LITERATURE AND THE VISUAL ARTS:
THE BRAZILIAN ROARING TWENTIES

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The dialogue between literature and the visual arts in Brazil in the 1920s has as its key moment the Week of Modern Art, or Week of ’22, and as its main names Oswald de Andrade and Tarsila do Amaral--through the interrelation between their works as well as joint productions. The approach of several artists of the time to blackness, prostitution, and the portrayal of Mangue in poetry and painting also seems to me very significant and emblematic in presenting the Horatian theme UT PICTURA POESIS (poetry is like painting). These are the axes around which revolves the text I will present.

THE MODERNIST REVOLUTION: THE WEEK OF ’22

The interdisciplinary character of the Week of ’22 reflects the double movement of artistic production in Brazil at a time when, while seeking to bring up to date national elements, it's drawn to the Medusa of the European vanguard while trying not to fall into the mere imitation of foreign models or to lose its national character with the adoption of new languages.

This phenomenon of multiartistic character consisted of a sequence of lectures, poetry readings and concerts which took place in the Teatro Municipal of São Paulo over three days and to this day is remembered as frenzied: February 13, 15 and 17, 1922. The "official" entry of Brazil into modernity was not limited, therefore, to a rhetorical show; an exhibition of architecture and visual arts accompanied it.
The movement of '22 was not born of spontaneous generation; rather, the establishment of modernity in Brazil had anticipatory moments and, inevitably, polemic ones. Evidence of both statements was the vehement rejection of the *esprit nouveau* disseminated by writer Monteiro Lobato's radical brand of nationalism, which contrasted with the echoes of Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto, imported early on to Brazil, by way of Bahia, by Almacchio Diniz and, in person, by Oswald de Andrade in 1912, on his way back from his first trip to Europe.

![1. Marinetti in Rio de Janeiro's Favela, 1926](image)

Other trailblazers of the movement were the two individual exhibitions Lasar Segall put on in 1913 in São Paulo and Campinas, which were practically ignored by local critics at the time. For its part, Anita Malfatti's exhibition in 1917 had arrived accompanied by the echoes of the war in Europe and the clamor of the first large workers' strike in the country.
Her painting bore the intense mark of expressionism, with which she had had contacts during her studies in Berlin and at the Independent School of Art in New York. But the artist paid a high price for her pioneering work: her exhibit was the object of polemic and scandal. Nevertheless, critics were and are unanimous in recognizing her exhibit as the first modern look at the visual arts; her work doubtlessly represented a point of departure for Brazil's historical vanguards and made it possible for the later manifestations of the new spirit to be received with less intolerance as the meaning of the irreversible trajectory toward modernity was recognized little by little.

We can say that the Week of '22 is colored by the commemorations of the first centennial of Brazil's independence and is concurrent with the funding of the Communist Party of Brazil. For its part, the event marks the overcoming of the rigid models of the nineteenth century, the exhaustion of a literature too influenced by the European canons of the end of the century, the entry of Brazil into modernity, and the birth of a national literature, amalgamated with a strong affirmation of Brazilianness.
TARSIWALD'S GAZE

Oswald de Andrade and Tarsila do Amaral—or "Tarsiwald," in Mário de Andrade's felicitous expression—constitute today true emblems of the Week of Modern Art. The joining of their names represents the fusion of body and mind united by the productivity of the ideology of Pau-Brasil and Anthropophagy. They met in São Paulo, in the celebrated year of 1922, when Tarsila returned to Brazil after studying in Paris for a two-year period. It's with this "couple mad with life" that the history of modernism in Brazil, begun with the 1917 Malfatti exhibit, enters its heroic phase. The following year the Tarsila and Oswald duo is in Paris, making contact with the most important artistic trends of the time. In addition to Tarsila's apprenticeship in the studios of Andre' Lhote, Albert Gleizes and Fernand Léger, the friendship with Blaise Cendrars opened even more for them the doors of the international vanguard whose headquarters were then in Paris: Brancusi, Picasso, Cocteau, Modigliani, Marie Laurencin and others. They also associated with the writers who had always shown an interest in Latin America: Jules Supervielle, Valery Larbaud and Ramón Gómez de la Serna.
There is a sort of mutual bedazzlement in the couple which, at this moment, looks at itself, at one another and, together, at Europe and Brazil. From this crossing of gazes, that is, from this whole of reciprocal influences, will come the most important part of the production of both, especially the one focused on the period from 1923 to 1925. In Oswald's poetry we perceive Tarsila's visual mark, and in her painting Oswald's unmistakable poetic presence. A sort of revolution for four hands of rare intensity.
[5. Oswald by Tarsila, 1923]

The countless portraits of Oswald that Tarsila painted at the time concentrate mainly on his face, with the exception of a pencil drawing in which the model's body is shown nude and in its entirety. The largest part of this production dates to the years 1922 and 1923, when the poet and the artist were still true apprentices of modernism and the fundamental moment of the phase named Pau-Brasil was germinating in them.

In addition to the several drawings of Oswald done by Tarsila, it's worth highlighting three portraits of the writer. Two of them date from the *annus mirabilis* of 1922.

These portraits take up most of the surface of the paper and the canvases and present a frontal vision, in the color pencil and pastel *picture* dated 1922, or show Oswald's face slightly inclined, in the oil versions of 1922 and 1923. In all three versions a serial element stands out: the representation of Oswald in a coat and tie, in the center of the picture, and with his head occupying the top part of the canvas. In all three works the vertical orientation of the bust also prevails.

In 1924 Oswald published his "Manifesto of Pau-Brasil Poetry." The metaphoric use of Pau-Brasil [Brazil wood], the wood which was the first Brazilian export, already contains the embryo of the movement in its subversion of the traditional relationship between metropolis and colony: "Let's separate: Imported poetry. And Pau-Brasil poetry, for exporting," Oswald de Andrade states in the manifesto. For the value of its reddish pigment, the brazil wood, difficult to obtain, was much sought after and valued, from the fifteenth century on, for European court fashions and Church authorities' habits.

