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New FJJMA Exhibition Examines Cold War Latin American Art

NORMAN, OKLA. - Following World War II, artists across South America and the Caribbean enjoyed a period of international and cosmopolitan development that rivaled their North American and European counterparts. A new exhibition at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art explores the advancement of Latin American art from the 1940s to the 1990s. Libertad de Expresión: the Art Museum of the Americas and Cold War Politics is on display Oct. 5 through Jan. 5, 2014, at the museum, located on the University of Oklahoma Norman campus.

In 1948, as political tensions between the Western and Eastern blocs escalated to a cold war, the Ninth International Conference of American States convened in Bogotá to address the spread of international communism. Twenty-one American states agreed to such an action and adopted several additional resolutions.

The charter of the Organization of American States that resulted from the conference established a new body charged with furthering relations among the Americas, effectively replacing the Pan American Union. Much of the charter emphasized international cooperation, respect for sovereignty and an end to social ills as the primary objectives of the OAS. The charter made it clear that the OAS saw cultural diplomacy as an important aspect of its central mission to promote understanding among the Americas, and the Visual Arts Section would help further the cause.

Following the ratification of the charter, the visual arts unit specialist, Cuban José
Gómez Sicre, was promoted to the position of chief, and he began an ambitious exhibition program at the Pan American Union building in Washington, D.C., that would further awareness of the art of the Caribbean and Central and South America in the United States. Gómez Sicre sought out established artists as well as emerging talents and, beginning in 1949, he acquired works from these exhibitions, forming a nascent permanent collection.

The collection eventually gained institutional status as the Museum of Modern Art of Latin America in 1976 and assumed the building that had been the official residence of the OAS secretary general. In 1991, the name was changed to the Art Museum of the Americas.

“José Gómez Sicre championed artists sympathetic to international trends in contemporary art with the intention of demonstrating the cosmopolitanism of Latin artists and emphasizing freedom of expression in the American republics,” said Mark White, the Eugene B. Adkins and Chief Curator and interim director at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art. “Ironically, Gómez Sicre’s support for freedom of expression did not include artists of a socialist or communist bent, and he shied away from overtly political artists.”

On loan from the AMA in Washington, D.C., Libertad de Expresión examines how both the OAS and its cultural institution, the Art Museum of the Americas, advanced Latin American art and democratic values during the Cold War. The exhibition features such modernist styles as Constructivism, Surrealism, Art Informel and Abstract Expressionism by more than 60 artists, including Joaquín Torres García, Roberto Matta and Jesús Rafael Soto. This exhibition is made possible, in part, by the Norman Arts Council Grant Program.

“Libertad de expresión, so to speak, serves as a lens through which this exhibition examines Gómez Sicre and the AMA,” White said. “The AMA used art as a form of cultural diplomacy with the goal of furthering understanding and cooperation between the Americas. In the process, it championed the international aspirations of Latin American art and culture.”

This exhibition’s private opening reception will be preceded by a symposium from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, Oct. 4. The symposium will explore the role that freedom of expression has played in Latin American and Caribbean culture, journalism and politics from post-World War II to the present. The symposium is co-sponsored by the FJJMA and the OU College of International and Area Studies.

Guest presenters include Claire Fox, associate professor at the University of Iowa; Patrick Frank, author; Monica Rankin, associate professor at the University of Texas at Dallas; and Alan McPherson, OU professor of international and area
studies. The symposium is complimentary and open to the public.

Due to limited seating, reservations are required to attend the symposium and lunch by emailing the FJJMA at tdenton@ou.edu to register for the symposium and/or lunch. A full symposium program is available on the museum’s website at www.ou.edu/fjjma.

Additional educational programs are scheduled this fall at the museum, including a community day for families with dance and music performances by Algeriá Real, Ballet Flamenco Español, Los Niños de España y México and the OU School of Dance from 1 to 6 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 6. That same day, a Latin American cinema series is scheduled for 4 p.m.; the series continues at 7 p.m. Oct. 8 and 9. A gallery talk with White is scheduled for 12:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 29, and a fashion show, dance performance and OU student Halloween party are scheduled from 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 31. The museum also is teaming up with OU’s Student Life for a public Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) Street Festival from 6 to 10 p.m. Friday, Nov. 1. Additionally, a Family Day is scheduled from 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 17.

More information about the exhibition and programs is available on the museum’s website at www.ou.edu/fjjma.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is located in the OU Arts District on the corner of Elm Avenue and Boyd Street, at 555 Elm Ave., on the OU Norman campus. Admission to the museum is complimentary to all visitors, thanks to the generosity of the OU Office of the President and the OU Athletics Department. The museum is closed on Mondays. Information and accommodations on the basis of disability are available by calling (405) 325-4938 or visiting www.ou.edu/fjjma.

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**IMAGE CREDIT**

A new exhibition of Latin American art from the Cold War, on loan from the Art Museum of the Americas in Washington, D.C., goes on display at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma Saturday, Oct. 5. Libertad de Expresión: the Art Museum of the Americas and Cold War Politics features works by more than 60 artists across South America and the Caribbean, including Untitled, a 1954 painting by Cuban Mario Carreño (1913-1999).

Mario Carreño (Cuba, 1913-1999)

*Untitled*, 1954

Oil on canvas, 31 x 41 in. (78.7 x 104.1 cm.)
OAS/Art Museum of the Americas Collection.
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan King, 1981