a new teacher will be needed, specially qualified to deal with this delicate expression so as not to harm it. For him, the production, by the child, of a drawing or a painting, would be the result of an innate ability, the result of his own condition as a child, even though there were the “gifted” who would do without any help, not needing this type of assistance, educator, not specialized in forming artists, but dedicated to structuring those children emotionally and socially. There is, apparently, a contradiction when it is considered that the “gifted” do not need this education, since it is not intended to form artists, even they could need these values that are intended to be taught. On the other hand, if there is no need for academic education, there is a need for new techniques, which would justify the qualification of a new specialist.

Concerns about the formation of the child’s personality and the role of art as an aid to education, were not the only motivations for children’s art exhibitions in that period. Gradually, they would assume a role of reconciliation and rapprochement between children from different cultures stimulated by the post-World War II atmosphere marked by the so-called “Cold War” and the atomic threat. Often supported by UNESCO, which defended the role of art as a trainer of an “integral man” [36] – one who, together with knowledge, would develop sensitivity and emotion – these exhibitions, which toured the world bringing together children’s drawings and paintings of diverse origins, propagated the stimulus to the understanding and the tolerance to the differences as a way to guarantee the reconstruction of a peaceful world.

One of these exhibitions, entitled Art for World Friendship, arrived in Curitiba in 1961, promoted by the international organization Art for World Friendship, based in Pennsylvania, USA. Born in 1947 in the city of Philadelphia, this organization aimed to establish personal contacts, through painting and drawing, between children of different cultures, beliefs, ideologies, and countries, believing that “through their art and without the language barrier they they could learn about each other’s lives and interests; to create a bond of understanding and friendship between them until they reach adolescence and adulthood” [37]. Children’s drawings were considered direct means of communication, as they did not require the interpretation of adults, constituting “colorful messages of friendship and goodwill that walk, firm and bold, from country to country, from community to community, from school to school, from child to child” [38].

The works were first selected according to the author’s age and geographical origin, and after being exhibited, they were redistributed to children from other parts of the world. Each child who sent their own composition would receive another one, made by someone of their own age, from another country. The drawings should be spontaneous, covering any theme, with the exception of war matters, which were strictly prohibited. Even considering the fact that censorship of children’s testimonies about the atrocities committed by man was intended to provide the viewer with a message of peace and optimism, this restriction put in check the much-acclaimed

freedom of expression for children, limiting their spontaneity to the exploration of positive themes. Thus, a type of demonstration that could have the power of the complaint was silent, for fear that it might contribute to the generation of more violence.

This first exhibition presented, in addition to the drawings of the children of Curitiba, others from Art for the World Friendship of Pennsylvania and seven other countries, in a total of 125 works [37]. The Curitiba press, emphasizing the great interest aroused by the exhibition, drew attention to the similarity between the drawings of Brazilian children with those made by children from distant countries, noting the “artistic development achieved by our ‘Escolinhas de Arte’ in comparison with the other nations” [39]. The newspaper published photographs of a work done by a Thai child and another by a child at the Escolinha de Arte at Colégio Estadual do Paraná, a state school based on the city. The drawings reproduced in no way resembled children’s doodles. The Thai child or teenager reproduced an oriental religious image with a very developed work of light and shadow, which can be the result of both copying from photography and direct observation. In turn, the Brazilian child presented a clown head with a sad expression that, despite not showing a technique as developed as that of Thai work, demonstrated the knowledge of representation schemes acquired through the observation, most likely, of the work performed by other artists. The Soroptimist exhibition was certainly not concerned with the presence of works that demonstrated the traditional study of drawing and even copying in some cases, since the exhibition was primarily aimed at promoting exchanges that, it was believed, would contribute to peace between the peoples.

A year later, the second Art for World Friendship exhibition was held in Curitiba, now presenting around a thousand drawings from 42 countries and eight Brazilian states from various formal and informal educational institutions.

The catalog of the Second Art Exhibition for World Friendship [38] showed a much greater involvement of institutions from Paraná and others from outside the state, accusing the participation of children from the Little Art School of Brazil, other institutions of Pernambuco, Espírito Santo, Santa Catarina, Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul, and Paraná. In addition, children from Central and South America, Africa, Asia, Oceania, North America, and several countries in Europe also participated. From the countries of the socialist bloc, only representatives of Czechoslovakia and Poland were present. The exhibition catalog recorded the techniques used in the preparation of the works, which were quite diverse. In addition to the traditional tempera, charcoal, wax crayons and pen nibs, finger paintings, collages with recycled paper from magazines and newspapers, prints made with cork stamps and mosaics were presented. Compositions made with experimental materials such as twigs and strings were also shown. The exhibition had no competitive character and, therefore, would not distribute medals or prizes. The catalog featured a “conclusion” page, where the president of the Brazilian Art Commission for World Friendship declared that the organization’s only objective was “strengthening children’s and youth’s generosity”, and that through children’s art it would be possible “to supply the basic needs of man, since it reflects the soul and feelings of the citizens to come”. Announcing that the exhibition’s works would be sent to other countries, the president believed that it would be possible to promote understanding and tolerance since: “With the unfolding art of the Brazilian girl’s soul, united to the hearts of children from the ends of the earth, who knows, maybe a better world can be built, or modified, for the future. Let us raise our thoughts to God and have faith, therefore, in the idea that the exchange of drawings will turn into a pleasant, effective and lasting relationship” [38].