It's the radicalization of a *naïf* poetry and painting, in which the indigenous theme is recycled according to the methods of the international vanguard. Finally, the closing of Oswald de Andrade's manifesto summarizes and inverts the traditional meaning of the concept of "barbarian" and gives us the multicultural dimension of this revolution: "Barbarian, gullible, picturesque and tender. Newspaper readers.

Shortly after this, the book of poetry *Pau Brasil* emerges--published in Paris in 1925, with illustrations by Tarsila--and the representative production of Pau-Brasil painting also begins: *The Country Girl* (1923),

![Image](image.jpg)

[6. Carnival in Madureira (1924)].

*Favela Hill* (1924), *La gare* (1925) and other canvases from the same series.

As Tarsila, beginning in 1922 and especially 1923, fixes on canvas her passionate gaze, Oswald will also leave his amorous testament in an emblematic poem about the artist: "Atelier" [Studio], written and rewritten countless times, and incorporated in "Light Posts," one of the sections of the book *Pau-Brasil*, published in Paris by Sans Pareil in 1925.
The "Bauhaus" cover with the Brazilian flag bears Tarsila's signature, like the illustrations inside. None of Oswald's works establishes as intense a dialogue with Tarsila's aesthetic project as this "Atelier":

**ATELIER**

Country girl dressed in Poiret

The laziness of São Paulo abides in your eyes

Which have never seen Paris or Piccadilly

Or the exclamations of the men

In Seville

At your passage in earrings

Locomotives and national animals

gematize the limpid sceneries

Congonhas pales beneath the canopy

Of the processions of Minas
The verdure against the klaxon blue
Cut across the red dust
Skyscrapers
Fords
Overpasses
The aroma of coffee
in the framed silence

"Atelier' is one of the poems most representative of the oscillations between the national and the cosmopolitan poles, the rural and the urban ones, the European and the Brazilian which distinguished modernism in Brazil so much. It embodies the Pau-Brasil style not only for the ideological tension implicit in the solution to the problems of a dependent culture, like the importation of the European vanguards' approaches (as exemplified in the poetry of Apollinaire and Cendrars, for example), but above all for its synthetic, naïf and geometric presentation.

The first verse ("Country girl dressed in Poiret") points simultaneously in two directions, reproducing the Oswaldian dialectics of the "here and there"--the title of a poem appearing in "History of Brazil." The periphery and the center, pivotal point of the dialectic of the national and of the cosmopolitan aspects in the Pau-Brasil ideology, take on a concrete character in this opening verse. It immediately points to the interior of the state of São Paulo, locale of Tarsila's birth and childhood, and, at the same time, to the City-of-Lights, represented by Paul Poiret, one of the most famous stylists in Paris at the time.
The *maison* Poiret, which would create Tarsila's dress for her wedding to Oswald, was one of the couple's favorites for buying utilitarian designer objects. The magnificent image of this first verse has the effect of a synthesis, suggested by the clothing, the fashion code, in which the emblem of the Paulista interior is fused and condensed in the Parisian metonymy.

Nowhere in the poem does Tarsila's name appear; on the contrary, her image is constructed always periphrastically around attributes and geographies. This deliberate omission was the fruit of various exercises in style, as the manuscripts show.

As a work locale, the studio situates the poem in the context of painting and colors, defining Tarsila right from the title by her professional and artistic bias. This clear-cut delimitation of the poem's ambit, almost a framing device, becomes apparent in the last line, in the synesthesia of the "framed silence" that concludes the poem.
Backward Brazil, exemplified by the Paulista interior of the 20s and rendered concrete by the affectionate appeal to the "country girl," contrasts in the poem with the sophisticated European cities frequented by the couple: Paris, London (Piccadilly) and Seville. By choosing "laziness" as the attribute of the gaze, Oswald, besides referring to Tarsila's beautiful eyes, revindicates the importance of the theme of idleness in the characterization of the "national" pole. This theme had already been employed as reflection by Mário de Andrade in 1918 in "The divine laziness," leading to the well-known refrain "ai que preguiça!" [ "I'm feeling so lazy!"] in the novel Macunaima, and, much later, would be fundamental to Oswald himself in the elaboration of the anthropophagic ideology. "The wise solar laziness," present in the Manifesto of Pau-Brasil Poetry of 1924, rises again powerfully in the Paulista gaze of Tarsila, who, in turn, takes it up again with the image of the sun in the shape of orange slices in the anthropophagic phase of "Abaporu" and "Anthropophagy" (1928 and 1929), and in the reverberating circles in "Setting Sun," also from 1929.

The long syntax established by the free verse of this first stanza dynamizes the movement culminating in the final verse, which emphasizes a sort of Glorious Tarsila, passing like a victorious Seville woman among the men's salvos.
The "passage in earrings," which concludes the stanza with a close-up effect, immediately recalls the beautiful "Self-portrait" (1924), in which the painter's long dangling earrings adorn and support her head in the air. Besides, in the same way that Tarsila consigned to posterity an extraordinary Cubist Oswald (the 1923 oil), the poet doesn't resist the temptation of a profile of Tarsila as a "Cubist country girl." The dangling earrings suggest to Oswald the ideal format for the representation of the quality of linearity.

The second stanza shifts the focus from the woman to the landscape of Brazil. In it, the locomotive (like the cable car after) transfigures itself as one of the great emblems of international modernity, mixed with the sign of the autochthonous element, represented by "national animals" and the baroque and Christian tradition of the state of Minas Gerais. Modernity is established not only in the poem's mechanical content and geometrization, but in its very composition, devoid of punctuation marks, in the "lapidary conciseness" mentioned by Paulo Prado in the preface to the book Pau Brasil. "He geometrized reality,"
João Ribeiro would repeat in 1927. This prismatic gaze into the Paulista interior opens the "San Martinho" section of *Pau Brasil* in the poem "Nocturne:"

**NOCTURNE/NIGHT TRAIN**

Outside the moonlight persists

And the train divides Brazil

Like a meridian

The geometric landscape comes here to a moment of utmost synthesis, the design of the circle and the straight line transformed into icons in the middle verse, the meridian which "divides Brazil," and the poem, down the middle. The ambiguous title defies the romantic context and announces itself as the possibility of being also a night train.

