



MUSEU
D'ART CONTEMPORANI
DE BARCELONA

The History of Exhibitions: Beyond the Ideology of the White Cube (part one)
Course in art and contemporary culture
19/10/2009 - 30/11/2009

Experiencias'68
(Instituto Di Tella, Buenos Aires, 1968)
Primera bienal de arte de vanguardia – Tucumán arde
(Rosario, 1968)
Presented by Ana Longoni and Jaime Vindel
9/11/2009 - Auditorium MACBA – 7 pm

Experiencias'68
May 8 to 23 1968
Instituto Di Tella, Buenos Aires

Artists: Rodolfo Azaro, Oscar Bony, Delia Cancela, Jorge Carballa, Roberto Jacoby, David Lamelas, Pablo Mesejean, Margarita Paksa, Roberto Plate, Alfredo Rodríguez Arias, Juan Stoppani, and Antonio Trotta

Artists presenting works outside/against the institution: Pablo Suárez, Eduardo Ruano

Curator: Jorge Romero Brest

The Instituto Di Tella – founded in Buenos Aires in 1958 by the family of businessman Torcuato Di Tella and funded, for the most part, by the Fundación Di Tella – and, more specifically, its Visual Art Centre, directed by Jorge Romero Brest, played a crucial role in promoting and fostering new trends. As a result, the centre, which opened in 1963 in Calle Florida, in an area of great cultural activity in the capital, served as a magnetic pole, attracting artistic ideas and initiatives. For instance, the centre staged exhibitions of works by artists who had been short-listed for the Premio Nacional, which was awarded annually, adopting the name of *Experiencias Visuales* [Visual Experiences] in 1967.

However, Di Tella's patronage of the arts also generated considerable tension within an art community that was becoming increasingly politically aware – not only opposing the Onganía dictatorship, but also supporting international protest movements – and keen to make its voice heard through collective actions and happenings. These tensions surfaced particularly at Experiencias'68, which was organised by the Instituto Di Tella and represented the epitome of radical experimentation. The event also marked the artistic *avant garde's* break with institutional structures.

“With Experiencias'68 and, to a certain extent, continuing on from Experiencias Visuales 1967, a group of young artists attempt to approach the problem of creation in almost extreme terms. To a greater or a lesser degree, they present vital situations not dissimilar from those traditionally presented in artworks, except that these are not represented in images. As if they wished to bring art closer to life – the main ambition of artists from all periods – whilst superseding the intermediary that is the form-symbol.

The word ‘experience’ gives rise to different interpretations, and its use can even be redundant, since all artworks entail an experience on the part of their creator, intended to cause another in the spectator. Here, however, the word is used with the clearly-defined intention of indicating that these are not static ‘works of art’ – terminated and definitive – but dynamic creative projects for the spectator. This is a different attitude, one that goes beyond mere contemplation of painted or carved images; it is a question of alerting the spectator to what is before their gaze but which, perhaps, they do not notice, so that they intensify their contemplation until they experience it with the greatest intensity, becoming aware of their position in the world.” **Jorge Romero Brest**¹

¹ Text written on 23 May 1968 at the request of the Di Tella Institute authorities, as public information in response to the police action to close down Roberto Plate's installation *Baño* [Bathroom], cited in LONGONI, Ana; MESTMAN, Mariano. *Del Di Tella a Tucumán Arde*. *Vanguardia artística y política en el '68 argentino*, Buenos Aires: El Cielo por Asalto, 2000, p. 93 (Eudeba, 2008).



Towards the end of May 1968, the Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia [Avant Garde Art Group] launched the Experimental Art Cycle in Rosario, a season of exhibitions which, at first, received financial support from the Instituto Di Tella.

The final exhibition in the season, Gabriela Carnevale's "encierro" ["confinement"], finds continuity in a series of collective actions that no longer seek the institute's support.

“How did the Experimental Art Cycle develop into “Tucumán Arde?” – The Experimental Art Cycle is something that was generated, germinated in late 1967. It forms one with approaches that are far more concerned with the aesthetic. Parallel to this – it was in April, I think – questions were being asked regarding viewers, venues, galleries, all these kinds of things. In the Experimental Art Cycle, the goal was to reach Buenos Aires, to get Romero Brest’s backing, etc. We persuaded Di Tella to support the season but, a few months later, around mid-68, we broke off from them, and Romero Brest’s money was returned. The group discussed whether it should be returned or used whilst breaking away just the same. But a different type of commitment, different type of awareness, was being formed.” **Gabriela Carnevale²**



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² Interview with Gabriela Carnevale in LONGONI, Ana; MESTMAN, Mariano, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

Primera bienal de arte de vanguardia - Tucumán arde
November 3 to 17, 1968
CGT de los Argentinos, Rosario

November 25, 1968
CGT de los Argentinos, Buenos Aires



Artists: María Elvira de Arechavala, Beatriz Balvé, Graciela Borthwick, Aldo Bortolotti, Graciela Carnevale, Jorge Cohen, Rodolfo Elizalde, Noemí Escandell, Eduardo Favario, León Ferrari, Emilio Ghilioni, Edmundo Giura, María Teresa Gramuglio, Martha Greiner, Roberto Jacoby, José María Lavarello, Sara López Dupuy, Rubén Naranjo, David de Nully Braun, Raúl Pérez Cantón, Oscar Pidustwa, Estella Pomerantz, Norberto Púzzolo, Juan Pablo Renzi, Jaime Rippa, Nicolás Rosa, Carlos Schork, Nora de Schork, Domingo Sapia, and Roberto Zara.

