

**Creating a Micro-Utopia: Transcending Nation
Branding in *Arte Popular Brasileira***

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the marketisation process undergone by *Arte Popular Brasileira* (APB) in current neoliberal society. It examines APB's multiple negotiations when transitioning from its community-based origin to becoming a symbol of national heritage and artwork traded in cultural settings reserved for the economic elite and global cultural circuits. APB is defined as an authorial creation by artists with no institutional training. Born and raised in vulnerable socioeconomic conditions, they ground their work in deep cultural memories and collective ways of knowing and doing: *saberes e fazeres*. Promoted by public and private sectors interested in consolidating nation-branding agendas, APB is marketed as an authentic expression of *brasilidade*. This repositioning of APB reflects feelings of disenchantment with the ethos of modern Western society that produces various forms of alienation. In this context, APB's aura awakens consumers' nostalgia for ways of life more connected to nature and customary community values. By adopting a decolonial perspective, this research situates APB as a local manifestation that responds to a worldwide tendency in the following ways. First, APB negotiates with state agendas that consistently resort to peoples' arts to brand their nations: specifically, to artistic expressions produced by peoples historically facing oppression. Second, one chapter locates the nation-branding process within global trends through a cross-cultural analysis with other national scenarios in Latin America and Oceania, all operating under conditions of "coloniality." Third, as a local experience, APB is instrumentalised, but it also fills an ontological void by becoming a "micro-utopia." Finally, the thesis posits that such a utopian role represents places outside modern Western paradigms and thereby brings them into being by displaying *saberes e fazeres* that popular artists have been protecting, sharing, and re-elaborating, where cultural memories have resisted the dehumanising processes accentuated by neoliberalism. As micro-utopia, APB contributes to re-establishing such connections for the individual consumer, while its creators, popular artists, find a means to re-exist as guardians and narrators of culture, thereby gaining access to forms of citizenship historically denied to them.

Keywords: Arte Popular Brasileira; Brasilidade; Cultural Memory; Guardians of Culture Marketisation; Micro-Utopia; Nation Branding.

To all those who lost someone in the midst of the pandemic.
In loving memory of my beloved aunt Nanci.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABMAM	Associação dos Artesãos de Barro e Moradores do Alto do Moura (Association of Artisans in Clay and Residents of Alto do Moura), Caruaru, state of Pernambuco, Brazil
APB	<i>Arte Popular Brasileira</i>
APM	<i>Arte Popular Mexicano</i>
ARTESOL	Artesanato Solidário ‘Solidary Crafts’ (Non-Governmental Organisation)
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands
CDCE	Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions
CNFCP	Centro Nacional de Folclore e Cultura Popular ‘National Centre for Folklore and Popular Culture’
CNFL	Comissão Nacional do Folclore ‘National Commission on Folklore’
CNRC	Centro Nacional de Referências Culturais ‘National Centre for Cultural References’
CODEVALE	Comissão de Desenvolvimento do Vale do Jequitinhonha ‘Jequitinhonha Valley Development Commission’
CPC	Centros de Cultura Popular ‘Centres of Popular Culture’
CRAB	Centro Sebrae de Referência do Artesanato Brasileiro ‘Reference Centre for Brazilian Crafts of Sebrae’ (See SEBRAE)
CSICH	Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage
FENEARTE	Feira Nacional de Negócios do Artesanato ‘National Fair for Crafts Trades’
FONART	Fondo Nacional para el Fomento de las Artesanías ‘National Fund for the Development of Arts and Crafts’
FUNAI	Fundação Nacional do Índio ‘National Foundation for Indigenous People’
FUNARTE	Fundação Nacional das Artes ‘National Foundation for the Arts,’
IBGE	Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística ‘Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics’
ICIP	Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property

IP	Intellectual Property
IPHAN	Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional ‘National Institute for Historical and Artistic Heritage’
MAM/SP	Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo ‘Modern Art Museum of São Paulo’
MAP	Museo de Arte Popular ‘Museum of <i>Arte Popular</i> ’, Mexico
MASP	Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand ‘Museum of Art of São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand’
MCA	Museum of Contemporary Art Australia
MNA	Museo Nacional de Antropología ‘Nacional Museum of Anthropology’
NGV	National Gallery of Victoria, Australia
NSW	New South Wales, Australia
NZMACI	New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAB	Programa do Artesanato Brasileiro ‘Programme for the Brazilian Crafts’
SAP	Sala do Artista Popular ‘Popular Artist Hall’
SEBRAE	Serviço Brasileiro de apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas ‘Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service’
SPHAN	Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional ‘National Service for Historical and Artistic Heritage’
TCEs	Traditional Cultural Expressions
TK	Traditional Knowledge
UDCD	Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity
UFAL	Universidade Federal de Alagoas ‘Federal University of the State of Alagoas’
UNEAL	Universidade Estadual de Alagoas ‘University of the State of Alagoas’
WAI	Waitangi Tribunal claim

INTRODUCTION

Any charm that “backwardness” may have for someone who doesn’t suffer from it is another proof of dissatisfaction with the forms that progress has taken.

– Roberto Schwartz, *Misplaced Ideas*

Setting the Scene: *Arte Popular Brasileira* as Cultural Discourse, Heritage and Artistic Practice

The modern practices of collecting, exhibiting and consuming “others’ cultures” have been deployed in tandem with Western colonial expeditions and trading enterprises. It dates to nineteenth-century forms of imperialism, when artists and writers took part in ethnographic voyages to the colonies in search of the unknown, later resulting in international exhibitions, such as those held in London and Paris respectively in 1881 and 1885, and photography books to present to the metropolis how life was lived in remote lands.¹ Access to the non-Western world also inspired modern artists from the twentieth-century avant-garde, who found in those societies, then considered to be primitive, the inspiration for spontaneous formal expression, as well as a vehicle for liberating themselves from the strict artistic canons that prevailed in modern Europe (Gombrich 190-91; 196-205).

It has since taken different forms, ranging from “exoticising” to “assimilationist” approaches, in which the object is sometimes exhibited as ethnographic artefact, and at other times, as artistic object (Karp, *Exhibiting* 375). Regardless, what has prevailed is that such strategies have consistently adopted a hegemonic perspective to build a discourse on the “other.” Although initially this interest in displaying such objects was directed toward reinforcing imperialist power and its positions of domination, such a display has also occupied a central role in the symbolic construction of both the imperial and the post-colonial

¹ See <https://www.bie-paris.org/site/en> for entire list of international exhibitions.

nation-state.

In nations where the population is characterised by *mestizaje*, such as those in Latin America, representations of the cultural practices of historically oppressed groups have been conceptualised as the “popular” by local elites. This is a complex term, whose meaning will evolve throughout this thesis. In brief, it can be said that the “popular” is placed in opposition to “erudite” forms of culture, always involving complex power relations with groups labelled as “others” due to ethnicity, indigeneity, social class, or other identity markers. Similarly, within nation-states, official representations of the popular in cultural institutions have assumed a contradictory role. On the one hand, these institutions adopt the same exhibition strategies previously used by colonial powers when displaying “distant others.” However, within the new nation-states, these groups do in fact account for the majority of the population, while also providing the foundation for nation-building. It is within this broad and complex scenario that this thesis analyses the place that *Arte Popular Brasileira* (APB) occupies in the construction of Brazilian national identity, which began with the establishment and consolidation of the modern nation-state and has continued in the current need to emphasise participation in the global neoliberal world.

Debates about the place occupied by APB are intricately connected to the country’s initiatives on cultural heritage preservation. In the early 1900s, there was a concerted effort to establish a national identity for Brazil, which had become an independent republic in 1889. The main goals were to create cultural policies intended to turn the vast territory and the diversity of peoples into a cohesive nation. A re-evaluation of APB began in the 1930s with Modernist artists who directly participated in the nation-building project promoted during the first presidential term of Getulio Vargas (Philippou, “Modernism” 251). In the mid-1930s, the Minister of Education and Health, Gustavo Capanema, had the duty of establishing a new

national vision: “to build a representation of the new Brazil, based on an active, young and healthy people—but that relies on a tradition that should be preserved” (Batista 15).²

During these policy reforms, artists and scholars from the Brazilian elite were assigned different tasks. One of those intellectuals was Mário de Andrade (1893-1945), who in the 1920s was responsible for consolidating the Modernist Movement in Brazil, and who started the development of its heritage preservation project.³ As the head of the newly created Department of Culture, in 1935, he envisioned a preservation policy that would encompass all the heterogeneity of cultural practices of the Brazilian people. He included the material and immaterial dimensions of this heritage when, in 1936, he authored the draft for the creation of the Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (SPHAN, today the Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional – IPHAN). “National Artistic Heritage,” according to M. Andrade, included “all works of pure art or applied art, popular or erudite, national or foreign, belonging to public authorities, social organisations and national individuals, also including art owned by foreign individuals residing in Brazil” (M. Andrade 55).⁴ Specifically, in the category of *arte popular*, the author includes a wide range of artefacts that somehow had an ethnographic interest, except those produced by “Amerindians,” as they had been categorised separately in a different section of the document (57). *Arte popular* included items such as ceramics, clothing, roadside mortuary crosses, music, stories, culinary recipes, and dances.

Nevertheless, policies on heritage proved to be much more selective after the creation

² All foreign language quotes and interview excerpts have been translated and transcribed by me. The original version will follow in footnotes. “Quer-se construir uma representação do novo Brasil, alicerçado num povo ativo, jovem e saudável—mas que conta com uma tradição, a ser preservada.”

³ Brazilian Modernism was an artistic movement at the beginning of the 20th century that aimed to build a genuinely Brazilian artistic production, and it has influenced national artistic production to this day. About the movement, see Gilberto Mendonça Teles.

⁴ “Entende-se por Patrimônio Artístico Nacional todas as obras de arte pura ou de arte aplicada, popular ou erudita, nacional ou estrangeira, pertencentes aos poderes públicos, a organismos sociais e a particulares nacionais, a particulares estrangeiras, residentes no Brasil.”

of SPHAN. The dominant idea was that national identity should be legitimised by the great patriotic feats of Brazilian history. The definitive version of M. Andrade's proposal became the Decree-Law n. 25/1937, which resulted in a more succinct text, and one that disregarded the immateriality of culture. Furthermore, as architects constituted the majority of the SPHAN team, they prioritised protecting buildings and monuments, mainly from the Catholic religion or military precincts, exhibiting a Portuguese colonial baroque style. In this first stage, these authors identified Brazilian art from the second half of the nineteenth century as belonging to the "popular," a traditional manifestation nested in rural environments. Hence, it was linked to a past that still prevails in the present as such traditions have been passed on orally by generations, which also explained the urgency to document them (Ayala and Ayala 14-15).

As Brazilian sociologist Renato Ortiz suggests, when analysing processes of modernity in Latin America, interest in popular cultures is usually linked to nation-state building, which was, however, not considered to be in conflict with the newly modern values of the project since "the call to tradition was a social requirement. The recuperation of popular culture was the way to express vanguard ideals and to advance the project of national construction" ("From Incomplete" 255). In Brazil, artists and intellectuals associated with the Modernist Movement were committed to defining Brazil's authentic culture: they were interested in preserving Brazilian culture while also implementing the country's heritage policies. As part of their preparation, many visited Europe and upon returning, while they applied the newly learned techniques and styles of expression, they refused to import the same foreign art models into Brazil. As stated by Oswald de Andrade, poet and one of the founders of the Brazilian Modernist movement in the 1920s, this attitude was a reflection of "the counter-weight of native originality [that would] ... neutralise academic conformity. // [A] Reaction against all the indigestions [sic] of erudition. The best of our lyric tradition. The best of our modern

demonstration” (Andrade and Rego 187).⁵

The developing intellectual thinking saw no contradiction between local knowledge and modernity as they were seen as reinforcing the Brazilian peculiarity of acting in light of the novelties of the time. In the Manifesto Antropofágico ‘Cannibalist Manifesto’ that became the reference document which conveys the ethos for the Modernist movement in the country, O. Andrade highlights the need for a “participatory consciousness” (Andrade and Bary 39), hence standing against the modern rational, utilitarian, hierarchical and catechising impetus that prevailed then. In contrast, this Manifesto invests the “Brazilian identity” with a cannibalistic attitude, as a country ready to absorb external artistic and academic influences and re-elaborate them from its own identity base.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Cannibalist movement focused on the elaboration of an abstract Brazilian subject, without discussing at the time the oppressive or class conditions in which the real Brazilian Indigenous and Afro-descent populations existed (Schwartz, “Brazilian Culture” 239), it “has become an obligatory genealogical foundation for contemporary academic debates on hybridity and postcolonialism” (Irwin and Szurmuk 22). Thus, in the visual arts, the pursuit of a national creative autonomy naturally turned the gaze towards Brazilian indigeneity, but this time in a different way from the romanticism of the nineteenth century, which fulfilled an ideal of pursuing a representation of national heroes using Indigenous peoples’ symbologies to depict a distinctive, peaceful, and noble past (G. Oliveira 76-80), alongside the ethnographic representation of Indigenous and enslaved Africans in Brazil. In contrast, within the Cannibalist approach, Indigenous peoples were presented as “anti-heroes,” full of imperfections in the sense that it was a deviation from modern-Western patterns. The real Brazil also included Blackness, to be represented as part of

⁵ Manifestos tended to use short phrases for dramatic effect. In the Pau-Brasil Manifesto (1924), the word choice “indigestion” is a reference to rebellion against pleasant “digestible” erudite arts. This digestive metaphor would later inspire the Cannibalist Manifesto (1928).

the country's popular cultures, which "guaranteed its ability to critically appropriate and assimilate diverse African, Indigenous and Western influences, while also resisting domination by hegemonic models" (Philippou, "Primitive" 286). This is how the modernists searched for the Brazilian "primitive." However, unlike Europe, which turned to the so-called primitive humans from the distant worlds of Africa and Oceania, in Brazil, the modernists found it in their own backyard. In a paradoxical turn, this artistic manifestation was promoted by a "white cultural elite [that] appropriated the local and marginalised, nationalised it and then universalised it. At the same time, they also adopted a universalist notion of Modernism, nationalised it and thus particularised and localised it" (Philippou, "Modernism" 251).

To the cultural revalorisations of the descendants of Indigenous and Afro-Brazilians were also added two other forms of *mestizaje*: the *sertanejo* and the *caipira*, who developed a local culture of their own and who were already being reassessed by intellectuals before the Modernist movement, and later would be integrated into the popular culture construct.⁶ *Sertanejos* describe the poor mixed-blood creole population who moved from the coastal regions to finally establish themselves in the *sertão*, the 'backlands' of the Northeast, to work with cattle herding. Although living in very destitute conditions, they provided the colonisers with meat, leather, and working oxen. The *caipiras*, on the other hand, descend from creole populations that settled in the Southeast, who, during the colonisation period, were responsible for organising the expeditions to the hinterlands, the *bandeiras*, to occupy new territories and enslave Indigenous peoples.⁷ Under the political and economic dependence on the Portuguese and Creole elites, these *mestizo* cultures would experience unique ways of life in these new environments. They would first incorporate Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous socio-cultural

⁶ The literary work "Os Sertões" (1902, Rebellion in the Backlands) by Euclides da Cunha, which depicts the life of the *sertanejo*, is an example of how Brazilian intellectuals have focused on the country's marginalised populations.

⁷ About the different miscegenation variations in Brazil, see D. Ribeiro, *Brazilian* 189-315.

elements, affiliating themselves with these groups through the creation of a highly mixed peasant culture that also underwent exploitation, and would later organise themselves into antihegemonic popular movements throughout history. In such circumstances, the notion of *brasilidade* ‘Brazilianness’ put forward by intellectuals at the beginning of the twentieth century found resonance in the common element of a reality built with direct bonds with local cultures that shared similar conditions of oppression.

The period between the 1930s and 1950s represents a phase of intense registering and cataloguing, in which researchers and artists identified many cultural practices, while seeking inspiration for their own individual creative activities. Supported by the Vargas populist governments of the time, popular cultures became a symbolic resource for the making of a national identity (Schelling 258). Several pieces became an attraction for collectors during this period, marking the beginning of what would become *Arte Popular Brasileira*. It all started when APB was exhibited in more prominent urban centres. In this movement, a set of pieces by Vitalino Pereira dos Santos (1909-63), a figurative clay sculptor from Pernambuco State, Northeastern Brazil, was displayed at the Institute of Architects of Brazil in Rio de Janeiro in 1947, in an exhibition organised by the painter and designer Augusto Rodrigues. The Popular Ceramic Exhibition announced the production of Mestre ‘Master’ Vitalino, whose pieces were initially commercialised at the street market of Caruaru, Pernambuco (Frota 29). This event is considered the symbolic initial milestone of the “discovery” of APB. Vitalino’s work became a success, and it surpassed the limits of street markets to later reach galleries and museums spaces (fig. 1).⁸

⁸ All photographs were taken by the author during fieldwork in 2019 unless otherwise noted.



Fig. 1. Vitalino's clay sculptures at the exhibition "Brasilidade na Arte Popular – Museu Casa do Pontal collection," CRAB headquarters, Rio de Janeiro.

Some local newspapers in Pernambuco and Rio de Janeiro reported the Popular Ceramic Exhibition in brief notes. In the Carioca newspaper, the event featured in the column of journalist and art critic Antônio Bento. The author argues that the ceramic sculptures made in the Northeast had the primary function of becoming children's toys, but, despite this, they could be appreciated as art for their originality and aesthetic value, thus exceeding the utilitarian value of common pottery:

Many of the pieces exhibited are of unquestionable originality. They may even be considered pure art, despite their functionality or their destination. ... The ox plays an important role in this infant sculpture. The Northeast, in several of its areas, is just emerging from the era of pastoralism. It is natural, therefore, that the ox is almost a totemic entity for the primitive potters of the Northeast as much as for the children, in whose toys the animals are equated with men or gods, as in the magical ceramics of the primitives. ... They are works of art as valuable as those of cultured sculptors. ... The potters from Garanhuns and Canhotinho are complete artists. Their statues can serve as a basis for painting and sculpture in the Northeast, so rich in popular artists and so poor in the field of civilised plastics or Fine Arts.⁹ (Bento 6)

⁹ "Muitas das peças expostas são de incontestável originalidade. Podem até ser consideradas como arte pura, apesar de sua funcionalidade ou seu destino. ... O boi desempenha papel importante nessa escultura infantil. O Nordeste em várias de suas zonas, está apenas emergindo da era do pastoreio. É natural, portanto, que o boi seja quase uma entidade totêmica para os primitivos oleiros do Nordeste tanto quanto para as crianças, em cujos brinquedos os bichos equiparam-se aos homens ou aos deuses, como nas cerâmicas mágicas dos primitivos. ... São obras de arte tão valiosas como a dos escultores cultos. ... Os oleiros de Garanhuns e Canhotinho são artistas completos. Suas estátuas podem servir de base à pintura e à escultura do Nordeste, tão rico em artistas populares e tão pobre no campo da plástica civilizada ou das Belas Artes."

From this transcription, two central points can be highlighted. Firstly, Bento treats the producers as members of a collective, with no specific mention of authorship, while the name Vitalino is not cited either. Vitalino's role in this exhibition is known from sources that later focused on APB (Frota; Mascelani, *Mundo*). Second, Bento alludes to the interest of modern visual artists in the Africans' so-called primitive art by comparing Northeastern production with what he named "magical ceramics of the primitive," and characterises the ceramists as childish, clearly distinguishing them from those of the modern "art world" (Becker, *Art Worlds*).

Despite acknowledging the "true beauty" and high aesthetic values in APB pieces, the art critic does so by situating them outside the realm of "civilised arts." The use of terms that denote the distance from erudition will be a dominant factor when evaluating APB, constantly insisting on its connection with unreal, fantastic, and childlike domains. It is essential, then, to analyse what relations are established in constructing and recognising the "other" within a system of social inequality that addresses the "other" as inferior, being understood as "'the common people,' the poor, the mass, the ordinary" (Bourdieu 452).

Based on this idea, my thesis uses the concept of "people(s)," as an umbrella term that has been consistently used in Cultural Studies to refer to diverse oppressed populations and social forces that struggle against hegemonic groups. These opposing forces, "the people versus the power bloc" (Hall, "Notes" 360), are what Stuart Hall describes as "the central line of contradiction around which the terrain of culture is polarized" (360). In this sense, I employ the term "peoples' arts" to denote the artistic expressions coming from that abstract entity that does not belong to the hegemonic culture. It is a general term that encompasses APB, used in this thesis to allow for a comparative analysis between different socio-cultural contexts, which can be expanded to other arts created by populations who have been historically excluded from the dominant culture, primarily due to colonial processes.

Whereas “Peoples’ art” enables situating APB in a global context, the term “popular art” is employed considering analysis developed within Brazil and the broader Latin American context. In this sense, “popular art” is a creative expression derived from the colonial experience of *mestizaje*, which represents the rise of something new, made from the coexistence of different realities in a particular local context. Therefore, I identify the creators of APB as “popular artists”, indicating that they belong to the people and express their creativity within this space of struggle and domination shaped, first, by colonialism, and today by the logic imposed by the neoliberal order. Popular artists have translated into artworks their enduring traditional cultural practices despite, or to overcome the conditions of oppression they have experienced in the modern world.

APB in the Art Scene

Following agendas of the time, the Comissão Nacional do Folclore (CNFL) was inaugurated in 1947. Luis Vilhena states that, even amid difficulties in carrying out research, budget constraints, and lack of government support to local commissions, the folkloric movement was able to set up the Campanha de Defesa do Folclore Brasileiro ‘Brazilian Folklore Defence Campaign’ in 1958 (99-107). The organisation initiated its work by celebrating agreements with universities to carry out research on folklore, a trajectory that was negatively impacted by the establishment of the 1964 dictatorial regime. During the First Conference on Brazilian Folklore held in 1951, the CNFL presented a document that became the basis for subsequent studies on the subject, “Carta do Folclore Brasileiro” ‘The Charter of Brazilian Folklore.’ This text would set the scope for Folklore Studies within the area of Cultural and Anthropological Studies in the 1980s, covering tangible and intangible aspects (named in the document as spiritual aspects), keeping popular manifestations separate, as something free from exogenous influences:

The ways of thinking, feeling and acting of a people, preserved by popular tradition and imitation, and which are not directly influenced by the erudite circles and institutions that are dedicated either to the renovation and conservation of human scientific and artistic heritage or to a religious and philosophical orientation. (Comissão Nacional do Folclore 1951, Par. 2)¹⁰

During its years of activity, the Campaign motivated the creation of museums, which in several Brazilian states were called museums of *arte popular* or folklore (*Revista Brasileira de Folclore*). In 1968, the Museu Nacional do Folclore was created, and renamed in 1976 as the Museu Nacional do Folclore Edson Carneiro, a tribute to former director of the Defense Campaign of Brazilian Folklore. Within this context, *arte popular* was understood as a set of material aspects within the field of Folklore Studies. It denoted manual works completed within a community social context, employing techniques passed down through generations, in which what predominated was its functional purpose, while also displaying aesthetic merits. Likewise, throughout the first museums' collections, the works had mainly a documentary character.

The folklorists opposed any attempts to assign authorship to popular artists. Renato Almeida, one of the founders of the National Folklore Commission, states that one could not speak of authorship since this production is wholly immersed in a social context. He argues that a popular artist cannot be considered an author as his imaginative capacity would not exceed that of a copyist because of the use of “only family themes within the customary mode” (99).¹¹ Therefore, it was the representative power of communal living that distinguished this production, which could also create aesthetic enjoyment in exhibitions.

The theme of daily life was recurrent in the popular figurative works, with religiosity

¹⁰ “Constituem o fato folclórico as maneiras de pensar, sentir e agir de um povo, preservado pela tradição popular e pela imitação e que não sejam diretamente influenciadas pelos círculos eruditos e instituições que se dedicam ou à renovação e conservação do patrimônio científico e artístico humano ou à fixação de uma orientação religiosa e filosófica.” In 1995, the VIII Brazilian Congress of Folklore decided to revise the Charter of Brazilian Folklore (Comissão Nacional do Folclore 1995). It was aimed to align the concept with the recommendations of UNESCO 25th General Conference held in Paris in 1989), which placed the “folklore” and “popular culture” as equivalents.

¹¹ “unicamente [de] motivos familiares dentro do modo consuetudinário.”

as one of the most predominant topics. In this area, two types of sculptures stood out: images of Catholic saints and “ex-votos,” that is, miracle figures representing parts of the human body that feature in chapels or other sacred places, as well as in pilgrimages (fig. 2). Such pieces attracted the interest of collectors after they gained validation in the 1930s, when they started to be included in several art collections.



Fig. 2. Wooden ex-votos display. Permanent exhibition Museu Afro Brasil, São Paulo.

The art critic Clarival Valladares (“Arte”) is one of the first authors to identify as debatable the influence of consumer culture in APB production. Valladares states that, inevitably, such influence would affect *arte popular*’s “genuine” nature due to the advances of industrial society into local communities that were previously isolated from urban centres. In this context, the ceramic production by Vitalino, although considered by Valladares “primitivos genuínos” work (“Primitivos” 42), was not part of what he described as the “comportamento arcaico brasileiro” ‘Brazilian archaic behaviour’ (46), insofar as the work already responded to demands of retailers from the major cities (“Arte” 64).

Aware of the exogenous interest, Vitalino focused his work not only on representing ordinary people from his own social and regional environment, but he also started to include the characters from urban centres and consumers who visited the town, as well as deciding on painted or raw clay finishing in accordance with clientele expectations. Hence, the playful feature his works acquired is a direct result of the consumer market he inhabited:

Scenes of operating rooms with three or four figures and patients with an open belly, of a lawyer's office haunted by his client's report, of the deputy seducing voters, of the priest listening to devout ladies with great sins, of the nuptial sermon and prisoners in the inspection. All these were themes executed almost in mass production. (Valladares, "Arte" 64)

Collectors then acquired items related to the people's daily life made with local raw materials and traditional techniques, linked to religious rituals, culinary practices, children's games, festivities, and customary anecdotes. Those who sought APB understood it as an authentic and unpretentious cultural expression. The underlying idea was that this art was made by people who had no contact with the art market, and as such, was not subject to any technical or stylistic commercial influences. In other words, it was seen as the embodiment of authenticity, a pure expression of the Brazilian people's soul, free from foreign aesthetic standards. Under these circumstances, APB was described as naive, spontaneous, uncommon or outsiders' art. When associated with the "primitive" term, as stated by Philippou, it was done to connect with authentic *brasilidade*, with the autochthonous and vernacular, as opposed to an "intensive nineteenth-century re-Europeanization of Brazilian society and culture" ("Modernism" 248), which is what had taken place during the Empire phase that followed the proclamation of Independence between 1822 and 1889.¹²

For the Italo-Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi (1914-92), APB belongs to daily life. In the 1960s, Bo Bardi was responsible for organising several exhibitions of APB in the Northeast, and subsequently she pioneered the inclusion of APB pieces into modern museum spaces. Worth mentioning in this context two exhibitions that featured some of her architectural projects: the exhibition "Nordeste" 'Northeast,' held during the renovation of the Solar do Unhão in the city of Salvador in 1963, headquarters of the Museu de Arte Popular and the Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, and the exhibition "A mão do povo brasileiro" 'The hand

¹² The Nineteenth century in Brazil is marked by a strong influence of England, especially in economic terms, and France regarding cultural values.

of the Brazilian People' in 1969, at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP), whose opening inaugurated the museum's new building. These exhibitions attest to the well-established relationship between popular and modern artistic practices, and a political attempt to include the popular in institutionalised cultural spaces in the country, practices that were repressed by the dictatorial military regime of the moment (1964-85) (Pedrosa and Toledo 32).

At that time, Lina Bo Bardi expressed her concern about the place occupied by popular creations within the larger art context and began to question the categories imposed upon them. She celebrated the era in which aesthetic expression could be extended to all forms of art, regardless of social class, in a way that art would "signify the right of men to aesthetic expression" (Macartney and Gilbert 120). Lina Bo Bardi also sought to correlate artisanal production with industrial design. The techniques used by ordinary people and the treatment given to raw materials inspired her, as she was trying to approach the needs of modern society in a "progressive attitude of popular culture connected with real problems" (123).¹³ This was a discourse in favour of universalising the right to aesthetic expression for all social groups that progressively established itself in the various cultural forums in the country. Professionals in the artistic and cultural field, such as the architect Janete Costa (1932-2008), began to advocate for the incorporation of APB objects in dialogue with Brazilian design and erudite art.¹⁴ The art critic Mário Pedrosa (1900-81), for example, argued that "all modern art has been inspired by the arts of peripheral peoples" (173). For this reason, he even proposed, when the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro burned down in 1978, that it be reconfigured as the

¹³ This incentive developed a condition in which creative professionals, such as designers and architects, started to seek inspiration in popular cultures. A recent example of this is the creation in 1997 of the Museum of the Brazilian Object, *A Casa*, whose main goal has been to foster integration between artisanship and design to promote a Brazilian expression and generate income for local communities (see <https://acasa.org.br>).

¹⁴ Similarly to Lina Bo Bardi, Janete Costa acted as curator of APB exhibitions, among them the "Viva o Povo Brasileiro", organised in 1992, in Rio de Janeiro, on the Earth Summit, the UNESCO's Conference on Environment and Development (see Brazil, Ministério da Ação Social).

“Museum of Origins,” encompassing five different museums to represent Brazilian artistic diversity: “the Museum of the Indian; the Museum of Virgin Art (Museum of the Unconscious); the Museum of Modern Art; the Museum of Black People; and the Museum of Folk Arts” (173), which never materialised.

Although this practice has not found immediate social repercussions in the art world, since it has not directly included popular creators in the artistic circuits, but only their works, it has sparked a major shift in thought on how to define the original aspects of a national art. To summarise, the initial artistic appropriation of popular cultures motivated by a modern and anthropophagic attitude gradually created the cultural atmosphere that explains the place APB occupies today. The neoliberal era that followed would come to settle its fluctuating status between national heritage, consumable cultural artefacts, and genuine art practices.

Art or Intangible Heritage?

Between the 1960s and 1970s, like most of its Latin American neighbours, Brazil was facing a troubled period of military dictatorship. Counterculture and grassroots movements gained space in universities and leftist political organisations. There was a concern about developing an engaged art in defence of the Brazilian people, which resulted in the creation of the Centros de Cultura Popular (CPC). The popular art included in the CPC was different to the concept of APB then disseminated in the country. According to Vivian Catenacci, this movement used art to communicate with working-class sectors, with the aim of transforming Brazilian society. The main difference is that the CPC talked about “revolutionary popular art.” In their view, APB, or art of the people, was the one “belonging to the countryside, archaic, backward, in which the artist was not different from the common people because he was simply

limited to organise facts of everyday life” (33).¹⁵ Catenacci demonstrates that the CPC movement, contradictorily, denies the validity of popular expressions as it tried to impose a top-down approach while believing that it was necessary to empower the people to transform society to become more egalitarian. Despite the conceptual conflicts, this revolutionary political project allowed the inclusion of issues related to the less favoured classes into the national agenda for cultural policies. At the same time, the promotion of popular cultures and connections with African cultural heritages also made headway within the military government that longed to maintain control over a cultural agenda as a way of legitimising their power nationally and internationally (see Anani Dzidzienyo; and Kimberly Cleveland, “Afro-Brazilian Art”).

In 1975, the Centro Nacional de Referências Culturais (CNRC) was founded by Aloísio Magalhães, whose main goal was to create alternatives that could invigorate cultural practices in the country. According to Magalhães, there was a risk of cultural flattening since Brazil was undergoing a developmental phase. Later, in 1979, when the group was incorporated into IPHAN, the institution started seeking more comprehensive ways of safeguarding their cultural heritage, considering both the tangible and intangible forms of culture. Furthermore, in that period, the newly created the Fundação Nacional das Artes (FUNARTE) incorporated the old Campanha de Defesa do Folclore Brasileiro under the name of the Instituto Nacional do Folclore. This entity was later renamed as the Centro Nacional de Folclore e Cultura Popular (CNFCP), which was responsible for promoting and preserving APB.

In 1983, under the leadership of Lélia Coelho Frota, the National Institute of Folklore created the Sala do Artista Popular (SAP) still active today (fig. 3). The SAP programme has been seen as an innovation in terms of using the museum space as a social agent, acting as an

¹⁵ “própria das comunidades rurais, arcaicas, atrasadas, em que o artista não se distingue do povo e se limita, devido à simplicidade da sua arte a ordenar os fatos do cotidiano.”

interactional space between the artist and the public, and becoming a marketplace where visitors can buy the pieces directly from the producer.¹⁶ Bringing popular artists to the main stage has given some voice to the knowledge holders of local practices. This had also allowed compliance with policies for the protection of intangible heritage long before it was formalised by the 2003 UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.