The same formal solution occurs in the third stanza of "Atelier:" "The verdure against the klaxon blue/cut/on the red dust." A master of synthesis, OA comes up with a more radical solution than in "Nocturne" in this stanza of "Atelier," as here the participle "cut," totally isolated, "cuts" the stanza in the middle both graphically and literally, like a meridian. The nationalistic theme of Pau-Brasil, introduced in the previous stanza by the geography, architecture and tradition of Minas Gerais is complemented by the highly contrasted coloring: the green, the blue and the red. In these colors we recognize the palette that Tarsila would also adopt as part of the rhetoric of the affirmation of national aspects, the colors of Pau-Brasil, which, by definition, is associated with coloring properties. The red soil in the last verse, present in many of Tarsila's pictures, is a consequence of the dust raised by the car arriving at the plantation. Here, again, the Paulista reminiscences of modernism through the titles of two important journals are strong: the synesthesia "Klaxon blue" is reminiscent of the most avant-garde of modernist journals, *Klaxon*, and the "red dust" (typical of the Paulista interior and of other Brazilian regions) of verse 13, of the review *Terra roxa....e outras terras* [Red soil....and other soils] of 1926.
Geometry, "national animals," meridian cuts and other elements pertaining to the Brazilian tradition are found in a profusion in this stage of Tarsila's work. The flora and fauna of Brazil appears in the naïf bestiary of her painting; dogs and hens in

10. "Favela Hill" (1924);

rabbits, armadillos and roosters in

11. "Market" (1924);
12. The Urutu viper in "The Egg" (1928);

13. a toad in "The Toad" (1928);
14. river otters in "Setting Sun" (1929);

15. monkeys lounging in tree branches in "Postcard" (1929), etc. Unlike *Douanier* Rousseau's primitivism, in which the animals have the function of representing the oneiric and exotic vertigo of surrealism, Tarsila's animals, even though always depicted in a naïf way, have the obvious function of affirming "Pau-Brazilianness".
Oswald de Andrade's naïf sense, always reinforced by the recourse to a deliberately spare style, is molded on the unidimensionality of a picture like "E.F.C.B." (Estrada de Ferro Central do Brasil) [Central Railway of Brazil], in which the iron trusses of the bridge and of the railway signals (metallic echoes of the Eiffel Tower) decorate not an urban landscape but the interior of Brazil: palm trees, churches, light posts, and the famous "ochre and saffron shacks" mentioned by Oswald in the Anthropophagic Manifesto.

The last stanza tropicalizes and "paulistanizes" the urban scenery of the 20s. The enumerative synthesis situates itself in the limits imposed by the frame of silence; the viewer contemplates the city of São Paulo as if it were a silent and aromatic ready-made object, a postcard offered to the tourist's camera-eye. The futurist-paulista city is the harbinger of a Niemayer about whom Oswald spared no praise decades later, and still 15 years before the inauguration of Brasilia ("Niemeyer's architectural genius," as he would qualify it).
The images in the poem's final stanza, in which the cold geometric metal and concrete masses are contraposed to the hot solar sphere, reappear in the Manifesto of Pau-Brasil Poetry: "Howitzers of elevators, cubes of skyscrapers and the wise solar laziness"--the possibility of a cold constructivism abolished by the tropical idleness that characterizes the São Paulo megalopolis.

From the title to the last stanza of the poem, a passage from the atelier as an interior space destined for the artist's production to the rural landscape of the interior of Brazil takes place--with an intense horizontality suggested by "Locomotives" and by the "processions of Minas"--, culminating in the vertical opening of the skyscrapers crossed by the overpasses of the geometrized city. The poem thus portrays this sort of rite of passage which begins in the studios of Léger, Lhote and Gleizes and ends up in the open Brazilian space of the Tarsilian palette.

[17. The Country Girl]

We also must not forget the beautiful painting of 1923 which, prior to the composition and publication of Oswald's poem, coincidentally or not bears the name "The Country Girl" (CI, il.51). In a letter written the same year from Paris, Tarsila herself confesses: "I feel more and more Brazilian: I want to be the painter of my land. I'm so grateful to have spent my entire childhood on the plantation. The memories of
that time are becoming precious to me. In art, I want to be the country girl from São Bernardo, playing with rustic dolls, as in the last picture I'm painting." (my emphasis).

Characterized by a markedly cubist approach, the national/cosmopolitan tension present in "Atelier" translates itself in the painting by the rural motif molded on the canvas with the aesthetics imported from Paris. The national tone in the context of a rural calm based on the unidimensionality of the naïf perspective. Tarsila's "country girl" isn't dressed in Poiret, but Léger. The cylindrical forms of the female body--mixed with the angular cut of the houses, the tree trunks, the stripes of the hands and the facade of the house on the left, as well as the green oval volumes of the leaf and the possible pineapples--are intensely reminiscent of the mechanics of Ledger's design.

When this painting is compared to Oswald's poetic works, the acute sense of social criticism present in the work of the Paulista poet, which would only appear in Tarsila's work in the 30s, is mentioned. One can also speak of the direct style of Tarsila's paintings, of the tendency toward decorativism lacking the humor or the aggressiveness which characterize Oswald's works. There is, however, an instance of close collaboration between the two in which this doesn't happen--on the contrary. I'm speaking of the book of poetry Pau-Brasil, in which Tarsila's illustrations have a merit almost equivalent to that of the poems. There is a real dialogue between illustration and poem which greatly enriches the book, beginning with the cover depicting the flag of Brazil, in which the positivist motto "Order and progress" is substituted by the expression which identifies not only a book, but the aesthetic-ideological program which would inform the production of both artists until the anthropophagy phase.

Tarsila's ten illustrations which comprise each part of the book display a simple stroke, synthetic, childish and full of humor. The idea of croquis, inherent in the sketch of the tourist, is present in the illustrations. The modernity of these images, which had already premiered in Feuilles de Routes, by Blaise Cendrars, obliterates any sense of bombast given to the history of Brazil, as it happens in the poems. There is a humor inherent in the small illustrations, which contain a "naive" criticism sketched in their rapid stroke. In the sequence of drawings we find an anti-epic version of Brazil which goes against the grain of
the narrative of great history to make room for a foundational discourse in which fragmentariness, provisionality, an unfinished quality and humor prevail.

