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Brazilian avant-garde artists of the postwar era worked from a fundamental but productive out-of-jointness. They were modernist but distant from modernism. Europeans and North Americans may feel a similar displacement when viewing Brazilian avant-garde art; the unexpected familiarity of the works serves to make them unfamiliar. In *Constructing an Avant-Garde*, Sérgio Martins seizes on this uncanny obliqueness and uses it as the basis for a reconfigured account of the history of Brazil's avant-garde. His discussion covers not only widely renowned artists and groups—including Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Cildo Meireles, and neoconcretism—but also important artists and critics who are less well known outside Brazil, including Mário Pedrosa, Ferreira Gullar, Amílcar de Castro, Luís Sacilotto, Antonio Dias, and Rubens Gerchman.

Martins argues that artists of Brazil's postwar avant-garde updated modernism in a way that was radically at odds with European and North American art historical narratives. He describes defining episodes in Brazil's postwar avant-garde, discussing crucial critical texts, including Gullar's "Theory of the Non-Object," a phenomenological account of neoconcrete artworks; Oiticica, constructivism, and Mondrian; portraiture, self-portraiture, and identity; the nonvisual turn and missed encounters with conceptualism; and monochrome, manifestos, and engagement.

The Brazilian avant-garde's hijacking of modernism, Martins shows, gained further complexity as artists began to face their international minimalist and conceptualist contemporaries in the 1960s and 1970s. Reconfiguring not only art history but their own history, Brazilian avant-gardists were able to face contemporary challenges from a unique and oblique standpoint.

About the Author

Sérgio B. Martins is a critic and art historian living in Rio de Janeiro.

Endorsements

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"Through a series of case studies on artists of different periods, Sérgio B. Martins offers an intelligent alternative to predominant historical approaches toward Brazilian art. Negotiating theory and history, these individual practices become related through the term 'constructing' in the title, which invokes both the advent of the neo-avant-gardes and the specificity of their repercussions, suggesting a sense of historical process rather than identitarian closure."

_Michael Asbury, Reader in the Theory and History of Art, Research Centre for Transnational Art, Identity and Nation (TrAIN), University of the Arts, London

"In this book Martins weaves together pivotal episodes of postwar Brazilian art in an attempt to come to terms with the uneven modernism and modernity of the region and to make it critically available to the present. Mobilizing notions of disjunction and dislocation and a challenging theoretical constellation of references, he recasts the work of key artists and critics in epistemological terms."

_Monica Amor, Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art, Maryland Institute College of Art