Art for World Friendship's statements emphasized that the works displayed did not demonstrate academic knowledge, but rather an art: "[...] spontaneous, alive, social, tender and human, of children, for children and between children, without distinction of color, race, political or religious ideology. It is only intended that the little authors recognize each other as siblings and as friends, and that their art represents the most vibrant attempt for a dialog of peace and harmony with all the peoples of the Earth" [38]. For the organization, children and young people were considered the fundamental step to modify and rebuild the world.

Children's art exhibitions continued to be organized throughout the 1960s, always with the spontaneity and spontaneity of their participants as the main keynote. In 1963, the 3rd Art Exhibition for World Friendship took place in Curitiba [40]. In 1966, the Infantil Art Salon was held at the Art Museum of the Federal University of Ceará. In the folder accompanying the event, Jean-Pierre Chabloz [41] stated that the 64 works on display, written by public and private schools, were "entirely free and spontaneous". The author stresses in his text the importance of children's expression through drawing, pointing out in children's production similarities with modern painters such as Van Gogh, Matisse, Pierre Bonnard, Vlaminck and Gauguin. For Chabloz, this kind of experience was only possible if children were released from the "infant-school prison" that was the traditional teaching environment.

4. Conclusions

The rhetoric of educators and pacifists after World War II reflects the fear of a nuclear catastrophe and builds a representation of the child as the main and only hope for a future without wars. This criterion, which intended the free artistic expression of children as a strategy for the formation of a new man, identifies traditional artistic knowledge as a representative of a world that would have failed in every way. The child's drawing, which is easy to transport, comes to be seen as an important instrument for mutual understanding and non-verbal communication between different countries.

Later, after the fear of imminent war was removed, the desire seems to have remained that, through art, the child exercised creativity and would become an adult capable of relating to the world in a more creative way. The speeches take different forms and their objective is progressively no longer based on the need for mutual understanding, but on the stimulation of creativity as a preparation for life in an increasingly technological and supposedly dehumanized society. The school, criticized and "guilty" for suffocating the child's soul, should reform its methods and practices in order to stimulate the student's creativity.

Beginning in the 1950s, initiatives to promote children's art through exhibitions became frequent in several Brazilian states, sometimes assuming a competitive and awarding character that contrasted sharply with the pacifist and libertarian intentions promoted by the ideals of UNESCO. It appears that the children's art exhibitions, in this period, gain an irresistible attraction to parents and teachers and the media, consolidating the child as an autonomous individual creator who, in addition to not needing any guidance from adults, seems to produce images worthy of the admiration of classical art, or the "art of adults".

It is possible to identify that a new criterion for the analysis and selection of these works arises from the point of view of plastic arts or the individual manifestation of the child. However, the edition of the 1st Children's Art Salon at *Folha de São Paulo*

had quite different objectives from those that guided the first Soroptimist Club exhibition that took place in the same year in Curitiba. The Curitiba exhibition was keen to make it clear that it had no intention of rewarding or even classifying children's work, prioritizing the integration between children of different nationalities according to the criteria of the organization Art for World Friendship. The jury of the 1st Children's Art Salon, as published by the São Paulo newspaper, tried to demonstrate the usefulness of artistic teaching and the need for pedagogical revision on a more advanced basis. There are no references in the article to humanitarian issues like those of soroptimists, but it is clear that old procedures had no place within the new bases considered by the jury. The objectives of these two initiatives demonstrate that several orientations based the professionals and institutions that promoted children's art in the early 1960s.

The production of these drawings reveals contradictions, since, despite the touted non-interference of adults, it was expected that they would not show any trace of what was considered to be basic knowledge of visual language or techniques associated with traditional teaching of fine arts, in the privilege of an approximate esthetic of the expressionist character figuration. On the other hand, it was preferable for the child to explore themes related to his daily life, his city or his village. These points apparently contradict the rhetoric of freedom of expression, as well as the teacher's role, since, if the child should create freely, should this "new" specialist act like a mere observer?


Children who participated in these salons belonged to primary schools or art education institutions. For this reason, they were accompanied by teachers when carrying out their artistic works, not always being able to put into practice the freedom of expression so dear to the defenders of the exercise of creative capacity.

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