The last and most important stage of this joint work is the creation of Anthropophagy, which can't be separated from its genesis in the Pau-Brasil Movement. In the same way Oswald's two manifestos--"Pau-Brasil" (1924) and "Anthropophagic" (1928)--must be analyzed together and in a diachronic fashion, Tarsila's three most important paintings--"The Black Woman" (1923), "Abaporu" (1928) and "Anthropophagy" (1929)--must be seen as a triptych or one set. "The Black Woman," created in Paris, is explosive, monumental, raw in its extraordinary beauty, and is a forerunner by at least five years of the anthropophagy themes.

[18. The Black Woman. 1923]

Even though many have pointed out its analogies with Constantin Brancusi's "La Negresse Blanche" (ironically sculpted in white marble), whose studio Tarsila frequented in the same period, and with the
black theme which was then the rage among the Parisian vanguard, Tarsila's "The Black Woman" explodes with force from the depths of Afro-Brazilianness. I'd call it "barbaric and our own," to borrow Oswald de Andrade's words. The solidity of blackness is amplified by means of the monumental and cylindrical volumes of the neck, arms and legs, as well as the disproportionate and single gigantic breast hanging at forefront of the canvas. The "polished" and "lustrous" head, in apparent disproportion to the rest of the body, suggests an asymmetry reminiscent of Henry Moore's sculptures which will grow stronger in "Abaporu" and "Anthropophagy." The turgid lips, drooping and exaggerated, contrast with the smallness of an oblique gaze oscillating between sensuality and impenetrability. The brute force of the image resides also in the largeness of the surface of the painting, which it occupies entirely, almost spilling out of it.

In contrast with the rounded shapes and the brown color of the body, the background of the painting reveals a cubist approach, with the white, blue and black stripes crossing the canvas horizontally. The geometry intensifies: the rationalism of the horizontal lines is compounded by the tropical metaphor in the diagonal of the banana leaf, also behind the black woman. These contrasts somehow impose a certain perspective, relieving the picture of its own grandiosity and the telluric mass represented by the huge body.

[19. Abaporu, 1928]
With a picture given to Oswald for his thirty-eighth birthday, in 1928, Tarsila christens the movement through the title she gives it: "Abaporu," that is, "eater of human flesh", in the definition from Montoya's dictionary. The disproportion is accentuated in the seated figure in profile, whose leg and foot take up a large part of the forefront. The miniaturized head almost disappears at the top of the canvas. The brutality of "The Black Woman" acquires, in this new version, a blue sky and a bright sun placed right in the middle and at the top of the picture, separating the cactus from the primitive representation of the Brazilian--as well as indigenous--being. Deformation as a stylistic trait reveals an oneiric sense which already comes close to surrealism.

The tenets of the movement, presented by Oswald de Andrade in the Anthropophagic Manifesto (published in the Revista de Antropofagia in May 1929), would be inspired by this painting.

And, the same year, Tarsila paints "Anthropophagy," the third picture in the trilogy, a surprising synthesis-montage of the previous works. Two figures: the one in front, whose bared breast in the middle of the picture recalls directly "The Black Woman" and, juxtaposed, the inverted profile of "Abaporu." Together they point to the synthesis that Pau-Basil/Anthropophagy present in these paintings. The Brazilian character is indicated by the landscape in the background, in which a solar section of orange, suspended in
the air, shines on the tropical forest, or the matriarchy of Pindorama, highlighted by the banana leaf rising behind the figure in the foreground.

Thus the formidable couple, Tarsiwald, takes part in one of the most creative and intense phases of the Brazilian historical vanguards: from the aggressive Revista de Antropofagia, of 1928, Oswald attacks the Brazilian cultural and artistic establishment, while Tarsila creates the most fecund and radical works of her career.

Anthropophagy becomes one of the most original theses among those that were formulated in Latin America with the purpose of solving the tensions and contradictions typical of a country that, on the one hand, wanted to cut loose from its patriarchal and colonized roots and, on the other, was trying to keep up with the revolutionary artistic and cultural manifestations of the European historical vanguards. A hinge between the national and the cosmopolitan sides, the anthropophagic metaphor privileged the devouring Indian as a symbol. Mário de Andrade, faced with the seeming contradiction of having to survive in the sad tropics and feed on the inevitable European tradition, states in the first book that opens up modern poetry in Brazil, Hallucinated City (1922): "I'm a Tupi Indian playing a lute." Even though the Indian was already present in colonial painting and literature, a presence that culminated in the nineteenth century with the romantic vision of José de Alencar's Indianist novel, the anthropophagic rereading in the 20s gives him a revolutionary, messianic, and utopian function.

In the "Manifesto of Pau-Brasil Poetry," Oswald de Andrade anticipates several of the postulates which will culminate in the anthropophagic ideology developed in the 1928 manifesto. In the 50s he takes up again this ideology in the form of a thesis in The crisis of Messianic Philosophy and The March of Utopias. Having gone beyond the "isms" of the historical vanguards and having digested Hans Staden, the Montaigne of Des Cannibales, Rousseau's good savage, Marx, Freud and Breton, Oswald de Andrade proposes the anthropophagic movement as the last of revolutions. A revolution which, as a last resort, would abolish the capitalistic patriarchal system to restore though technological advances a new era of sacred idleness--the native idleness that had been destroyed by the Europeans with the introduction of
slavery and the production system—in a new space: the Matriarchy of Pindorama, the name of the land of Brazil in *nheengatú*, the indigenous "common language." In this valorization of the indigenous aspects we see that, while the Parisian vanguard sought the primitive substratum in Africa and Polynesia to delineate the principles of cubism, Brazil discovered it in its own land. Because of this, in the lecture given at the Sorbonne in 1923 Oswald de Andrade affirmed that in Brazil "Blacks are a realist element."