Fig. 3. Popular artist exhibition “Maria de Lourdes Candido: álbum de família,” SAP, CNFCP, Rio de Janeiro.

Moreover, Frota has played an essential role in the process of valuing the individuality of the Brazilian popular artist. She questions the non-authorship status given to popular artists promoted by folklorists mentioned earlier and has worked to narrow the gap between the aesthetic and anthropological dimensions (15). As director of the Museu Nacional do Folclore and later president of IPHAN, she agrees with the perspectives on Brazilian cultural heritage put forward by Aloísio Magalhães. What has been emphasised is the need to transcend the folkloric stage to prioritise an anthropological, cultural view, in which the creator and not the object occupied the centre stage. As such, cultural assets should no longer be understood as immutable, fixed on tradition and at imminent risk of disappearance. Instead, they should be appreciated as part of the natural rhythm of the community, able to adapt to history’s continuous changes.

¹⁶ About the SAP programme see Daniel Reis.

Parallel to the transformations in institutional practices about cultural heritage, mainly in the Brazilian Northeast, the APB collection activity has intensified with government support. One example is the permanent exhibition by the Tânia Maia Pedrosa collection at the “Casa do Patrimônio” ‘House of Heritage,’ located at the headquarters of the IPHAN in the state of Alagoas. This exhibition, entitled “A invenção da Terra” ‘The Invention of the Earth,’ opened in 2013 (Dantas), inhabiting the heritage safeguarding institution, which is a clear indication of the validation of APB as part of the Brazilian cultural legacy (fig. 4).

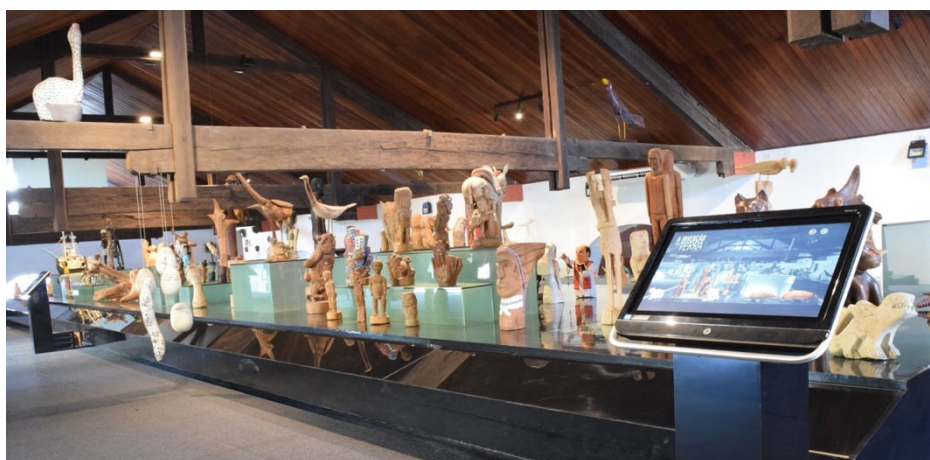


Fig. 4. Exhibition “A invenção da Terra,” Casa do Patrimônio, Maceió.

Private APB collections have also resulted in the creation of art museums. The most extensive collection is in the Museu Casa do Pontal, in Rio de Janeiro, established in 1995 from the private collection of the French Jacques Van de Beuque (1922–2000). Angela Mascelani, director of the Museu Casa do Pontal also highlights the importance of acknowledging authorship when talking about APB in the art world. For her, in a polyphonic manner APB represents “the roots of *brasilidade*” (*Mundo* 41).¹⁷ In addition, despite coexisting with anonymity for several decades, since the first collections of APB, many of the creators had already established their own subjectivity in their forms of self-expression and interpretation of the world surrounding them (28–29).

¹⁷ “raízes de *brasilidade*.”

The growing demand for APB has culminated in the creation of APB production centres. For instance, the Alto do Moura, located in Caruaru, Pernambuco, had Vitalino as the early Mestre, whose work is still an inspiration for many popular artists, to the point that Alto do Moura is today considered by UNESCO the largest centre for figurative arts in the Americas (Frota 341). Other centres are Vale do Jequitinhonha in the state of Minas Gerais,¹⁸ known for ceramic works in light clay tones, Capela city, Alagoas, with a ceramist group of apprentices of Mestre João das Alagoas, and the Ilha do Ferro Village in Pão de Açúcar city, with the wooden sculptures initiated by Mestre Fernando Rodrigues (1928–2009) in the community that has already a third generation of artists. Popular sculptural creation in these centres coexists with other cultural practices, such as cuisine and festivities, textile work in lace and embroidery, artisanal fishing, and religious celebrations.

Due to the exogenous interest in these production centres, the APB pieces transcend social and spatial borders, and they have been integrated into international exhibitions organised by art institutions such as the Fondation Cartier in Paris.¹⁹ Another example is the exhibition of popular artists from the *sertão* at the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico.²⁰ The inclusion of popular artists in exhibits like these allow them to gain prestige beyond their local regions. In Cleveland's words, "in spite of their exclusion from the majority of studies of national arts production, backlands folk artists are now known across and beyond the region through their representations of provincial life, history and culture" ("Coming" 71).

¹⁸ All the popular artists and ceramists of the Jequitinhonha Valley are part of the collective cultural practice recognised in 2018 as intangible heritage of Minas Gerais, with the register of *saberes e fazeres* (collective ways of knowing and doing) and Artistic Expressions under protection of the IPHAN of Minas Gerais.

¹⁹ The Fondation Cartier had the following exhibitions featuring APB: "Un art populaire" (2001) and "Histoires de Voir, Show and Tell" (2012) (<https://www.fondationcartier.com/en/exhibitions/histoires-de-voir> and <https://www.fondationcartier.com/en/exhibitions/un-art-populaire>).

²⁰ The Museum of International Folk Art organised two exhibitions especially dedicated to APB: "Folk Art from Brazil's Northeast" (1992–93), and "Brasil & Arte Popular" (2013–14) (<http://www.internationalfolkart.org/exhibitions/all-exhibitions-1954-present.html>). See also Kimberly Cleveland, "Coming".

In this first decade of the new millennium, publications about the life and production of popular artists began to emerge (Coimbra; Eid and Monte-Mór; Frota; Jackson and Cervenka; Lima and Lima; Mascelani; Name and Yassuda; Naves et al.; Pontes), while popular artists continued to be featured in publications about artisanship (Santana; Machado). Catalogues of national and international exhibitions have also been published for this purpose, such as the exhibition at “Brazil Body & Soul” (2001) held at the Guggenheim, New York (Sullivan) and the new editions of “A Mão do Povo Brasileiro”, 1969/2016 (Pedrosa and Toledo), and “Viva o Povo Brasileiro!” ‘Long Live the Brazilian People,’ 1992/2016 (Brazil, Ministério da Cultura). The curatorship of international exhibitions has been criticised in the academic world, considering that the production characterised as APB always appears to the public as related to concepts of underdevelopment and periphery in counterpoint to the contemporary art associated with the art of the centre countries (Fialho).

This national and international visibility results from the work carried out by private collectors and museums and the government’s commitment to implementing suitable tools for safeguarding popular practices considered part of national identity. Beyond the artist’s singularity, it is the symbolic evocations of *brasilidade* that makes an APB piece valuable as cultural heritage. According to Maria Amélia Corá, the government institutions’ conceptual changes to protect popular cultural heritage are also the result of social demands in the 1980s, for the preservation of cultural expressions coming from so-long-silenced groups. Henceforth, the incorporation of the heterogeneous cultural practices of the Brazilian people, assimilating both material and immaterial dimensions, would later influence the enlargement of the scope of heritage adopted in the Federal Constitution of 1988. The Magna Carta comprised not only artworks, monuments, and symbols of hegemonic culture, but also “the expressions of popular, Indian and Afro-Brazilian cultures, as well as those of other groups participating in the national civilisation process,” already encompassing immaterial dimensions of cultural heritage (Brazil,

Chamber of Deputies Art. 215, par.1).

Such comprehensiveness also explains the institutional stance adopted since the late 1970s by the IPHAN. The institute has implemented policies for safeguarding intangible heritage based on the concept of “cultural reference,” which has become part of the official vocabulary. This broad concept describes the collective symbolic representations that have established strong identity bonds with certain social groups. It extrapolates historical and artistic values and material support by highlighting the meanings that cultural expressions hold in the community (Corsino et al 14). By finally incorporating Mario de Andrade’s avant-garde ideas, IPHAN absorbs popular cultural manifestations from the CNRC trajectory, which has resulted in the “Programa Nacional do Patrimônio Imaterial” ‘National Programme for Intangible Heritage.’²¹ The demands to incorporate popular cultural practices into the official agenda were met mainly during the presidential terms of the Workers’ Party (2003-16) by Luís Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, who implemented a more vigorous political attitude to place popular cultures at the forefront of their government actions.²²

Furthermore, in this effort to “patrimonialise” popular cultures, the CNFCP became linked to IPHAN in 2003. Currently, throughout the country, there are more than one hundred and thirty inventories aimed at subsidising heritage safeguard actions and cultural heritage registrations, which will allow their continuity within the context where they are generated (Corsino et al).²³ In this respect, Cecilia Londrès emphasises the vital role of museums as spaces for the exhibition of cultural heritage and especially the forms of curatorship that are used to narrate stories of popular manifestations (172). Intangible heritage policies led to the

²¹ The Programme was created by Federal Decree, number 3.551, in 2000. It instituted the registration of cultural heritage into four books of records, which include the ways of knowing, celebrations, forms of expression and places, all considering the historical continuity of the cultural reference and its relevance to national memory and identity (Art. 1, par. 2).

²² See Brazil, Ministério da Cultura.

²³ See Brazil, IPHAN for the complete list of projects carried out for the Identification of Intangible Cultural Assets.

recognition of popular expressions as part of national identity and gave voice to marginalised communities. In this context, APB has as its highest heritage value the embodiment into objects of an entire collective, as on its materiality it crystallises the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. It is, therefore, related to non-material aspects of culture that are connected with cultural memories that previously had been disregarded by official historiography.

Aleida Assmann defines cultural memory as a form of collective memory mediated by symbols and representations that are vivid in social forms of interaction (“Memory” 220–21), and, thus, they involve popular artists in constant processes of re-elaboration. In this thesis, cultural memory is understood to align with those memories representing “local versions of the past” (Erl 42) that despite being non-institutionalised, have survived within the groups of “people outside the hegemonic power structure” (42). The progressive incorporation of APB into official Brazilian heritage discourses throughout the 20th century led to a transition from the invisibilisation of the memories of historically oppressed groups to a valorisation of vernacular, autochthonous and popular expressions in the official spaces of culture. In this sense, as opposed to nationalised memories, cultural memories, often called counter-memories due to their bottom-up perspective (Erl 42), are invested with new meanings in Brazil, where they have been used to ground official discourse for the construction of national identity.

At the same time, this practice has suffered gradual market exploitation in favour of offering an authentic product to the consumer. In an imbricated manner, APB can transit through low and high marketplaces, granting the consumers the opportunity to experience an “authentic” form of culture, either as the public at exhibitions or as buyers of artworks. However, this is not necessarily a spontaneous validation process but rather a fabricated reality instigated by an exogenous demand. In this context, APB would function as a communicating channel, through which different social classes meet, mutually acknowledging each other, and where social tensions are not always at the forefront. Leaning on the contact with APB, social

elites can “experience” or commercially acquire a cultural and artistic product that is different from their own realities, but that asserts their longing for *brasilidade*. It would therefore constitute a simulation of equality between consumers and creators, with both sharing a common identity of belonging to a single and cohesive nation.

From Nation-Building to Branding the Nation

Through the many stages described above, this thesis will explain that progressively APB has been transcending its original community boundaries and consolidating itself via the market relations set up by the neoliberal, global rationale. APB represents today a cultural manifestation originated and legitimised by its continued attachment to traditional forms of knowledge and memory, but its establishment and consolidation take place within the logic of the modern commodified society to serve the branding rather than the building of the nation. APB is situated, therefore, as one of the points of contact between different social groups and cultures, in a process that overlays prevailing conflicts related with socioeconomic domination.

In such a context, it is central to this thesis to consider the mutations and continuities between the nation-building process initiated in Latin America in the nineteenth century and consolidated in the early twentieth century, and the shift experienced in the last 50 years leading to nation branding agendas, with culture always occupying a leading role. As an artistic and cultural phenomenon, and under the rubric of neoliberalism, it is important to emphasise that in becoming a national heritage and a marketable product, APB responds to a political and economic rationale, one that encompasses all “human action into the domain of the market” (Harvey, *Brief* 3). In Brazil, neoliberalism was implemented in the aftermath of the military dictatorship period, which had conveniently “eliminated all the resistance to the market logic” (Avelar 204). The ensuing re-democratisation process was conducted so

that every realm of life, including culture, should fit into the consumer-oriented society. Cultural initiatives were organised to attract private funding, with the state acting as a regulator of tax deduction and resources transference.

Furthermore, the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution clearly states that cultural diversity is the country's foundational principle. Following the multicultural model, cultural policies were developed within an instrumental mindset, thus reducing social and economic demands to comply with goals that valued life quality and community development (McGuigan; Yúdice, *Expediency*). As a result, entrepreneurial programmes framed artisanship and APB as at the service of organising communities and in promoting an economically sustainable activity.

During the 1990s, the appeal to authenticity of a unique national identity began to have a central role in marketing strategies in order to create a national branding that would facilitate the participation of countries in global markets (Dinnie 68-69; 111-13). The “nation branding” rationale can be defined as “the unique, multidimensional blend of elements that provide the nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences” (Dinnie 15). Although authenticity, often associated with nostalgia for an uncorrupted past, denotes existential meanings for cultural products, the branding logic incorporates and transfigures these concepts to become commercial strategies. The marketing and entrepreneurial fields sustain that the reconversion of cultural expressions into commodities is the most prominent possibility currently available for cultural continuity (Firat 105-25; Basu 257-98). In this sense, branding arises as an alternative to incorporating a cultural product into current society not only for an international public but also for the national one. It permeates the act of purchasing, collecting, and experiencing art and culture in general, influencing how the public identifies with it. Thus, from the individual consumer's perspective, one may value the ways of

engagement with culture for individual distinction and to build a collective standpoint, whereas APB serves the local purpose of national branding to consolidate a communal identity.

State-sponsored branding campaigns represent a deliberate response to globalisation to create a unique identity that can differentiate countries from one another, attracting an influx of investment, trade, and tourism. Within this nation-branding logic, countries become more aware of their own heritage and try to develop a competitive identity to stand out in national or international markets (Anholt). Simultaneously, the commercial sector starts to reframe, or brand, national identities to promote products and services, in a process that has been called “commercial nationalism” (Volcic and Andrejevic 612). Considering that such a unique image creation is based on emotional qualities, nation branding is built around oral and visual symbols highlighted from the country’s cultural traditions (Fan 5–14). In this sense, culture is positioned as a socio-political tool, that besides being commoditised is used to foster public diplomacy.

Thus, the main difference between nation-building and nation branding state-driven strategies is that in the latter the state assists in promoting “a community that is gathered around a set of neoliberal values” (Varga 833), but where the state itself assumes a secondary role. For Melissa Aronczyk (22), the relationship between nation branding and citizens orbits around economic growth, in which the appreciation of culture is justified by the possibility of improving the living conditions of the population. National identity would then be instrumentalised as a distinctive element in the market, where “culture [has] to become competitive if the nation was to remain viable in the global marketplace” (Aronczyk 48).

To sum up, and considering current neoliberal forms of domination, I define APB as an authorial creation of artists with no formal institutional training, born and raised under vulnerable socioeconomic conditions, in which individual artistic expressions are deeply grounded in cultural memories and collective ways of knowing and doing, or *saberes e fazeres*

(fig. 5).²⁴ Consequently, APB exists within the contradictory dualities established by neoliberalism, where complex negotiations and goals coexist. Despite the exploitative relations the artists face when trading their art in the marketplace, it assists in alleviating communities' income shortages. This also provides these communities with the opportunity to receive a socio-identitarian validation lacking in previous decades when the culture they practised and represented was seen as backward, therefore against the goals of the modern state. Today their epistemological relevance is recognised and confirmed within the national cultural context. In this new dynamic, buyers are attracted to products invested with auratic authenticity that makes possible a reconnection with cultural memories from communities still existing within holistic forms of being. Thus, the artworks and the symbolic-ontological realm they convey and represent, assist in facilitating shelter from the different forms of alienation that have been amplified in the neoliberal society.



Fig. 5. Jairo Campos APB collection, Maceió.

²⁴ In this thesis, the term “artist” was opted to refer to APB creators. The terms artisans and artisanship will be used when the referenced sources directly cite these.

This thesis examines the intricate cultural, social, aesthetic, and political dimensions involved in the transition APB has experienced from its community-based origin to becoming a symbol of authentic national heritage and artwork, one to be traded both in national cultural settings reserved to the economic elite, and in global cultural circuits. This shift from subordination to officialdom and cultural prestige has consequently changed the place formerly occupied by the artists. Furthermore, this has forged new forms of negotiation between the different agents involved and, at times, the incorporation of APB into current “cultural consumption” practices has also created conflicting agendas.

The main agents that take part in these transactions are: the state and its cultural institutional administrators, who are directly concerned with developing policies to promote APB as cultural heritage; the art market, or cultural intermediaries, which includes collectors, gallerists, and curators interested in offering “authentic” experiences to local upper-middle-classes and international tourist consumers; the general public, as visitors, spectators, or consumers; and, at the centre of it all, APB artists themselves, who, depending on the context, retain their artisan status, or are bestowed with the “aura” of artists. Circumscribing these relations are all of those “others” who continue to exist in the communities outside the exchanges taking place through APB, but who are also affected since these processes modify the more general perception of social justice hierarchies.

Within this context, I argue that in neoliberal Brazil those different interconnected agents have given APB two primary functions: an instrumental as well an ontological-representative role, which are dependent and equally sustained in the marketplace. By intervening in APB’s creative-symbolic process and meaning, the state and cultural intermediaries have allocated an instrumental value to Brazil’s cultural diversity to, on the one hand, bring economic development to these communities, and, on the other, to promote a national branding built on “authenticity.” Paradoxically, the instrumental function, ensured

by inserting APB into market production circuits, also contributes to promoting APB's artists full citizenship by providing them with socioeconomic benefits and granting them a legitimate place in the labour market.

In turn, the ontological-symbolic function responds to the appeal APB has exerted on consumers in the marketplace. It has also granted APB the status of national heritage as it is seen as materialising forms of cultural memory in the terms explained by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, of creating a symbiosis between past and present, activated in socio-cultural contexts beyond dominant discourses (2). In that regard, and following Walter Benjamin, it can be stated that cultural memory helps to “brush history against the grain” (392), that is, it expands the already well-established official discourses by shedding light on alternative realities.

This is how APB gives popular artists authority to act as narrators of culture while their art comes to embody cultural memories and an ontological path towards ways of living perceived as authentic. Moreover, the ontological-symbolic function allows APB to be valued as “art” instead of “handicraft.” Therefore, popular artists are granted by cultural intermediaries an individual authorship status to create artistic objects, which also assist in expanding their creativity. At the same time, cultural intermediaries enable public engagement with APB through consumption and aesthetic experiences. These interactions with the artworks allow the consumer public to be transported from their everyday lives to the artists' socio-cultural reality, a process that may ultimately transform the consumers' own subjective-existential positioning. The market serves in this way to close the cycle by nurturing both cultural heritage and art systems when it demands that these “art workers” should produce authentic Brazilian culture.

It must be noted that not all the inhabitants of the communities from which the popular artists come participate in the exchanges that occur through the marketisation of APB. Nevertheless, although communities in general do not have direct access to the material benefits accumulated by a specific segment of recognised popular artists, to a certain

degree, the institutionalisation of APB has also entailed some advantages for them as a result of this instrumentalisation of culture, processes that I will explore with some examples throughout this thesis. On the one hand, part of the community may have indirect gains by working on the services and infrastructure required for the exhibition and sale of the artworks, such as guided tours, transportation, accommodation and restaurant facilities for consumers and tourists. On the other hand, the celebration of APB by society at large can change communities' perceptions about their own culture, resignifying identities and reinforcing their self-esteem. In addition, APB and handicrafts in general have been used as proof of cultural identity to support the acquisition of other collective rights, such as the land demarcation of *Quilombola* communities²⁵. At the same time, most of the Brazilian people, ravaged by social injustice, continues to operate outside this creative/consumer dichotomy, although the perception may be created that artworks are solving social injustices in general.

The instrumental and ontological-symbolic functions APB fulfils have been converging into a single and contradictory path, in which what is intended is to uphold local culture as a globally competitive product, as well as a medium for escaping from, or ameliorating the negative effects created by the modern neoliberal society. In the convergence of this double role, APB occupies a space I define as “micro-utopia,” in that APB becomes the vehicle for reconnecting with ancestral identities, with cultural and epistemological ways of knowing, being and doing, that is, *saberes e fazeres*. Thus, although perceived to be under threat or lost, these are revalued as a symbolic place outside the modern Western paradigm for ontological fulfilment through their authenticity value.²⁶

²⁵ Afro-Brazilian settlements first established by escaped enslaved people.

²⁶ The prefix “micro” aims to differentiate the concept of micro-utopia from the title of the 2012 exhibition “The Small Utopia. Ars Multiplicata” by the Fondazione Prada, in which Small Utopia refers to the avantgarde artists' ideal of democratisation of the arts. Micro-utopia also distinguishes itself from “Retrotopia” by Zigmunt Bauman, which is a generalised inclination to return to a lost past due to a defeatist feeling that there is no better future to pursue. In turn, micro-utopia describes a state linked specifically with APB and it envisions future alternatives when re-connecting with ancestral practices, as it will be further explained.

By confirming its existence in the marketplace, APB emerges as a representation of the consumer's nostalgic desire for rescuing life possibilities more connected to the natural environment, customary community values and imagination itself. It is structured on local knowledges and, as such, it competes for space with a mass-oriented production, said to be universal. This brings APB meanings closer to world elaborations based on particularities and singular points of view, or "small narratives" (Lyotard, *Postmodern* 60) as opposed to modern grand narratives. In defining APB as a micro-utopian expression, this work aligns with the epistemological trend of identifying utopian aspirations in Latin America towards a higher degree of cultural autonomy (Quijano "Modernity"; B. Santos; Campos; Schelling). However, APB does not position itself as a utopia capable of radically transforming reality because, since it is also a commodified product, it coexists with modern social logic while its founding principles survive in the interstices of modernity. Neither does this thesis position APB as a form of mere elusion. Instead, what it proposes is that it represents the creative potency of the people who have for decades awakened the yearning of other social classes for more wholesome experiences. Like the Benjaminian angel of history who faces the past while being carried into the future by the progress,²⁷ APB transforms nostalgia into a future-oriented inventive capacity. It is dragged into modernity but maintains its target values based on the local, the environment and the collective. While APB contributes to re-establishing such connections for the individual consumer, it also acts as a transformative means for the artists, resituating their place in society as guardians of *saberes e fazeres*. In this vein, APB is defined as a micro-utopia as a way of encapsulating into artistic objects cultural memories existing under market expectations.²⁸

²⁷ Allegory based on Paul Klee's drawing entitled *Angelus Novus* (Benjamin 392).

²⁸ The thesis also acknowledges that there are other groups who may be inspired by this process but neither consume its objects nor participate in the nostalgia created.

Thesis' Scope and Hypothesis

This work aims at contributing to the debate about the place occupied by APB in the Brazilian neoliberal society by exploring this field considering a nation-branding motivation. It aims to conceptualise and systematise the negotiations involved in the art-heritage system in the globalisation era for APB, in which the value of *brasilidade* is set as a steppingstone to facilitate marketisation. This marketisation reflects the expansion of a market-oriented society under neoliberalism, which forces cultural institutions and individuals to function with a business mindset in such a way that they now “compete and manage themselves in the market as brands” (Eränta et al. 19). George Yúdice asserts that in Latin America it was within the market that “the people’s culture” (García Canclini and Yúdice xxi) was disseminated. In that process of cultural valorisation, the market is situated “as not only a place for the exchange of commodities, but as part of more complex sociocultural interactions” (García Canclini and Yúdice 46). In this sense, added to its commodification into a saleable product, the marketisation of APB encompasses the different symbolic meanings for those who create and consume the artworks. Without overlooking the vast majority of those who do not create or consume the artworks, I understand APB as a medium for conveying the “popular” to the general society, a process that happens within the marketplace, although other forms of popular creativity remain outside this commodified sphere.

To explore this rationale and understand why APB exerts an appeal in the marketplace, this thesis compiles the former discussion into this guiding hypothesis: APB corresponds to a creative response, based on cultural memories put together by the people, to meet the demands of the art world for a marketable production that is authentic and locally grounded, while at the same time allowing the popular artist to accede to the benefits of modern society. Under these circumstances, APB would first result from the effort of cultural intermediaries, supported by the government, to materialise in the arts an image that corresponds to national identity.

Secondly, APB would be a consequence of the appropriation of those ideals of *brasilidade* by the market as an attribute that enhances the value of creative products. Thus, APB moves from a logic of popular collective creation that asserts an identity pursued by the nation-building project to a commodified product that incorporates the idea of branding the nation. Such marketisation process intends to attract consumers who are no longer satisfied with mass-culture and expect to be exposed to unique and personalised products. In this way, the marketisation of APB leads to a complex effect. Whereas the art market and the cultural heritage industry appropriate the culture of the oppressed to satisfy the nostalgic urge of the consumer, it also enables popular artists to unlock social, cultural, and economic spaces not previously available.

The concept of micro-utopia intends to explain that APB's attractiveness to the consumers is more than an imposition of an instrumentalised culture for socioeconomic and branding purposes. Rather, it fills an ontological void for a realisation that modernity cannot provide. To elaborate on this, the analysis was supported by a theoretical framework that places APB simultaneously as a consequence of and as a reaction to the oppressive and dehumanising aspects of the current order. Accordingly, micro-utopia is represented in the materialities of APB through an "aesthetics of the oppressed" (Augusto Boal) that have become appealing to other social classes and that responds, in a relational manner, to political, social, and cultural contexts in which the artworks are produced, exchanged, and consumed.

When APB is examined as intangible heritage, it participates in the wider assemblage of Brazilian "cultural references." This concept places value on the ways of knowing and doing of communities, which is explained by the Portuguese expression *saberes e fazeres*. Those two words have been used separately or combined by the official cultural policies on intangible heritage preservation (see Corsino et al. 13-14, 23) and, as an expression, in Brazil it has become a common statement in the academic and political forums related to the topic. This

phrase constitutes a reassessment of the forms of being and the body of knowledge belonging to the people, that is, their own ontologies and epistemologies. To acknowledge that, this research will employ *saberes e fazeres* as part of its own epistemic positioning. In that sense, when understood as micro-utopia, APB symbolically represents places where *saberes e fazeres* are protected, shared and re-elaborated, and where cultural memories have resisted the dehumanising processes that have been accentuated by neoliberalism.

Although this analytical approach to contemporary APB situates it as a local manifestation, it acknowledges that APB's change of status actually responds to a worldwide phenomenon: the marketisation of art-culture systems produced by peoples who have historically endured diverse forms of oppression. Conditions of oppression involve a series of social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances of domination that will be further explored in the following chapter. For the purposes of this introduction, it suffices to mention that this thesis follows Paulo Freire's concept of oppression (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 44), to denote processes of dehumanisation due to historically engendered violence over specific social groups. Current marketisation dynamics are of course carried out following each country's own political, social, and cultural history. In this way, this thesis keeps in mind those groups locked out of the creative/consuming dichotomy, which will be discussed below.

On this basis, I propose that countries with vastly different responses to globalisation have been resorting to the peoples' arts to promote or brand their nations. To expand upon these global trends, and to better situate the particularities of the Brazilian case, I engage in a cross-cultural analysis with other national scenarios, such as the official uses attributed to *arte popular mexicano*, in Mexico, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts in Australia, and Māori art in Aotearoa New Zealand. Although these countries have been built from very different colonial histories, with the nation-state of Brazil being shaped by Portuguese colonisers, Mexico by the Spanish, and Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand by the British, they all share

the fact that -to this very day- they exist under the conditions established by the colonial experience, in what has been described as “coloniality.”

Following Aníbal Quijano’s central contributions, Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh assert that each former colonial region and people continue to exist within a “Colonial Matrix of Power” (3–4), that is, within the complex structures of domination created by the European colonial enterprise. In this thesis, the selection of these countries fulfils precisely that purpose: to offer an account of four diverse contexts and experiences with colonialism. In addition, this cross-cultural analysis, focusing on Latin America and Oceania, also intends to challenge the binary geopolitical order of the developed/underdeveloped divide, which is today undergoing a severe scrutiny, and that will be explored in detail in the following chapter.²⁹

It is worth noting that this research has been conducted from a Latin American Studies perspective, and academically situated in Oceania, which has enabled an enquiry into similar debates taking place both in Latin America and in the South Pacific regions. This is particularly evident in Aotearoa New Zealand, a country where Māoridom occupies a central place with international prestige. To acknowledge the uniqueness of this academic experience opportunity, I aim at expanding my own positioning as a researcher in the Cultural Studies field, particularly in terms of understanding local practices as part of both an extensive interconnected world network, and a contextual response to global historical transformations. As a Brazilian studying in a country with a unique history in terms of Indigenous-European coexistence, I intend to raise awareness in my academic practice of the impacts of geopolitical processes of organisation and domination, with consequences in the most diverse parts of the world. Additionally, approaching the ways Māori have responded to the forms of coloniality

²⁹ I am familiar with Eli Bartra’s work, who has conducted a cross-cultural analysis between countries of different regions—in her case, Brazil, Mexico, Japan and New Zealand—although with a different purpose. Bartra follows a feminist methodology to focus on the role of women in folk arts, also considering the differences that this terminology has in each of her selected case studies. See *Feminism and Folk Art*.

that persist, will enable situating the Brazilian case in a global perspective and from a well-grounded international perspective. Māori are also supported by other international Indigenous networks that are not within the nation-branding scheme but challenge it.³⁰ By using this positioning, they are able to resist the creative/consuming binary, in essence “indigenising” the larger hegemonic structures by enhancing the creative part that will reduce the consuming aspect.

I should also stress that the opportunity to investigate Brazilian popular culture from Aotearoa New Zealand has reinforced an understanding and appreciation of cultures previously seen as remote. This viewpoint has been central to situating Brazil in a global context, especially considering that Brazil has historically struggled to acknowledge its Indigenous origins, as well as the endurance and the oppression lived by the Indigenous peoples, the Afro-Brazilians in general, and, specifically, by popular cultures that are the focus of this study. With the utmost respect, I know that as an outsider, I do have limitations in understanding the meanings of Māori culture, or those of Aboriginal and Mexican Indigenous nations, just as I do when it comes to the Indigenous or Afro-Brazilian cultures of my own country. Although my upbringing was in the state of Alagoas, in the Brazilian Northeast—where I had many opportunities to become familiar and get involved with popular manifestations and appreciate them as part of my own culture—being from a middle-class family often kept me on the other side of the spectrum. Hence, as posited by James Ritchie, a Pākehā³¹ scholar who studied Māori resistance practices over decades, a visitor should never speak for the host: “Whakakitenga—

³⁰ Without disregarding the multiple complexities of Indigenous cultures, this research employs the term Indigenous by means of allowing for global dialogues. It follows Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s approach as it creates a “network of peoples ... who have been subjected to the colonisation of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty” (L. T. Smith 39). When referring specifically to the Aotearoa New Zealand experience, the term Māori will be adopted as the most accepted identification in the country. The same will be done to Australia, with the adopted terms for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

³¹ New Zealander of European Descent.

Never presume to understand” and “the task of understanding is never complete” (Ritchie 63–64).

Thus, when studying cultures other than my own, I do not presume to know all their meanings, and it is not my task to decode them. Not all explanations will be available, and most of the time I experience these cultures and their artistic manifestations through what their authors state they want to make available, and from the displays organised for the general public who do not belong to the community. My intention, therefore, is to transit through established contemporary negotiations, including how cultural institutions, official legal regulations, market agents and the representatives of these cultures position themselves to use their artistic manifestations within a social, economic, and political order that is still fundamentally Western and, most of the time, oppressive. I also consider what might be “outside” the creative/consumer binary established in this nation-branding process by studying the nation-state usage of the term “popular” in the next section.