In August 1968 a group of avant-garde artists organized I National Avantgarde Art Encounter, where they laid the foundations for common action and agreed to present collective works outside the usual artistic circuits. Their first action was *Tucumán Arde* (Tucumán Burns), where their purpose was to expose the crisis in Tucumán through an analysis of 'Operation Tucumán', launched by the Argentine dictatorship in 1966 and announced as a series of measures to promote industry and diversify agriculture.

The collective project Tucumán Arde is one of the outstanding examples of political and investigative art in Latin America. Early in 1968, a group of artists, journalists and sociologists in Buenos Aires and Rosario carried out various actions which aimed to use art to expose the distance between reality and politics. The work of Tucumán Arde was designed to raise awareness of the situation among a broader public than the art circuit. The group used the resources of the art of the moment to encourage the public to take part. Tucumán Arde used the media to camouflage itself and in that way avoid the censorship that was applied to revolutionary art. It constructed a suitable situation to prove that, through overinformation strategies, the media could impose a different reality, thus exposing the press's power to manipulate. Tucumán Arde put itself forward as a programmatic model of a new art in which the artist had to assume an active role as protagonist of the social struggle. It developed in three phases.



PHASE I

Tucumán Arde was a project conceived to unfold in three stages. The first consisted of the investigation and recording of testimonies, the material that would be the basis of the exhibition. The artists made a first journey to Tucumán to collect information about the socioeconomic conflicts in the region, where the sugar mills that provided work for a large part of the population were being closed down, with the consequent general impoverishment. On a second journey they took photographs and recorded testimonies to back up the accusations they had made. They then called a press conference at the Museum of Fine Arts to give an account of the situation to the press, while the local police were forbidding people to have any contact with the artists after discovering their real intention to accuse. Meanwhile, in the cities of Rosario and Santa Fe a mysterious campaign was launched. First, posters appeared with the word 'Tucumán', then graffiti on the walls which read 'Tucumán Arde' ('Tucumán is burning'), This first stage concluded with the distribution of enigmatic posters announcing the 'First Avantgarde Art Biennial', an event which, in theory, had no connection with the Tucumán project.

PHASE 2

The second stage of the project consisted of an exhibition of the information collected in Tucumán. In the first days of November 1968, the headquarters of the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) trade union in Rosario was turned into a surprising space: the floor at the entrance was covered with the names of the owners of the sugar mills and their relations with local political power. Visitors had to step on the names in order to walk in. On the walls were the reports and reportages that reflected the situation in Tucumán, bringing out the relation between political interests and the crisis. Films,



audiovisuals and photographs were part of the material used. The lights in the rooms were switched off every two minutes as a symbol of the average time it took for another child to die in Tucumán. The bitter coffee served to the visitors recalled the lack of sugar, related to the closing of the mills. In a Tucumán press document people could read: “The aim of Tucumán Arde is, using the media, to point out the contradictions of the Argentine government and the owner class concerning the closure of the sugar mills in Tucumán and the serious consequences which are general knowledge”. The public could take home the reports and documents

that exposed the situation in Tucumán. On 25 November some artists organized the same Rosario exhibition in Buenos Aires. At the entrance a large banner was hung with the inscription ‘Visit Tucumán, garden of poverty’, in allusion to the advertising slogan ‘Visit Tucumán, garden of the Republic’. The jolly music of the local singer Palito Ortega provided an ironic counterpoint to the exhibition. In just a few hours the exhibition was closed down. The shows that had been planned for Santa Fe and Córdoba never happened.

PHASE 3

The third phase of the project had been conceived as a closing of the information circuit, a kind of synthesis and assessment of all the activities. But given the adverse situation of the country, the activities had to be cancelled.

Ana Longoni

Ana Longoni is a writer, CONICET researcher and professor at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), where she received her PhD in Art. She coordinates the research team “¿La cultura como resistencia?: Lecturas desde la transición de producciones culturales y artísticas durante la última dictadura argentina”, located at the UBA’s “Gino Germani” Research Institute of the Faculty of Social Sciences. Among other works, she has published the following books as sole author or in collaboration with others: *De los poetas malditos al video-clip* (Cántaro, 1998); *Del Di Tella a Tucumán Arde* (El cielo por asalto, 2000, republished by Eudeba, 2008); the preliminary study for Oscar Masotta’s book *Revolución en el arte* (Edhasa, 2004); one of the chapters of the anthology edited by Inés Katzenstein, *Listen, Here, Now! Argentine Art of the Sixties: Writings of the Avant-Garde* (New York, MoMA, 2004); and *Traiciones. La figura del traidor en los relatos acerca de los sobrevivientes de la represión* (Norma, 2007). She also edited *Escrituras, imágenes y escenarios ante la represión* (Siglo XXI, 2005) and *El Siluetazo* (Adriana Hidalgo, 2008).

Jaime Vindel

An art critic and historian, Vindel teaches Art History at the Universidad de León, where he also researches the influence of conceptualism on the *avant gardes* in Argentina in the 1960s. The editor of the book section for the international art magazine art.es, he has also published articles and texts in the magazines *Concinnitas* (Brazil) and *Ramona* (Argentina), as well as contributing to the book *Conceitualismos do Sul/Conceptualismos del Sur* [*Conceptualisms of the South*, Anablume, 2009].

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