Brazil doesn't resist the European vanguardist resonance in the well-known search for the primitive already present in Picasso, Paul Klee, Gauguin, the *Douanier* Rousseau and Paul Morand, among the main ones, and in journals such as *Cannibale* (1920), by Francis Picabia. The advantage in relation to Europe is that in Brazil the primitive emanates like an autochthonous internal force, without need to resort to the artifice of importation. That's why all Tarsila needed to paint *The Black Woman* in 1923 was her childhood memories of an Afro-Brazilian daily experience. And that's why the tales of the anthropophagic Tupinambá Indians, molded by Hans Staden's narrative (*Zwei reisen nach brasilien*, Marburg, 1557), began to circulate again in large runs thanks to Monteiro Lobato's efforts in the Brazil of the 20s. The inaugural date of the new anthropophagic era, established by Oswald in his manifesto, is the year 374, when the Caeté Indians from the Northeast of Brazil devour Bishop Sardinha [when the deglutition of Bishop Sardinha by the Caeté Indians from the Northeast of Brazil takes place]. Far from satisfying hunger, the act of devouring (a "Marxillary" act, as Oswald de Andrade would ironically say to highlight its dialectic meaning) has a ritual value of incorporation of the "other's" attributes, a tribal gesture which, by assimilating the enemy's qualities, aim at overcoming the limitations of the "self." "The anthropophagic reason," as Haroldo de Campos calls it, is, finally, the ideological gesture that Oswald de Andrade comes up with to solve the dilemma of the cultural dependence on the European centers (Paris, Berlin, Moscow, Milan, Florence, Lisbon), without falling into the mere imitation of foreign models or having to take refuge in the worn local themes advocated by the nationalistic tendencies.

In the prodigious year of 1922 (the year of *Ulysses*, *The Waste Land*, César Vallejo's *Trilce* and the Week of Modern Art), when Oswald and Tarsila meet, neither of the two is exactly a modernist. Oswald,
who came from a frenchified symbolist heritage, during the events of the Week of 1922 will limit himself to reading passages from his first novel Os condenados [The condemned]. In Paris, Tarsila was still a student at the Julien Academy, and would only return to São Paulo in June 1922. The encounter of the two awakens the passion of the gazes that leads Tarsila to paint the countless portraits of Oswald in the same way that he would create the countless versions of "Atelier." The discovery of the vanguards in Paris brought the couple to a rediscovery of Brazil: the history, the culture, the flora, the fauna, the geography, the anthropology, the ethnicity, the religion, the cuisine, the sexuality. A new man, a new color, a new landscape and a new language discovered beginning with the colonial legacy. From this explosive re-reading will arise the Pau-Brasil ideology, which would reach its climax at the end of the decade with Anthropophagy, the most original aesthetic-ideological revolution of the Latin-American vanguards of that time.

The period from 1922 to 1929, marked in the beginning by the Week of 22 and at the end by the crash of the stock market, the resulting coffee crisis and the revolution of 1930, closes the most intense experimental phase of Brazilian culture. These are the very years that frame the encounter, the reciprocal influence and the separation of this extraordinary couple.

BLACKNESS, EXOTICISM AND THE DEPICTION OF MANGUE

The Black theme anticipated by Tarsila do Amaral in the "The Black Woman" of 1923, and the exoticism which dominates Anthropophagy of 1928--one of the premier moments in the work of the modernist pair--culminated in the work of Lasar Segall and have their highest point in the portrayal of Mangue evoked in poems by Manuel Bandeira, Vinicius de Moraes, Oswald de Andrade and Hélio Oiticica, as well as in the visual work of the Russian artist.

The Parisian vanguard gave blacks the status of modernity beginning with the Picasso's Les demoiselles d'Avignon (1907)—in which the faces of at least three of the five prostitutes are African masks—represented for the arts.

The countries of Latin America, peripheral in relation to the Berlin and Paris vanguards, didn't take long to realize that the primitive could have much more to do with an American tradition than with a European one. This interiorizing approach originating from the national aspect reveals an art that makes it possible to import certain plastic formulas and, at the same time, to turn to its own traditions. This is what happens in the poetry and painting of the time, with the most diverse solutions.

It might seem ironic, but we can say that Brazil, with an extremely high demographic density of Blacks, is relatively poor in the Afro-Brazilian lyrical production. Approximately 9 to 18 million Africans were taken to the New World. Between 1811 and 1870 there were 3% in North America, 32% in Spanish America and 60% in Brazil. And let's not forget that in 1922 less than three decades had passed since the abolition of slavery in Brazil.
The best Black-African poetic representations are found in Raul Bopp (1898-1984), a writer and diplomat from the state of Rio Grande do Norte, and in Jorge de Lima (1893-1953), a doctor, poet and painter from the state of Alagoas.

*Urucungo. Black Poems* (1932), by Raul Bopp, could be considered the most representative book of the vanguardist generation with Black themes. Bopp came from the ranks of the "anthropophagic" generation, and the conception and composition of *Urucungo* (the name of an African musical instrument) go back to the Week of 22. The vanguardist legacy is still predominant in poems like "Favela (film)," whose visual metaphors immediately recall Oswald de Andrade's *Poesia Pau-Brasil*, or even the *ultraísta* camera-eye metaphor of the Oliverio Girondo of the 20s:

The banana tree pushed out its tits.

The papaya trees' double-chins are swollen

The Black woman squatted in a corner of the courtyard.

She set the hens all acackle.

Down below

a suburban train passes blowing smoke.

In the grocer's door

a black man yawned like a tunnel.

In 1928 Jorge de Lima publishes his best known poem, *That Black Woman Fulô* ("Fulô" is a corruption of flor, flower, in Afro-Brazilian speech), in the form of a *plaquette*. The following year, he collects his *New Poems* (1929), in which he exploits the African landscape ("The Belly Sierra"), Afro-
Brazilian cuisine ("Foods") and the slaves' tales ("Iaiá is drowsy"). Jorge de Lima reminisces over the tales of his childhood, bringing to the forefront the Black heritage of Brazilians. His language is, in Gilberto Freyre's definition, the Afro-Northeastern, thus avoiding the facile exoticism of a white poet who chooses to deal with a Black theme:

Oh Fulô! Oh Fulô!
(it was the Missus calling)

come help me, oh Fulô,

come fan me,

I'm all sweaty, Fulô!

come scratch my itch,

come pick off my lice,

come rock my hammock,

come and tell me a story,

I'm so sleepy, Fulô!