Conceptual Methodological Framework, and Structure

From a conceptual-theoretical perspective, this research acknowledges the understanding of nation described by Will Kymlicka as “a historical community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and culture” (11). These elements allow for qualifying as nations the Indigenous communities from different countries and those dispersed *Quilombola* societies that were established in Brazil to escape and resist enslavement.³² However, in the context of this thesis, the nation-

³² Enslaved populations from the same region in African were intentionally dispersed to different parts of Brazil to prevent rebels from organising against the metropolis. Despite this, many communities, named *Quilombos*, were raised by escaping enslaved people that maintained self-governance alongside autonomous Indigenous nations in extensive parts of the territory, even after the Independence proclamation (G. Oliveira 201). Notwithstanding the attempt to outlaw the reproduction of African cultures on American soil (Kymlicka 24; D. Ribeiro 75), descendants of enslaved Africans managed to keep alive some of their original practices, among which are cultural manifestations that evolved into a unique expression, such as the Candomblé religion, considered today part of Brazilian cultural heritage.

building process and the current nation-branding efforts are exclusively concerned with the nation-state. These last concepts are applied to countries as political units, which after independence established unified territories under an autonomous ruling government. It fits into Anderson's "imagined community" (6) as it aims at constructing a nation united by cultural aspects, within well-established borders, and under one single form of leadership, which encourages its members to imagine themselves united in ties of brotherhood, therefore, overlooking exploitative forms of relations.

In this sense, within the modern-colonial framework, the idea of nation-state disregards plural forms of social and cultural organisations while imposing a dominant government on a clearly defined territory. By recognising the need to reaffirm cultural pluralities that still exist in different nation-states, composed of multiple and non-homogeneous identities, I examine the place of APB in the context of the Brazilian social organisations established in the context of consolidating the modernity project. To fulfil this task, it is necessary to understand these non-hegemonic cultural practices as well as the processes of appropriation that have been incurred by the state and carried out through its various institutions with the support of the private sector, and in order to consolidate national identity as a branded feature: *brasildade*.

National identity describes an active process of collective identification with common defining characteristics. Identity is hence understood not as an analytical and static concept, something to be obtained. Instead, its connection to the national represents an intention to promote a social, political, and cultural sense of belonging to the nation (Brubaker 28-48). The state is, therefore, "a powerful 'identifier' ... because it has the material and symbolic resources to impose the categories, classificatory schemes, and modes of social counting and accounting with which bureaucrats, judges, teachers, [the military,] and doctors must work and to which non-state actors must refer" (43). Hence, as Brubaker poses, national identity

designates a strong sense of commonality with a large-scale population that creates differentiation in the international arena.

In this context, it is necessary to examine certain prevailing concepts that have been adopted as the standard translation for the written content of exhibitions and catalogues of APB. For instance, in the Brazilian cultural milieu, the English term “folk art” is used to identify the artistic manifestations of popular culture based on so-called traditional practices. Albeit in a vivid process of transformation, given the impositions of modern society, they are opposed to popular artistic manifestations linked to the cultural industries and aimed at the great masses, commonly associated in the English language with the term “popular art.” Nevertheless, the term “folk art” in the Anglophone context is directly related to pre-capitalist and pre-modern practices that have been encapsulated in an ahistorical and anachronistic manner by dominant discourses to support the construction of an authentic past, which is not the case of APB.

Since this thesis is written in the English language and, in order to retain the integrity of meanings identified in the object of study, it has been decided to maintain its Portuguese language version, that is, *Arte Popular Brasileira* (APB). In this respect, it is also worth noting that in Portuguese or Spanish there is no differentiation between the words “folk” and “popular.” Despite the existence of the term folklore, the prefix “folk” does not constitute an independent term in Portuguese. In contemporary times, all creations from the common people, following current tendencies or traditional forms of knowledge, have the “popular” (in Portuguese) as a signifier. Thus, the “popular” label comprises many different meanings, and as it is easily associated with ordinary people, it remains the dominant term. In this sense, those excluded from the creative/consuming binary continue to struggle to assert resistance.

In Latin America, the people who produce “folk” art are also those who produce or consume the “popular,” considering the aforementioned English language definitions. They

inhabit rural and urban communities with access to the media and have been sustaining their artistic production as a strategy to both participate in modernity and resist its oppressive mechanisms (García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*). Those populations have used cultural manifestations within the field of *arte popular*, “a body of images and forms” in order to “reframe their truths” (T. Escobar, *Mito* 126).³³ Such repositioning occurs in the encounter of the popular with hegemonic forces of the modern/colonial system. For these reasons, to name as folk art a dynamic popular manifestation, immersed in a dialectical game of “containment and resistance” (Hall, “Notes” 348), will not entirely do justice to the richness and depth of this practice in the modern Brazilian context. Therefore, when adopting Portuguese concepts to discuss APB, this thesis underscores the difference between the terms “popular” in Portuguese/Spanish and English languages, stressing the dynamics taking place in the market exchanges of APB that engages with consumerism without yielding the communities’ *saberes e fazeres*.

In pursuing this critical stance on the adopted terms, one can still note a tension concerning the term “traditional arts,” conventionally understood as those built around a set of practices and beliefs transmitted across generations (Graburn 6–11). Such uneasiness is particularly noticed when the Western classificatory gaze focuses on the socio-cultural forms of organisation and expression belonging to groups in situations of oppression, such as Indigenous populations or popular communities. The labelling of their practices and knowledges as traditional relegates them to a fixed past that prevents them from occupying artistic spaces of self-expression and independent thinking in the present.

Although the creative manifestations of APB have undergone several transformations in terms of materials, techniques, and even their final purpose, APB maintain a close relationship with ancient knowledge and identity values in popular communities. However, the

³³ “un cuerpo de imágenes y formas”; “replantear sus verdades.”

use of the term “tradition” may suggest non-active practices that are not prone to innovation, which is not the case for any artistic manifestations that comprise my object of investigation. For this reason, the definition “traditional art” will not be employed for characterising the creative expressions analysed in this thesis as it may imply an uncritical denomination that reproduces Western interpretations introduced by European colonisation (Mallon 364). Thus, tradition will not serve the purpose as the main qualifier of a specific art form. It may be used as a term to identify customary social or cultural practices passed on by several generations and still active in present times.

This thesis has adopted three investigative methods: archival, fieldwork research, and bibliographical research consultation and analysis. From a disciplinary perspective, this research is established on Critical Theory, Latin American Cultural Studies, and Decolonial Studies, and supported by central theoretical concepts, such as cultural memory, authenticity, national identity, nation branding, oppression, among others, which will be addressed further in the following chapters.

During the archival stage, official legislation that regulates the safeguarding and promotion of cultural heritage in Brazil were consulted, as well as those international agreements related to cultural heritage that were adopted in the country. In addition, catalogues from previous exhibitions, inventory publications, and permanent collections belonging to official museums were consulted. They are central to understanding their stance on culturally promoting the country, and to appreciating the official endorsement given to APB to promote an idea of national identity.

The analysis of the artworks focuses on the symbolisms and meanings represented through APB. Rather than raising questions around stylistic values, which would validate that discussion into the realm of Art History, this analysis pays attention to the intersections between those artworks and the broader circumstances in which they are immersed, thus giving

priority to a focus on cultural analysis. In this context, the formal results of APB, consisting of the stylistic qualities of the artworks, such as shape, texture, scale, material, and colour, are examined in relation to the social and cultural meanings they communicate. Regarding the typological assortment, the research laid emphasis on APB's sculptural production, mainly ceramic sculptures and woodcarvings, for it can fluidly traverse the boundaries of heritage, craft, and art fields.³⁴

From a national perspective, I examine all the stages involved in the cultural circuits followed by APB, from its community-based production, exhibitions, commercialisation, and the state policies that frame them all. To demonstrate the work hypothesis, the analysis of the marketisation process of APB was based on collective case studies to ensure representativeness and reliability. Consequently, it follows a qualitative research strategy and a multi-site case study (Mills et al). To this end, data collected during fieldwork was obtained through semi-structured interviews (Given 810; Kvale; Magnusson and Marecek; Wells 25) and non-participatory field observation, that is, a qualitative research strategy for collecting information without interacting with creators, mediators, and consumers of APB (Given; Salkind). The non-participant observation method was applied when visiting the communities where popular artists lived, as well as when visiting the cultural circuits engaged with these artworks, this in order to get a sense of the social environment in which APB is created, exhibited, and commercialised.³⁵

³⁴ This research acknowledges the existence of paintings in the realm of APB, although, according to the interviewed gallerist Roberto Rugiero, it is still less valued than sculptures. Roberto Rugiero can be considered one of the pioneers in the work of identifying and valuing APB painting. Among the galleries interviewed, Brasileira Gallery and Estação Gallery include popular painters in their collection, while Karandash Gallery and Pé-de-Boi Gallery prioritise three-dimensional artworks. Among the museums visited, the Museu Afro-Brasil and the Museu Nacional do Folclore include APB paintings in their collection, but sculptures remain predominant.

³⁵ This study complies with the current University ethics guidelines. It received approval for conducting fieldwork by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) on 30 January 2019 (Protocol number 022278).

Firstly, three areas located from three Brazilian states were selected, two in the Northeast region (Alagoas and Pernambuco) and one in the Southeast (Minas Gerais), where over generations, artisans have been responding artistically to the outward community interest in their creative production.³⁶ Focusing on these critical locations, several APB production centres were chosen. The selection followed a mapping organised according to published inventories, catalogues and specialised publications related to APB, which evidenced a concentration of cities where the current generation of popular artists live and work (fig. 6).

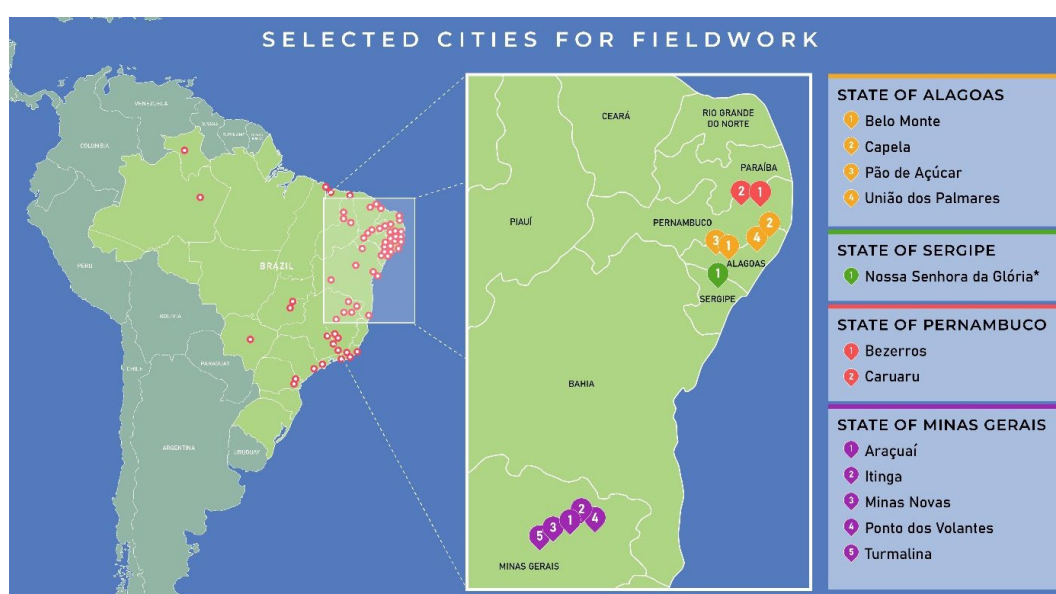


Fig. 6. On the left, illustrative map to show concentration of popular artists in Brazil (locations based on Coimbra; Eid and Monte-Mór; Frota; Jackson and Cervenka; Lima and Lima; Mascelani; Machado Name and Yassuda; Naves et al.; Pontes; Santana). On the right, detail with selected cities for fieldwork.

Secondly, in order to examine APB collections and exhibitions, visits were organised to the Rio de Janeiro–São Paulo axis, two South-eastern metropolitan cities, which gather most museums, art galleries, official cultural institutions and civil society related organisations.³⁷ Visits to exhibitions, collections and art galleries in Maceió, the capital of Alagoas were also included as an example of regional mediation, since it is through this city that the production of APB in the community centres of Alagoas flows to other urban regions. Local museums,

³⁶ The city Nossa Senhora da Glória is a town belonging to the State of Sergipe, which is adjacent to Alagoas, hence considered part of the same creative area of Pão de Açúcar and Belo Monte. See fig. 6.

³⁷ See Appendix 1 for list of visited exhibition spaces and APB collections in Brazil.

retail stores and headquarters of artisans' cooperatives were also incorporated in the fieldwork in some of the visited cities throughout the country.

In all these places, interviews were conducted, with the interviewees divided into three different groups of agents following the separate roles they play in APB's processes of creation, promotion, and circulation:³⁸

- i. Seventeen Popular artists—interviewed in their ateliers or communities. The selection criteria were based on those who are already considered public figures, well recognised by the media, scholars and cultural institutions involved in APB.
- ii. Eight Cultural intermediaries—collectors, curators, art gallerists and scholars who have a well-established professional career related to the investigation and promotion of APB.
- iii. Eight Public Officers and Third Sector representatives—responsible for implementing cultural policies on cultural heritage preservation. In this group, NGO's representatives, and presidents of local cooperatives for the artisans were also included as they often act as intermediaries for public service and retail stores to connect within the community.

The last two groups can be considered the first APB consumers in the market chain. They have played an essential role, since they are responsible for implementing cultural programmes with the artists and their communities, organising exhibitions, running museums or art gallery collections, establishing collections, connecting the artists with retailers, art fairs and other events, or commercially representing them. Cultural intermediaries can also offer their accounts on their customers and exhibition visitors, explaining the clients' profiles and what they look for when buying APB. In general, academics and the media recognise these

³⁸ See Appendix 2 for detailed information about interviewees.

professionals as experts in the field. Thus, they are crucial in the process of legitimising APB in the heritage and artistic field. The main points covered in the interviews were the different stages involved in the cultural circuits pursued by APB, from community-based production to exhibitions, commercialisation and the state policies that regulate them all. The gathered information was used as raw material to provide first-hand knowledge and a complementary perspective to the literature already available. It also informed the theoretical framework used during the critical analysis stage.

To account for the international perspective, the cross-cultural analysis confronting the Brazilian case with alternative approaches in Latin America and Oceania is based on visits to cultural institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and Mexico, focusing on cultural activities and exhibitions specialising respectively on Māori art, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders art, and *arte popular mexicano*.³⁹ The goal was to learn, from non-participatory observation, the manifestations of different sets of national and private agencies. This practical international approach allowed for a better understanding and for situating the Brazilian branding strategies.

The focus of this cross-cultural analysis is on examining the official and institutional attitudes towards the art produced by specific cultures under situations of oppression in their respective contexts. In this sense, it does not intend to put the artworks under comparison, nor does it aim to scrutinise artistic responses to their own realities. Given the natural limitations involved in research of this nature, no interviews were conducted with the different agents involved in the cultural circuits during fieldwork in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, and Mexico. The investigation into the artists' responses, as well as their insertion into cultural spaces and the art market, was developed specifically for the Brazilian case, which is the central focus of my research. Nonetheless, this fieldwork analysis was supported by official cultural

³⁹ See Appendix 3 for list of visited places per country.

regulations and relevant international treaties and agreements, as well as secondary source literature related to contemporary examples and the historical transformations experienced by these creative practices within their national contexts.

This thesis has been structured following the two main pathways that explain APB's development in terms of what was previously described as its instrumental and ontological-symbolic place within Brazilian society. In addition to this introduction, the thesis comprises four chapters. Chapter One, "A Multidisciplinary Theoretical Approach to *Arte Popular Brasileira*," examines decolonial aesthetic possibilities to experience APB by situating it as part of the "cultures of the oppressed." Furthermore, it develops the central argument of positioning APB as micro-utopias, which proposes a new conceptual avenue to explain the attractiveness of APB to consumers within the context of the instrumentalisation of peoples' art to serve nation-branding agendas. The concluding section examines the place of these creative expressions within the current geopolitical global order, thus expanding the Brazilian case to an international debate.

To critically analyse the Brazilian experience by confronting their specificities with alternative approaches in Latin America and Oceania, Chapter Two, "Nation Branding Across Borders: Cultural Policies and Peoples' Arts," examines the diverse national political strategies for safeguarding, valuing, circulating, and exhibiting the artistic expressions from Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Mexico, in particular: *Arte Popular Mexicano*, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' art, and Māori art. By focusing on different national scenarios according to geographical, historical, socioeconomic, and cultural criteria, the aim is to demonstrate the paradigmatic and prevailing use of peoples' arts as an apparatus for governance, social cohesion, and international positioning.

Chapter Three, "*Arte Popular Brasileira* as Micro-utopia," returns to the Brazilian case and puts under scrutiny the transactions performed in the creation and consumption of APB in

the cultural arena. By having the material collected in interviews as its core, the analysis unravels the social, cultural, and political dimensions of APB from the symbolic meanings associated with it. This chapter presents both the strategies for instrumentalising APB, and the micro-utopian effects produced by the discourses adopted by the public and private sectors in associating it with ideals of *brasilidade*, authenticity and nostalgia. From the perspective of popular artists, it discusses the connotations of micro-utopia in a journey towards de-alienation that identifies forms of re-existence facilitated by the creative work.

Lastly, Chapter Four, “Aesthetic Experiences and Sensibilities of *Arte Popular Brasileira*,” expands the analytical range by focusing on the aesthetic dimension of APB. By adopting a decolonial theoretical framework, this chapter considers the aesthetic experiences from both the cultural intermediaries and the artist’s gaze. It then discusses the formal qualities of APB as an expression of “the aesthetics of the oppressed,” as a way of manifesting micro-utopian meanings.

CHAPTER I

Arte Popular Brasileira: A Multidisciplinary Approach

It is the despised task of hands capable of transforming clay and wood and straw, bird feathers and seashells and breadcrumbs into beauty. This art is called, as if apologetically, artisanship.⁴⁰

– Eduardo Galeano, *Memórias del fuego II*

1.1. Exploring APB as a Multidisciplinary Cultural Manifestation

When approaching APB, key questions emerge around the terms that define this creative manifestation of the people. First, the very act of analysing cultural expressions not coming from “erudite” cultural contexts—as understood by the modern Western paradigm that defines the “art world” (Becker, *Art Worlds*)—creates an immediate and intrinsic discrepancy. Describing this art as “popular” seems to relegate it to a position of tacit inferiority when compared to the Western artistic cultural canon. Simultaneously, the place APB has been granted to strengthen institutional positions of national identity frames it within the specific context of society within the geopolitical organisation of the modern nation-state.

Thus, APB’s current “embodied meaning[s]” (Danto, *What* 37) must be seen as fashioned by a specific social milieu: the art world that has intervened in assessing its aesthetic and cultural place. Howard Becker considers the art world as a collective activity resulting from the actions of a particular set of individuals and organisations, who regulate the definitions of what ought to be considered art. This world has been instituted through certain conventions around human activities bestowed with social value. When APB was first considered “art,” it was not the artist but exogenous agents who first granted it its artistic

⁴⁰ “Es la despreciada tarea de manos capaces de transformar en hermosura el barro y la madera y la paja, la pluma de pájaro y la concha de mar y la miga de pan. Ese arte se llama, como pidiendo disculpas, artesanía.”

meaning, following their own agendas about the place this art occupies within the national ideals. These exogenous agents include intellectuals and collectors, who act as cultural intermediaries between the communities that produce APB and a potential consumer public living in Brazil's urban centres. Government institutions also gradually endorsed the intangible attributes of this creative expression, which culminated in granting APB national heritage status.

Despite not fitting into the parameters of the Western art reference systems, APB has been serving the purposes of the modern project of nation building. This compels one to consider a theoretical framework able to account for the creative expressions of other locally situated peoples and communities—including their objects, narratives, communal celebrations, and their own diverse forms of conveying their sensorial interpretations of the world—while challenging their incorporation into hegemonic universal models. The Decolonial Studies theoretical approach offers a critique of Western Modernity, understood as “a specific historical experience that began with America, when new material and subjective and intersubjective social relations have been produced, alongside the emergence of the new Euro-centred, capitalist, colonial world power structure” (Quijano, “Coloniality” 220). This line of analysis allows us to adopt a new model to situate the dominant socio-cultural order, starting from the political systems that have structured the nation-state systems, the economic structure of commodification, production, and waged labour force. In addition, this critical framework looks at the different nation-states of the globe from a relational perspective that permits observing from a different epistemological setting their place under diverse processes of subjugation and including creative expressions as dependent on such power structures.

APB and Decoloniality

Nelson Maldonado-Torres defines decoloniality as “the insurgent positionality of subjects and to the possibilities of decolonization in the *longue durée* of modern/colonial cultures and structures” (“Decolonial” 111). Following Quijano and Walter Mignolo, Maldonado-Torres situates the European modern-colonial system as one aimed at globally expanding the modern Western civilisational project, which is directly aligned with the capitalist form of economy. In that regard, the decolonial theoretical perspective adopts a critical stance to how former colonial societies have organised themselves, to conclude that these nation-states still operate following a colonial rationality, which is “expressed in the ‘racial’ distribution of work, in the imposition of new ‘racial’ geocultural identities, in the concentration of the control of productive resources and capital, as social relations, including salary, as a privilege of ‘whiteness’” (Quijano, “Coloniality” 218).

Therefore, a decolonial approach intends to situate modernity “as a problem to be overcome rather than as a project to complete” (Maldonado-Torres, “Decolonial” 112). It aims as well at identifying in the colonised subject’s alternatives of existence the “epistemic, practical, aesthetic, emotional, and oftentimes spiritual repositioning of the modern/colonial subject” (111). Such a “decolonial turn” must occur integrally, or holistically, contemplating, among other aspects, the arts, or other creative expression in order to situate oneself in the world. By understanding art as a “sphere (not purely aesthetic) of re-existence” that is “embedded in the affirmation of the body and the territory as material and concrete bases of human life” (Maldonado-Torres, “Arte” 27),⁴¹ it is imperative to contextualise these manifestations and detach them from self-proclaimed universal aspirations. Following Enrique Dussel (“World-System” 111), it can be stated that the world-system that places

⁴¹ “arte como esfera (no puramente estética) de re-existencia”; “anclada en la afirmación del cuerpo y del territorio como bases materiales y concretas de la vida humana.”

Europe as the centre finds its limit when the alterity of the “other” is re-signified as a “locus of resistance,” a place that establishes continuities of collective knowledges, prompting transformations and innovations that are beyond the mainstream.

In the Arts domain, Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez conceptualise aesthetic practices more broadly, encompassing all forms of feeling and perceiving. If an artwork is “a man-made object demanding to be experienced aesthetically” (Panofsky 33), it is necessary to discern the resultant aesthetic experiences. To differentiate them from the modern aesthetic normative, Mignolo and Vázquez name these practices “aesthesis” and situate them within the larger process of “modernity/(de)coloniality,” hence their specification as decolonial aesthesis, under which they distinguish two trends. The first current refers to the manifestations of popular cultures and arts that have been systematically silenced and devalued within the modern-colonial order. The second one refers to artistic practices that constitute “a critical intervention within the world of the contemporary arts” (5), directly confronting modern aesthetic conventions.

By placing popular creative manifestations coming from colonised societies and subjects at the centre of the academic discussion, this thesis intends to situate the analysis of APB according to the first current presented by Mignolo and Vázquez. Popular artists are immersed in a colonial system of artistic representation where they have constantly confronted dominant forms of power relations. Although their creative production is not intended as a counter-hegemonic practice that challenges modern aesthetic standards, their creation is constituted by other elements beyond the conventional conception of art. In a holistic manner, they incorporate into artistic objects their own territories through their relationship with the environment, communities, cultural memories, and the central place their bodies occupy due to the inseparability of their manual skills. In other words, APB embodies *saberes e fazeres* of the people. Therefore, this research adopts a decolonial lens

to cast a critical eye over this popular creative manifestation in Brazil; a practice of aesthesis, of the confluence of senses and sensations, which has long been overlooked and marginalised by the modern canons.

The modern idea of aesthetics, according to Berleant, dates to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the Fine Arts were separated from the “practical arts” (2), craft activities, for instance. By detaching them from other spheres of life experience, it was established that an aesthetic appreciation requires “a special mode of attention called disinterested contemplation, and that, to be properly appreciated, the art object must be isolated from its cultural context and separated from any utilitarian purposes” (3). Institutions devoted to the arts were therefore organised to serve this purpose. They expanded across the globe diffusing a Eurocentric vision of aesthetics, which was alien to colonised peoples, consequently imposing a barrier of exclusion and inferiorisation when classifying these creative manifestations.

Going against these authoritative and prescriptive ideas in the sensory world, new voices in the artistic and academic fields began to demand an epistemological re-evaluation of the Enlightenment’s aesthetic precepts. In its radical meaning, as simply put by Augusto Boal (22), aesthetics is the form of producing or perceiving a material or immaterial element in the world, hence inhabiting the senses of the subjects who experience it in a materially and historically contextualised manner. Seen this way, there are many possible aesthetics. This idea aligns with the revisionist approach taking place in Latin America, which sought to reassess the hitherto invisible place occupied by the region’s popular cultures and *arte popular* (Juan Ramos, *Sensing* 5-6).

Such work may create what Dussel calls “aesthetics of liberation,” an enthusiasm for the object, be it tangible or intangible, enacted culturally, in a specific material and historical context. On a larger scale, as indicated by Juan Ramos (*Latin American Decolonial* 86-101),

by turning to the aesthetics of liberation, nations would have the tools to create their own system of referential beauty without having to turn to Eurocentric standards that do not represent their own peoples. On an individual level, through an aesthetics of liberation, artists no longer create alone, but rather act as representatives of collective desires and tastes. The community thus acts as “the creative core of every aesthetic work”⁴² (Dussel, “Siete Hipótesis” 31).

In APB, the artists use the body of knowledge present in their own communities. Together with their forms of being in the world, it constitutes the artists’ *saberes e fazeres*, a creative basis for their artistic expression. When *saberes e fazeres* are valued by both the art world and cultural heritage policies, the artists begin to communicate their cultural memories to communities outside their own. The people themselves are the transmitting agents in the discursive context of APB. At the same time, the legitimation of APB by the policies of preservation put forward by cultural heritage agendas endorse a national knowledge production coming from the lower classes.

Following this perspective, a decolonial aesthetic appreciation exceeds the mere formal and visual examination of the object. By reclaiming its primary meaning, aesthetic appreciation should be rather understood in its original “aesthētikos” meaning, where pre-eminence was given to the perceptive senses (Berleant 2). In other words, the aesthetic experience constitutes a sensory and relational experience through the incorporation of all senses, to apprehend the real, and to situate the individual in a holistic condition of existence.⁴³ This concept draws closer meaning to Mignolo and Vázquez’s term of “decolonial aesthesis.” In that regard, J. Ramos points out that the decolonial aesthetic theory does not claim to be totalising and universal. It instead works as a “minor theory” thoroughly grounded in “local histories” (*Sensing* 30). This way of understanding art directly aligns itself with this research’s central thesis, mainly when sustaining that APB represents a form of micro-utopia, a minor narrative

⁴² “la sede creativa de toda obra estética.”

⁴³ For an analysis of the relational character of art, see Nicolas Bourriaud.

that assist in providing existential shelter from the illnesses created by modern neoliberal society, as will be further explored later.

This decolonial perspective on aesthetic appreciation, is undoubtedly determined by the artists' identity, social class, beliefs, and their positioning within the society they inhabit. As Dussel clarifies, "*aisthesis*" is a sensory experience that "determines a taste or preferences in judging things as beautiful (and its opposite)" ("Siete Hipótesis" 14).⁴⁴ Therefore, APB's formal characteristics—its poetics—cannot be detached from the power relations that participate in the process of legitimating, valuing, and representing APB in museums, galleries, and collections, which epitomise its political realm (Hall, *Representation* 3). Aesthetics seen this way, in its original sense of "aesthesis, constitutes a holistic experience that is not fragmented or rationalised. It rather integrates sensory perceptions and interaction with realities where the existential, material, and historical circumstances in which the artistic manifestations are produced converge. Therefore, "aesthesis" emphasises "this effort to summon the times that have been silenced, ignored and that contain other possibilities, which contain other ways of relating and ordering our presence, of relating to the world, of inhabiting and naming our world" (Vázquez and Barrera Contreras 82).⁴⁵

Despite the novel and sound theoretical alternatives provided by Decolonial Studies, to adopt epistemic alternatives to conduct a debate on the incorporation of the peoples' art into current global cultural and artistic circuits, there is still the need to correlate these creative manifestations with the prevailing understanding of Western art and with the art world spaces in which they currently navigate, but not without a critical engagement that may enable us to "delink" ourselves from this very same system (Mignolo, "Delink"). For

⁴⁴ "determina un gusto o preferencias en el juicio de las cosas como bellas (y su contrario)."

⁴⁵ "la acción de la aesthesis decolonial es precisamente este esfuerzo de convocar los tiempos que han sido silenciados, ignorados y que contienen otras posibilidades, que contienen otras formas de relacionarnos y ordenar la presencia, de relacionarnos al mundo, de habitar y nombrar nuestro mundo."

this reason, this thesis will maintain the use of terms such as aesthetics and arts, while also keeping in mind that in this analysis these concepts have a relational meaning for the human creative experience.

1.2. Art and Markets, Artists, and Artisans: Establishing Parameters

The valorisation and commodification trajectory undergone by APB reflects the clash of conflicting agendas working to promote a national culture based both on offering a symbolic voice to practices from Indigenous, Afro-Brazilian, and popular communities in general, that have been systematically silenced, and the modern desire to insert these same practices in the context of the consumer society. The following section will review some central cultural-political debates to situate the historical path that explains APB's contemporary relevance.

Folk and Popular as an Expression of Oppressed Cultures

One of the most used definitions of culture is by Raymond Williams, who understands culture as “a particular way of life” that “expresses meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour” (“Analysis” 56). Williams explains that the selection of elements that will shape a traditional culture “tend to correspond to its contemporary system of interests and values for it is ... a continual selection and interpretation.” (63). Based on this idea, culture represents a battleground, where conflicts and alliances are forged to establish social positioning (Storey, *Inventing*).

According to an Anglo-European perspective, the concepts of folk and popular derive from the same historical period, which, as indicated by Daniel Margolies, creates an interplay between Folkloric and Popular Culture Studies, as both deal with traditional practices (52). However, Margolies points out that the main difference is that popular culture is constituted based on amalgamating dominance and resistance, which is not the case with folklore. As John

Fiske poses: “Popular culture is the culture of the subordinated and disempowered and thus always bears within it signs of power relations, traces of the forces of domination and subordination that are central to our social system and therefore to our social experience” (67).

In Europe, interest in people’s culture dates to the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, with the consequent creation in 1846 of the English term “Folklore” to designate such cultural manifestations. This was defined as a movement by intellectuals “to discover the attitudes and values of craftsmen and peasants” registered mainly through “oral traditions, and with ritual” (Burke xi). Peter Burke sustains that in terms of aesthetics, what most motivated this interest were novelties found in “folk” expressions that served the revolt against art in which “‘artificial’ (like ‘polished’) became a pejorative term, and ‘artless’ (like ‘wild’) a term of praise” (9).

Likewise, in Latin America, the interest in popular culture is anchored in the need to consolidate nation-states, and in the aesthetic quest of modernist intellectuals to create a genuinely national cultural and artistic representation. However, there are important points of divergence with respect to Europe. Pablo Alabarces argues that Latin American popular culture should be conceived beyond mass culture, with its own forms of production, circulation, consumption, and mediation of symbolic goods. Alabarces identifies four main reasons for this, without which an adequate debate on popular culture in Latin America cannot be built: the persistent continuities of ruralism and their ways of life into the present, which occur in constant interaction with mass media; the significant presence of the Indigenous population on the continent in rural and urban environments, associated with the presence in some countries—as is the case of Brazil—of Afro-descent populations; the strong performance of popular culture in political debates, so as to constitute spaces for contesting, even if alienating practices of market appropriation occur; and the use of both mass cultures and folkloric and traditional forms to support populist agendas and discourses in the region.

Accordingly, Latin American popular cultures amalgamate different orientations: the market or commercial; the descriptive, which is associated to an anthropological definition; and the one that assumes a dialectical conception of culture, based on the historical process involved, and as such intimately connected with the concept of hegemony (Hall, “Notes”). The immersion of Latin American popular cultures in the structures of coloniality places them always in relation to the expectations created by Western Modern thought, thus, it can either be subsumed by it, or it can act to subvert such imposed norms.

In Latin American Cultural Studies is the common understanding that the development of popular culture takes place in the context of becoming “modern.” That is, rather than being suppressed, in this region popular culture was transformed by incorporating modern cultural ideals. Just as in Europe and North America, in Latin America, the development of popular culture has been linked to the market. The main difference resides in understanding popular culture as not only driven by cultural industries, but also by traditional practices: a folk way of life that coincides with capitalist exchanges, mass media, and tourism (García Canclini, “Cultural Studies”).

