

*Introduction, Special Issue on Surrealism and the 1960s Americas*

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The social and political landscape of the 1960s foregrounded complex intersections of art and politics across the Americas. During this decade, Surrealism, far from being in decline, remained actively committed to its principle of revolt and continued to be a reference for artists and writers in the region. Framing this special issue in the 1960s inscribes surrealist activity into a broader panorama of social transformation influenced by student movements, second-wave feminism, counterculture, and the rise of the New Left. On the other hand, revolutionary processes such as the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959) informed radical imaginaries in Latin America and beyond during the Cold War. As Andrea Giunta and George F. Flaherty have noted, the Cuban Revolution was a significant event “not only because it renewed notions of utopia but also because it redefined notions of international culture in the 1960s, with the revolutionary Cuban project of self-representation implemented both politically and aesthetically, in direct contradistinction to the Cold War.”<sup>1</sup> In this context, transnational networks of cooperation and solidarity between Africa, Asia, and Latin America facilitated encounters and exchanges between activists, artists, and intellectuals from Europe and the Americas.<sup>2</sup> This historical framework prompts us to reconsider surrealist manifestations in the Americas having to do with local and international socio-political concerns, thus extending the surrealist vision of resistance and revolution to the 1960s.

As art historian Dawn Ades has stated, Latin America was “the site for the most direct political effect Surrealism ever had.”<sup>3</sup> Studies on the political dimension of surrealist activity in the region often point to two important moments of exchange: André Breton’s visit to Mexico in 1938 when the poet, along with Diego Rivera and Leon Trotsky, wrote the “Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art”; and the series of lectures Breton delivered in Haiti in 1945. Yet artistic exchanges in the following decades offer new directions for studying the

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intersections of Surrealism, culture, and politics. In the 1960s, members of the Paris group travelled to Cuba and participated in events organized in accordance with the cultural policy of the revolutionary government. The participation of Roberto Matta, Wifredo Lam, Jorge Camacho, Agustín Cárdenas, and Alain Jouffroy, among others, in events such as the 1967 Sal6n de Mayo and the 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana, the artistic activity of Matta and Lam in 1960s Cuba, and the statements on the revolution issued in the surrealist journals *La Br6che*, *action surr6aliste* and *L'Archibras*, are some examples that shed light on how Surrealists based in Europe observed the Cuban revolutionary process during its first decade.

This special issue of *JSA* is informed by ongoing debates in the scholarship on Surrealism that discuss the crossroads of surrealist activity and politics in the 1960s. An important reference for the study of postwar Surrealism is Alyce Mahon's *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros, 1938-1968* (2005), which examines the political agency of the movement in its later period, including the Surrealists's participation in the upheavals of May '68 in Paris. Recent publications like Joanna Pawlik's *Remade in America: Surrealist Art, Activism, and Politics, 1940-1978* (2021), *Radical Dreams: Surrealism, Counterculture, Resistance* (2022), edited by Elliott H. King and Abigail Susik, and *Surrealism* (2021), edited by Natalya Lusty, have contributed significantly to a critical understanding of the political dimension of Surrealism in the 1960s. Similarly, curatorial initiatives such as the recent major exhibition "Surrealism Beyond Borders" (2022), held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Tate Modern in London, demonstrate an attempt "to challenge the hierarchies of cultural dominance that were—despite the radicalism of Surrealism—among its determining conditions, often related to race, class, gender, access, and privilege."<sup>4</sup> As curators Stephanie D'Alessandro and Matthew Gale noted, "new narratives from a more open set of coordinates, and from multiple sites and events, draw together threads that are synchronic, overlapping, and mutually enriching."<sup>5</sup>

These approaches open new research paths for the study of surrealist manifestations and of the influence of surrealist thought in Latin America, where "Surrealism flourished and transformed itself."<sup>6</sup> In *Surrealism in Latin America: Viv6simo Muerto* (2012), Dawn Ades, Rita Eder, and Graciela Speranza argue that Surrealism in the region is "a branch of the movement that has suffered from several disadvantages—including a partial and limited historiography and stereotypical characterizations that aligned it with the gratuitous fantastic and the charge that it appropriated artists such as Frida Kahlo in a neocolonialist manner."<sup>7</sup> For the authors, "those stereotypes, which are well entrenched, have led to surrealism being treated as a negative chapter in the history of modern and contemporary Latin American art."<sup>8</sup> In the last decade, transnational approaches have underlined the role of exchanges and dialogues between artists, activists, and intellectuals in the transmission of surrealist ideas, revealing the ways in which Surrealism was echoed in different geopolitical contexts. In drawing connections between the multiple

narratives that configure the constellation of artistic activity informed by Surrealism in the Americas, a more comprehensive view of Surrealism comes to light.