That Black woman Fulô!

Of major importance is the book *Black Poems* (1947), which includes no fewer than 13 illustrations by Segall. The images of Blackness are realistic and faithful to the poems, since they function as an iconographic support to the poetic texts. Two of the images stand out. The first is the one that illustrates the poem "Night fell on the quay."

In order to introduce the theme in Segall's work we have to ask ourselves some questions: is the black element in Segall's iconography a typical gesture of adaptation to the European primitivist vogue, and therefore a vision of exotic otherness on the part of the Russian painter, who spends most of his life in Brazil? Or is it an individual feature in an artist who identified himself with and absorbed the landscape and the human element of the tropics as visual discourse of what is Brazilian?
But is Blackness in Segall a discovery or a rediscovery? And in what fashion does the Russian Jewish painter represent it in his painting? The theme of Blackness couldn't have been unknown to him, even though there is no specific representation of it in his paintings produced in Europe or preceding his arrival in Brazil. German Expressionism, as well as French Cubism, not only fed on but were the product of primitive artistic and cultural references. At the same time Picasso paints Les demoiselles d'Avignon, Kandinsky also discovers Black art. The ethnographic museums of Dresden and Berlin --the latter being the most important in Europe at the time--were much frequented by the group of expressionist painters of Die Brücke. Primitivism was a password for vanguards, and Blackness was, perhaps, its best expression. In Latin America few were the painters who didn't make obligatory stops in Paris and Berlin and didn't integrate the primitive theme in their repertoires.

The same year he settles in Brazil Lasar Segall begins to produce painting with a Black theme. But Segall's commitment isn't to a national project, but to an aesthetic and ideological content which, surprisingly, had already germinated during his Expressionist period, and which finds in the Brazilian themes a sort of locus amenus to translate the preoccupations that marked all of his artistic production.

Within this context, how does one define the work of Lasar Segall, a European immigrant from the early 20s, a well-known artist belonging to the ranks of German Expressionism who makes the Black theme one of the leit-motifs of his work? The discovery in 1924, the same year of his arrival, of the red-light district of Rio de Janeiro, known as Mangue, awakens the Afro-Brazilian themes in his work. Segall will remain faithful to this theme during the next three decades (he dies in 1957).
An oil like "Encounter," created, in fact, in 1924, shows Segall's degree of awareness (or problematization) in relation to this issue. Not one of his various self-portraits reveals in such an evident manner his own process of transculturation. As if his accentuated "cinnamon-colored skin" weren't enough for the Slavic painter, the contrast with the whiteness of Margarete Quarck, then his wife, with whom he had emigrated to Brazil, cries out. The painting is intense in its ambiguities: even though the pair are holding hands, it may in fact signify the painter's leave-taking from his German wife, a separation which indeed occurred this same year. A temporal analysis of the painting would then mean a forewarning of Margarete's return to Berlin and an affirmation of Segall's choice of Brasil as his definitive country.

Federico Morais gives a perspicacious interpretation of this scene, which he perceives more as a "desencuentro," a failure to meet, than the "encounter" announced by the title. But the encounter could be of a geographic order, with Brazil, and not with Margarete, the marriage to whom was already coming to an end. A psychological approach reveals a woman with a tense, stiff countenance. Her frozen stare contrasts with Segall's candid expression and thick lips. Margarete's whiteness is a clear refraction index for the new
colors of the tropics: not only as a counterpoint to the brown of Segall's skin and clothes (the browns and ochres that will accompany him throughout his entire pictoric work), but also the green vegetation of the tropics in the reduced landscape in the figures' background. In this process of Segall's "mulattoization", the European aspects are maintained in his clothing: suit, shirt, tie and hat. The space is also ambiguous: on the one hand the shrunken palm trees; on the other, the geometry of the buildings (already present in pictures produced in Germany, as *The Street*, of 1922) on a paved surface, which maintains a dialogue with the rationalism of Margarete's static pose, extreme representation of everything European.

In 1924, the year of Segall's "mulattoization," his production of Black themes is prolific. It is the year in which he also paints, besides other works with an Afro-Brazilian theme,

23. LS, "Mulatto I,"
24. L.S, "Mulatta with child," and
25. "Boy with lizards"

26. (there's no way one can separate "Banana grove" from this series).

In the latter oil, the syntagm "mulatto" + "lizard" + "banana leaves" fuses and flattens in one dimension the concepts of culture and nature. This canvas offers an edenic, ahistorical, primitive and most enlightened vision of a Brazil that has just been discovered by the Jewish-Slavic gaze. Two years later, Segall shows his Brazilian production of the period in Berlin and Dresden. The enthusiastic analysis of "the solar culture of the south," published in a Berlin newspaper of the time, is not surprising in the birthplace of Expressionism:

How powerful this work is, the evolution that took place under the sign of Brazil shows clearly. It is the blossoming of a new and fertile vital era. The coloristic fascination with the south produces paintings that aim to be a remembrance, a sincere remembrance. The burning yellow of the sun, the light violet in which he paints the houses--like the clear reflection of fantastic plants--the deep green of the cactus and the palm trees and the coffee-colored people--all come together in a unique, clear intoxication of colors. He gave himself over to primitive nature with the same intensity as he did before to the demonic and spiritual hypnosis of the Ghetto and its musical
melancholy. The colors—generally a mystical dirty-green, gray, black, ash-green and a ghostly violet before—become altogether lighter in the miraculous solar culture of the south.

We know that this period of intense chromatism in Segall will not last, and that the 20s weren’t exclusively devoted to Black themes either, but without doubt this is Segall’s most fruitful period in the paintings, engravings and drawings devoted to this theme. Within the Black theme of the work, particularly noteworthy is the series devoted to the "Mangue."