Within these complex negotiations, just as “the popular” represent an abstract space where epistemological-symbolic struggles are displayed in Latin America, its creators, “the people” also constitute heterogeneous groups facing social class forms of domination. Ticio Escobar defines this category as “‘los de abajo’: those excluded from full power, participation and representation” (*Mito* 26).⁴⁶ This same set of individuals or populations is called by Paulo Freire “the oppressed”, whom those holding hegemonic power have named in various ways: “depending on whether they are fellow countrymen or not—‘those people’ or ‘the blind and envious masses’ or ‘savages’ or ‘natives’ or ‘subversives’” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 56). Freire explains that the deprivations those peoples (in plural) endure are the result of

⁴⁶ “‘los de abajo’: los excluidos de poder, participación y representación plenos.”

oppression, in which “oppressed” appears as the consequence of an unjust social order, one marked by violent restrictions of autonomy, deprivation of basic social rights, and disavowal of cultural aspects, in which alienation is imposed on one’s own conscience, thus involving processes of de-humanisation. With his main body of work written in the 1960’s, Freire later argues in the 1990s that there is a “present conquest, which does not necessarily require the conqueror’s physical body,” one which can take place through different forms, such as socioeconomic subservience and cultural domination (*Pedagogy of Indignation* 103). Indigenous peoples, African Americans, and mestizo populations that comprise the urban peripheries, and peasant working classes integrate the oppressed group, which the modern-colonial system has translated into ethnic and social class oppression, enduring economically straitened circumstances.

Consequently, it is “the culture of the oppressed, the excluded classes” (Hall, “Notes” 360) which today is described as “popular culture.” In light of the above, this thesis understands popular cultures in a plural format, as those coming from peoples historically marked by oppression, who, from a Gramscian perspective, resort to multiple negotiations to combine their original practices with elements of the cultural industries, and are, accordingly, both “commercial” and ‘authentic,’ marked by ‘resistance’ and ‘incorporation,’ ‘structure’ and ‘agency’” (Storey, *Inventing* 51).

George Yúdice states that in Latin America all the institutions responsible for the protection and dissemination of culture, namely: “education, radio, film, museums, and anthropological institutions” (“Latin American Intellectuals” 658) were conceived within the agendas put forward by the cultural industries agendas. According to Yúdice, with the advent of neoliberalism, the negotiation process between social classes changed because of the mediation of new civil society organisations that took over social and cultural responsibilities formerly in the hands of the state. He argues that this transformation caused popular cultures

to lose their revolutionary dimensions and, consequently, it became more attractive to other social classes who embraced it as a cultural commodity. The author indicates that under these conditions of immersion into modernity, the popular coming from Indigenous peoples and those of African descent is more susceptible to co-optation (659).

Nevertheless, despite being progressively incorporated into the mainstream when absorbed by neoliberalism, popular cultures can also emerge as places that challenge the current status-quo, envisioning new possibilities of explaining and interacting with the world, such as the 1930s samba, or funk since the year 2000 (Yúdice, *Expedience* 130-32), that represent both cultural products to be appreciated or acquired by consumers, and symbols of resistance against hegemonic views. Following this line of analysis, it can be argued that popular cultures in Brazil have developed with multiple meanings, incorporating novelty and traditional practices. Regarding the visual arts, it is however important to acknowledge that the place of inferiority referred to earlier have been challenged by curatorial and intellectual experts who view the peoples' art beyond conditions of marginalisation.

Peoples' Art and Culture Industries

Coined in 1947 by Adorno and Horkheimer to explain the process of culture commodification with the advent of new forms of media, the concept of culture industries has broadened the understanding of relations between high, folk, and popular arts. Following this perspective, Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel differentiate high arts and popular arts by explaining that the second “were not made to endure—even if some of them did—but to be expended, used up,” whereas the first comprised “objects of contemplation” (60). Popular arts progressively became detached from the understanding of folk art as “communal artefacts, part of a whole rhythm of life” (60), due to the advance of mass media and its production made for entertainment. In this sense, cultural industries also imposed the main difference between folk

and popular arts: although popular arts are “no longer directly the product of ‘the way of life’ of an ‘organic community,’ and it is not ‘made by the people,’ it is still, in a manner not applicable to the high arts, a popular art, for the people” (64-5).

Some authors argue that popular cultures have had an impact on folk art in terms of lessening its artistic value. According to Gary Fine, in the United States, “popular culture has discovered ‘folk art,’ sometimes described as ‘country crafts,’ ‘junk style,’ or ‘Americana’” (45), while in Aotearoa New Zealand an equivalent term is “Kiwiana” (C. Bell 179). Therefore, the association of ‘folk art’ with financially accessible touristic souvenirs, sometimes mass reproduced—a phenomenon described by Fine as “McDonaldization of folk art” (46)—instilled in the enthusiasts the urgency of separating “real” folk art made by the people from commercial objects.

Furthermore, the insertion of folk art into the art world is challenged by its deep connection with artisanal production. Both worlds care about the ability to master techniques, materials or skills in a unique way, so-called virtuosity and efficiency following a set of well-defined rules and conventions (Becker, “Arts and Crafts” 862–889). The crucial point that differentiates art and artisanship is the utility value that the crafted object has for the community, while expressiveness and aesthetic-formal values are the main concerns for art world products. In this sense, folk art receives an exogenous artistic legitimacy through institutions and intellectual groups, such as museums or universities that function as centres of cultural authority (Baumann).

Folk art’s central meaning relates to daily life activities, religious ceremonies, or collective communal celebrations, always emphasising its common heritage nature. That is, on one hand the term folk art is strictly connected to communal traditions, henceforth ideal for the nation-building project. On the other hand, there is an art market niche interested in folk art that has been influencing its development. Because of this ambiguity, members of the art world

have been searching for other concepts that could assist in highlighting individual creative merits. As important as the aesthetic value is the ascription of individual authorship. Therefore, labels such as *la art brut*, outsider art, or self-taught art emphasise self-expression, thus not holding any relation or dependency with cultural heritage. All these terms put the focus on the artist's biography and not on the artwork itself. In this sense, those terms closely relate to authenticity and the exotic rather than to traditions or cultural collective heritage (Fine; Maizels; Maclagan; Russell).⁴⁷

In view of the above, and the conceptual confusions caused by the English “folk art” concept, this research will continue to identify the visual artistic production made by ordinary people in Brazil as APB. Differently from other definitions, APB today comprises the double character of representing an intangible cultural heritage constantly recreated, adapted, and consolidated by the artists, and a consumer-oriented artistic phenomenon. In this sense, APB is community-derived, with artists usually living under harsh economic and social conditions. Therefore, although not trained by institutional forms of education, they are deeply connected to their natural and social environments, which is also what determines the materials and themes they choose. It must be stressed that popular artists may have started to work with crafts or other manual activities while striving for survival and generating regular family incomes, but, ultimately, they do achieve an individual sense of authorship, which is considered essential to be recognised as an artist.

García Canclini stresses the consequences resulting from including the artists' signature in their pieces (*Transforming* 63). In this process of inserting *arte popular* into the market and the cultural industries, he clarifies the change of value associated with the pieces, as the communities in some ways become “neutralised” by the individual signature, in such a

⁴⁷ *Art Brut* is a French term created by Jean Dubuffet in 1945 and Outsider Art is the adopted British translation coined by Roger Cardinal at 1972 (Fine 25).

way that the meanings obtained from the pieces in relation to the cultural, environmental, and social conditions, are obscured by the pre-eminence given to the author's individual interpretation. Thus, in order to "enter" into modernity, individuality is emphasised, and to the detriment of the collective. Such a transition from the broader cultural realm to that of art participates in what Roberta Shapiro describes as "artification." It may serve in nation-building projects "and may be a conduit for certain groups to assert identity or ascendancy on the local or national level" (267).

In Latin America, *arte popular* generally includes Indigenous art—which is not the case in Brazil, as further elaborated in the next section—since indigenous nations are indeed central to the processes of coloniality, and are on a par, as Ticio Escobar states, with the other excluded sectors in terms of full participation in society ("Arte Indígena" 7). For T. Escobar, Indigenous art is often categorised as handicrafts, or immaterial heritage because:

they are not the product of an individual creation (despite each artist reformulating the collective patterns), nor do they generate transgressive ruptures (although they suppose a constant renewal of social meaning), nor do they manifest themselves in unique pieces (although the work produced serially strongly reiterates the repeated truths of their own history).⁴⁸ (5)

Whether considered handicraft or art, the direct interaction of *arte popular* with the market, tourists, the cultural and mass industries, as well as with the art world, García Canclini understands that this manifestation reflects the main conflicts of incorporating the popular into capitalism, which is what has been experienced by Indigenous and mestizo populations (*Transforming* 28). The transformation undergone due to new forms of production, circulation, and consumption, has prompted a change in people's consuming habits, including the aesthetic

⁴⁸ "no son producto de una creación individual (a pesar de que cada artista reformule los patrones colectivos), ni generan rupturas transgresoras (aunque supongan una constante renovación del sentido social), ni se manifiestan en piezas únicas (aun cuando la obra producida serialmente reitere con fuerza las verdades repetidas de su propia historia)."

appreciation of these objects. *Artesanías* (the term employed by García Canclini), moved from rural communities to urban centres, occupying retail shops, galleries, and museums, serving not only the producers themselves, but also state agendas and the interest of other social groups. In addition, the author argues that *artesanías* have also fulfilled a central role in the reproduction of capitalism. This occurs since they help to “solve” unemployment in rural areas, retaining large part of the population in these regions; they supply consumption needs for unique and authentic products that surpass the consequent “standardizations” of industrial production; they participate as well in spectacularising historical, natural aspects and habits of life, creating differentiation of places to attract the flow of tourism; and they serve the political-ideological functions of the state to keep its population cohesive by reinforcing common cultural values on the nation capable of generating income and attracting investment flow (García Canclini, *Transforming* 37–47).

When entering the realm of artistic discussion, new nuances of meaning are added. Besides the elasticity of boundaries between crafts and arts within the capitalist market (28), APB is perceived as tied to collective cultural heritage, hence central to national identity agendas. In addition, APB is prized as a unique artistic good, appreciated and consumed exclusively by more economically favoured social classes while at the same time APB struggles to access the art world, because it has to prove its authenticity and non-conditioning to the marketplace. In the process of being exhibited in collections and museums, APB participates in the representation of two kinds of museum knowledge: those that treat “art as art,” and those museums that treats “art as a cultural product” (Danto, *Abuse* 126). In the last instance, there is an anthropological dimension in which the artistic work performs the same function of a written document, a picture, or an ordinary object, providing an account of a specific culture. This is indeed reflected in Brazil as both art and anthropological museums have been promoting APB, respectively, as authentic art and as national heritage.

Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous or Popular?

In Brazil, the resistance of Indigenous populations to Portuguese domination led to their massive decimation, and the consequent flight of most of the surviving groups from the coastal region, where the colonising process had begun, to the hinterlands (D. Ribeiro, *Brazilian* 12). The progressive substitution of Indigenous enslaved labour by African populations, who were forcibly introduced between the 16th and 19th centuries, meant that the presence of the Afro-Brazilian population in urban and rural areas occupied by the state surpassed the Indigenous presence. For a long time, the latter sought refuge in the territory's dense forests, especially in the Amazonian region. It was only in the 17th century, though, that the black presence surpassed the Indigenous enslaved population (D. Ribeiro, *Brazilian* 67).⁴⁹

In this scenario, Brazil's popular cultures are greatly influenced by Afro-derived cultures, arousing the interest of Brazilian folklorists, for instance Arthur Ramos. In his studies on the cultures of African descendants in Brazil in the first half of the twentieth century, A. Ramos focuses on artistic manifestations, which he names "Negro Art," composed mainly of ritual objects from Afro-Brazilian religions connected to the re-interpretations made by the descendants of African populations of ritual objects linked to Catholicism, such as baroque saints and *ex-votos*. These convergences combined with the *mestizaje* process, and the advancement of Popular Cultures Studies in the country, led to the incorporation of everyday objects of Afro-Brazilians into the universe of APB, sometimes including ritual objects in the same category of the popular. According to Roberto Conduru (29–44), in its search for national identity based on the popular, the Brazilian modernist movement absorbed practices of Afro-Brazilian and Mestizo origin in the same range. In that vein, between the 1970s and 1980s, academic discussions re-appropriated in fact the concept of Afro-Brazilian art to debate about

⁴⁹ For historic estimates of slave trade numbers see Brazil, IBGE, *Brasil: 500*; for last demographic census with current population ratio of Indigenous and Afro-Brazilians in the country see Brazil, IBGE, *Pesquisa*. For a comprehensive analysis on this topic see also Boris Fausto (49–55).

the place occupied by Afro-Brazilians in the artworld. The concept then has extended beyond the artist's ethnic origin to encompass artists who, as Brazilians, are thematically and formally influenced by the African characteristics existing in the country (Conduru; Munanga). The inclusion into APB collections specifically occurred for Afro-Brazilian creators who come from lower social classes.

In the artistic domain, the presence of Afro-Brazilian artists used to remain invisible, even though they had participated in the Brazilian artistic and cultural production since colonial times. From the 1980s onwards, exhibitions were organised, mainly by the artist and curator Emanuel Araujo, to highlight the Black presence that “deeply saturates all aspects of national identity” (153), ranging from traditional, religious and community practices to contemporary artistic practice, with the participation of APB and its Afro-Brazilian artists.⁵⁰ Thus, APB steps onto a tenuous line between appropriation by the elites and reappropriation of culture by the popular classes, especially when associated with Afro-Brazilian art.

In folklore and later anthropological studies, Indigenous arts in Brazil were restricted to a separate universe of collective creation, comprising feather work and body painting, lithic arts, weaving and ceramics. The reference study corpus on the topic was carried out by Berta Ribeiro and Darcy Ribeiro (See D. Ribeiro “Arte Índia”; B. Ribeiro *Dicionário*), which was conducted independently from studies on APB. Because of this influence, the concept of APB was progressively framed excluding indigenous creative practices, and that is how it is currently understood in the country. However, during the formation of the APB collections, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, a few indigenous artistic creations began to be incorporated. Importantly, these artists' socio-economic vulnerability conditions were maintained as an important unifying feature of different creators included in an APB collection. An example of

⁵⁰ Contemporary Indigenous Art has recently undergone a similar process. It has been gaining momentum since the 2010s by reappropriating artistic media as a platform for voicing Indigenous agendas. See Maíra Almeida; Paola Tavares; and Ela Bittencourt.

APB incorporation of these Indigenous creations is the wooden benches of the Indigenous tribes of the Upper and Lower Xingú, Amazonian region, and the Karajá ceramic dolls from tribes of the same name inhabiting areas of the states of Goiás and Tocantins (fig. 7).⁵¹



Fig. 7. From left to right, exhibition at CRAB, Rio de Janeiro, of Indigenous creative works from the Assurini, Marubo, Malu, Kalapalo, Kanamari, Kayabi, Tapirapé, Tijuana, Tukano, Waimiri and Waiwai peoples, Rio de Janeiro; Karajá ceramic dolls from the ARTESOL collection, São Paulo.

Ethnicity or Indigeneity?

The term ethnicity has been used to identify groups that share a set of historical, ancestral, and cultural characteristics that may or may not coincide with the idea of nation with which a given community identifies. This is mainly due to the diasporic and migratory movements that have existed throughout history (Williams & Schertzer; Alcoff). My research acknowledges the difficulties of conceptualising the term ethnicity, often conflated with race and nationality, and of its political implications for distinct groups that are identified as “ethnic.” In fact, all these terms respond to dynamic social constructs intimately connected with power relations, and the control of certain groups over others. By focusing on Latin America, my research adopts Peter Wade’s concepts of “race” and “ethnicity” that respond to a social construct that must be analysed within the context of the European colonial enterprise across

⁵¹ The Bei publishing house has a collection of more than 500 indigenous wooden benches with identification of the artists and their ethnic groups (see <http://colecaoBei.com.br/colecao>). The Karajá dolls were declared Brazilian intangible cultural heritage in 2012. Made exclusively by women, the clay dolls are considered an important tool for socialising and transmitting knowledge to the children of the tribes.

the world. “Race” and “ethnicity” sometimes overlap, hence the use of the ethnic-racial term. In general terms, the main distinction is that racial identification is more related to phenotypical variation in that ancestral transmission is relevant to determine a “race.” In turn, ethnicity is concerned primarily with cultural differences based on geographic locations within the modern world, differences that are also transmitted across generations (4–23).

Notwithstanding the official recognition of Brazil’s cultural diversity, the debate about ethnic-racial diversity continues to be problematic, still not adequately addressed (D. Ribeiro, *Brazilian* 4, 318; Wade 57). This is likely because Brazil’s nation-building process has been developed on the contradictory uniformity of a multi-ethnic population. As stated by Darcy Ribeiro, it has been overloaded with a continuous, violent, and repressive governance over Indigenous peoples and imported African populations. Such power structure has been, however, disguised by a discourse of racial miscegenation that would establish a gradual absorption of all ethnicities into society in an equal manner. Miscegenation would also be justified by the false notion of a systematic whitening of the population. Indeed, the notion of a “Brazilian racial democracy” that was established during the 1930s would later be a national strategy to perpetuate inequalities at the expense of marginalising Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples.⁵² Such an ideology resulted in the creation of skin colour hierarchies when discussing ethnicities in Brazil, in which the whiter the skin, the greater the chances of occupying better socioeconomic positions (Silva and Saldivar).

In a different way, indigeneity is directly related to the colonial project and subsequent nation-state building (Williams & Schertzer), as well as the subjectivities involved in “Indigenous embodiment, knowledge production and politics through relations with land, landscape and earth beings” (Radcliffe, “Geography and Indigeneity II” 441). In that regard, indigeneity has been described as a term that establishes “first-order connections ... between

⁵² For an overview on the “racial democracy myth” see Abdias do Nascimento; and Sharon Stanley.

group and locality” (Merlan 304), or “heterogenous, place-based ways of knowing” (Hunt 29). As an analytical concept (Radcliffe, “Geography and Indigeneity II”) and a political position (Williams & Schertzer), indigeneity corresponds to the construction of a dynamic identity shaped out of the negotiation of difference with other subjects and in a perpetual questioning imposed Western epistemologies (Radcliffe, “Geography and Indigeneity I”; Breidlid). Diverse and heterogeneous Indigenous populations all share the experience of domination, and it is under this common feature that the term is used internationally. The category Indigenous peoples, in turn, is applied in this thesis in the plural to acknowledge the particularities of each community, group or nation concerned with a right to self-determination while facilitating solidarity between these same groups on a global scale. Linda Tuhiwai Smith recognises the use of the term Indigenous as “a powerful signifier of an oppositional identity” (38–39), acknowledging that it has been employed as the standard term since the 1970s to enable the configuration of an international “network of peoples” (39) who share their struggles and forms of resistance as colonised populations.

Given the above, although ethnicity does not completely encompass Indigenous populations, it also partakes in the creation of indigeneity as a concept. In adopting the term ethnicity, this research does not intend to disregard the multiple aspects that make up an identifying definition for Indigenous peoples, such as their specific bonds with the land as central to their identity and spirituality. Nor does it overlook the fact that they are the original inhabitants of such territories, an aspect that acquires a different dimension in the colonial context. With that in mind, and without intending to generalise, I use the term ethnicity to describe forms of subjugation and oppression common to various groups that have been excluded or have suffered multiple forms of discrimination derived from the imposition of the ontological-epistemological modern-colonial project, hence moving beyond identifications

based solely on a social class system. When referring strictly to Indigenous populations, the term indigeneity will be prioritised.

1.3. Micro-utopias and Brazilian Cultural Memory in the Modern Society

The combined processes of state and private intervention and promotion of APB have defined its current place and status. First, as an authorial artistic expression it represents a creation coming from a reality of socioeconomic deprivation, which nevertheless has been able to inscribe ancestral and vernacular forms of collective knowledge in unique aesthetic pieces. Secondly, as a cultural manifestation, APB symbolises a reconnection with more holistic states of being that aim at representing the true nature of *brasilidade*. Lastly, as a marketable product, APB offers an alternative route to reconnect with cultural practices considered authentic, thus drastically differing from mass-produced goods. While the state has established cultural policies that have incorporated APB into the national identity, the art industry has strategically capitalised on its socio-symbolic meaning to directly connect it with the idea of *brasilidade*, which is the term chosen in many exhibitions to indicate how APB has come to be seen as essential in the nation-building process, and more recently, to fulfil national branding goals. One of the most recent exhibitions confirming this approach was “Brasiliidade na Arte Popular,” which displayed part of the collection of the Museu Casa do Pontal, considered one of the most important private collections in this field, at the headquarters of the Centro Sebrae de Referência do Artesanato Brasileiro (CRAB)—a branch specialised in handicrafts of the Serviço Brasileiro de apoio às Micro e Pequenas Empresas (SEBRAE)—in Rio de Janeiro city in 2019 (fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Exhibition “Brasilidade na Arte Popular” – Museu Casa do Pontal collection, CRAB headquarters.

APB fulfils therefore a dual symbolic function: as a repository of cultural memory, it serves as the carrier and disseminator of *saberes e fazeres* of Brazilian peoples, and in the process also serving to expand the “official historiography” with other forms of symbolic representation that have not solely centred on the memory built by the state (Erll 45). Jan Assmann considers cultural memory a form of “historical consciousness,” in which the collective brings the past into the present, hence actively participating in the meaning-making of the community’s identity (113–14). These reminiscences are manifested in mediated symbolic creations, such as artworks. Consequently, when APB artists incorporate mnemonic elements from their communities’ experiences, their works build, in fact, identity bridges. It is in this context that in its current value as the chosen cultural realm to serve the task of “branding the nation,” APB has become, in fact, an ontological shelter from the modern neoliberal world, providing a form of symbolic refuge from the multiple forms of alienation created by the consumer society. It is ontological as these artistic-symbolic artefacts facilitate a connection with forms of being and existence that the Western-modern world relegated to a place of inferiority for not complying with the rational and positivistic values that define it, and which were promoted and imposed through the colonial enterprises.

In addition, Hannah Arendt states that the modern world results from the reification of human labour within a system of mass production that has deprived most of humankind of enjoyment of the world they have themselves created: “laboring class, which literally lived

from hand to mouth, stood not only directly under the compelling urgency of life's necessity but was at the same time alienated from all cares and worries which did not immediately follow from the life process itself" (255). In that context, *Homo Faber*'s efforts end up generating a disenchantment of existence, or as Arendt puts it, an alienation from the world.

The apex of this disenchantment is reached in the current neoliberal era through the market's complete deregulation, hence transforming it "into the organising principle of the entire social structure," also expanding to the subjective realm, when individuals are made to believe they are solely responsible for their own success and "failures," as they no longer recognise themselves as an interdependent part of a whole society (Pino-Ojeda 201). This echoes Lyotard's assertion on the failures of modernity's "grand narratives," challenging the universality of their "narratives of progress, of socialism, of abundance, of knowledge" that were supposed to benefit the modern social corpus (*Differend* xiii). Following Lyotard, Jameson emphasises the sense of incompleteness left by modernity, which produces a generalised feeling of abandonment among individuals, since in modern society "utopian ambitions were unrealisable, and its formal innovations exhausted" (Jameson, Foreword xvii). By failing to guarantee the ideal of human emancipation, modern grand narratives give way to difference, or to "the little narrative ... [that] remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention" (Lyotard, *Postmodern* 60), through which one seeks local or individual solutions to the struggles created by the current socioeconomic system. Such a collapse of grand narratives is one of the avenues that explain the attractiveness in the artistic representations of those previously oppressed cultures, that is, those that have always existed on the fringes of the Western-model world, as inferior or "uncivilised." It also illuminates the relevance that APB find where the quest for personal fulfilment is sought in localised time and space respites, in un-serialised, unique realities, which in the context of art and culture is what grants authenticity. These little narratives manifest a desire "for the realisation of the fantasy to seize reality"

(Lyotard, *Postmodern* 82). Inasmuch as reality is only real when contextualised, “difference” becomes the antithesis to the homogenising totality of modernity.

As an “imaginative, normative, prescriptive, and future-oriented” concept (Hayden and El-Ojeili 2), utopia relates to a critical position towards the deficiencies of the present to accomplish the promised better life. From a political perspective, utopia is seen as a desire for radical transformation in the current social and cultural reality to overcome human inequalities and ecological imbalances (Tie 24-25). Ernst Bloch states that utopia is the inherent principle of human hope, of “venturing beyond” (4), part of the process of imagining alternatives to current social designs. In his view, rather than being unattainable, utopian thinking has the function of manifesting a discourse of the “not-yet-conscious ... [and] psychologically anticipates a real-possible” (144). In this quest, art plays a key role, insofar as it serves as “a laboratory ... of implemented possibilities” (Bloch 216). Within this framework, the concept proposed here is “micro-utopia” in order to describe those socio-culturally displaced realms, those left out from the macro-narrative referred to by Lyotard. Likewise, instead of representing the “non-place” described by Thomas More in his classical *Utopia* (1551), these previously neglected ontological spaces have in fact survived in the interstices of the modern hegemonic society, coexisting from the margins with the modern grand narratives. As such, APB creates a metaphorical place of refuge from multiple forms of discontent, far from the modern disenchantment and alienation described by Arendt. As a micro-utopia, APB offers the possibility of rediscovering and reconnecting with those forms of cultural memory and ethos that modernity so categorically had rejected.

From this perspective, APB become a minor narrative, authenticated by the artists’ direct connection with their communities and their system of beliefs. It thus functions as a material representation of ontological and cultural alternatives. The need to position “local cultures against metropolitan norms” (Zamora and Kaup 7) becomes a maxim in the

epistemological constructions of Latin America as a place and culture, which Boaventura de Sousa Santos summarises as the “Baroque ethos,” or the “cultural conscience” of the continent (68). The baroque aesthetics represented the desire to differentiate from Eurocentric models to create Latin America’s own cultural signature. Haroldo de Campos states that in the baroque epistemology developed in Latin America, the anthropophagic ideals are already clearly outlined in an attempt to deconstruct the “logocentrism we inherited from the West” (328). In so doing, the linearity of official historiography is replaced by the constellation of cultural possibilities found on the margins of history, which leads to an increased appreciation of otherness.

For Santos, the Latin American baroque ethos is “the manifestation of an extreme instance of center’s weakness,” which, in order to legitimise itself on the margins of colonial centres of power, resorts to eccentricity, exaggeration, and imaginative turbulence (57–58). Santos states that in Latin America the baroque subjectivity form is fractal, free, exuberant, and constituted by two fundamental elements: *sfumato* and *mestizaje*. The *sfumato* idea alludes to the blur effect that takes place in the borders of a baroque painting, which, in the baroque ethos would enable the contact between different worlds and create “cross-cultural dialogues” (59). In this context, *mestizaje* is the action of creating new meanings by utilising the fragments of worlds that *sfumato* brought together. From this perspective, it can be asserted that APB conciliates heterogeneous representations of popular ways of living from all over the country while facilitating interaction between different social classes through symbolic and market exchanges.

Paradoxically, in the consumer society, the same market that creates multiple forms of alienation is the one promising redemption by offering access to goods bestowed with authenticity. As Christopher Howard states, to the extent that authenticity functions as a social and relational attribute to identify what modern society has destroyed, it also perpetuates the

capitalist need to dominate the yet uncorrupted forms of life (98). In this sense, in the neoliberal society, the so-called “authentic consumption ... [is placed in] opposition to a supposedly alienated form of mass consumerism” (Umbach and Humphrey 96). By narrating these local histories, more connected to pre-modern forms of cultural memory and, therefore, less influenced by the neoliberal rationale, APB henceforth becomes central to meeting the nostalgic need for authentic forms of life that move away from the homogeneity and universality represented in the modern society. At the same time, this local minor narrative is only fulfilled when APB partakes in market exchanges and cultural trades as an authentic commodity, mediated by museums, art galleries, and retailers.

In the attempt to reach those consumers that want to reconnect with the cultural memory of popular cultures through such authentic consumption, some APB artists actively participate in government programmes that offer an entrepreneurial orientation.⁵³ To sell their products, other artists resort instead to different cultural intermediaries, such as collectors, gallery owners and retailers,⁵⁴ who, ironically, hope to keep the artists away from the influences of the market. This suggests that maintaining APB artists’ socio-cultural conditions of oppression is a prerequisite for securing the aura to their artworks (as will be explored in Chapters Three and Four). The promotion of *brasilidade* through the heritage status granted by the state indicates, therefore, that APB fulfils the role of a *micro-utopia* for consumers alone, who are attracted by the artistic appeal promoted by cultural intermediaries, those ultimately responsible for facilitating its commercial success.

⁵³ The Federal Law no. 13.180, enacted on October 22, 2015, recognises artisanship as a formal occupation and enables popular artists to register as artisans in the Programme for the Brazilian Crafts, hence being qualified to perform business functions, such as issuing invoices and paying taxes. The SEBRAE, a private non-profit social interest entity operates the handicrafts programme, which thereby situates the artisans as micro and small entrepreneurs. The formalisation of occupation for popular artists and artisans facilitated the action of CRAB with the popular creators, who could then be framed as service providers.

⁵⁴ The 2019 annual report of the non-profit organisation ARTESOL, which has created a network of actors involved in APB circuits, listed fifty-nine shops and twenty-two cultural institutions such as galleries and museums specialised in artisanal and APB products (See ARTESOL).

From the APB artists' point of view, micro-utopia has to be understood in a different way: it allows escaping from multiple and sustained forms of exploitation. The consent to sharing the popular artists' *saberes e fazeres* as micro-utopias in an equally exploitative marketplace lies in the fact that the oppressive conditions and ensuing socioeconomic uncertainties are higher without this possibility.

In this regard, using micro-utopia as a theoretical lens allows us to recognise that there are collective experiences still embedded in certain marginalised spaces of the neoliberal society, which have however not yet conformed to market forms of fundamentalism. APB therefore opens paths for de-alienation to the different actors it involves. Although art can certainly not change people's existence, it nourishes the human longing for hope and completion, acting as a "metacultural critique of late modern life" (Howard 114). As such, APB's operation within the neoliberal market logic materialises within the confines of a micro-utopia a yearning does not aim at awakening a revolutionary impulse, but rather it works as a vessel for alternative life potentials in the present and, to a certain extent, assists in diminishing what Darcy Ribeiro calls "the social irresponsibility of neoliberalism" (*Brazilian* 172).

Simulating Authenticity and Cultural Capital

Based on a significant body of publications on APB,⁵⁵ their exhibitions over the last seventy years, and the scenario described above, my research identifies three categories of popular artists:

- i. Artists with no institutional formal training or education or who do not follow art's established canonical conventions. Initially, they have little or no contact with the art world and are often "discovered" by agents who act as cultural intermediaries,

⁵⁵ See, for example, Coimbra; Frota; Lima and Lima; Naves, Montes, and Monte-Mór; Name and Yassuda; Pontes; Brasil - Ministério da Ação Social.

and who assist them in gaining visibility. In most cases, these artists are immersed in a community that practises traditional manual skills, thus displaying artisanship abilities that allow them to create artistic objects with no utilitarian purpose. Then, the artist stands out as an individual from the community but continues to produce with the same artisan techniques. Under these circumstances, it is common for family members or the community to work together with the artists, following the style created by them. A kind of school is created around the artists who are later considered a *mestre* by their community. Some apprentices finally differentiate themselves in creating and achieving an individual style. At this point, the community is already aware of the external value given by the art market, so they work to meet such demands and expectations.

- ii. The artists are self-taught or trained within a community that has already been identified as a centre of APB production. The prestige already given to popular artists from the community is what motivate other members to become artists. They usually take advantage of manual skills from their previous occupations, such as bricklayer, carpenter, or blacksmith. External agents may also encourage them to choose to supply the art market with new names. These artists seek their own style simultaneously with trying to maintain a link with the language of APB already recognised in the region, either by using the same materials and techniques, by retaining certain theme choices, or by maintaining certain formal qualities in their works.
- iii. In a third case, artists are “discovered” in mental health institutions who find relief for their disturbances in artistic expression. Alternatively, even if they are not patients in treatment, they are identified in underprivileged communities as persons who create driven by an existential need. This category relates to the *Art Brut* or

Outsider Art, inasmuch as the artistic creation blends with the artist subject, who, with a mix of mental imbalance and inner genius, uses the art to make a place for themselves in the world. Despite the attempt to coin the term *arte incomum* ‘uncommon art’ (Andriolo) to identify this category, these artists’ works usually appear in publications and exhibitions mixed in with those of the two categories previously described.