We start this special issue with Anne Foucault's thorough analysis of the engagement of the Paris Surrealist Group with the Cuban Revolution in the 1960s. Foucault discusses how the Cuban revolutionary process and its anti-imperialist stance resonated with the movement's political position and its idea of revolution. As the author notes, the presence of Cuban surrealists Agustín Cárdenas and Jorge Camacho in Breton's circle contributed to an interest in the Cuban revolutionary process. Cuban artist Wifredo Lam also played a key role, not only through his work that merged modernist languages with his Afro-Cuban heritage but also through his participation in the organization of the *Salón de Mayo* in Havana in 1967, an international event that allowed artists based in Europe to visit the island and observe the development of the new revolutionary cultural landscape. In the issue's next essay, I continue the discussion of Surrealism in 1960s Cuba, focusing on how this revolutionary context informed the works Chilean-born surrealist artist Roberto Matta created in Cuba in the 1960s, a period in which the artist travelled to Havana on several occasions. The essay argues that Matta's experience in Cuba is an important antecedent to reassessing the political dimension of his later work as well as his relationship with Latin America after more than two decades of living in Europe and the United States.

Célia Stara follows with a compelling examination of the relationship between Surrealism and the neo-avantgarde in Mexico in the 1960s through the lens of Leonora Carrington's work. In her essay, Stara examines Carrington's collaboration with Chilean filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky and with the local publication *S.NOB*, as well as the artist's response to the Tlatelolco massacre in 1968 and her support of the Women Liberation Movement in Mexico. Taking Carrington as a case study, Stara challenges a misleading understanding that exiled surrealists in Mexico were isolated from the local artistic community, demonstrating instead that Carrington was not only attuned to the new generation of artists but also that local socio-political circumstances informed her work. Moving beyond Cuba and Mexico, Surrealism also informed avant-garde initiatives in Chile in the 1960s. Next, Liz Donato's engaging essay offers a novel approach to the work of a group of architects, poets, and artists collectively known as the Valparaíso School, which, in the 1950s, proposed an experimental approach to architecture, poetry, and pedagogy which was informed by a myriad of avant-garde influences, including Surrealism. The group's activity continued into the mid-1960s, as seen in *Ameréida*, a project initiated as a journey from the extreme South of Chile to Bolivia and that concluded in the form of an epic poem that revealed the attempts of the project to question colonial subjectivities.

Abigail Susik continues this special issue with a thought-provoking conversation with Paul Buhle, author and founding editor of the bimonthly journal

*Radical America*, published between 1967 and 1999 in the United States. A central figure in American counterculture, Buhle provides a refreshing perspective on the intersections of Surrealism and radicalism in the U.S. through his contact with Franklin Rosemont and Penelope Rosemont, co-founders of the Chicago Surrealist Group. Buhle offers valuable testimony to their collaboration in the special issue of *Radical America*, “Surrealism in the Service of the Revolution,” published in January 1970 and edited by the Rosemonts. The issue concludes with Emma Skinner’s review of the aforementioned 2021-22 “Surrealism Beyond Borders” exhibition.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to Anne Foucault, Célia Stara, Liz Donato, Abigail Susik, and Paul Buhle, for their contributions to this special issue. I would also like to extend my thanks to Claudia Mesch and all the anonymous reviewers for their work at the *Journal of Surrealism and the Americas*, an important platform for the dissemination of critical work on Surrealism in the region.

1 Andrea Giunta and George F. Flaherty. "Latin American Art History: An Historiographic Turn," in *Art in Translation* 9, (no. 1, 2017): 129.

2 See Paula Barreiro López. "Cultural Guerrilla: Tricontinental Genealogies of '68," in Zeina Maasri, Cathy Bergin and Francesca Burke, eds., *Transnational Solidarity Anticolonialism in the Global Sixties* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022); Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

3 Dawn Ades, "Surrealism in Latin America," in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, ed. David Hopkins (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 178.

4 Stephanie D'Alessandro and Matthew Gale, "The World in The Time of The Surrealists" in the exhibition catalogue *Surrealism Beyond Borders* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2021), 19.

5 Ibid.

6 Dawn Ades, Rita Eder, and Graciela Speranza (eds.), *Surrealism in Latin America: Vivísimo muerto* (London and Los Angeles: Tate and Getty Research Institute, 2012), 7.

7 Ibid., viii.

8 Ibid.