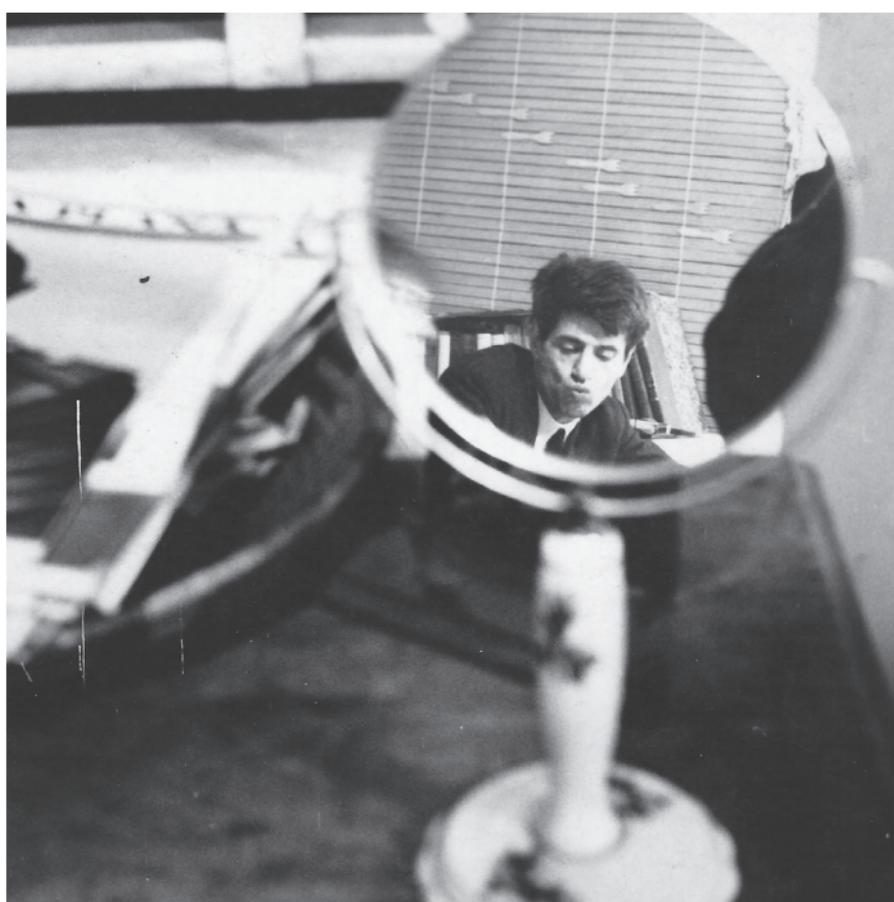


Oscar Masotta

Theory as Action

Exhibition from 23 March to 11 September 2018



Oscar Masotta, Buenos Aires, c. 1968. Photo: courtesy of Cloe Masotta and Susana Lijtmaer

'Masotta, was it Gardel?'

Oswaldo Lamborghini

OSCAR MASOTTA (Buenos Aires, 1930 – Barcelona, 1979) was an avant-garde intellectual, a controversial and provocative activist situated in the midst of the abrupt transformation of the political and cultural arenas in which he was a participant from the 1950s to the seventies. In contradistinction to the strongly anti-intellectual climate of that time, he defended the theoretical as a specific mode of emancipatory political intervention.

A crucial figure in the introduction of the then unconnected new paradigms of thought, together with the articulation of new ideas and ways of realisation, he has been defined by various authors as ‘a true modernising hero’, ‘a prototypical sensibility of the sixties’ and a ‘flagship writer’. While other intellectuals viewed existentialism and structuralism as irreconcilable, Masotta synthesised his position within the conjunction *consciousness and structure*: ‘The philosophy of Marxism must be rediscovered and specified in the modern doctrines (or ‘sciences’) of languages, structures and the unconscious.’

His passions and areas of intervention were polymorphic, multiple, mobile: from literature and political militancy to the artistic avant-garde, comics and psychoanalysis. A heterodox Marxist and an intellectual on the margins of academia, he was (and continues to be) a controversial figure due to his dandyism (deliberately slovenly), the ‘frivolity’ of his passions (the left intelligentsia reproached him for dedicating himself to happenings instead of addressing the problem of hunger) and for failing to fit the model of the committed or organic intellectual.

RETURN

UNTIL RECENTLY, Masotta was largely remembered in a dissociated way: either as a literary critic or for introducing and promoting Lacanian psychoanalysis in Argentina and Spain, while his influence as a theorist, prime mover and creator within the artistic avant-garde of the sixties, and as a leading pioneer who bestowed a semiological reading on comics, was less clearly defined.

Without having travelled outside of Argentina, in two lectures given at the Instituto Di Tella in 1965 Masotta put forward an unprecedented reading of Pop art. His thesis: the historical correlation between Pop and semiology, Pop as a semantic art (producing signs rather than images), his theory of the mask in reverse and his critique of contemporary sensationalism. In 1967, Masotta edited the collective volume *Happenings*, contrasting two contemporary artistic genres: the 'old' happening and a new genre, initiated with the anti-happening, capable of 'fusing the "revolutionary praxis" with the "aesthetic praxis"'.

At the same time, he was developing an interest in mass culture, particularly comics, writing two books on the subject in 1966 and 1970. In 1968, he organised the First World Comics Biennial at the Instituto Di Tella, and from 1968–69 he co-edited the magazine *LD. Literatura Dibujada*. These initiatives were pioneering in their recognition of the aesthetic condition of the comic, until then depreciated within cultural analysis.