In all three cases, an exogenous agent, either from the private or the government sectors, is behind the assignment of these works to the category of artistic creation. Furthermore, it is also essential to consider two questions regarding the art consumption experience: who the general consumers are and what attracts them to these products. The following chapters will elaborate on these guiding questions in the contemporary Brazilian context, as well as on its positioning on the global stage. To this end, central theoretical concepts need to be explored.

Cultural capital is relevant for understanding taste differences when valuing high or popular cultures consumed by different social classes (Bourdieu and Wacquant 295). This is so because cultural consumption practices reproduce already established social patterns of domination. Those who occupy dominant positions within the field of art and culture, such as scholars, journalists, and professionals with tertiary education, define what is considered an erudite culture and impose a binary view by placing what comes from lower classes as popular cultures or a cultural “other.” As part of “cultural competence” acquired through formal education and social interactions, those specific social groups have also been building a particular taste for APB for various reasons, but mainly due to the prevalent influence left by Brazil’s modernist movements discussed earlier. This “habitus” facilitates an artistic or aesthetic contemplation to appreciate not only “proper” works of art, but “everything in the world, including cultural objects which are not yet consecrated—such as, at one time, primitive arts, or, nowadays, popular photography or kitsch—and natural objects” (Bourdieu, *Distinction*

xxvi).

Storey affirms that the distinction between high and popular cultures took place in the second half of the nineteenth century through a “selective appropriation by elite social groups of aspects of what had been until then a shared public culture” (*Inventing* 32). By considering these strategies of “aesthetic enlightenment and social validation” (39), it is possible to draw a parallel, for instance, with those Brazilian popular cultures that have been validated as part of the national identity, namely, Samba de Roda, Capoeira, Wajãpi Indigenous body paintings.⁵⁶ They are considered today to be cultural heritage, exhibited in institutional spaces, but only after being “sanitised” to be formally appreciated by higher social classes.

Similarly, APB has been endorsed only after being appreciated as artistically worthy by elite consumers, who decode meanings not envisioned by its creators. The progressive incorporation of APB in exhibition spaces is what has been instrumental in consolidating its appreciation. Nevertheless, the flawed relationship between cultural institutions and the general educational system does not prepare a broader audience for the consumption of APB. For instance, Eurocentric patterns have structured the art and cultural modules included on the primary school curriculum, and just recently, the history of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous cultures has been introduced in schools’ didactic materials and as subject courses (in compliance with Federal Laws no.10.639/2003 and no.11.645/2008 (Brazil, Presidência da República, Casa Civil). However, it has not yet been implemented in the whole country. Hence, APB faces a contradictory status. It can be seen as inclusive when allowing popular artists to enter the art world, yet a limited public appreciates its artistic merits.

On the one hand, the need for an “illustrated” gaze able to appreciate APB guides this aesthetic experience, perpetuating then, Western modern paradigms. At the same time, the

⁵⁶ See footnote 23, p.21.

appreciation of Brazil's popular cultural and artistic manifestations, initiated by the anthropophagic movement of the 1920s, although driven by an intellectual elite, represented a significant step towards redirecting the gaze from Europe to Brazil's own geographical and cultural reality. On the other hand, people's supposed inability to appreciate popular artistic creations is directly associated with the colonisation of the ways of living that are not in line with the Eurocentric models. As Enrique Dussel states, for five hundred years Western aesthetics' quest for centrality and universality has denied other cultural worlds ("Siete hipótesis" 35). This negation of popular cultures has spread through the internal coloniality of one class over others, so the ways of understanding the world and interpreting reality become guided by the dominant standards. Thus, the gaze, the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting in the world are also colonised. Following Franz Fanon, Anders Breidlid explains that the ultimate consequence of colonisation is the colonisation of the mind, and by internalising Western discourses, the colonised minds negate their own values (11). Similarly, Paulo Freire associates this colonisation of the self with the self-deprecation that "derives from their internalisation of the opinion the oppressors hold of them [the people]" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 63). These contradictions between having one's own culture valued by cultural heritage policies and by a group of enthusiasts in the art world and, simultaneously, remaining in a condition of oppression, have permeated the entire process of valorisation of the APB as an authentic Brazilian production, points that will be explored in the following chapters.

The concept of "mass culture" is useful to understand other forms of "mind colonisation" instigated by mechanical techniques that produce serial cultural artefacts (Hall and Whannel 36). Considering that homogeneity is its more salient feature, mass culture efficiently works to "maintain social authority" (Storey, *Inventing* 27), hence prompting alienating effects and corrupted versions of popular cultures in which originality is overshadowed by formulaic repetition. This negative result has provoked the need to find or

protect an “authentic” culture, which Storey describes as “a utopian space, keeping alive the desire for a better world beyond the confines of the present” (*Cultural Theory* 194). Such an authentic culture is not necessarily just within traditions but also within a non-indoctrinated production, as such, outside the exploitative rules of the capitalist society. In this sense, what is authentic in modernity is to be found in subversive spaces, in the margins of the system, in the different ways in which the modern project has been globally implemented, in the “off-modern” to employ Svetlana Boym’s term (30). This understanding runs in parallel with the modern need to affirm existential integrity (Golomb 79), which results from an individual search for distinction as a global response to the cultural system imposed by mass production (Baudrillard, *System*).

Indeed, the desire for authenticity in the “era of mechanical reproduction” (Benjamin 251-83) pursues an effort to avoid the disappearance of “singularity” in artistic creation. In other words, and using Fredric Jameson’s terms, praise for singularity represents a resistance against homogenisation of modern universal categories (“Aesthetics” 101–32). The machine-derived culture has meant that the auratic meanings must be found elsewhere rather than in the uniqueness of the artwork since it can be indefinitely replicated until the difference between original and copy becomes unrecognisable. The valorisation of APB by Brazilian cultural intermediaries is, therefore, somehow similar to the aspirations of the European modernists, and later to that of collectors of Outsider art and *art brut*, or of those considered on the margins of society, who identify in these non-mainstream art’s forms a link between the formal freedom of the creator and the ensuing maintenance of their authenticity (Fine; Lindholm).

Walter Benjamin’s definition of aura as “the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be” (255) synthesises the “unapproachability” (272) of the artwork due to its cult value. Thus, an auratic distance is retained, creating a gap between the manner of appreciating art and everyday life objects. In the case of APB, pieces can be continually reproduced and can

still bear their unique status, indicating that their auratic sense is situated not in the object itself but in the meanings it emanates. What is really being consumed are the emotions and sensations it exhales, activated by the cultural memories it embodies and brings along. Such mnemonic registry is not only appreciated for its documenting value of life experiences, which would attribute to the object of APB a purely ethnographic status, as the encounter with these meanings is mobilised through an aesthetic experience. They are perceived as an innate expressive capacity of the popular artist, who, without access to formal education and maintaining a practice that goes against the homogenisation of the industrial era, remains authentic in the eyes of the consuming public. From this perspective, in socially and economically deprived places, highly affected by colonial domination, forms of artistic expression have been safeguarded, thus their auratic meanings have survived as well.

By consuming these artistic objects, the public acquires a product bestowed with authenticity, an intangible value that is also transferred to them, thereby distinguishing themselves from the general consumers of mass-produced goods. Although this negotiation can be seen as the usual formula to assert a certain form of status, what is outstanding in this instance is that the “prestige” of the pieces is derived from an “aura” of the “oppressed,” whose culture is valued today as a micro-utopia. For the above reasons, the standardisation introduced by the technological apparatuses of the cultural industry appears as a turning point for understanding popular cultures today. Insofar as the valorisation of popular cultures has been built on the notion of authenticity, there are no aims to standardise or mass-produce APB. On the contrary, exclusivity and the guarantee of a single handmade piece resulting from an individual creative process are its marks of distinction (Adorno 202–14). However, the marketisation of APB does require balancing its authenticity values with standardisation patterns, which Adorno describes as “pseudo-individualisation,” in order to be commercialised in the high-quality market. Then, a simulation is played in the standardisation mechanism,

keeping the notion of a handmade product.

Another result of the commodification ensuing from the culture industries is its loosening of old cultural boundaries. What was once considered “serious” or “popular” art-culture can switch places according to new interpretations (DiMaggio and Mukhtar 171). APB participates in high-class settings to this extent, albeit that does not remove the popular from its subordinate condition. To be traded, these artworks move from the places where they are produced, but not the artists, or their social conditions. This suggests that its cultural and artistic value relies precisely on the fact that it is made in its authentic place of origin.

A Refined Taste for Authenticity and Nostalgia

In the late 1990s, research related to cultural consumption pointed towards new understandings on the theories of taste, which were mainly developed by Pierre Bourdieu. Insofar as the exchange of information has progressively increased with globalisation, the consumer experience defined as belonging to “snob” or “slob” tastes was deemed partial and insufficient. What has been proposed is that high social classes have in fact acquired “omnivorous” patterns of consumption, incorporating popular cultural elements in their cultural diets, while lower classes have maintained a more limited range of consumption (Peterson and Kern). In Brazil, Danielle Hedegard has analysed the omnivorous consumption by foreign tourists, who aim to experience the “cultural other” by joining, for instance, capoeira classes (“Blackness”; “Transactional”). For Hedegard, one of the high-class international tourist’s consumption features is their desire to experience distant social cultures, not easily accessible for everyone (“Blackness”). Besides the analyses of international tourists in Brazil, the author claims that to reinforce their own status, Brazilian elites tend to valorise Western global culture and “state-nationalized cultural

objects ... though valorized in estheticized forms or through complex styles of appreciation” (“Transnational” 54–55).

The omnivorous theory has not yet been matched with rising worldwide attraction for diversity, as what still prevails is the idea of refinement of taste (Rossman and Peterson). Despite this, it is evident that high-class consumers are more willing to try different cultural products as a way of acknowledging their place in a multicultural society. Therefore, the social distinction is established by the range of consumption and the possibilities of access given by economic power. As Renato Ortiz posits, “the opposition ‘erudite culture’ versus ‘popular culture’ is substituted by another: “those who go out a lot” versus “those who stay at home” (“Legitimacy” 493).

What Peterson called omnivorous culture Mike Featherstone describes as postmodern society’s eagerness for consuming experiences to fulfil a new lifestyle. In this sense, Featherstone contends that the commodification of culture has given origin to a stylisation of life, or an aestheticisation of the everyday, where the difference between the consumption of high or popular cultures will depend on what messages the consumers want to convey. Ultimately, this leads to the formation of new social entities, in which cultural institutions, such as museums, have to be re-signified to attract larger audiences. This repositioning of consumer patterns in which different types of artistic-cultural productions are mixed is said to be a result of a multicultural valorisation in a globalised world.

The discussion around the insertion of popular cultures into museum spaces and within national cultural heritage endeavours must also include the question of what happens when APB occupy elite spaces that were previously denied to this art. Another question is the extent to which this phenomenon has turned the “art from the people” into a highbrow set to be consumed by higher classes or in which ways APB exhibitions are a result of the transformation of cultural institutions into more democratic and inclusive entities. Insofar

as cultural consumption is considered a social activity, some mediators act as guides who determine what should or should not be consumed. The interaction between the art world enthusiasts and the socio-cultural context where they meet are central to understanding artistic production and the processes of exchange and legitimation. The main shortcoming in this interface is that when a good is transferred from a “niche to mainstream,” it can affect market demand as well as its symbolic values (Currid). In other words, it can compromise its authenticity.

In the artistic field, authenticity is associated with provenance or authorship (Baudrillard, *System* 76; Lindholm 13). When an art piece’s integrity is identified as unadulterated by standardisation dynamics, and is located in borderline spaces, that is, regions not yet devoured by the advances of modernisation, authenticity becomes attached to nostalgia. Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as a “rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress” (xv). It therefore involves a desire to return to a lost time space that may never have existed. Boym explains that, in an attempt to escape the universalising narrative of progress created by modernity, in an ambivalent way, nostalgia seeks to give meaning to the past in its multiple possibilities from where alternatives for the future can be imagined. In her words, “marginalia of a given époque doesn’t simply become its memorabilia; it might contain the kernels of the future” (31). In this sense, nostalgia can connect with collective memories, which subsequently are personalised in individual constructed memories that offer other accounts for the future.

Within this referential framework, APB seems to maintain at once their heritage status while also retaining artistic and market appeal, which—through nostalgia—facilitates a “materialisation of the immaterial” (Boym xvii). This is done by making accessible to the consumer an object with “authentic” value, one bestowed with the power to satisfy “nostalgic” feelings. This representation of a reality far from that experienced by

the actual consumer grants the aura of the artistic object while evoking utopian possibilities.

Nowadays, APB has established a market exchange between the people and higher-class consumers. Concurrently, higher classes only consume it because it is made by the people, for this stamp of socio-cultural origin provides an authentic value. The experiences may take place in specific spaces: museums, galleries, and art fairs, or by visiting the artist in his community to see *in situ* the creation process, inasmuch as “the idea of authenticity is so central that seeing the artist in his ‘natural setting’ validates the work” (Fine 151). Critical analytical debates emerged from heritage and the tourist industries sectors often refer to the “spectacularisation” of popular cultures. What prevails is the interest in disseminating it as part of promoting national identity or branding. A consequence is that, in the process, APB can lose its “original” symbolic value by becoming a simulated version of itself or a representation specifically manufactured to cater for “others.”⁵⁷

Following Baudrillard, this thesis understands simulation as the process originating from a reality where it is no longer possible to discern differences “between real and imaginary” (“Precession” 362). In this new context, both traditional and contemporary expressions engage in simulated realities to provide marketable experiences about the popular. Some of these, although transformed, somehow succeed in retaining traces of an ancient time, and can, therefore, claim to be authentic. When applying this discussion to APB, it can be inferred that it corresponds to a simulation that has been progressively incorporated into the reality of a popular creation while at the same time complying with art world demands for authenticity. In this circumstance, while still connected with local realities, APB would work to create an echo that narrows the gap between past and present,

⁵⁷ Analogous examples on the issue of cultural adaptation for consumption purposes can be found in some Brazilian indigenous communities from the Amazon region, who select or even make up some dances and rituals to be exhibited for tourists (Morris). This is similar to the struggles of *Candomblé* Afro-descendant religion, which has been forced to adapt its rituals in order to fit into the concept of heritage (Sansi).

with no distinction between tradition and fantasy, hence generating a form of embodied nostalgia.

In APB, the traditional bonds are highlighted through what García Canclini calls the “dramatisation of patrimony,” a sort of performance in commemorations, monuments, museums, where a concerted “effort to simulate that there is an origin, a founding substance, concerning which we should act today” (*Hybrid Cultures* 110) is enacted. Consequently, a simulated reality adapted to respond to the market and tourism logic progressively becomes a traditional symbol of place, with which the inhabitants identify themselves. Ultimately, it does not matter if the traditional origins of woodcarving or the winemaking process are real or fictional, or even if the fantastic creation of a Middle Earth (as in Aotearoa New Zealand) can make a whole country feel identified or not. What matters is that it enhances a competitive identity that can be later considered cultural heritage. On a less cynical note, when analysing Eric Hobsbawm’s idea of “invented traditions”—in which practices are re-elaborated but maintain in the present levels of continuity with the past—Boym argues that they contribute to the construction of, or to strengthening a lost sense of cohesion and community “and offer a comforting collective script for individual longing” (42). In this manner, APB’s contemporary forms of re-elaboration can acquire different meanings for creators, promoters, and consumers alike through negotiations that at times emphasise the marketable aspects of this cultural manifestation and sometimes accentuate transformative capacities for the popular artists’ life conditions.

Art and Heritage Industries and the Management of APB

The recognition of popular artists as individual creators within the art world has been facilitated through publications, art fairs and exhibitions. Similarly, APB’s symbolic and anthropological value, and subsequent status as cultural heritage has reached a new level as

APB enters the commercial universe as “art” and “design” objects. The consumers have been responsible for assigning some kind of “mystic halo” to the artworks—their aura—, whereas the artists are considered a sort of genius of pure invention. Angela Mascelani, current director of the Museu Casa do Pontal in Rio de Janeiro, explains APB’s ambiguous journey into the Brazilian plastic arts system:

Paradoxically, with the weakening of the prestige of folkloric studies, a new look at popular artistic production began to appear. Under the new perspective, a split occurs in the perception of the popular as necessarily devoid of individual authorship. In the art bias, in which the Renaissance ideal of “authorial genius” now stands, members of the popular strata can be seen as authors, as individuals with their own characteristics and original thinking.⁵⁸ (*Mundo* 28)

Mascelani acknowledges that although it is necessary to maintain the contextual relationship between APB, culture, and ways of living of the communities in which it is originated, “it is through the valuation of individual contributions, of singular authors, that production is affirmed contemporaneously as an ‘art world’” (13). Within this double reference of the individual and the collective, these works “materialise the presence of their authors in the world, expressing their points of view and experiences of life” (13).⁵⁹

However, although signing APB has become a frequent practice, there is an implicit complacency in accepting a blurred understanding on authorship seen as both an individual style, and a mark of communal repetition gained by following the legacy of their predecessors. This can be noticed when relatives start helping popular artists and progressively learn their unique style. When the primary artists are no longer able to work because of illness or ageing,

⁵⁸ “Paradoxalmente, será com o enfraquecimento do prestígio dos estudos folclóricos que começará a aparecer um novo olhar sobre a produção artística popular. Sob a nova perspectiva, ocorre uma cisão na percepção do popular como necessariamente desprovido de autoria individual. Pelo viés da arte, na qual vigora a ideia renascentista de “gênio autoral,” integrantes das camadas populares podem ser vistos como autores, como indivíduos portadores de características próprias e pensamento original.”

⁵⁹ “é por meio da valorização das contribuições individuais, das autorias singulares, que a produção se afirma contemporaneamente como um ‘mundo de arte’”; “concretizam a presença de seus autores no mundo, exprimindo seus pontos de vista e experiências de vida.”

their descendants carry on with the production to give continuity to those patterns, shapes, and motifs, while honouring the predecessor's signature. Even though each piece is unique, models can be repeated in response to market demands. Thus, APB is reproduced and maintained in a live system, which justifies its insertion in the intangible heritage policies.

From the governmental management of cultural heritage perspective, several Brazilian states are issuing public notices to acknowledge *mestres* who are considered living heritage (Mestres do Patrimônio Vivo). The Registration of Living Heritage, inspired by UNESCO's Living Human Treasures programme, was established in 1993 and discontinued in 2003 when the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage came into force. The plan encourages the protection of individuals who hold traditional knowledge and are responsible for transmitting this legacy to future generations, among whom popular artists are included (fig. 9).⁶⁰ Following the logic of continuity and aligned with the global trend of instrumentalising culture to achieve socioeconomic gains, the Brazilian government established the “Programa do Artesanato Brasileiro” ‘Programme for the Brazilian Crafts’ (PAB), in 1991, converted into law in 2015. PAB is responsible for introducing APB in the market as an entrepreneurial strategy—the programme is currently linked to the Ministry of Economy—and in this sector, APB is interpreted as handicrafts. Within the artisanal typologies, PAB recognises APB as an individualised form of creation in which artists express “identity aspects of the community or [their] imaginary”⁶¹ (Brazil, Ministério da Indústria, *Ordinance no. 1.007-SEI* Art 20, par. II). It also distinguishes artisanship from Indigenous or Quilombola communities, considering it a result of collective work.

⁶⁰ It is important to note that not all the *Mestres do Patrimônio Vivo* are popular artists and there are representatives of other intangible cultural practices that are granted the award, such as dances and celebrations. What is more, not all the popular artists that are identified as *mestres* have been granted with these public awards, although they have the government recognition and are included in the official cultural circuits.

⁶¹ “aspectos identitários da comunidade ou do imaginário do artista.”



Fig. 9. Clay sculptures at Mestre Vitalino's Family Gallery, Museu do Barro, Caruaru.

This programme engages with touristic actions that have pondered local cultural practices as economically attractive. Along with other crafts masters, popular artists are invited to promote their products through fairs and other events designed for artisanal production (Brazil, *Portal*). Similarly, the art market circuit has integrated this production, while several art galleries in the country's major cities have specialised in APB, which from the 1970s and 1980s have functioned as cultural intermediaries. The pieces are sold at higher prices, as they have been promoted as authentic products.⁶²

The multicultural model behind the identity policies established in Brazil in the 1980s has given a pre-eminence to ethnic identity marks. As said earlier, this production has been deeply geared to satisfy an exogenous gaze, without necessarily properly dealing with issues of racism or social and economic inequalities.⁶³ Because of that, socioeconomic disadvantages and marginalisation coexist with the new reality of art centres (Fialho). From a cultural perspective, it can be said that the broader society is living the ultimate neoliberal consequence,

⁶² The price range is approximately R\$30 to R\$30,000 (NZD 7.83 to NZD 7,825.11 using 2021 foreign currency exchange rates), varying according to the artist's fame and the place the artwork is sold.

⁶³ The definitions of multiculturalism, pluriculturalism and biculturalism will be explored in Chapter Two.

in which every nation is turned into colonies, with people treated as “natives” to serve a “global company” (Žižek 28–51). The market logic built upon the appreciation of cultural diversity has incorporated the “other’s uniqueness” into the global market. This way, it has been sustaining an exotic trend, valuing cultural differences as long as they can be subsumed into the universal pattern of capitalist organisation: as commodities at fairs, museums, and exhibitions, or as the combo-package of tourism and heritage experiences.

1.4. Peoples’ Arts within the Global Geopolitical Order

As the process undergone by APB is not unique to Brazil, it is relevant to look at it from a broader perspective to better evaluate points of commonality and difference. To this end, this section will address the theoretical foundation that will allow the establishment of a parallel with Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Mexico in Chapter Two, as countries where art produced by non-privileged sectors of general society has been endorsed and chosen to consolidate these nations’ identities.

When considering from a global perspective the strategic place countries have given to popular and Indigenous cultures, it becomes evident that this reflects a trend started at the end of World War II, when a set of development policies categorised countries following an international geopolitical order, and for which mainly macroeconomic indicators were considered. This is a moment when countries were classified as “developed” or “underdeveloped,” an order that followed a strictly consumption-based and capital accumulation logic on a planetary scale. The countries leading this initiative were responsible as well for establishing developmental parameters, a new set of traits that prevailed during the Cold War and are still current. Countries classified as underdeveloped were given the last places in the queue, as they were considered as lagging in the race for modernity. Several ratings emerged to situate political forces during the ensuing Cold War period, with the world

divided between the First World, or the West, and the Second World, of the Communist East, while the underdeveloped nation-states remained as the Third World, with a terminology that has persisted even after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (A. Escobar, “Making and Unmaking”; Esteva; Tomlinson; Sachs).

Although “Third World” was employed by international financial organisations, it was first and foremost a term adopted by the political leaders and intellectuals from Africa, Asia, and Latin America to name their own political project against colonialism and other forms of “neo-colonialism,” not always associated with territorial control (Prashad xv; 10). This project to resist such colonial and neo-colonial endeavours envisioned better worlds and constituted a collective consciousness that demanded justice, dignity, redistribution of resources and cultural recognition. It consisted of a “third force in world affairs” (Tomlinson 309), whose efforts were frustrated by the economic policies enforced by the countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which then controlled the existing institutions of international economic management.⁶⁴ The term Third World thus becomes directly associated with the indices of backwardness and underdevelopment, as mentioned earlier, standing in contrast to the Western world, which would supposedly hold capabilities for assisting the Third World on its path to development.⁶⁵

In the case of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, when the development blocs were defined, these countries managed to negotiate their adhesion to the OECD as members in 1971 and 1973, respectively. They thereby distanced themselves from the discussions of the so-called Third World, whose countries, such as Brazil, faced greater resistance in their attempts

⁶⁴ The OECD’s initial activities date back to 1948 when the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) was founded with Western European members. In 1961, it was reorganised as OECD, expanding its members to the US and Canada, and later Japan, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand (Leimgruber and Schmelzer 1).

⁶⁵ Further elaboration on international theories of development is beyond the scope of this thesis. For more information on the subject, see Tomlinson; Leimgruber and Schmelzer.

to join the organisation since they belonged to one of the “three less developed regions” (Hongler 149) of the world: Africa, Asia, and Latin America.⁶⁶

As already stated, the developmental paradigm was strictly based on economic growth, which was used to dictate the plans of action carried out by international organisations, such as the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund that used the per-capita gross national product (GNP) as a measure of progress (Esteva; Latouche and Bawtree). Following Pierre Senarclens, it would be possible to say that more than the breach presented by macro-economic figures, the distance between the “developed” and the “underdeveloped” countries was primarily built on promoting the social and cultural norms imposed by the Western industrialised countries, which consequently disavowed alternative ways of living.

In countries then classified as “Third World,” such a hierarchical discourse led to denying their own ancestral cultures. In the “First World,” the same ideology ignored the bubbles of discrimination that persisted within their own territories, overshadowing at the local level the differences between the existing Indigenous peoples, diasporic migrants from various parts of the globe, and descendants of European settlers. The developmental rationale thus disavowed cultures that differed from the hegemonic Western model, understanding these “culture[s] as a residual variable, to disappear with the advance of modernisation” (A. Escobar, “Making and Unmaking” 91). That is, to privilege the “First/Third” world model, it was necessary to obscure all other cultures. By default, this very exclusionary process, which implicitly recognises the existence of distinct cultures, sets the conditions for discriminatory practices, thus, in turn, setting in motion new forms of colonisation, whose effects hitherto operate and nurture unequal exchanges among different regions around the planet (A. Escobar,

⁶⁶ In this sense, Australia and New Zealand benefitted, among other aspects, by their geographic location. Japan, seen by OECD as the only exception of Asian countries, also did not face any resistance to its adhesion (see Patricia Hongler). On Australia and New Zealand, OECD accession process, see Peter Carroll.

“Making and Unmaking”; Esteva).

During the 1980s, both Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies pursued conceptual and practical alternatives, alerting exploited countries about the importance of not reproducing Eurocentric standards or those promoted by the United States. Indeed, counteracting intellectual thinking about otherness and against the imposition of the Western-modern model have been actively addressed in previous decades, with authors like Franz Fanon, considered to be the forerunners of such studies, a major debate that would go beyond the framework of this thesis immediate task.⁶⁷ While Indigenous leaders had long rejected these approaches, in the late 1980s, intellectuals began to question this developmental logic, which had been supporting a binary view of global dependence, and placing in a position of inferiority several forms of social and cultural organisation that differ from the Western model. From this perspective, post-developmental theories started to question the suitability of classifications based on economic growth and consumption patterns within the neoliberal system (Sachs). In parallel, postcolonial critique (Bhabha; Spivak) and Decolonial Studies (Mignolo and Walsh) pursue conceptual and practical alternatives to release exploited countries from the need to reproduce Eurocentric and United States standards.

It is within this framework that the concept of the Global South emerges as one of the most important theories to contest the Western hegemonic cultural model.⁶⁸ Despite being used as an updated concept that identifies developing countries, or those with the lowest income rates according to the World Bank (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 13), this term has been accepted

⁶⁷ Regarding this topic, see Pramod K Nayar; and Linda T. Smith.

⁶⁸ This thesis acknowledges the Indigenous scholarship critique over decolonial concepts developed in academic spaces from the North, such as “the Global South” that can represent co-optation of Indigenous and African-descend peoples’ knowledge “from the South to the North” (Cusicanqui 102) to emulate a decolonial discourse in dialogue with these groups. There is a significant divide among Indigenous scholars who resist partaking in postcolonial discussions, as this line of thought may be interpreted as an attempt to reinscribe Western intellectuality into the centrality of the world definition academic task. What is more, those intellectual debates may perpetuate formal scholarship while disregarding orality and other forms of creating and sharing knowledge (L. T. Smith 50–51). However, as a researcher from the South and for the purposes of this thesis, the framework established by the Global South theory enables the creation of an epistemic space where hegemonic positions can be contested, and alternative approaches can emerge.

in academia as a battleground that challenges top-down impositions from developed countries, acknowledging multi-centralities in current geopolitical international relations. Vijay Prashad conceptualises this ongoing phase of global history as “a world of protest, a whirlwind of creative activity” (9). As stated by Alfred López, the countries from the South, by recognising how these international bodies have used forms of discourse and economic policies as an attempt to subordinate them, can, therefore, elaborate new strategies for coping with or responding to neoliberalism. Based on these theories, the reference to the West—as opposed to the Global South—must be understood as an epistemic positioning rather than a strictly geographical location. Whereas the former represents the contemporary hegemonic model of civilisation imposed by dominant European countries and the United States, the latter acknowledges the part of the planet that is still subject to diverse forms of colonial experiences, thus suffering and resisting the daily effects imposed by globalisation (Mignolo, “Global”). Therefore, Western epistemologies and those articulated from the South indeed occupy opposite poles of power and resistance.

It is worth noting that such developmental classification does not reflect the actual levels of wealth enjoyed by individual countries. Although the Global South represents the group of most exploited countries, they are certainly not the poorest. Given its immeasurable natural wealth, it must be considered that Global-South countries have become the primary providers of human and material resources for the Global North in the form of natural commodities and labour force (Mignolo, “Global” 165). This abundance was utterly disregarded when setting up the post-World War II logic of development. By situating poverty and underdevelopment in the South, Western countries have obliterated their “south within.” Recognising these contradictions enables experiments for resilience against neoliberal impositions. In this sense, the concept of the Global South challenges this Western-centred paradigm while acknowledging multi-centralities in current geopolitical international relations.

It is well reviewed in the literature that Indigenous peoples' activism have been enacted under other frameworks rather than the Global South project.⁶⁹ The perils created by neoliberalism are also found in countries not geopolitically classified in the Global South category, such as Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.⁷⁰ Aram Ziai warns of the failure of developmental logic, which by prioritising economic criteria, has ignored negative indicators in these very same "developed" countries, which are not considered in the rankings of progress: "If one defined violent crime, racism, suicide, isolation, alienation, environmental destruction and the major indicators of a 'bad' or 'underdeveloped' society, the industrialised countries would hardly be at the top of the 'development' scale" (Ziai 8). When focusing on the historically oppressed groups in these non-Global South countries, it can be noticed that they are, in fact, among the most impacted by the consequences of development.⁷¹ Some scholars emphasise that the same conflicts against the systematic exploitation of specific communities also occur in Global North countries (L. T. Smith; Trefzer et al). These studies call for an awareness of the interplay between structures of power around the globe as well as of the interconnection between distinct populations when responding to transnational forces of capitalism (Trefzer et al. 3). Thus, "southern isles" are found across the globe, in which structural conditions of coloniality perpetuate not only transnationally but also internally within the national territory with processes of domination between different social groups.

From this perspective, Brazil, and Mexico, with the last one geographically located in the northern hemisphere, are part of the Global South, while Australia and Aotearoa New

⁶⁹ About this topic, see Maaka; Breidlid. For worldwide examples, see McKinley; and L. T. Smith.

⁷⁰ These countries are situated outside the Global South for their belonging to the Western culture (Mignolo, "Global").

⁷¹ As an illustration, suicide statistics in Aotearoa-New Zealand in 2016 show a rate of 20.3 per 100,000 population among Māori, compared to 9.5 among non-Māori (New Zealand, Ministry of Health). In the case of Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, when comparing suicide rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, states that in 2020, "intentional self-harm ranked as the 5th leading cause of death for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, while it is ranked 13th for the non-Indigenous population" (Australia, Bureau of Statistics).

Zealand, located in the southern hemisphere, are not considered part of the Global South, although they do contain those “southern isles,” or bubbles, across their own territories. In that regard, these four countries have been experiencing colonial continuity (Rabasa; Thomas 11) in a way that their main commonality is the condition of “oppressions within.”⁷²

Nonetheless, this research fully takes into account the indisputable differences between those countries in terms of territorial dimensions, population rate, and unique social and political history, as reflected in the following social statistics: The last censuses of these countries recorded 3.3% in Australia for Indigenous populations, 16.5% in Aotearoa New Zealand, 21.5% in Mexico and 0.38% in Brazil.⁷³ These statistics—especially in Mexico and Aotearoa New Zealand—assist in explaining why these countries have been more successful in implementing more effective affirmative action policies. Without overlooking the current levels of prejudice and economic inequality existing in these countries, Māori peoples are internationally acknowledged as successful in resisting assimilation and “maintaining a degree of autonomy in colonial New Zealand” (McCarthy, *Museums and Māori* 8). Likewise, Mexico’s Indigenous communities’ resilient attitude is considered a paradigmatic example for the Latin American region in terms of negotiations and counteractions against the state power, which influenced the political engagement of Indigenous movements throughout the continent (Dávalos 28–29).

Clearly, there are different contexts to which the artists belong, being that a popular community or an Indigenous nation. Especially in the cases of the Indigenous nations, the

⁷² Resistance against internal coloniality is the driving force for both groups, those nation-states participating in the Global South and Indigenous nations that still seek state-independent forms of self-representation. A discussion on how the Third World Project as a political project of resistance to forms of imperialism—in this thesis updated for the epistemic space of the Global South—can have its initial ideas reinvigorated through a solidarity collaboration with Indigenous nations and other forms of stateless groups (identified by some authors as the Fourth World). See Whetstone and Yilmaz.

