



# LATIN AMERICA'S NEW BREED

Most Latin American collectors sought only local and historical work into the 1990s. But a new group, set on creating a more diverse palette, is buying up contemporary art from around the world.

BY CAROL KINO



Clockwise from top: Jimmie Durham's *Still Life with Spirit and Xitle*, 2007, from the collection of Cesar Cervantes; Dan Graham's *Bisected Triangle, Interior Curve*, 2002, from the collection of Bernardo Paz; from the Coppel collection, Teresa Margolles's *En el Aire*, 2003.

Anyone seeking proof that the art world has gone global should look at the dramatically changing tastes of Latin American collectors. Just 10 or 15 years ago, most were making strictly local collections, with Brazilians acquiring work by Brazilian artists, Mexicans by Mexicans, Argentines by Argentines and the like. They also tended to be somewhat conservative, favoring painting and modern masters over riskier mediums and contemporary work. Only a few sought out the work of their own time, like Rosa de la Cruz, co-founder of Miami's erstwhile Moore Space, and Ella Fontanals Cisneros, the Venezuelan philanthropist behind CIFO, the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation.

But recently, aided by the growth of international biennials and art fairs, a new group of Latin Americans has been taking its place on the international art stage. Most are deeply committed to acquiring a broad range of contemporary art—in some cases from across their region, but more often than not from around the world.

"This new breed of Latin American collectors has a very wide horizon," says Jose Kuri of the Mexico City gallery Kurimanzutto. "And they are so committed to the artist. Even if it's very challenging,

they will go for it. It's not bourgeois collecting."

Most of these collectors started out in a more traditional mode, and several have retained their historical holdings. People who know the São Paulo-based collection of Ricardo and Susana Steinbruch say that the couple has uncovered surprising links between the work of contemporary Latin Americans like Gabriel Orozco and Damián Ortega, and their core collection of key figures from the 1950s Brazilian avant-garde, including Ligia Clark, Mira Schendel and Hélio Oiticica.

Isabel and Agustin Coppel of Mexico City—who began over 15 years ago by collecting the work of midcentury Mexicans, like Carlos Mérida and Manuel Gonzalez Serrano. Today, their 1,200-piece collection also encompasses contemporary work by artists like Gabriel Orozco, Lothar Baumgarten and Tracey Emin, as well as their 1950s and 1960s antecedents. (A show drawn from their collection, *Expected/Unexpected*, is on view through January 18th at Maison Rouge in Paris.)

Many of these collectors make their decisions without consultants, and they don't shy away from material that is outsize, ephemeral or otherwise hard to house and maintain. Take Cesar Cervantes, a restaurant entrepreneur whose family lives with the

Ernesto Neto's *Nave Deusa*,  
1998, from the collection  
of Bernardo Paz.





Above, from left: Argentinian collectors Juan and Patricia Vergez; Eugenio Lopez Alonso, founder of the Fundación/Colección Jumex Gallery in Mexico City.

collection at their home in El Pedregal, a suburb of Mexico City that was developed in the 1950s by the modernist architect Luis Barragan.

Although his first interest was modern Mexican masters, Cervantes made an abrupt about-face in 2000, when he visited his first international art fair and discovered Orozco and the Japanese conceptualist On Kawara. After returning home, "I took off from the walls all that I had bought before," he said, "and I started from zero." It took him a year to acquire his first Orozco, and another two to find a painting by On Kawara. Along the way, he developed a taste for work one wouldn't necessarily expect to see in a home, like *R-5 Cake* (1999) by Abraham Cruzvillegas—a brown Renault Le Car crafted out of mocha-frosted cake, which must be housed in a refrigeration unit. Then there is *Still Life with Spirit and Xitle* (2007) by the Native American artist Jimmie Durham. A 1992 Chrysler Spirit crushed by an 8-ton boulder, it sits outside the driveway and has become a major local attraction. "I think being risky and non-conventional is part of what it is all about," he said.

Juan Vergez and Patricia Pearson of Buenos Aires developed their internationalism more gradually. They initially focused on Argentinian artists of the 1960s and 1970s, like Alberto Greco, Antonio Berni, and Emilio Renart. In the early 1990s, during a business trip to São Paulo, they became friendly with the dealer Marcantonio Vilaça and decided to add Brazilian work to the mix. Then, at Art Basel a few years later, Pearson found herself strongly drawn to a photograph by Shirin Neshat. "I said, 'We cannot buy this because we are Latin American collectors,'" Vergez recalled. "She said, 'Why not?' So we bought the piece and then, boom, the world was not enough. So we became international collectors."

In 2006, they opened Tacuarí, an appointment-only space in an old ink factory in Buenos Aires. Vergez, who programs the space himself, loves the idea of mixing emerging Buenos Aires talent with well-known artists from around the world, including Olafur Eliasson, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Yoshitomo Nara. "You can see the relationship of artists that really don't know each other, and the dialog is fantastic," he said. "You realize that there is really only one art that is contemporary and there are no boundaries."

Indeed, spaces founded by private collectors have become essential places to see new art, like Fundación/Colección Jumex Gallery in Mexico City. Founded by the voracious contemporary-art collector Eugenio Lopez Alonso, it is located in the Jumex juice factory compound on the industrial outskirts of town.

Opened in 2001, it mounts three shows a year: one offers an inde-

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pendent curator's take on the collection; another focuses on emerging local work; and a third is an international collaboration that wouldn't come to Mexico otherwise. This past spring, for instance, Jumex showed The Walker Art Center's *Brave New Worlds*, which included 70 artworks never seen there before, including ambitious political installations by Dan Perjovschi, Walid Raad and 22 others. Working through his foundation, Lopez Alonso also supports many Mexican museums.

The Brazilian collector Bernardo Paz has taken a different tack, with Inhotim. Nestled in a Brazilian forest, this Shangri-la combines his two passions: contemporary art and the landscape of his native Minas Gerais. About five years ago, Paz hired the New York art advisor Allan Schwartzman to help develop his ideas for the collection and the space. "When he brought me on," says Schwartzman, who also serves as chief curator of the museum, "he had this vision for creating a legacy."

The complex, which opened to the public in 2006, comprises a series of pavilions in a botanical garden, where one can see rotating shows of work from Paz's heavily international contemporary-art collection, as well as three permanent installations by Brazilian artists—Tunga, Hélio Oiticica and Cildo Meireles. This year, they opened two new pavilions, one housing an architectural installation by the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo, and another dedicated to work by the Brazilian superstar Adriana Varejão (now Paz's wife). Several more commissions are planned for Chris Burden and Matthew Barney, among others. Remote as it is, the massive complex has been a popular hit, receiving up to 2,000 visitors a day.

Schwartzman said that when Paz began collecting more than twenty years ago, his tastes were more historical. But "Bernardo is an amazing person who has a very active mind," he said. "He simply became more interested in the art of his generation than of the past. It was purely a voracious appetite that led him in this direction." **AB**

Clockwise from left: Adriana Varejão, *Celacanto Provoca Maremoto*, 2004-2008, from the collection of Bernardo Paz; *Chang Heng's Machine*, 2004, by Abraham Cruzvillegas, at Mexico City's Fundación/Colección Jumex Gallery; from the collection of Juan Vergez, Martin Creed, *Work No. 628*, 2007.