In recent years his theoretical production and also his artistic interventions – in particular his happenings *Para inducir al espíritu de la imagen* (To induce the spirit of the image, 1966) and *El helicóptero* (The helicopter, 1967), and his media work *El mensaje fantasma* (The ghost message, 1967) – have been revisited with increasing interest. Theorists, curators and artists have discovered in Masotta a hotbed of fertile ideas and experiences, which not only compound the history of the sixties' avant-garde, but allow us to consider the current drifts of art and politics from his resonances and anticipations, as well as his truncated, failed or interrupted paths.

The exhibition includes some reverberations that unleash Masotta's controversial legacy within contemporary art, his unorthodox thinking and his ability to disturb, as in recent works by Spanish and Argentinean artists such as Dora García, Gonzalo Elvira, Ángel de la Calle, Guillermina Mongan and Un Faulduo.

KEY CONCEPTS

THE EXHIBITION ALSO INCLUDES a relevant set of works by the 'Argentine image-makers' – as he named them, to differentiate them from Anglo-Saxon Pop – and the Grupo Arte de los Medios (Media Art Group), considered today one of the starting points of international Conceptualism. From ideas such as the avant-garde, dematerialisation, discontinuity and environment, Masotta constructed tools with which to consider the dramatic turn that art was taking. But it is not always about terminology coined by him. A voracious reader, he picked up ideas from very different authors, from Karl Marx and El Lissitzky to Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Marshall McLuhan, Umberto Eco, Susan Sontag, Ricardo Carreira...

EXILE

ALTHOUGH HE READ LACAN'S work from very early on, and an interest in psychoanalysis remained an axis throughout his career, it was in his later years that he concentrated on the dissemination of Lacanism. Shortly before going into exile in 1974, hounded by the climate of increasing political violence in Argentina, he founded the Freudian School of Buenos Aires. After a spell in London, he moved to Barcelona in 1975. In the four years that remained until his untimely death, he was intensely active in various European cities. He was linked to the counterculture, especially to Alberto Cardín, Eugenio Trías, Federico Jiménez Losantos and other young oppositional intellectuals. Among the hundreds of study groups that he promoted – cited by those involved as a founding, horizontal and provocative influence in their formation –, the first was based in the studio of the painter Josep Guinovart. He founded the Freudian libraries in Barcelona and Galicia (1977). A reader of feminism, his last publication was in the collective book *La revolución teórica de la pornografía* (The theoretical revolution of pornography).

‘Something would change: from a critic, essayist or university researcher, I would become a happenist. It wouldn’t be a bad idea — I thought — if the hybridization of images at least had the result of disquieting or disorienting someone.’

Oscar Masotta, 1967

A COLLECTIVE INVESTIGATION, AN UNFINISHED ARCHIVE

THIS FIRST EXHIBITION about the intellectual career of Oscar Masotta is the result of several years of collective research, in which his daughter Cloe was closely involved, along with many other essential collaborators.

The project was first realised publicly in the exhibition that opened at the MUAC (Mexico) in 2017; following Barcelona, it will conclude in Buenos Aires. Hopefully, in these last two cities, those in which Masotta lived and agitated, it will provoke an exercise in memory, an enquiry into his connections and latencies, his traces – long invisible – in the present. He was an essential articulator of the collective who dared to intervene in territories in which he had no legitimacy, inventing a place of enunciation from the institutional margins.

Perhaps the most encouraging result of this long process will be the construction of an archive, non-existent until now, or rather dispersed, inconclusive, fragmentary and in progress; one that is composed of scattered fragments, unexpected signs, testimonies and documents. An archive that will overflow the restricted temporal and spatial limits of the exhibition and will be available for future readings and activations.

Exhibition organised by MUAC Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, UNAM, Mexico, in collaboration with MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.

Curator

Ana Longoni in collaboration with Hiuwai Chu, Amanda de Garza and Guillermina Mongan.

Guided visits

Included in Museum admission. See times and languages at macba.cat.

Parlem de...

Oscar Masotta

By Cloe Masotta, Andrés Duque, Ana Longoni and Gonzalo Elvira
Saturdays 14 April, 5 and 12 May, 6.30 pm. Free admission

Screening

Segunda vez, by Dora García, followed by a discussion with the artist

Wednesday 2 May, 8 pm
Cinema Maldà. 3 €

Publication

Oscar Masotta, 'Después del pop: nosotros desmaterializamos'. *Quadern portàtil*, no. 35. Barcelona: MACBA, 2018 (lecture given at the Instituto Di Tella, Buenos Aires, July 1967).

Night of the Museums

Programme related to Oscar Masotta

Saturday 19 May, 7 pm to 1 am
Free admission

Seminar

Deflagrations

Oscar Masotta. The Avant-garde and Psychoanalysis

By Enric Berenguer, Nora Catelli, Rithée Cevasco, Dora García, Ana Longoni, Cloe Masotta and Martín Vitaliti
Thursday 7 June, 4.30 pm
Meier Auditorium. 5 €. Free with MACBA Amic card.
Previous booking at macba.cat

Become a Friend of MACBA from 15 € per year

Enjoy free and unlimited access to the temporary exhibitions and the Collection, guided tours and activities throughout the galleries.

Find out about the Friends programme and its benefits at macba.cat.

Opening times

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 11 am to 7.30 pm (from 25 June to 24 September, from 11 am to 8 pm)
Tuesday closed
Saturday, 10 am to 8 pm
Sunday and public holidays, 10 am to 3 pm

The Museum entry ticket is valid for a month. Activate it at the ticket desk and visit us as often as you like. Saturdays from 4 to 8 pm, free admission to the Museum.

MACBA

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Plaça dels Àngels, 1
08001 Barcelona
macba.cat

Follow us



#OscarMasotta

Media sponsors