⁷³ See Australia, Bureau of Statistics, *Estimates*; New Zealand, Stats; Mexico, INEGI; and Brazil, IBGE, *Pesquisa*. In contrast to the ratio for Indigenous peoples, 8.86% of Brazil’s population is identified as being Black, with 45.06% being identified as *pardo* (a mixture of Black and White descent), which indicates that more than half of the Brazilian population are of Afro-Brazilian ancestry.

recognition of the collective sense of belonging diverges from those established by the modern project of consolidating nation-states (Kymlicka). The participation of Indigenous peoples within the modern-colonial project prompts ongoing clashes in engaging with governmental institutions as such. These institutions must be seen as extensions of colonial forms of interaction within their respective nations (Williams and Schertzer). Therefore, indigeneity today confronts an ambiguity between defining oneself as Indigenous and as a modern nation-state citizen. It often carries different interpretations of sovereignty and self-determination, as is the case with the Treaty of Waitangi/ Te Tiriti o Waitangi signed in 1840 between the British Crown and several Māori chiefs in Aotearoa New Zealand, discussed further in the following chapter.

Arts' Role in the Global South and Southern Isles

The global geopolitical order consolidated after 1945 has additionally intervened in creating cultural and artistic classifications, not only between countries but also for culturally oppressed groups within nation-states. The imposed superiority of the Western norm over other existing forms of socio-cultural organisation, although disregarding the alternative models, creates a curiosity for unconventional ways of life within consumer society. This longing for knowing the “other” recalls the “noble savage” trope in Europe that presented a romantic view of the supposed natural life of Indigenous peoples as far more harmonious than urban life with its violence, poverty and alienation. It also resulted in an appraisal of otherness bringing to light the polarisation of two art worlds, the West and all the others, or, following Stuart Hall, “the West and the Rest” (“West”).

Despite occupying the uneven positions of centre and periphery in current international power dynamics, groups under oppression persist within these countries, and they share the fact that their creative manifestations are used to consolidate their country's national identity.

In this world-system approach, peripheral locations are defined as those “external to the Eurocentric rationale” (Palermo 9)⁷⁴. As a matter of course, the countries under consideration may occupy different levels of influence and dependence worldwide as well as within their specific geographic regions.⁷⁵ What is relevant for the present discussion is that, despite such dissimilar realities, in these countries the state has been relying on artistic and cultural forms that come socially from disenfranchised groups, which have been somewhat adjusted to fit into the contemporary Western art-culture system. The conditions of social and cultural oppression still prevailing are found on ethnic, Indigenous, and socioeconomic circumstances, which often overlap.

From a broader perspective, when art is categorised as popular, Indigenous, Aboriginal or Māori, such designations not only create meaning for their own collective but also respond to the image building adopted by each country. During this process, these artistic creations engage in conflictive social negotiations related to political representation in the public sphere, and they can represent either subordination to a dominant order, or rather convey a political positioning towards affirming one’s own identity. Accordingly, as suggested by García Canclini, to understand popular art as a cultural phenomenon that reflects a particular social reality, it is essential to consider the historical, political, and social conditions where this art has been created (*Transforming* 30). In this regard, the post-World War II geopolitical classifications are inadequate for explaining creative works across countries and cultures in the global era. These categories include the dyads developed/underdeveloped, First/Third-World, North/South, and West/East. This is primarily because such Western categorisations privilege

⁷⁴ “Exteriores a la razón eurocéntrica.”

⁷⁵ International Studies intellectuals have also claimed the notion of semi-periphery to avoid the strict dichotomies within the notion of centre-periphery. On this basis, semi-peripheral countries operate under the influence of processes from the centre (or the core) while being contingent on constant negotiations with peripheral countries. Although the common understanding has been to split Brazil and Mexico as underdeveloped and Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand as developed countries, over the years, all four countries have been included in lists of semi-peripheral countries, according to the World Power Index. See Daniel Morales Ruvalcaba.

economic positions that disregard the existing cultural and natural wealth of so-called oppressed societies.

Furthermore, such short sightedness expands when considering the current stage of globalisation, and it also challenges pre-existing national and social boundaries due to an increase in flow, not only in trading goods and services but also in terms of human mobility through migration or tourism (Appadurai 33–36). Culture, therefore, plays a central role in creating socio-political assertiveness in such a way that it circulates in distinct spaces and represents an “arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation” (Appadurai 44).

Considering the above, it is worth noting that this thesis subscribes to the understanding of the impossibility of categorising art, culture, and ways of life according to scales of development. As such, it aligns with Octavio Paz when he asserts that,

The notion of “underdevelopment” is an offshoot of the idea of social and economic progress. Aside from the fact that I am very much averse to reducing the plurality of cultures and the very destiny of man to a single model, industrial society, I have serious doubts as to whether the relationship between economic prosperity and artistic excellence is one of cause and effect. (19)

At the same time, the use by the state of artistic manifestations coming from socially and economically underprivileged groups to implement national agendas indicates a worldwide pattern. Even though Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, Māori art, *arte popular mexicano*, and APB embody diverse social, cultural, and artistic aspects and realms, they represent the art of peoples who share both an experience of domination and a close relationship with ancestral knowledge. They illustrate artistic expressions whose foundational values are in strict connection with worldviews from specific communities that still hold essential meanings for those communities in the present time. These artistic expressions constitute either collective or individual creations inspired on ancestral knowledge and shared life experiences. In this sense, these artworks—built on cultural memories—represent the merging of customary and

contemporary practices of peoples who, although fully immersed in current artistic local and global trends, feel primarily connected by a similar origin and history, thus sharing a unique sense of identity. Accordingly, the next chapter will be dedicated to creating a parallel between APB and other international endeavours.

CHAPTER II

Nation Branding Across Borders: Brazil in the Global Stage

Globalization, I want to suggest, must always begin at home. A just measure of global progress requires that we first evaluate how globalizing nations deal with ‘the difference within.’

– Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

2.1. From Oppressed Cultural Memories to a Valuable Cultural Asset

The task of building national identities has historically conveyed a discourse of those who occupy a hegemonic position, which has incurred in cultural erasure of oppressed groups (Godezenzi). Insofar as geopolitical categorisation corresponds to a system for centralising power, creative manifestations from around the world have also been embedded in a classification in which Western art “hold[s] the position of a ‘commanding point’” (Zabel 34). As discussed in the previous Chapter, several theoretical positions, such as the “Global South”, have challenged the developmentalist logic that maintains cultural hierarchies. The 1980s “Memory Boom” triggered a reassessment of cultural memories of long-silenced groups (A. Assmann, “Memory”; Jelin et al.), such as Indigenous peoples and other oppressed communities. This re-examination has also been supported by Decolonial thought’s increasing influence. Ironically, the current neoliberal market model finds ways of co-opting those previously ruptured cultural memories so they can serve the state’s agendas (Beasley-Murray and Moreiras). In that sense, the post-1945 paradigm has gone even further by instrumentalising culture, itself produced under “conditions of oppression.”

Furthermore, academic research about peripheral or semi-peripheral countries that are particularly oppressed by hegemonic forms of cultures, tend to use the same westernised oppressive ideas to explain their own local experiences (Osiel 263-64). In that sense, creative

manifestations in Latin America and Oceania are, in fact, immersed in a Western representation system, being produced and reproduced under a definition of art that was—at least initially—unfamiliar to them. As a result, when adjusted for modern aesthetic appreciation under terminologies such as “ethnic,” “Indigenous,” or “popular,” these artistic manifestations can end up perpetuating the same binary model of domination that has organised nation-state formation in the last two centuries. Esther Pasztory clarifies this need to establish “other’s culture” according to modern parameters as the way “westerners” found to continue consuming it while exempting themselves from assuming any form of responsibility for their colonial legacy:

Sorry, folks, the decision is, you are ethnic. This decision allows the westerner to have an alien other and not to have to live in a relatively homogeneous world in which all the difference has been eradicated. In this contemporary non-western art, there is a great plus to the westerner—one doesn’t have to feel guilty.

It is in light of this relationship between alternative forms of artistic expression and the modern system of representation, appreciation, and reproduction that this Chapter engages in a cross-cultural analysis. On the one hand, it will cover APB and *Arte Popular Mexicano* (APM), where Brazil and Mexico are placed as belonging to the Global South. On the other, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island (ATSI) art and Māori art are situated in what this research calls “southern isles” of Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, all operating nonetheless in conditions of colonality, despite their fundamental differences in terms of their colonial history. This chapter identifies the implications of the strategies implemented in governmental policies and official institutional spaces to preserve and promote arts whose represented peoples remain struggling to overcome socioeconomic and cultural gaps in society. It aims to place Brazil in a global perspective regarding how governmental institutions have been framing artistic and cultural expressions belonging to groups that historically engendered situations of oppression in their respective nations.

Each of the analysed cultural expressions uses specific materials, manual techniques and ancestral knowledge reassessed through contemporary lenses to achieve unique formal results. Nevertheless, beyond consideration about geographical and cultural differences, two noteworthy features do prevail. First, along with its national identity concerns, the state has reoriented these artistic manifestations to meet the market demands of the cultural and tourism industries. Second, labelling these arts with identifiers other than contemporary art normally highlights the fact that they belong to social groups who are on the fringes of the dominant social classes. Through an exogenous gaze, these artistic forms have been displayed in museums, art galleries, festivals, or fairs, in a way that, being outside the mainstream, constituted one of the first attributes to spark market interest. Some of these artists have been able to claim these representations back and have taken agency over their own culture, as can be seen in contemporary, urban-based Māori and ATSI artists. Other examples, such as the community-based Aboriginal artists in Central Australia, despite having a position in Australia's art market that is considered successful, show an ongoing dependence on the sponsorship of the institutional, cultural system to survive and do not have the market accomplishments reflected in their socioeconomic position.

Considering this shift from the nation-building project to nation branding, the present analysis aims at demonstrating that there is ample evidence about the instrumental use given to the artistic and cultural production of specific groups with underprivileged socioeconomic circumstances, and at times also enduring ethnic or identitarian forms of oppression, whose art is, nonetheless, chosen to represent their country's national identity. To this end, two main strands have been chosen to evaluate the official response towards peoples' art in each of the four studied countries. It is important to reiterate that the term "peoples" refers to the abstract and heterogeneous set of distinct collectives that face a context of oppression, as previously outlined. Thus, the identification of different artistic manifestations with the term "peoples"

art” aims to shed light on that shared experience of oppression through coloniality. The first strand to be analysed are cultural policies put forward by international and national domestic bodies. The second strand focus on how cultural institutions have been exhibiting peoples’ art following their local cultural policies. This last category pays attention to the approach adopted by museums and art galleries and art market positions regarding authorship, professionalisation and contemporary art events engagement.

A Descriptive Timeframe

Although the artistic outputs are not compared, a brief historical overview is provided to contextualise the discussion in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Mexico, and Brazil. What is today known as Australian Aboriginal art comprises a wide range of creative expressions, which have existed for over forty thousand years among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and which continue to evolve. These artistic manifestations differ regionally and utilise a variety of media, encompassing, for example, body paintings, sand sculptures, wood carving, feather and fibre weaving and baskets, memorial posts, ceremonial objects, all of which have for some time been subsumed under the categorisations of crafts or decorative arts (Morphy, “Moving” 4) (fig. 10). The transition of some of these practices into formats analogous to those conventionally adopted as “western art forms” (8), mainly acrylic painting on canvas, have resulted in Aboriginal art being progressively accepted as contemporary art. These artistic expressions are strongly linked to the Aboriginal ways of being in the world, hence participating in ritual, daily practices, generational transmission of stories and knowledge on territorial guidance and interrelation with “country,” which contains all the connections between people, spirituality and ancestry, the land with all living beings and natural resources (Australia, AIATSIS, “Welcome”; Rose 7–8). These art practices also address Indigenous creation stories, which bridge past, present and future in a timeless manner. This understanding

is commonly translated into English in a single term, the “Dreaming,” but which represents a satellite aggregating different explanations and worldviews for each cultural group (Nicholls). Furthermore, aboriginality encompasses experiences of social exclusion and resilience to racism and discrimination encountered both in remote and urban areas.



Fig. 10. Aboriginal art collection Art gallery of NSW–Sydney.

Laura Fisher states that the religious missions established in remote areas of Australia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often encouraged the production of Aboriginal arts and crafts “usually to raise money for the settlements” (6). However, it is since the 1970s that the state has been subsidising Aboriginal Arts to assist in a Reconciliation agenda (42).⁷⁶ The state strategies included the installation of community centres to build support for isolated areas that suffered from infrastructure and urban services deficiency, and lack of regular work. They exerted an important influence on the process of social empowerment of these peoples.⁷⁷ In 1971, one of these experiences, the Papunya Tula community, gave origin to the Western Desert Art Movement. With the guidance of the art teacher Geoffrey Bardon, some Aboriginal men started to paint the back of the school, later transitioning to canvas and board (V. Johnson

⁷⁶ For an overview of the Reconciliation period in Australia, from the 1967 Referendum to the 2008 National Apology to Australia’s Indigenous peoples, and the ensuing repositioning of Aboriginal Cultures see Laura Fisher 17–30.

⁷⁷ Currently, there are around a hundred and ten community art centres in Aboriginal communities in Desert Australia (Australia, Standing Committee 27).

1–2). Through the work carried out by Bardon, artistic representations previously created in stone, body adornment, sand and bark tree began to be made on canvas, enabling the insertion of Aboriginal art into artistic circuits.⁷⁸ Papunya Tula—and later Yuendumu (Carmichael and Kohen)—, became the most famous Aboriginal community in the art world, specialised in the “dot painting” style, and is no longer state-subsidised (fig.11).



Fig. 11. Façade of Papunya Tula Art Gallery, Alice Springs. In front of the building, Aboriginal peoples sell their paintings to tourists. Those who try to sell their work in the streets, have their paintings seen as less valued and of lower quality.

The ATSI art international recognition has as its milestone the exhibition “International Dreamings: Art Exhibition of Aboriginal Australia,” which toured New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles in 1988-90, showcasing the work of Papunya Tula Artists (V. Johnson 175). As a national watershed moment, Ronald Radford (6–7) highlights one of his curated exhibitions, “The Great Australian Art Exhibition 1788–1988” organised to commemorate Australia’s Bicentennial. Today, this new artistic positioning contributes to creating awareness about the violent past to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands peoples have been subjugated and the abusive conditions still present in many communities. At the same time, this resulted in two

⁷⁸ Albert Namatjira (1902–1959), who lived at Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission in the vicinity of Alice Springs, had already switched to painting on canvas, using watercolour technique, out of self-interest and was also taught by artists visiting the region in the 1930s. Although his work fell into popular taste when the country sought to assert its national identity by turning to the Australian Desert, it is only recently that his works have come to be regarded as an expression of aboriginality and not simply as mimicry of a western style. His legacy remains in development at the Iltja Ntjarra (Many Hands) Art Centre, with family descendants, artists who have also lived in Hermannsburg, or Aboriginal artists who want to paint in watercolour. See Aitken and Wareham.

coexisting realities within their artistic production: one of urban-based artists, and the other—which represents the majority—made up of artists located in remote communities.

Fisher explains that this divide between the artistic manifestations of remote and urban areas reflects Australian colonisation, politically and economically concentrated in the south of the continent and with the occupation of the northern and central regions only intensifying in the 1970s with mineral exploitation (106–8). Such exploitative activity has led to an awareness of the Aboriginal peoples' living conditions in those areas, prompting the state to exhibit these peoples' cultures as an avenue for reparation. However, the emphasis of the state on remote artists to define an “authentic” aboriginality has often pushed urban-based artists to a secondary position creating new forms of exclusion (37, 97, 108), even though they have greater autonomy to individually engage in the art world with a more political capacity.

In order to acknowledge cultural plurality, a long-standing demand of Aboriginal peoples in their resistance struggles in both political and cultural spheres, the government began to adopt in the 1990s the terminology of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts, identifying the geographical location also of peoples inhabiting not only regions of the mainland but also the Torres Strait Islands and the nearby north-eastern Australian coast (Dolan 56; Gardiner-Garden and Simon-Davies). In the art market context, however, reference to Aboriginal art usually remains. To highlight this heterogeneity, these populations are currently identified by language group. ATSI peoples comprise 250 different linguistic groups, including 800 dialects (Australia, AIATSIS, “Living Languages”), with symbolic varieties for visual representations of their culture, a complexity that has been simplified through homogenisation dynamics put forward for the purpose of Western assimilation.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori art comprises a wide range of formats. Some of these practices participate in the visual arts domain, such as ta moko ‘tattooing,’ raranga ‘weaving,’ whakairo ‘sculpture,’ and ‘kōwhaiwhai’ painted patterns, with gender separation customarily

occurring in some of them. Sydney Moko Mead declares that Māori art is an ancestral millennial art that permeates every aspect of Māori culture, connecting the person to the supernatural and today's world, as a member of a community, either at the level of iwi 'tribe,' hapū 'sub-tribe,' or whānau 'extended family.'⁷⁹ "They are anchor points in our genealogies and in our history. Without them, we have no position in society and no social reality" (*Māori Art* 207). The central defining element of Māori art is its understanding as taonga, "powerful symbols of tribal identity" (Tapsell, "The flight" 325), generically translated into English as "treasures." More than physical elements, taonga refers to a "powerful and all-embracing Māori concept" (326), encompassing material, spiritual and ancestral dimensions. Therefore, it demands a direct relationship with their communities and place of origin.

When analysing Māori art practices, Peter Boyd explains that they may be understood as a process, "a manifestation of ongoing investigation into the nature of reality and the nature of the relationships that underpin it" (202). With a high conceptual essence, Māori art represents formal results of processes that offer (re)connections with memories and spiritual dimensions of life. On the relational aspect, it brings together a wide range of world positionings, environmental, social, historical, and personal. Similarly, Caroline Vercoe indicates that the idea of place has a powerful participation in Māori artistic practice. This notion includes not only relationality established on the land but also on the oceans, as a place of nourishment, encounter, and connections with other Pacific islands. Indigeneity is indeed a determining factor of identification in Māori art practices. Although colonialism had a drastic impact on Māori art forms, the historical interference of European cultural elements did not alter the main customary graphic patterns and symbolic forms of representation for their culture. Regardless of the influence of new techniques and materials, the emphasis on some art

⁷⁹ Some authors prefer to relate the Te Reo word iwi with "nation" rather than "tribe" since the latter has its origins connected to the "lowest class[es]," where the first is associated with birth (See Moana Jackson quoted by Allen and Waitere 55).

forms, or even some represented themes, customary Māori art patterns and motifs have been preserved (fig. 12).⁸⁰



Fig. 12 Pātaka, storehouse and Hotunui, meeting house, Foyer Entrance, Auckland Museum.

The Māori migration to cities that began in the late 1940s enabled the formation of urban-based artists (Waitere and Allen 47), for whom the educational system acted as an important “patron and employer” (Skinner 143).⁸¹ Today those artists operate within the contemporary art world, but in ways that their individual practices remain strongly connected to indigeneity and their ways of transiting between Māori and Western worlds. Damian Skinner states that in the mid-twentieth century, Māori artists began to produce artworks of painting and sculpture within the Western modernist context. That was a search for “artistic strategies that could translate motifs and ideas from customary Māori art, their heritage as Māori, into the spaces and issues of contemporary art in Aotearoa New Zealand during the 1950s and 1960s” (141).

⁸⁰ Examples of the settlers’ influence on Māori art can be observed at the Māori Court Gallery at Auckland Museum. The first example relates to the introduction of metal tools to the wood-carving process, which enabled more detailed shapes and patterns previously achieved using natural instruments, such as shells. The second is the carved image of Madonna and Child made in 1845 by Patoromu Tamatea, which represents an Indigenous expression of Christianity while maintaining a visual representation of customary Māori art.

⁸¹ On the tertiary influence for Māori art practices see Robert Jahnke.

This transition between customary and individualised authorial art practice occurred gradually and was also influenced by government-sponsored projects such as the revival of customary Māori art in the 1920s and 1930s, through the Rotorua School of Māori Arts and Crafts, established in 1927, currently the New Zealand Māori Arts and Crafts Institute (NZMACI). This movement was led especially by Sir Āpirana Ngata, the “politician and cultural expert” who promoted the revival of the *whare whakairo* ‘carved meeting house’ as “a centre of community life and a way to strengthen Māori cultural practices and identities in the first half of the twentieth century” (Skinner 139). On this basis, various art forms were promoted to preserve Māori identity while enabling a connection to the Western world. However, Paul Moon states that, especially in the case of the *whakairo*, in this early process of renewal, there was an overemphasis on aesthetic and decorative elements (8). What followed was the wood carvings commodification to the detriment of their symbolic, spiritual, and historical value to the communities. This idea is reinforced by McCarthy when he mentions that “the value of contemporary Māori art has changed in European eyes and become a sought-after commodity in the field of New Zealand art, made possible by the whole network of Pākehā dealers, collectors, critics and institutions that benefit from the rise of this newcomer” (“Rules” 179).

In parallel, there is a gradual change in exhibition trends from addressing Māori art, “whether it was ‘art handicraft’ in the 1900s, ‘arts and crafts’ in the 1920s and 1930s, or ‘primitive fine art’ in the post-war period” (McCarthy, “Rules” 178), which would be followed by the appreciation of wood carvings in museums and art galleries for their formal qualities, mainly from the 1970s, and a “succession of styles—Māori modernism, contemporary Māori art, and what might be called Māori postmodernism” (178). One of the first exhibitions to allow for an engagement of Māori art with the artistic mainstream was “New Zealand Māori Culture and the Contemporary Scene” at the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch in 1966 (Skinner

147). In this period, while modernist Māori artists sought innovation with independent cultural practices from reinterpretations of their cultural heritage, institutions such as NZMACI continued to promote customary artistic practices. At the same time, as Skinner explains, the exhibitions organised established a dialogue between modern and customary practices, illuminating issues of the relationships between Māori and Pākehā culture systems.

With the “Te Māori” exhibition in New York in 1984, the turning point occurs for the artistic appreciation of Māori art and for the re-valorisation of these cultural expressions in the country (Mead, *Māori Art* 153). The exhibition toured the United States (1984–85) and then Aotearoa New Zealand major cities (1986–87), gaining national and international relevance. Māori demanded full involvement in the exhibition design with elders’ advisory support, and participation in the openings and guided tours (Tapsell, “Ko Tawa” 267). This shift in the cultural field comes directly tied to the political and social context of the 1970s and 1980s, with Māori urban protests movements and the ensuing period named “Māori renaissance” that aimed a reinterpretation and fulfilment of the real meaning of the Treaty to be expressed through art and culture (Waitere and Allen 47; Orange 170–80). Such changes also find resonance in the need for strengthening Aotearoa New Zealand’s national identity, culminating in the bicultural policies and legislation that would guide the Māori art assessment by institutions (McCarthy, *Museums* 8, 53, 96). Henceforth the commitment to social and political struggles places Māori art in a central position for strengthening Māori identity while also enabling Aotearoa New Zealand to promote a sense of distinctive nationhood in the global arena.

In the current government’s “Māori Arts Strategy 2019–2024,” ngā toi Māori includes customary visual arts practices within the universe of Māori heritage arts and contemporary artworks in their many formats (New Zealand, Creative New Zealand, *Te Hā* 8). The document recognises the authority of communities over the arts and on how the collective systems whānau-hapū-iwi should be represented artistically (15). At the same time, the government

promotes ngā toi Māori nationally so that it is “visible everywhere and highly valued, as part of New Zealand’s distinct identity, which is admired globally” (27).

In Latin American, the artistic manifestations of Mexican Indigenous peoples have progressively become associated with peasant life, both because of *mestizaje* and the incorporation of these populations into the so-called popular strata. In this context of hybridisation, as described by García Canclini (*Hybrid Cultures*), APM, similarly to APB, derives from heterogeneous manual practices in techniques and visual outcomes, varying regionally in the country and encompassing, for example, ceramic pieces, votive figures, wood carvings, painting, weaving, and work in vegetable fibres (fig. 13).

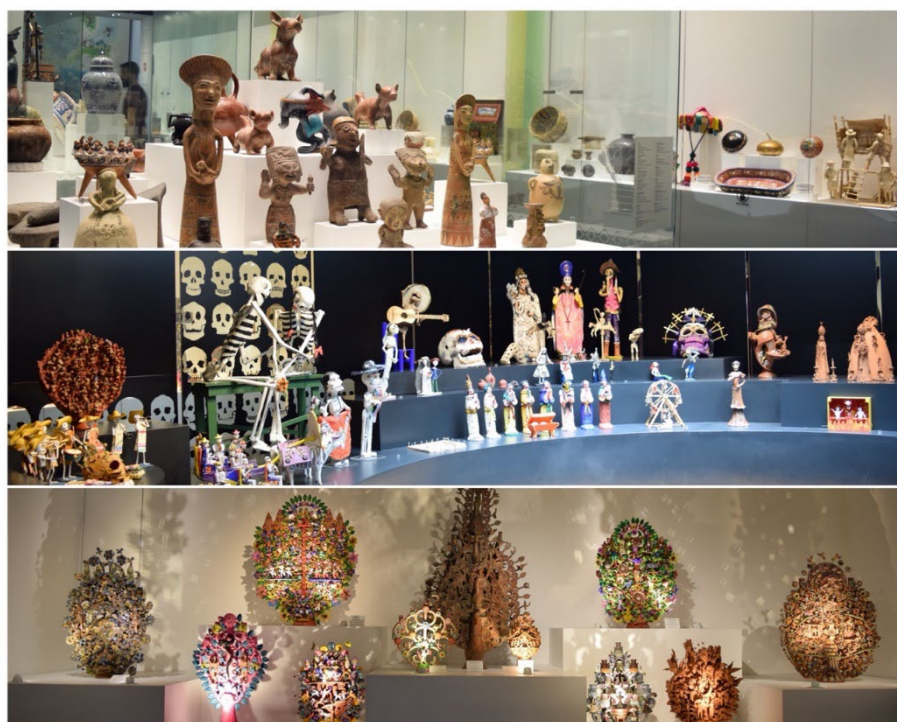


Fig. 13. APM collection of Museo de Arte Popular, Mexico City.

The high levels of inequality and poverty experienced by these oppressed groups in Mexico led to the organisation of an armed movement of peasant populations claiming greater access to land and better living conditions, ultimately culminating in the Mexican Revolution (1910–20). Inspired by the Revolution, Mexican artists, who already wanted to move away from Eurocentric authority for their cultural initiatives, found the appropriate political

atmosphere to devote themselves to creating a Latin American aesthetic that was politically engaged and aware of the exploitative conditions engendered by colonisation. Accordingly, Mexico had its own contesting movement in the arts in the early twentieth century that became influential throughout the continent. Like the Brazilian Anthropophagic movement, the Muralist movement (1920–30) found openness in the governmental sphere that sought to consolidate its national project. Muralists thus secured access to the walls of public buildings and used elements of popular cultures intending to educate and raise awareness of the people (Baddeley and Fraser 80–81). Those avant-garde artists and intellectuals who used visual and symbolic elements of popular cultures in their creative processes, such as Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, were responsible for important collections of APM and pre-Hispanic objects (Oesterreich).

Although the Mexican Revolution led a process of valorisation of the Pre-Hispanic and Indigenous cultures of the time, the pursuit of forging a national identity, in fact, followed the path of assimilation. Guillermo de la Peña posits that assimilationist policies guided a transition of Indigenous to being “‘revolutionary peasants or workers’ ... [and later] of ‘Indigenous in transition to Mexican-ness’” (“Social Citizenship” 131), a project that aligned with the *mestizaje* agenda put forward by the state. In this way, while Indigenous peoples were included in the set of popular classes, their culture began to participate in the national culture.

The *indigenista* discourse that permeated the Mexican nation-building project in the aftermath of the Revolution was responsible for the revival of Indigenous *artesanías*—also named *arte popular* from the 1920s onward—which became a symbol of national unity (Oesterreich 4). In parallel to the muralist movement, artists, such as Dr Atl (Gerardo Murillo), began a curatorial practice in alignment with the government for the organisation of APM exhibitions for aesthetic appreciation of an authentic Mexicanness. The first APM exhibition with this aim took place in 1921 in Mexico City to commemorate the centenary of

independence. In subsequent years, several national and international exhibitions, such as the “Exhibition on Mexican Arte Popular” in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1930 and the “Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art” in the MoMA, New York in 1940, included APM.

Miriam Oesterreich points out that this process of modern appropriation of Indigenous traditions established two moments of APM marketisation. Nationally, APM is situated as an affordable Mexican art for the middle class, uniting different social strata, transitioning to urban areas, and stimulating future cultural policies linked to economic development. Internationally, the intense exchange established between Mexico and the United States in this area was initially focused on commodification for the purposes of tourist attraction. Deborah Dorotinsky further states that the valorisation of APM results from a search not only for national unity but also for continental cohesion. It, therefore, represents a cultural diplomacy strategy encouraged mainly by the USA cultural policies during the Cold War period. Thus, by incorporating *mestizaje*, APM is symbolically positioned as a transitional stage between past and future, backwardness and cosmopolitanism. The same motto will permeate all Latin American countries, including Brazil.

From the governmental standpoint, the Indigenist policies also focused on promoting *artesanías*, which were stimulated by the National Indigenous Institute (established in 1958) and the Fondo Nacional para el Fomento de las Artesanías (FONART;1974) (Papousek 171). FONART has been the primary official entity for promotion, development, and commercialisation of *artesanías*. Recent official reports estimate that there are more than two million artisans in the country, corresponding to 10.4% of the Mexican population in 2017 (Mexico, Secretaría de Desarrollo Social 12). This includes 166 cultural manifestations categorised as APM throughout the national territory in 2021 (Mexico, SIC). In the Mexican official institutions, the terms *artesanías* and *arte popular* have been used interchangeably, to refer to customary handmade objects with an initial function within the communities for

everyday needs, luxuries, festivities, and rituals that have transitioned into the market and guaranteed income through generations for those peoples. Under the official definition, the arts created by Indigenous descent artists are included as part of the *popular*, in parallel to the arts derived from urban communities (Mexico, Secretaría de Educación Pública).

Mexican integration into global neoliberal trends from the 1980s has increased private sector participation in legitimising APM. In addition to private collectors and the artistic and intellectual classes, private institutions, such as Citibanamex (Banco Nacional de México, a foreign-owned financial institution since 2001), have positioned themselves as essential partners of the public sector. The bank has created a cultural support programme for APM since 1996, hence, acting as a key participant in the successful insertion of Mexican *artesanías* in the cultural market, encouraging artists to create individually (Coffey, “Banking”). Consequently, Citibanamex is also behind APM’s “glamorisation,” which has been instrumental in positioning it as a higher-income consumer good.

Finally, Brazil’s APB is today a form of artistic expression coming from popular strata of society, from both rural and urban areas. As discussed in preceding chapters, APB can be seen as the outcome of individual creativity based on collective knowledges and experiences. Such a deep connection with the intangible nature of *saberes e fazeres*, as well as with cultural memories, bestows APB with a symbolic imaginary of national identity. The market interest in APB results from multiple efforts of the state and the private sector that have been culturally representing APB as an authentic practice of *brasilidade*.

2.2. Cultural Policies for Peoples’ Arts

In the cultural realm, the trend to promote art and culture from different groups and communities is a direct result of the 1950s cultural diversity policies led by UNESCO through international instruments, culminating in the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity

(UDCD) in 2001 (United Nations 707–12). Building on the 1950s guidelines, in the 1980s, various social movements sought the emancipation of groups in a situation of oppression, thus encouraging the implementation of actions that included and promoted traditional cultures to activate socioeconomic development. However, this phase of affirmative and historical reparations policies coincides with the global objectives of the neoliberal order of expanding markets and educating citizens to become better consumers (Yúdice, “Cultural Diversity”; and *Expediency*; Žizek).

Cultural diversity policies are initially based on the notion of multiculturalism in its recent use in Western societies, which was supported by the precepts of human rights developed by UNESCO in the aftermath of World War II. As a governmental discourse, multiculturalism was first adopted by the Canada government in mid-1960s (Stratton and Ang 138), and later materialised into different political agendas of countries belonging to the British Commonwealth (D. Bennet, 4). The implementation of multicultural policies tried to address the challenge of integrating into the national context all the different cultures coexisting within a country (Kymlicka), although such an attempt did not come free from prejudice.