[27. LS, Head behind shutters]

After black women, the shutters are the most important semantic matrix present in a large number of illustrations of Mangue, will signify a mysterious division: a border between private and public space? An understanding split between culture (external) and primitive mentality (internal)? A barrier between a male universe, desiring, and the female counterpart, mysterious and hidden by the shutters? In this sketch, as in the entire Mangue series, social identity becomes superimposed to individual identity.
In 1943, the year of his great retrospective at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes of Rio de Janeiro, two decades after having begun this theme, the album *Mangue* is published, with 4 original engravings and 42 reproductions of drawings. These are drawings produced for the most part between 1925 and 1929, but also a few from 1943, the year of publication of the album, complete the series. Three important texts introduce it: "Lasar Segall," by Jorge de Lima; "On drawing," by Mário de Andrade; and "Mangue," a prose text by Manuel Bandeira, who in his important book *Libertinagem* ([Libertinism](#)) (1930) had in fact included a poem by the same title. In his text, Bandeira mentions a few verses of Vinicius de Moraes' poem, "Ballad of Mangue," composed a few years earlier. But unlike Vinicius, who describes "whores," "blond/mulatto/French/dressed in carnival costumes," Segall only sees black women and mulattas, and his human landscape lacks any carnival vision whatsoever. Segall's prostitutes identify the condition of blackness, added to the social condition of poverty. Contrary to Stephanie D'Alessandro's interpretation in her excellent study, according to which Mangue for Segall "represented a realm of unrestrained sexuality and exoticism, and he fashioned himself its artistic explorer, venturing out into the eroticized space of the
primitive," I believe that the space of poverty, loneliness and the complete absence of individual identity abolish any possibility of eroticization of this human landscape.
Without doubt Segall had all the elements to give it an erotic, exotic and chromatic interpretation; but he chose instead the pathos and the tone of tragedy already discernible in his expressionistic work and in the Jewish theme, besides the Black one. What we perceive in Segall, more than an original Brazilian matrix, is the immigration of themes that had already matured during his European and Expressionist period.

What is the expressive form that Segall brought to Brazil? I'm not going to repeat what's already been said; that is, the Expressionist postulates that preceded him. But I am going to describe a few themes that were to become the true molds of Central Europe which Segall would fill here with the Brazilian substance of expression. First of all, prostitution as a theme was not anything new in the work of Segall himself; he had already dealt with it in the eight illustrations he did in 1921 for a novel that takes place in a red-light district: Bubu de Montparnasse, by Charles Louis Philippe. And we must not forget that the original title (as well as the theme) of the seminal painting of the primitivist vanguard, Picasso's Les Demoiselles
d'Avignon, was Le Bordel d'Avignon, and that although Picasso resisted the change of name a great deal, it was necessary to be able to show it briefly and for the first time in 1916 in the "Salon d'Antin", org. by Andre Salmon. The theme of abandon and destitution, present in Mangue, are the stuff of the great works of Segall's Expressionist period, such as

34. Interior with indigents (1920) or
35. *Interior with poor people* (1921).

It's also noteworthy that the theme of Mangue or of female prostitution was one of Segall's permanent focuses, from the beginning to practically the end of his artistic production. It's what we see in late, but no less important, oils, like

![Image](image.png)

36. *Interior of Mangue* (1949),

or in two works of great similarity painted one year before his death which could be considered a point of departure—
37. *Street (1922)*—

and a point of arrival—

38. *Street of The Errant Ones I (1956)*.

This arc, which could also be drawn for the Jewish theme (the most important paintings of which were created in Brazil—
39. *Old Age* (1924),

40. *The Torah Scroll* (1933),
41. *Pogrom (1937)* and

42. *Ship of immigrants (1939-40)*

reveals semantic matrixes that go beyond aesthetic programs or pictorial nationalisms.
This brings us back to the initial question: how Brazilian is Segall's painting? Local critics have already considered this question on a few occasions. There were times when, for political reasons, and on the occasion of the publication of the special issue of the *Revista Academica* in June 1944, Segall was vehemently considered a Brazilian painter *par excellence*. But outside this moment of tension and ideological definitions in which it was fundamental to highlight Brazilianness, the issue was never definitive. However, there are early perceptions, pellucid and more modulated, such as Manuel Bandeira's in his introductory text to *Mangue* (s/p), when he identifies and superimposes the Jewish theme on the Black one, paradoxical as it might seem:

Segall, a grave and serious soul, went [to Mangue] to contemplate the loneliest and most distressed souls of that world of perdition, as he had already contemplated the loneliest and most distressed souls of the Jewish world, the pogrom victims, on the third-class deck of luxury ocean liners (Manuel Bandeira).

I think Segall himself was aware of these subtle processes. And I'd like to show two revealing moments. The first one, a letter to his friend Will Gorhmann a little less than two months before his departure from Germany, which states, in relation to everything his eyes saw: "We don't change when we see that which is new, that's no longer possible, but we grow and our horizons widen (...) the memories we have of our childhood rarely or never leave us." We know that, on the one hand, "that which is new" was one of the totems of futurist modernolatry, but not of the Expressionists. And beyond the "isms" I think that Segall, when he comes to Brazil at 33, absorbs that which is new with a structure inherited from Expressionism. In an autobiographical text dated circa 1950 in Campos do Jordão and published posthumously, Segall seems to be very clear on this idea about the origins of the Brazilian subject matter of his pictorial production:

If someone were to ask me whether my art renewed itself in Brazil I'd answer that it didn't, if the question implied that in order to create that which is "New" one has to renounce "the Old of great legacies." And if someone were to ask me whether I employ now the same expressive forms as in my Expressionist period I would answer that those would then be an art formula to which I would have become enslaved (...) The motif of the "Mangue" for example universal human destinies (sic), wasn't new for me when I first saw it in Rio de Janeiro. These are motifs which, as a man, have always stirred me and as an artist have inspired me to create. I've painted them so many times in my life! Before I used to call them "The Errant Ones." In Rio, though, I approached them with a more mature feeling and human understanding, and above all with a mature artistic perspective." [My emphasis]
Mangue stirred the imagination of various artists. Segall was the first one to represent it, beginning in 1924, in a diverse and consistent manner (engravings, watercolors, drawings, wood engravings, etchings, oils) up to the 50s, turning the famous district into one of the central themes of his work. But he wasn't the only one. As I've already mentioned, Di Cavalcanti, too, frequently portrays it in his paintings, and also talks about the time of his bohemian youth in brothels, especially those of Lapa, the Rio de Janeiro district, in his autobiography *The Journey of My Life*. Even though it's a little long, it's worth quoting this text by Renato Cordeiro Gomes, who shows us in a very precise fashion the "rise and fall" of prostitution in Rio de Janeiro. In this cartography of whorehouses, the Lapa district was frequented by a bohemian elite in Rio de Janeiro, as opposed to Mangue, characterized by a prostitution that went down in history for its poverty, its decadence and its working-class patrons:

Some of the cross streets of Mangue, at the edge of the downtown of Rio, had been designated since the end of the nineteenth century for the confinement of the prostitutes of the lowest classes. The control and regulation of prostitution by the state was beginning then with the purpose of restricting it to areas intended for legal prostitution. In 1920, the police "cleaned up" the city for the visit of the King and Queen of Belgium: the prostitutes were put in jail for vagrancy and later placed in brothels in nine cross streets in Mangue. At that time an unofficial system was created by which the police registered prostitutes and intervened in the administration of the brothels. Thus this area of lower-class prostitution was established, in contrast with the luxury prostitution located in the Lapa section which, with its night clubs, cabarets and cafés, turned into the "tropical Montmartre," a place for the city's bohemian intellectuals, reaching its peak in the 30s. Mangue continued to be the most popular and poor red-light district, whose decadence, together with Lapa's, accelerates with the repressive and moralizing policies of Getúlio Vargas' Estado Novo (the Lapa brothels were closed down in 1943) and the relocation of night life to Copacabana after WW2. Mangue held on, still poor and decadent, until 1979, when it was demolished to build the subway and only the so-called Villa Mimosa, which finally closed down in the 90s, was left. After the demolition of Mangue the Administrative Center of the City of Rio de Janeiro was built in the "Cidade Nova," the New City. The imagistic repertoire of the city, however, lives on, naming the building of the Secretariat of the Administration of the City "Piranhão" [Hooker], and the Secretariat of the Treasury "Cafetão" [Pimp]. The Mangue repertoire of images endures as a trademark of the city.

In Manuel Bandeira's *Libertinagem* [Libertinism](1930) we find one of the first poetic records of Mangue. In this book, which inaugurates the 30s, we find some of the most important poems of the
Brazilian lyric poetry of the vanguardist generation, such as "Poetics," "I'm off to Pasárgada," or "Evocation of Recife." The title itself, Libertinism, points directly to eroticism and sexual transgression.

In "Ballad of Mangue," by Vinícius de Moraes (1913-1980), the melancholy character typical of ballads places the problem in immediate sync with Segall's tragic tone. The Baudelarian vision of a city contaminated by evil, incarnated in the animalized description of women-prostitutes, appears with extraordinary power in the poem's 70 octosyllabic verses. There is an implacable succession of images, in which the female character, associated with venereal diseases, appears degraded, like poisoned, as well as poisonous, flowers. Vinicius describes a European (Polish and French women) and Afro-Brazilian ethnic group; unlike Segall, who, as I have mentioned, only perceived a single human composition, of Black origin. The maritime image, due to the location of Mangue near the harbor (a location Segall made the most of), emerges enriched by the vision of this neighborhood as a ship of fools: "Where is your ship going?" Vinícius asks rhetorically. Vinicius' Mangue is a city of perdition, doomed and with no room for redemption.

Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954) in O santeiro do Mangue [The Saint-seller of Mangue], a censored dramatic poem that came out only in 1991, 30 years after its composition and several attempts at publishing, chooses Mangue as a place of convergence for degraded human relations surrounded by an urban space, a scenery of subversions where opposites of interchanging value mix. Unlike all other examples I have referred to so far, O santeiro do Mangue is a highly ideologized text and an instrument of scathing criticism of the bourgeois society of the time. It maintains the caustic tone of social criticism through the parodic attitude that always characterized the author. And if in Vinicius de Moraes' poem there were reminiscences of a Mangue portrayed as a ship of fools, in Oswald de Andrade's the naval metaphor--given the proximity of Mangue to the harbor--links it to the slave ships that put into port in Brazil: "It's the hot human ship/Mangue's slave trader. O santeiro do Mangue is the harrowing voice of a Brazil whose sexuality exposes the contradictions and the suffering of a degraded system exploiting human relations.
Finally, as in a sort of synthetic coda, a concrete poem by Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980). The artist from Rio de Janeiro, author of the memorable "Parangolés" [Capes] created in the 60s, constructs the poem with the crossing of just two words. The title of the picture/poem, BANGÚ/MANGUE, refers to two sections of Rio de Janeiro that are, socially speaking, fairly different. Bangú, a traditional manufacturing neighborhood, is totally dissociated from the image of prostitution that characterized Mangue or Lapa. The poem, from 1972, was written a few years before the demise of Mangue in 1979. Bangú and Mangue, neighborhoods geographically distant from one another, are here united in the utopian space of poetry, where the paronomasia that brings together the two terms of the title reclaims Afro-Brazilian resonances. In actuality Oiticica doesn't reproduce the two words of the title in their entirety: BANGÚ' is the verse that crosses the picture diagonally, from right to left and from the top down: MAE (mother in Portuguese) is the second word, in the opposite direction and crossing the first one. It's the title of the picture/poem that directs our reading and anticipates for us the reconstitution of the word Mangue, starting from the fusion of "Bangú" + "mãe." We have therefore two words in the title (BANGÚ/MANGUE); two in the poem
(BANGÚ/MAE); and a third term (MANGUE) that is constructed or derived from the reading of the other two words or verses, as in an anagram. An allegorical reading with a social undertone would allow us to read it as the crossing of the working class with the motherland, Brazil, suggesting a sort of inevitable conclusion in indigence and prostitution, incarnated in Mangue. A peripheral and precarious Brazil, where the images of the women of Mangue by Segall, Vinicius de Morais and even Oswald de Andrade oscillate between the Mother-worker of Bangú and the Mother-whore of Mangue, who, cornered by the modernity of urban projects (the subway), end up being excluded from their own neighborhood and exiled from their own existence.

―Translation by Adria Frizzi

Photographs by Paz Aburto