In recent years, multiculturalism has been considered a misguided model when it comes to suggesting “acceptance” of difference, since such policies are likely to perpetuate inequitable conditions of power by acting as a selective determinant, deciding on some cultural aspects to be preserved and celebrated as part of the national culture and others to be suppressed (Murdock 65–135). This is mainly the case when addressing the conditions of social, economic, and political inequality of diverse cultures existing within nation-states whether through immigration, or those Indigenous populations that occupied the territory before colonisation.

In Australia, multiculturalism is an approach “generally accepted ... as integral to Australian national culture and identity” from a “top-down political strategy” (Stratton and Ang 136–137). Multicultural Australia has historically prioritised the appreciation of cultures

resulting from European immigration, failing to recognise cultural practices of ATSI peoples, whose population until the 1967 Referendum remained unaccounted for in the Commonwealth census (Hodge and O'Carroll 109).⁸² Accordingly, there is a difficulty in recognising Aboriginality within the multicultural agenda (Koleth). Such a conflict is both because Aboriginal populations do not want to—and should not—be equated with another ethnic group such as those incorporated via immigration. More importantly, this is so because multicultural policies do not address the violent colonial legacy of Australia's formation (Stratton and Ang 158–59).

In parallel with the Australian government attempts to broaden the scope of multiculturalism to include Indigenous peoples' affairs, Indigenous movements' high level of political engagement has ensured a political agenda for reparation detached from multicultural policies (Castles 16–19; Stratton and Ang 158–59). This also involves recognition and the right to culture, with the rescue of cultural memories and traditional practices on the Aboriginal populations' terms but imbued with a sense of collective responsibility for the whole Australian community (See Watson; Poole 129–41; Coleman 38).

The insertion of ATSI art into state commemorative events, as in the case of the 1988 Bicentennial, may reflect its mobilisation to serve the national reconciliation project (Fisher 49–52). Furthermore, ATSI art have played a central role in offering Australian acknowledgement of Indigenous cultures. It also participates as evidence of several political claims, especially through the inseparability between land, knowledge, and culture within Indigenous ontological visions (Bowrey 408; Coleman 44; Hodge and O'Carroll 128; Genocchio 7; Fisher 31–40; Merlan 309; Morphy, *Aboriginal Art* 35, 288).

⁸² The intentions to adopt a multicultural government in Australia arise from the attempt to replace the “White Australia” policy, a race-based immigration approach put in place from 1901 to 1972, to consolidate a national identity with an emphasis on British immigrants (Poole 116–17; Stratton and Ang 148–51).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, cultural policies discussions revolve around biculturalism as a national foundational element. This ideal is based primarily on the Treaty of Waitangi/ Te Tiriti o Waitangi, signed in 1840 between the British crown and iwi Māori chiefs. The document established colonial occupation through a governance pact, albeit with radical differences in interpretation between the two counterparts, regarding sovereignty, ownership, and subject rights (Orange 53–54). The British interpretation of the Treaty led to the “we are one people policy of assimilation” (Walker 3), in which Māori populations were progressively disempowered in political forums, had their language and culture suppressed, as well as their lands confiscated and alienated.

It was Māori activism since the colonial period rather than state partnership action that secured their culture survival (Walker 5; Ritchie 9; 72). The Māori Renaissance made artistic expressions assume an essential role in resisting assimilation and redirected the focus to the marae space, the open area in front of the wharenuī, as an active symbolic meaning in the re-conceptualisation of museums from an Indigenous perspective (Walker 5; Waitere and Allen). Pragmatic motivations also guided the concern with building a national identity in the 1960s and 1970s, when the United Kingdom joined the European Economic Community, no longer guaranteeing a market for Aotearoa New Zealand’s exports (McCarthy, *Museums* 7). This led to the country’s need to assert itself as a distinct nation in the face of global markets. Furthermore, the 1970s Māori protests about Treaty infringements led to the creation of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975, which provides a legal forum for Māori Treaty claims (37; 57–58). By articulating national and international contexts, governmental responses to such demands sought to promote a national identity based on the ideals of the Treaty of Waitangi, a policy that began to receive concrete public support in the 1990s (237).

Nevertheless, biculturalism has been highly contested as a colonial construct that has shaped Māori as a homogeneous entity, thus preventing an entire process of self-determination

(O’Sullivan 30). At the same time, an official bicultural system has provided a symbolic platform for articulating an identity as Indigenous peoples and as participating citizens of a modern state (Bennet and Liu 95), creating a pathway to exercise indigeneity. For Teanay Tuiono, Aotearoa New Zealand has managed to revalue both cultural aspects and Māori language, with control over the land being the most significant obstacle faced by Māori populations (quoted by Waitere and Allen 71). In this sense, the solid Māori cultural presence in the practices stimulated by the national government indicates a partial achievement with symbolic inclusion after centuries of struggle, while losing so much territory and wealth. Thus, biculturalism has been serving—to some extent—Māori interests to engage with official institutions and remains a commonly used term in the cultural sector (O’Sullivan 33; McCarthy, *Museums* 3, 14).

In the Mexican context, the rising Indigenous activism, associated with engagements in the international arena influenced the government to remodel its acculturation discourse into “ethno-development” policies (de la Peña “Social Citizenship” 132).⁸³ The practice culminated in 1992 with the constitutional reform that recognises the presence of Indigenous populations, thus delineating the country’s *pluricultural* identity. It encompasses the entitlement of Indigenous peoples to hold autonomous political, economic, and cultural institutions “reconciled with national integration”⁸⁴ (Barabas 4). Alicia Barabas explains that the notion of *pluriculturalismo*, differs from that of multicultural policies because it is less historically charged and “seeks to bring different ethno-cultural groups together in a relationship of interdependence, equality and mutual respect, while each develops its own way of life and culture”⁸⁵ (4).

⁸³ See also Sieder, “Recognising” 192-93 regarding the influence of the Zapatista Movement in this process.

⁸⁴ “conciliada con la integración nacional.”

⁸⁵ “trata de unir a diferentes grupos etnoculturales en una relación de interdependencia, igualdad y respeto mutuo, al tiempo que cada uno desarrolla su propio modo de vida y cultura.”

Yet, Indigenous official recognition was also employed to legitimise governments at national and international levels (Sieder, “Recognising” 197), pushing the country to change the sociocultural standing of Indigenous peoples without necessarily changing socioeconomic inequalities. Luis Vázquez León points out, for example, the overuse of the concept of *Pueblos Originarios* ‘the First Inhabitants of the Land’ to the benefit of business interests and profit-driven land exploitation. Besides, there seems to be a perpetuated romanticised view, with the super valorisation of pre-Columbian ancestral culture—as is seen with visual symbols used across Mexico City streets, subways and immortalised in the astonishing archaeological collection of the Museo Nacional de Antropología—overshadowing the current Indigenous populations that have their identities superseded by social class marginalisation.

From this perspective, the valorisation of popular cultures in Mexico goes hand in hand with the different phases of developing policies aimed at the country’s Indigenous peoples. They pass through a conflictive path of instrumentalisation to legitimise a national identity, to promote tourism and guarantee income to the communities, while also representing symbols of the struggles for autonomy of Indigenous peoples by challenging homogenisation and claiming the right to difference in their local identities.⁸⁶

In the case of Brazil, the narrative of a culturally diverse nation, as resulting from different cultural encounters, was founded on the “myth of racial democracy” established in the 1930s during the Getúlio Vargas presidential term. Although already incorporated as an official discourse, the concerted quest for an effective discourse on pluralism was further advanced in the 1980s to respond to the social internal pressures during the re-democratisation process, which were deeply influenced by international neoliberal organisations interested in Brazil’s joining the foreign markets.⁸⁷ In 1988, the constitutional recognition of the role of

⁸⁶ On the resistance role of *arte popular*, see Adolfo Colombres.

⁸⁷ About Brazilian social activism, see de la Peña, “Social; A. R. Ramos; Crook and Jonhson; and Fausto.

popular, Indigenous and Afro-descent cultures as part of Brazilian cultural heritage, initially seems to have had a solely symbolic purpose. Since then, it has become the legal apparatus that has enabled land reparation actions to be conducted for Quilombola communities as well as other later affirmative policies for Indigenous populations and Afro-Brazilians (French 5–6; 77–78; 94).

In this sense, other cultural manifestations expand their meaning in building or retrieving identity to create a collective sense of belonging in the country's Indigenous and Quilombola communities. Conversely, the Brazilian Indigenous population still faces the predominance of an idealised Indigenous imaginary, isolated in the Amazon region, whereas those living in urban and nearby rural areas struggle in keeping their cultural memories active. In these areas, their dwellings and physical characteristics sometimes differ little from those of the majority Afro-descent residents living in impoverished areas. Because of that, they have to resort to other aspects to claim their indigeneity (see French 34–42). In such cases, the official recognition of cultural diversity has led to the recovery of collective memories and cultural practices to guarantee other rights. Artisanship has also been reactivated as a reliable resource to insert these communities into creative economy circuits (Varjão and Reis 45–59; Brazil, Fundação Palmares 34–35). This recognition includes the valorisation of pieces now considered APB, as those found in the Quilombola community of Muquém in Alagoas State, with ceramic work (fig. 14).



Fig. 14. Museu Muquém at UNEAL, União dos Palmares.

International Agreements

Following an orientation aimed at valuing cultural diversity, be it multicultural, bicultural or pluricultural, international legal instruments provided a key reference framework for delimiting cultural policies at national level. Such is the case of those declarations and conventions put forward by UNESCO, specifically the 2001 UDCD, the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage (CSICH), and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (CDCE) in effect since 2007.⁸⁸

By incorporating the trend to internally acknowledge cultural diversity, all countries endorsed the 2001 UDCD, complemented by the 2005 CDCE. The UDCD establishes the principles that associate culture with development, provided that this should be “not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence” (article 3). It defines cultural goods as unique merchandise, “as vectors of identity, values and meaning” (article 8), encompassing more than commercial value. This implies the need for policies that regulate the market at a local and

⁸⁸ In the context of indigenous cultures, they also engage with the 1989 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (International Labour Office - ILO Convention No 169) and the 2007 UNESCO Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. On the subject, see, for example, Synot; Aylwin and Policzer; Malezer; Whare; Hobbs; De Oliveira Godinho; Llanes Salazar; Lai, “Protection.”

global level, considering the autonomy of states (not the specific peoples involved) in defining the best ways to promote and disseminate the cultural manifestations existing in their society (article 9). The resulting CDCE adopts a market-oriented approach in which cultural expressions are valued for their potential to contribute to “development and poverty reduction” (Richieri Hanania and Fabri 3) and employment creation (Richieri Hanania, “Bringing” 126). It is important to clarify that, despite the broad scope inferred by the title “cultural diversity,” the focus of the CDCE is on industrially and digitally produced cultural goods that participate in cultural exchanges in the international sphere.⁸⁹

Government practices related to the promotion and preservation of people’s arts are most closely connected to the 2003 CSICH, which will be further analysed as a paradigmatic case of the dynamics at play in the four studied countries. This convention defines intangible cultural heritage as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage” (article 1). Heritage is considered dynamic, being constantly recreated in the present while building a continuity chain through its intergenerational transmission. Oral expressions and traditions, performing arts, social, ritual, and festive practices, and traditional crafts are considered intangible (article 2). Following this definition, immateriality assigns new symbolic meanings to creative expressions, including the peoples’ art, challenging the qualities of the material objects that come with them, such as originality and uniqueness of the piece over indefinite reproduction and copy.

The convention entrusts the duty of safeguarding this heritage to the state, which must define the appropriate measures to ensure the “viability” of intangible heritage. Safeguarding actions and management plans should be developed with the groups, communities, or

⁸⁹ For a detailed analysis of the CDCE, see Richieri Hanania; Message; Bowrey; Rodríguez Barba.

individuals responsible for its creation and transmission, including “identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage” (article 3). Heritage education and awareness-enhancement practices are encouraged, as well as their connection to sustainable development.

While Brazil and Mexico expressed full support for CSICH, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand to date have not ratified the document. Australia has postponed endorsing the convention by understanding that it prioritises precisely cultural practices of Indigenous groups, to the detriment of demonstrations considered more broadly Australian (Laurajane Smith). Leader-Elliot and Trimboli indicate other possible justifications for the government opposition: dispersed governmental structure of the Australian Commonwealth distributed into state governments; conceptual vagueness; use of listing that may be culturally inappropriate for Indigenous populations; difficulty of ranking among the great diversity of cultural groups, including Indigenous populations and immigrant communities, creating a potential problem of divisiveness; and difficulties in defining who has authority to speak about a particular cultural heritage.

New Zealand’s reasons for concern about the bill relate to the non-inclusion of language as a dimension of heritage but only as a vehicle for knowledge transmission, and the obligation of listing to initiate measures for preservation, which in addition to creating hierarchy among taonga, shifts the role of guardianship to the state (Craith et al 118, Ritchie 106). There is also the claim that the CSICH compartments the tangible and intangible natures of heritage, which, in Māori experience, are all encompassed within the concept of taonga (Myburgh 658). The CSICH’s indication of the state’s role to determine measures for protecting intangible assets can be conflicting when the cultural manifestations that are intended to be preserved refer to a specific social group. For instance, the use of graphic symbols inherent to a specific iwi must

be carefully respected and not inadvertently appropriated by others. In this sense, the right over the maintenance and use of a collective's cultural practices in favour of national identity may be jeopardised if—with the Convention's ratification—the authority over cultural expression is transferred from iwi to state. Besides, there is an existing gap in the Convention regarding intellectual property (IP) rights, a fundamental criterion for Māori cultural manifestations. Because of that, Māori customary practices that are not fixed in an immutable material format, and which are not currently protected by conventional IP laws,⁹⁰ are not contemplated by CSICH either.

Moving to Latin America, there is a political orientation towards the acceptance of a hybrid popular culture, as previously stated, with the influence of various cultures on the consolidation of national belonging. It prevails the understanding that the intangible culture arising from the country's different social groups is a fundamental component of national heritage and must therefore be protected by the state. Mexico has played a representative role for the region in forums related to intangible heritage at UNESCO. Its endorsement of CSICH is considered a government commitment reflecting the long track record of cultural institutions such as the National Institute of Anthropology and History (López Morales et al 41; 46).

Based on the CSICH, the government initiated in 2008 the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Inventory should be systemic, considering the manifestations' vitality, encompassing not only ancestral practices, but also those that are emerging in the communities or undergoing processes of renewal. The action resulted in 249 inventoried cultural manifestations,⁹¹ including *artesanías*, and the proclamation of the “Ley General de Cultura y Derechos Culturales” (General Law on Culture and Cultural Rights) in 2017 (López Morales et al 42–52). The law proposes the national and international preservation

⁹⁰ On this topic see Lai, “Intellectual Property”.

⁹¹ Available on the Sistema de Información Cultural de Mexico, <https://sic.cultura.gob.mx>.

and promotion of cultural manifestations, considering their “material and immaterial, preterit and actual dimensions, inherent to the history, art, traditions, practices and knowledge that identify groups, pueblos and communities that integrate the nation” (Mexico, Cámara de Diputados Art. 3).⁹²

Brazil’s experience with intangible heritage policies is considered pioneering and a reference for the CSICH (Kignel 254; Cavalcanti). The Presidential Decree 3551, implemented in the year 2000, establishes the Registry of Cultural Goods of an Intangible Nature and creates the National Immaterial Heritage Programme (Brazil, Presidência da República). Such a forerunner position results from the historical process of valorisation of popular cultures that has interpreted CSICH as supportive of the interdependence of the material and immaterial characters of cultural expressions. Therefore, APB, for example, assume a cultural heritage character because the value is placed not in the object itself, but in the collective knowledges it carries.

Such understanding reinforces the idea of the embodiment of cultural memories in art objects. It brings the meaning closer to the expression of “cultural reference” adopted by IPHAN, which focuses on the values attributed by the community and the identity bonds established with the practices (Corsino et al). According to this interpretation, those artistic representations fully enable the intricate connection between present and past for building cultural memories, as well as between creative innovation and customary knowledge. From the numerous inventories, IPHAN has registered forty-eight of the identified cultural references as national cultural heritage of intangible nature.

It is also worth noting that, despite the term “intangible cultural heritage” being considered by some authors an inappropriate term to refer to Māori cultural heritage (Myburgh

⁹² “materiales e inmateriales, pretéritos y actuales, inherentes a la historia, arte, tradiciones, prácticas y conocimientos que identifican a grupos, pueblos y comunidades que integran la nación.”

661; Craith et al 120), policies aimed at the immaterial aspects of culture open up the possibility of legal and institutional legitimisation for previously neglected cultural practices and knowledges, and leverage local and community spheres to the same standards of consecrated national memory based on erudite culture and official monuments. Moreover, Mexico and Brazil, which have adopted the Convention, already operate in a form of complementarity between the tangible and intangible components of heritage, so that material results, such as *arte popular*, are elevated to the categories of national art and heritage by the recognition of their immaterial value for local communities.

In international forums, it is argued that the institutionalisation of intangible cultural heritage expands the possibilities of market appropriation, since a connection is established with sustainable development, and consequently with tourism, to maintain its vitality. On the one hand, there is the risk of “folklorisation” and “performatisation” of heritage, weakening its primary value as a social community practice. On the other hand, the market interest is seen as a stimulus for the consolidation of cultural practices as heritage, by encouraging their continuity (see Lixinski). APB itself in its contemporary manifestations are the result of its marketable insertion—as are some of the APM manifestations and the acceptance of ATSI art as contemporary art—a fact which, notwithstanding the inherent disputes, does not invalidate the identity and symbolic meanings for the peoples who create them.⁹³

National Regulations

Despite not having signed up to CSICH, Australia has an extensive body of legislation at both Commonwealth and state levels aimed at incorporating the idea of intangible cultural heritage and its values related to objects, sites, and landscapes (Leader-Elliott and Trimboli 257–267). Kathy Bowrey (430) asserts that besides being an essential source of employment

⁹³ The negotiations arising from this contradictory market participation will be explored in the next chapters for APB.

for Indigenous peoples, the Indigenous visual arts and craft sector is the dominant element of the arts in Australia. In this way, there is an institutional effort to regulate this sector, which also responds to Indigenous demands to recognise that their artistic material production cannot be disassociated from their ways of life and territories.

Specifically, in the arts field, the Australia Council holds the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy (VACS) 2021–2024, “a formal agreement between the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments,” targeted at the contemporary Australian visual arts sector, including the participation of ATSI artists in the national and international cultural circuits (Australia, Council for the Arts, “Policy Framework”). The VACS includes professional support to ATSI artists and arts workers through funding. Among the featured actions is the First Nations Arts Awards, annually delivered since 1993 on the anniversary of the 1967 referendum and the start of National Reconciliation Week. According to the “Protocols for using First Nations Cultural and Intellectual Property in the Arts” (Australia, Council for the Arts, “Protocols”), with the last edition issued in 2019, the Australia Council for the Arts preferentially uses the term First Nations, except when working with specific communities or language groups, for whom it seeks advice to define the appropriate language of reference. The Australian government defines ATSI art as the “classical, traditional, and contemporary practice[s], including all new forms of cultural expression. This is applied across all art forms in urban, regional and remote areas” (Australia, Council for Arts, *First Nations Arts*). The government acknowledges First Nations Arts and Culture as a living heritage that represents a contribution to world culture and the country’s national identity, and which should be considered a “source of pride for all Australians.” Additionally, government actions to enhance ATSI art have a substantial impact on “an increase in cultural pride and self-esteem stemming from a sense of inclusion and cultural identity.”

Much of the discussion surrounding the protection of ATSI art has taken place in the incorporation of Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs) and Traditional Knowledge (TK) into IP laws. The Protocols document asserts that, informed by the 2007 UNESCO Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the protection models adopted in the country for cultural heritage, TCEs and TK, adopt the language of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), which would be more comprehensive than the conventional IP regulation because it incorporates tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage when protecting it in perpetuity.

The entrepreneurial approach towards culture is particularly visible in the Northern and Western Territories, where ATSI art assists in generating socioeconomic benefits for local communities. The production, commercialisation, and circulation of ATSI art—which, as previously said, is mostly orchestrated by state-subsidised art centres—accounts for a significant part of the population's income in remote communities (Australia, Council for the Arts, *Arts Nation* 31). Apart from acting as a governance space to regulate cultural trade for Indigenous artworks, the centres are responsible for providing the community with essential services such as medical care, education, transport, and social welfare that are not available in those locations. In addition, the incentive of artistic practices offers a sense of meaning to vulnerable populations with high unemployment rates and susceptibility to drugs and alcoholism. Therefore, ATSI art assumes a political role and acts as a currency of exchange between the state and the communities as well as actions of historical reparation (Bowrey 431–34). In the art centres, artists receive training in material use and monitoring in work development. There is no intervention in the creative process, but there is guidance for the large-numbered creation of artworks for commissioned exhibitions and fairs (fig. 15).



Fig. 15. Above, workspace of Iltja Ntjarra Many Hands Art Centre; below, Tjanpi Desert Weavers Art Centre, Alice Springs.

In terms of public management, actions towards Indigenous arts in Oceania are mostly linked to funding agencies that work directly with arts in general. Australia applies an art-management principle with the Council for the Arts, focusing on its “Closing the Gap” agenda by increasing investments in ATSI peoples’ cultural expressions. The interdependence between the people and the land of ATSI art leads to advocacy “for the critical role of culture—as a necessary part of the solution to Indigenous disadvantage, and for the healing and strengthening of individuals and communities” (Australia, Council for the Arts, *Submission 4*). In this approach, cultural and artistic festivals assume an active role throughout the country, with more than one hundred annual festivals of different formats and dimensions. These spaces are related to Indigenous celebration and creativity practices, which, adjusted to contemporary leisure and

tourism events, act as “potent sites for cross-cultural negotiations” and become spaces of self-representation “with opportunities for economic participation” (Phipps and Slater 12).

The city of Alice Springs in the central Australian desert—close to the art communities at Papunya and Yuendumu—for example, has hosted the light festival Parrtjima since 2015 to celebrate Aboriginal culture, attracting thousands of tourists to the region (fig. 16). While artists offer workshops to visitors, artworks are sold in different venues. Art galleries compete with some Aboriginal artists selling their canvases on the street floor, who work hard to attract the attention of potential consumers. Notwithstanding the extreme community relevance, the tourist appeal generates contradictory situations in which much of the structure of the region revolves around visitors to the detriment of the needs of local Aboriginal populations, such as prioritising the festival’s public transport for tourists and preventing Aboriginal access into commercial establishments.



Fig. 16. Parrtjima light festival, Desert Park, Alice Springs.

The non-adoption of international intangible heritage terminologies also in New Zealand is reflected in the establishment of distinct national cultural policies that have been adjusted to meet Māori demands. Some legal protection instruments, such as the Historic Places Act 1993 and the Resource Management Act 1991, refer to the sacred and spiritual aspects of Māori cultural heritage, which according to specialised research, would be the equivalent of intangible dimensions of taonga. At the same time, the principle of rangatiratanga ‘self-

determination' established by Te Tiriti, and that of kaitiakitanga 'guardianship' require the state to be in close contact with the peoples involved with cultural expressions to decide on the most appropriate protective measures. Conversely, the fragmentation of Māori cultural heritage segments to fit existing legislation administered by different government entities makes it difficult to exercise governance and demand effective actions (Myburgh 640–43; Paterson 107–11).

The inextricability of artistic manifestations with Te Reo language, the land, and mātauranga Māori 'traditional knowledge' brings these cultural practices closer to a political sphere. Much of the current format of protection and valorisation of Māori art is the result of claims issued in the Waitangi Court since the mid-1980s (Paterson 107; Frankel 439–41). Waitangi Tribunal claim WAI262/1991 is one of the most comprehensive in scope and alleges that the Crown "has failed in its responsibility to allow Māori to exercise their rangatiratanga in respect of their taonga" (Myburgh 660). The primary legislation to protect these expressions, managed by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, is the Protected Objects Act that came into force in 2006 (last updated in 2010), superseding the Antiquities Act 1975. The Act defines objects that relate to Māori culture, history, or society as taonga tūturu, and this has specific legislation in terms of ownership and trade (New Zealand, Ministry for Culture and Heritage).

The WAI 262 report, released in 2011, led the government to re-access specific legislation to address more comprehensive protection of taonga. One example is the guide protecting intellectual property with a Māori cultural element under Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment management, which positions such expressions according to an economical approach to culture (New Zealand, Ministry of Business). Suzy Frankel argues that this is due to the need for Indigenous populations to find tools to participate in and exercise agency in the current market exchange system since Indigenous cultures have been inserted into this global market in a largely inappropriate way (440). The guide includes protective

measures for trademarks, designs, and copyrights relating to words, symbols, imagery, graphic patterns, and rights of use of individual original artworks, with the proviso that some aspects of mātauranga Māori may not be copyrighted as they belong to traditional collective knowledge.

One of the trademarks created to prevent misuse of Māori artworks and certify their quality and authenticity, is the trademark Toi Iho, or Māori made, launched in 2002 and funded by the Māori Arts Board of Creative New Zealand.⁹⁴ Frankel also distinguishes a category called taonga-derived works, which “have a Māori element to them, but that element is generalised or adapted, and is combined with other non-Māori influence” (443). According to her, these taonga-inspired works with a more tenuous connection to mātauranga Māori contribute to the survival of Māori culture in society at large by demonstrating the close association of Māori identity with national identity.

The autonomy for entrepreneurial strategies aligned with community values is evident in Aotearoa New Zealand, where Māori communities organise cultural and artistic activities for a touristic audience. For example, in the city of Rotorua, this process of self-reliance can be observed at the tribal-owned institution Māori Arts and Crafts Institute (NZMACI) – Te Puia Cultural Centre. Te Puia aligns the professional training of Māori artists with tourist activities on the same premises. Tourists pay a fee to visit the space—used for Māori artist training—through a specific route, during which they can approach the artists, make cultural enquiries, and appreciate their well-structured workspace through a mezzanine panoramic view. Guided tours explain the art-making process in a culturally contextualised manner related to local nature and tribal histories. There, visitors can have a “genuine experience” by immersing

⁹⁴ The current manager of Toi Iho trademark is the Toi Iho Charitable Trust, established in 2013, to replace the Māori Arts Board of Creative New Zealand which would be dissolved in 2014 (see Toi Iho).

themselves in Māori culture, including customary performances and meals, demonstration of artistic techniques, and a showcase of artworks produced by those artists in training (fig.17).



Fig. 17. Māori art training facilities, NZMACI – Te Puia, Rotorua.

The organisation responsible for Māori arts in Aotearoa is Creative New Zealand–Arts Council for New Zealand Toi Aotearoa, a Crown entity linked to the Ministry for Arts, Culture and Heritage that works for funding, advocacy, capacity building and international representation and exchange for all the arts. With a specific department for promoting Māori arts, the institution acknowledges the interconnectivity of customary and contemporary expressions in the way that artistic expressions embody mātauranga Māori. This way, the engagement of Māori artistic practices with the arts sector enables more critical dialogues and an institutional valorisation of Māori art as an active and contemporary practice. Regardless, the current strategic plans for Māori art still identify a lack of representation and audience

engagement compared to other mainstream art forms, especially when away from the main urban centres (New Zealand, Creative New Zealand *Māori Arts; Audience Atlas*).

In the case of Mexico and Brazil, actions to promote and preserve the Indigenous arts and *arte popular* are managed by organisations not directly linked to public entities dedicated to arts in general. Instead, there are separate entities who specifically work with *arte popular* within the governmental bureaucracy. In Mexico, cultural policies to preserve and value popular cultures have been connected to the promotion of social, economic, and human development, in a national scenario in which Indigenous and peasant populations depend on the state to ensure better living conditions and, consequently, the continuity of their cultural practices. Given that in Mexico, *arte popular* encompasses Indigenous *artesanías*, all official actions are concentrated on FONART. This institution seeks to improve the artisan's welfare while promoting Mexico's cultural heritage (Mexico, Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, FONART, *¿Qué hacemos?*). López Morales emphasises that to achieve such a purpose, the programmes funded by FONART become exclusively geared towards “populations under conditions of poverty, vulnerability, underdevelopment and marginalisation” (49). In this way, there is a state-sponsored effort to subsidise local socioeconomic amelioration through APM promotion. The initiatives are divided into support for artisans' participation in fairs, events and exhibitions; training and technical assistance to improve production and commercial conditions; support to boost production with funding to purchase raw materials, tools, and pay for wages; financing artisans to supply the market according to specific product demands; annual competitions of *arte popular*; organisation of artisanal tourist corridors, recently proposed to be boosted by the artisanal tourist routes programme in a partnership signed in 2021 with the secretariat of tourism (*Programas*).

Considering diversity as a defining feature of *arte popular*, there is an acceptance through the official discourse that in each geographic region of Mexico, as well as in Brazil, a

set of different practices will be found with other formal solutions unique to that place. This creative production is then employed as localised branding so that states or cities compete for the flow of investments and tourism. For instance, the FONART programme “Corredores Turísticos Artesanales” ‘Artisanal Tourist Corridors’ created in 2017, proposes the insertion of *artesanías* into the tourist market and are organised in towns named Pueblos Mágicos ‘Magic Towns’ to be experienced by national and international tourists (Mexico, Secretaría de Bienestar). The mapping currently has forty-two artisanal corridors connecting APM ateliers, funding sanitary improvements, signage for production, exhibition and sales spaces, and hospitality training (Mexico, SECTUR, *Pueblos*; and *Firman convenio*). In turn, the Pueblos Mágicos programme names 132 villages that embody symbols that are important in the country’s collective imaginary, and which represent national identity. By using terms such as magic, enchantment, legends, scenarios of transcendent feats, the programme proposes to value the diversity of Mexican populations clearly supported by strategies of exoticisation of the popular and the Indigenous converted into touristic experience.

A central influence on the creative manufacture of community artisanship is the state-sponsored awards *Los Grandes Maestros del Arte Popular de Mexico*, a National Prize for APM in several categories, which began in 1975, and since 1995 established partnership with the programme Fomento Cultural of Citibanamex, intending to encourage creative production that is distinguished by its aesthetic qualities and cultural representativeness (Fomento Cultural CitiBanamex). On the one hand, this stimulated innovation in ways of doing, on the other hand, generated competition within the community, promoting values related to capitalist individualism. This action greatly influenced the transition from an initially collective creation to individualised authorial production (Coffey, “Banking”).

In Brazil, the implementation of policies for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage is associated with processes of cultural democracy. As in Mexico, the new framework

of cultural diversity as a strategy to achieve sustainable development makes policies related to the immateriality of culture directly associated with social inclusion. Framing cultural expressions into goods and services capable of generating income becomes the driving element to achieve that purpose (Santos and Müller 471). During Lula's presidential term, it was created the programme *Brasil Plural* (2007) that aimed to guarantee access to mechanisms of support and cultural promotion to groups and networks of cultural producers responsible for the manifestations of Brazilian diversity. Among its actions, the programme created the *Prêmio Nacional de Culturas Populares* 'National Prize for Popular Cultures'—with seven editions issued between 2007 and 2019—, designed to reward *Mestres de Cultura*, including popular artists (See Barros and Kauark; and Brazil, "Prêmio").

Governmental actions towards APB are directly linked to its representation as a material result of cultural references. Such artistic expressions represent an understanding of the complementarity of the heritage's tangible and intangible natures, even when protected explicitly under intangible cultural heritage legislation. In this sense, APB remains under the protection of the cultural heritage sector—concentrated in IPHAN and affiliated institutions—and not the organisation responsible for managing visual and performative contemporary arts, which is the FUNARTE. Therefore, there are no specific measures that treat APB as contemporary art in the federal government sphere. Its insertion in the art market ends up being led by private cultural entities such as museums and art galleries, so that participation in biennales, for example, is the result of private sponsorship.⁹⁵ Within such a broader logic of including APB as a set of cultural references, official exhibitions of APB emphasise aspects of cultural heritage (fig. 18). APB then represents a material repository for cultural memories for the Brazilian people, further elaborated in the next chapter, in which artists act as narrators of

⁹⁵ See the following chapter for examples.

their communities or regions through their artworks. What is preserved are the *saberes e fazeres* and the embodiment of popular creativity.



Fig. 18. Permanent exhibition “The Object and its Narratives” of the Museu Nacional do Folclore Edson Carneiro, Rio de Janeiro.

IPHAN has developed a specific legal instrument, the Inventário Nacional de Referências Culturais ‘National Inventory of Cultural References’, a methodology to identify cultural references. The institution acts with local communities to originate a dossier and guide all subsequent registration, fostering and monitoring decisions so that the elected measures ensure the continuity of the cultural reference in the communities (Corsino et al; Londrès). The decentralised format of implementing governance policies in the country generates autonomy for IPHAN regional departments and state culture secretariats to expand federal legislation into specific regulations for their localities. It also engages other non-governmental actors in identifying, preserving, and valuing cultural heritage, such as universities, NGOs, and private cultural institutions (Santos and Müller 473; Cavalcanti 20).

Moreover, autonomy is granted to local states to fund specific awards such as local calls for Brazilian Mestres do Patrimônio Vivo, focusing on popular expressions, including APB. Despite not being adopted at the federal level, the practice continues in some Brazilian states with public calls for awarding a small lifetime grant to citizens who have played a significant role in the continuity of cultural practices. In this way, individuals are publicly recognised as holders of knowledge, those who maintain cultural memories through their artistic

achievements. Although it is an individual award, the recognition reverberates in the communities, generating interest in cultural practices and attracting tourism and economic investment. One example is in the state of Alagoas that inaugurated in 2019 the “Circuito Alagoas Feito à Mão” ‘Alagoas Handmade Circuit,’ which mapped the ateliers and homes of popular artists and artisans and installed four urban monuments at the city capital—large-sized replicas from the original sculptures by Mestres of the state (fig. 19).



Fig. 19. Alagoas Handmade Circuit with monumental replicas of APB from recognised Mestres—from left to right, Irinéia, João das Alagoas, Zezinho, and André da Marinheira—allocated in different spots of Maceió.

As explained in Chapter One, APB has been included in the Programa do Artesanato Brasileiro (PAB), seeking to enable artists and artisans to act more efficiently in the market according to business strategies. Corporate guidance is related to entrepreneurial skills, such as pricing, packaging, customer services, to allow more ethical market trading, rather than interfering in the creative process itself. The country does not have an accurate number of people currently working with APB or artisanship as an occupation. The inconsistency of data led the federal government to invest in mapping and strategic planning of the handicraft sector since 2006 (Brazil, Ministério do Planejamento 29–33). What is more, the 2014 Census indicates the presence of handicraft activity in 78.6% of municipalities (Brazil, IBGE, *Perfil* 22). Recognising the economic relevance of the sector, the federal government has been working to structure the Brazilian handicrafts management system with the aim of making it more competitive nationally and internationally. The funding has been directed to a national

database for registering artisans with 167,355 artisans registered by 2021, digital inclusion, and market expansion for the sector (Brazil, *Portal do Artesanato Brasileiro*; Brazil, Ministério da Economia).

Local state secretariats of culture have been instructed to implement the PAB national policy, fostering the production chain with a focus on the quality of customer service and sale of products. Other non-profit organisations and non-governmental organisations (such as the SEBRAE, and the Artesanato Solidário–ARTESOL) also act in partnership with local and national governments in promoting artisanal entrepreneurship, seeking a balance between innovation and continuity of *saberes e fazeres*.

In addition, Indigenous cultures are mainly researched by the Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI), while Afro-Brazilian culture is primarily promoted by the Fundação Palmares ‘Palmares Foundation’. Thus, given the fragmentation of Brazil’s Indigenous and popular universes, as explained in Chapter One, CSICH is also employed by FUNAI to safeguard Indigenous cultures. Some actions overlap when, for example, Indigenous cultural manifestations are the target of inventories or registered by IPHAN as national cultural heritage. Some activities or exhibitions of Indigenous arts and crafts are also carried out in the CNFCP or through partnerships with other institutions, but the authority on actions for the preservation and promotion of Indigenous culture remains concentrated at FUNAI. Such institutional fragmentation leads to the conclusion that APB carries a cultural heritage meaning rather than a contemporary artistic production for the state. Its distancing from matters related to Indigenous peoples and Afro-Brazilian movements somewhat exempts the state from discussing reparation measures when promoting APB.

2.3. Institutional Practices: Exhibiting Identities

When implementing cultural policies, institutions have been legitimating the insertion of peoples' arts in museums and art galleries either by trying to adjust these artistic expressions to conventional practices or by experimenting with different attitudes within exhibition spaces. Simultaneously, these institutions have been stimulating the conception of cultural policies aimed at these artistic expressions in the political field. Kylie Message argues that recent new museology approaches concerned with promoting cultural diversity, made museums to operate as "sites of instability" (472), with an orientation towards a greater contextualisation of their exhibitions.⁹⁶ By doing this, contextual cultural elements are used not only as a collection for the celebration of the country's great diversity but as components that create a specific environment for appreciating peoples' arts. This process may also challenge canonical positions when engaging with debates on coloniality and power imbalances.

David Dolan argues that in the Australian case, the market, public institutions, and the academic world have been mutually influential in repositioning ATSI art in exhibition spaces. Dolan states that in the 1990s, public art museums that already hosted Aboriginal art exhibitions also began to build exhibits integrating Aboriginal and non-Indigenous art in the same venue (62). This is now a normal practice, as observed at the Ian Potter Centre–NGV Australia, which includes ATSI art as part of contemporary Australian artistic expressions (fig. 20).

This transliteration of ATSI art is nonetheless not always seen in positive terms, as it belongs to a universe completely different from the Western category of fine arts. By understanding ATSI art as endowed with solid relational characteristics with physical, ancestral, and spiritual dimensions, Morphy contends that it needs "contextual information" ("Moving" 6) to be appreciated in collections and exhibitions. In this sense, the symbolic

⁹⁶ About the New Museology movement see Peter Vergo.

meanings behind the aesthetic values are essential for the successful incorporation of these creative practices into museum spaces.



Fig. 20. Above, “The Joseph Brown collection.” Below, “From Bark to Neon – Indigenous Art from NGV collection,” NGV Australia, Melbourne.

To contextualise ATSI art, Australian museums highlight a connection between its visual symbols and its cosmologies. The Melbourne Museum’s Bunjilaka Aboriginal Centre, for example, features a specific precinct for the permanent exhibition “First Peoples,” which opened in 2013 (fig. 21). The curatorial team worked directly with representatives from the Koorie Aboriginal peoples of Victoria for six years preparing the exhibition (Goldstein 480), to demonstrate through contemporary and customary artworks alongside audio-visual resources the temporal journey of Aboriginal peoples impacted by colonial encounters. Cultural protocols marked the opening day, with a “smoking ceremony, traditionally important in events such as births and funerals” (480).



Fig. 21. Main entrance of the “First Peoples” exhibition and part of the circuit highlighting the cultural diversity of the “Many Nations” that comprise ATSI art across Australia. Bunjilaka Aboriginal Centre.

Other institutions—such as the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA), National Gallery of NSW, and the Araluen Centre—despite retaining a conventional format for exhibiting the artworks, have maintained a connection to the language groups and regions they represent (fig. 22). This process of homogenising Indigenous cultures has been highly questioned in an effort to neutralise stereotyped understandings consolidated by the market, as was achieved with Aboriginal dot-painting due to the reputation of the Western Desert Art movement. At national and local levels, official documents and exhibitions strive to apply specific names to differentiate communities among themselves, underscoring the attempt to transform the homogeneous perception to a multinational composition of ATSI peoples. At Araluen Arts Centre, in Alice Springs, for instance, the touring exhibition “Tjungunutja: from having come together” (2019) featured earlier paintings of different cultural and language groups that came to the Aboriginal community of Papunya in the Western Desert region of

Central Australia to paint in the 1970s. The very name of the exhibition, a Pintupi-Luritja word, indicates the cultural variety of the groups that gave rise to the Western Desert Art Movement (fig. 23).



Fig. 22. ASTI arts collection of Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

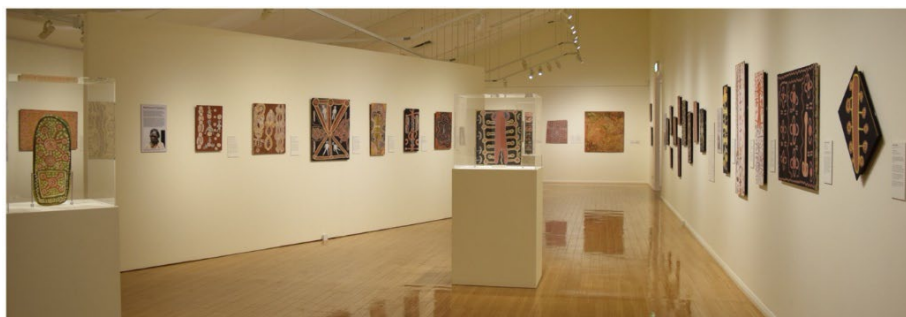


Fig. 23. “Tjungunutja: from having come together” exhibition. Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs.

When presenting the life and work of Papunya Tula artists, Vivien Johnson also mentions that, although there is individual recognition for each artist, in accordance with the contemporary art world and market demands, the movement’s longevity and ingenuity are mainly due to the emphasis given to these individuals’ sense of the collective, their organisational capacity as a cooperative, and the connection with “country” (xiii–iv). These facets, cultural background, and community spirit are normally claimed as needed for positioning ATSI in the art world. Morphy frames museums and art galleries as spaces for experimentation, and, while many still follow conventional exhibition models, the incorporation of opening ceremonies, as well as the production of documentation and

explanatory catalogues are steps towards greater contextualisation (“Moving” 18). New techniques of representation are necessary, however, to account for the entire symbolic body that goes beyond the limits of the institutions.

Albeit not as advanced as in New Zealand, the insertion of professionals of Indigenous descent into decision-making positions has also been an upward movement in Australia.⁹⁷ As Dolan explains, Aboriginal curatorial staff appointments since the 1990s, indicate both a commitment by institutions to maintain a collection dedicated to Aboriginal art and a reinforcement of a division of collections of European and Indigenous origin, thus perpetuating colonial categories (62). In fact, this division can be noticed in the sectorial organisation of the buildings, as in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, in Sydney, where the lowest floor is dedicated to Aboriginal art exhibitions. The location has long been a cause for criticism against the gallery, which, with its expansion project, intends to dedicate the central and front galleries to Aboriginal art (Brand). This repositioning also seeks to go beyond the institution’s physical limits, bringing artistic creations closer to urban spaces, especially the more touristy areas. Along these lines, since 2017 the Art Gallery of NSW has been responsible for curating the Badu Gili project (Water light in Gadigal language). This is a daily, free light show projection of Aboriginal artworks on the façades of the Sydney Opera House (fig. 24; see Sydney Opera House).

⁹⁷ Regardless of the advances in both countries when it comes to the social inclusion of Indigenous groups, there is still a striking difference between Australia and New Zealand. Nicholas Thomas highlights that while New Zealand had Māori graduates and representatives in the parliament since the end of the nineteenth century, in Australia, the same did not happen before 1960 (184).



Fig. 24. Badu Gili light show, Sydney Opera House.

In museum spaces of Aotearoa New Zealand, the process of homogenising Indigenous cultures has also been challenged. Although still present in the official bicultural discourse, curators emphasise the need for battling universalising views. In the 1980s, Sidney Moko Mead stated that the primary purpose of a museum in Oceania should be to facilitate the maintenance of art forms and their integration within the communities (“Indigenous Models” 100–1). The concept of *taonga* applied to the museum to identify the entire collection of artworks—not only the art of Māori provenance—pursues this idea. According to Conal McCarthy et al., this was done by following the reassessment of the Treaty of Waitangi, which has not only centred on Māori culture, but it has also redefined how museums interpret the idea of intangible cultural heritage. The country’s attitude attests to the primacy of one distinctive approach for cultural management. It may not follow the CSICH, yet it does support recognition of collective authority through respect for its integral culture. In that context, *taonga* become understood as cultural heritage, comprising both tangible and intangible dimensions, including non-Māori artistic and cultural objects. On a similar note, Marilena Alivizatou identifies Te Papa Museum

as a prominent example of incorporating Māori narratives and as an international successful experience in applying the idea of intangible heritage to museum space.

Kylie Message explains that the Te Papa Museum, envisioned in the late 1980s and opened in 1998, reflects a commitment to represent a national identity in accordance with bicultural policies (476). After the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Act 1992, the museum acknowledges the country's cultural diversity due to immigration, but the central function is to accommodate two main cultures in unity, with a focus on recognising Māori's preeminence. This bicultural intention currently remains in the museum's official communication and the offered guided tours (fig. 25).



Fig. 25. From left to right, Te Tiriti o Waitangi/ The Treaty of Waitangi installation; Waharoa (gateway) created for the Colonial Museum, Te Papa's forerunner, in 1906. Te Papa Museum.

New Zealand has been implementing cultural protocols in museums and art galleries. As an illustration, the public is given the opportunity to wash their hands with running water at the end of the circuit to be purified after being in contact with photographs or belongings of deceased people (fig. 26). In general, an effort is made to respect the sacred character of culture, whose decoding to a wider audience must be made by Māori, the knowledge holders. The museums' incorporation of the taonga concept is an example of this official recognition

(McCarthy et al. 8). Although this practice can imply respect and inclusion, such extrapolation to non-related Māori practices may indicate a political strategy that loses sacred aspects of culture to prioritise the association of the Indigenous peoples' knowledge with its national image, hence creating a sense of international uniqueness.



Fig. 26. Cleansing water after exhibition circuits at Te Papa Museum (left) and Auckland Museum (right).

Affirmative actions on educational institutions also had an impact in the cultural sector that have been filling positions with professionals of Indigenous descent. The awareness of self-representation puts the current curatorial team at Te Papa Museum in a constant process of methodological revision to avoid directly applying Western museological practices. For instance, curator Puawai Cairns indicates a preference for using the concept of “ReMāorification” to highlight Māori voices and to determine the best ways of sharing Māori knowledge in museum spaces.

The museums visited in Aotearoa emphasise the iwi's authority to connect with their taonga due to the close ancestral correlation established with Māori art. In that regard, Te Papa Museum offers a regional and global leadership in museum practices (Geismar 123). At the Museum, iwi representatives assist the curatorial team who act as facilitators without full autonomy to create a narrative. This guardianship practice, or kaitiaki, represents part of the

core of transforming a Western Museum norm into an “Indigenous model” (Mead, “Indigenous Models”; McCarthy et al 6).

The effort to recognise cultural specificities within the iwi system of organisation is evident in the Te Papa exhibition “Ko Rongowhakaata: The Story of Light and Shadow.”⁹⁸ Rongowhakaata iwi is given a voice to express its relationship with taonga throughout history, with an exhibition circuit narrating their history through customary and contemporary artworks. It stresses their art practice as dynamic, strengthened by the past, and in active transformation. All the textual narratives available in this exhibition are in first person, highlighting iwi’s view about their cultural development. The exhibition also demonstrates a curatorial concern to highlight Māori cultural heterogeneity and its different positions within the larger context of the country’s historical formation, overcoming the simplistic understanding of biculturalism that tends to represent Māori populations as uniform. Because of this approach, Te Papa also stands out as attracting a more considerable number of Māori visitors, who find themselves represented in the specific iwi exhibitions. Contemporary Māori artworks displayed in art galleries, including the art gallery floor at Te Papa, on the other hand, do not have the same appeal and maintain a conventional upper-middle-class Pākehā public of these spaces (McCarthy, “Rules”).

Community engagement is also made evident in the Rongomaraeroa te marae, “the museum place of encounter,” which serves the purpose of relationship with the iwi, but also assumes a national dimension in which “all people with taonga in the museum were entitled to stand and speak on the museum’s marae” (McCarthy, *Museums* 97). The wharenuī of the marae was executed as a contemporary reinterpretation, designed to represent “the spirit of bicultural

⁹⁸ Photography is not allowed at the exhibition. Images and more information available on <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/visit/exhibitions/ko-rongowhakaata-story-light-and-shadow>.

partnership that lies at the heart of the Museum, and is based on the idea that Te Papa is a forum for the nation” (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa; fig. 27).

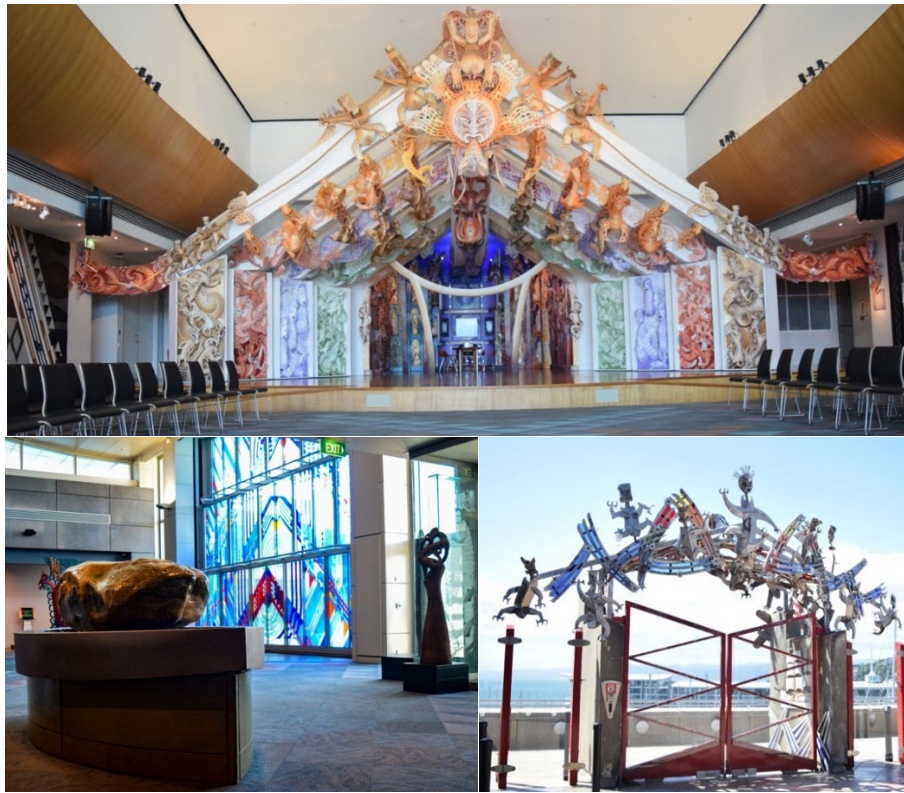


Fig. 27. Rongomaraeroa te marae, Te Papa Museum.

The Auckland Museum also follows the first-person narrative approach. Despite being a war memorial, the Auckland Museum circuit is organised to recognise Māori’s active participation in New Zealand’s historical formation and response to the colonisation process. Specifically, the New Zealand Wars gallery displays carved sculptures, portraits, gifts, and weapons to tell from a Māori perspective how they took part in wars alongside Pākehā and how these events have impacted their lifestyle. The exhibition tries to connect the paths of “Two people, One land” (fig. 28). As posed by Haidy Geismar, “the history of appropriation of Māori cultural production is also the history of the production of the New Zealand settler state” (90). In this sense, there is an effort to respectfully showcase the colonial occupation and following nation-state project, bearing in mind its impacts on the first inhabitants’ lives. The showcase at

the Auckland Museum remains largely conventional, yet community engagement is observed through the research team, who facilitate access to taonga for their family circles.



Fig. 28 Exhibition “Two People, One Land: The New Zealand Wars,” Auckland Museum.

Temporary exhibitions also offer a space for experimentation to translate Indigenous knowledges to larger museum audiences and iwi co-curatorship in the Auckland Museum. According to Paul Tapsell, this is possible as the Auckland Museum curatorial team maintained “a less politically encumbered institution,” unlike the Te Papa, which was directly bound by the mandate of “perpetuating the government-led ideology of bicultural” (“Ko Tawa” 267). Tapsell recounts that collaborative work with iwi can establish a trusting relationship in which the exhibition offers them a space for knowledge transference for iwi descendants “growing up away in the cities” (272).

There is thus a dual function of cultural activities and exhibitions for Indigenous peoples: On the one hand, they speak to their own communities, in the process of construction or (re)appropriation of dignity and pride of their historical background and how they can keep their culture alive while navigating colonial legacies. On the other hand, they speak to the broader public composed of the country’s general society and foreign tourists, operating in a didactic manner to increase awareness and establish respect towards Indigenous cultures that,

although occupying Westernised places, diverges in the creative ways of knowing and doing. Recent exhibition experiences have reinforced this principle of “ReMāorification,” such as the show “Toi Tū Toi Ora: Contemporary Māori Art” at the Auckland Art Gallery (2020–21; fig. 29). With over 300 works of Māori art, this was the institution’s largest exhibition, occupying the entire venue and being considered a milestone in the process of decolonising a mainstream institution (Art Toi). Extrapolating museum and art gallery venues into public spaces is also a common strategy for enhancing Māori identity in New Zealand. Using Māori public art in urban spaces is a regular practice in many cities to connect citizens and visitors with Aotearoa’s unique culture.⁹⁹



Fig. 29. “Toi Tū Toi Ora: Contemporary Māori Art,” Auckland Art Gallery, 2021.

In the Mexican context, Mary Coffey argues that APM’s increased commodification process has ultimately come to equate citizenship with consumerism as popular artists’ access to citizenship is directly tied to their ability to sell their products (“Gifting”). In this context, exhibitions of APM act as value legitimisers and boosters of the desire to purchase. FONART, for example, has five museum shops in Mexico City, mixing exhibition spaces with information about APM authors and their regions but mainly focused on sales with a percentage return for the creators according to a fair-trade ideal (fig. 30).

The institution follows a state-regulated logic of economic entailment of culture, which is situated as a guarantor of the social welfare of popular artists in exchange for them being

⁹⁹ See, for example, Artweek Auckland.

responsible for the production of national culture. Coffey argues that this government role in the neoliberal context has been partially transferred to the private sector, with the prominent role of Citibanamex (“Gifting”). These actions consolidated APM’s art status and its role as a representative of a globally prized national cultural heritage. Henceforth, market success is positioned as a necessary condition to guarantee well-being for the collective, and consumers, when encouraged to buy APM, assume along with the state a responsibility to help maintain life quality in local communities. Artists are also supported individually, when considered great *Mestres*, and their marketplace success ensures an improvement in their living conditions.



Fig. 30. FONART Retail store, Mexico City.

Regarding museum practices, the Museo Nacional de Antropología (MNA), inaugurated in 1964, represents APM as an integral part of the country’s material culture, therefore occupying the ethnography section. The ethnographic organisation is divided into galleries dedicated to the different Indigenous populations representing their cosmovision and ways of life in contemporary times. The galleries are divided by region, although they do not highlight Indigenous peoples who emigrated from their regions of origin or those that now inhabit urban areas in the country (Liffman 146). As part of the contemporary world, Mexican popular material culture is directly related to the idea of a living and ever-changing heritage.

The objects are exhibited alongside human-scale mannequins that simulate the communities' lifestyles, including ritual practices, everyday life, and festive celebrations.

Nonetheless, the circuit creates an effect of detachment from modern life, which is only recalled by the inclusion of new materials in tangible production, such as plastic, and in the manufacture of local products destined for commercialisation. Experiences of exchange outside community life are also emphasised with artisanship activities (fig. 31). In so doing, it is in consumer transactions that these populations participate in modernity. As Coffey explains, the new ethnographic museum installations implemented in the 1990s present communities facing the challenges of modern society ("Gifting" 11). In this way, the heterogeneity of popular cultures is bound together by a "collective injury" (12) that is "embodied [in a] social sector in need of support" (15), as they all face exclusion from the prevailing socioeconomic order.



Fig. 31. Representation of women producing *artesanías*. Sala Purécherio, MNA, Mexico City.

From the 2000s, the MNA has appointed curators from Indigenous peoples, strengthening engagement with their communities (Liffman 151). This relationship between community and museum generates experiences such as the one reported by Paul Liffman in his analysis of the Gran Nayar gallery, dedicated to the Huichols peoples from central northwest Mexico. In a process of reterritorialisation, Huichols communities executed ritual performances

with offerings of votive bowls left at the foot of ancestral archaeological sculptures displayed at the museum. The curatorial team reappropriated the votive bowls and incorporated them into the Gran Nayar Gallery, in a process described by Liffman as “metapragmatic curatorship” (153), thus reinforcing the importance of the representativeness of cultures previously silenced in museum spaces.

The Huichols Votive Bowls represent a remarkable negotiation of these people to participate in the markets of APM. One of the internationally recognised Huichol’s art representations is the sculptures covered with vibrant coloured bead decoration. The pieces traded, such as jaguar heads, masks, and bowls, are completely beaded following traditional design patterns. However, the votive bowls used in ceremonies are punctually beaded to mark symbolic representations that are meaningful within the cosmovision of these communities, while the utilitarian bowls are not decorated at all. Therefore, a clear election is made of the cultural elements that will serve a trade exchange and those preserved for community use.

In contrast, the Museo de Arte Popular (MAP), in Mexico city, inaugurated in 2006 also with support from Citibanamex, has a vision of valuing APM embedded in the ideal of exchange established between communities and society in general, tourists and consumers, with the museum playing a mediating role (R. López, *Crafting*, “Conclusions”). APM pieces are situated as an integral part of the identity conformation of each Mexican region, but which can be experienced aesthetically by a general public. This appreciation is justified on the grounds of the possible improvement in the communities’ living conditions. In this way is recognised the relevance of the marketplace for APM survival, which is enhanced by the opportunity to acquire pieces by the same exhibiting artists in the gift shop. The museum circuit focuses on the aesthetic qualities of the pieces, which are organised by type of material, theme, and corresponding geographical indication. There is community involvement in workshops and

events, such as the famous La Noche de los Alebrijes ‘The Night of the Alebrijes,’ in which various popular artists participate by making the *alebrijes*—papier-mâché sculptures of fantastic animals—in large-scale size to participate in an award contest and a commemorative parade (fig. 32).¹⁰⁰



Fig. 32. From left to right, wooden *alebrijes* collection and large-size papier-mâché *alebrijes*, MAP.

Similarly, in Brazil, some APB exhibitions prioritise a modern view of art, focusing on the object and its formal qualities, and others incorporate a better contextualisation about the living conditions and biography of the artists, with a more anthropological perspective (fig. 33). In general, museums dedicated to popular cultures often emphasise the dialogue and syncretism between the various cultures that make up the country. Yasmin Fabris explores this institutional positioning when analysing the exhibition “Puras Misturas” ‘Pure Mixtures’ that inaugurated the museum Pavilhão das Culturas Brasileiras in 2010, bringing together works by artists classified as popular, Indigenous, urban, erudite, among others. However, Fabris states that the approach towards APB remains dependent on a re-signification, from artifact to art, based on its contrast with erudite art objects (222). In fact, it is the contrast not only with erudite objects but with the Eurocentric institutional space itself that is one of the most used resources to highlight the potency of the popular as “art.” Its non-adjustment to the modern Western

¹⁰⁰ *Alebrijes* origins date to the creation of fantastic multicoloured animals using papier-mâché in the late 1930s by one single person, Pedro Linares, whose idea later inspired entire communities, and which also became considered national heritage. Some communities would later create wooden *Alebrijes*, normally with men responsible for carving and women for painting. From the beginning, *alebrijes* were made with ornamental purposes, and their production was progressively stimulated by the state (Masuoka 207; Bartra “Fantastic Art”).

system highlights its conditions of oppression, while simultaneously awakening the desire to learn about other realities of which consumers and visitors are not part.



Fig. 33. APB collection, Museu Nacional do Folclore Edson Carneiro, Rio de Janeiro.

In Brazilian museums such as the Museu Nacional do Folclore Edson Carneiro and the Museum of Arte Popular Janete Costa, curators are free to build their own professional narratives. Some act as ethnographers within the communities, while artists are often invited to exhibition openings or to offer workshops to the public, yet they do not necessarily participate in the curatorial process. The Museu Nacional do Folclore, for instance, remodelled its long-term exhibition in November 2016, freeing itself from the previous showcase of objects organised into categories of popular expressions classification. The new show, named “O Objeto e suas Narrativas” ‘The Object and its Narratives,’ presents stories that can be told through works of APB. With a spatial composition with sculptures and paintings, clothing, musical instruments, craft objects, graffiti, drawings, and toys, the circuit gathers artworks from different regions of the country, organising them in themes that represent the relationship of the Brazilian people with the sea, the rivers, the land, the urban environment, and with written and musical language.

The Janete Costa Museum has a slightly different approach. The curatorial team elects a contemporary topic that will be discussed with the audience through the selection of APB. An example is the exhibition “Entre Anjos e Palmeiras” ‘Between Angels and Palm Trees,’ which commissioned wooden sculptures of angels and palm trees from popular artists from the state of Piauí to discuss the idea of freedom (fig. 34). These museums also offer a gallery space where the featured artists can commercialise their artworks, bringing them closer to their clientele. The museums’ acknowledgement of the artists’ authorial status, as in Mexico, does not mean autonomy in deciding on their own representations. Viewed through this lens, popular expressions are—to some extent—protected under tutelage when occupying art-culture official spaces, insofar as an understanding of the popular inevitably confines it within the conflict between classes and contingent to exogenous forms of legitimation.



Fig. 34. Exhibition “Entre Anjos e Palmeiras,” Museu Janete Costa, Niterói.

As a result of this paradox, some Latin American curators question the impact of official actions in placing Indigenous art under the category of *arte popular*. Ingrid Suckaer states, for instance, that the government promotion of *arte popular* in Latin America has deprived Indigenous art of being regarded as contemporary art. For Suckaer, the problem resides in the label “popular,” which prevents these artworks from being acknowledged as critical (4). In Brazil, recent initiatives have also been trying to place Indigenous art in the contemporary art scene so that it can transcend the collective artisanal production framework, comparable to

what has been happening with the Brazilian Black movement (Araujo).¹⁰¹ On the other hand, artists who are identified today as “popular” claim that such terminology does not affect their work. For most of them, there is no difference between being an artist or an artisan, and this is a discussion that belongs to gallery owners, collectors, and critics.

The new museology discourse has also remodelled Brazilian museological practice, resituating the displayed objects from repositories of independent knowledge to mediating instruments of identity and memory (Gonçalves 99). Thus, the interaction with communities through workshops and itinerant events becomes a constant practice of museums devoted to popular cultures. Moreover, this approach influences the creation of community museums. In this vein, smaller experiences have appeared in the country intending to strengthen community ties with APB. With the support of entities such as universities, state and municipal governments, local museums have been created as a way of returning to the communities a sense of dignity about their own cultural work. By the launching of these museums, it is argued that APB is commonly recognised by exogenous agents but somewhat unexplored by local inhabitants.

In 2017, a few experiences of APB memorial spaces were installed in Alagoas with this goal. One of them is the Artisan Fernando Rodrigues dos Santos Memory Space in the Ilha do Ferro Village, whose name honours the pioneer artisan Mestre Fernando. This village, full of sculptors and female embroiderers, receives many purchase requests and they are aware of the market value of their products, although ordinary people from Alagoas do not regularly consume them. The memorial was an initiative from the Universidade Estadual de Alagoas (UNEAL), and each local artist has donated one of their pieces to build the collection, feeling proud to be part of a museum exhibition. These memorials act as a showcase and educational space. The communities feel valued because now the pieces made to be bought worldwide can

¹⁰¹ See footnote 50, p.64.

be displayed in their hometown, creating a sense of worthiness since their creations have enough merit to be inside a museum.

2.4. Peoples' Art Value

This cross-cultural analysis has explored how cultural memories of groups that experience conditions of oppression are being used as a fundamental value in branding national identities, following an ontological quest for differentiation in the global era while enacting culture through a business mindset. By considering the role of culture, it is understood that all four countries have gone through different paths for historically representing oppressed groups. This instrumentalisation of peoples' art occurs both for political-social purposes and to generate income for the communities and groups represented. When participating in the art-culture systems, these populations are inserted into a marketisation context to achieve representativeness and access social and economic benefits, as seen, for instance, in the indications of fair-trade in the gift-shops of museums and galleries.

International treaties are considered important cornerstones for creating awareness, and for establishing forums for cooperation and supporting demands for changes in policy attitudes at a national level. Adhesion to those regulations in Latin American countries is a response to this global interaction in order to encourage local changes in behaviour. However, although Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand have not ratified the CSICH, the cultural policies developed in these countries have focused on the protection and promotion of Indigenous cultural manifestations considering their holistic complexity and local specificities. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the regulations created in these countries align the needs for preservation and valorisation of Indigenous cultural expressions with the legal matter of intellectual property, which does not happen when cultural manifestations are associated with the concept of popular cultures. The extent of these legal measures as a response to the actual

demands of Indigenous peoples, or rather as a way of incorporating such creative expressions into market-based global exchange trends, is an issue that needs further investigation in the future.

At the same time, these four countries' incorporation of both the UDCD and CDCE's precepts for cultural diversity and promotion of the different cultures that integrate the national culture demonstrates an interest to align with international practices of affirmation of difference, seen as an asset for development. This involves complex negotiations: strengthening local cultures in order to benefit their own peoples and appropriating these cultures as a means of soft power in the global sphere.

Regarding national agendas on the peoples' arts positioning, Australia stands out by its assertive movement in internationally situating ATSI art as contemporary art, as the avant-garde created by the world's oldest living culture. The endeavour of incorporating these specific cultural expressions into the western model of aesthetic appreciation certainly brought new issues, such as the exploitation of artists by intermediaries, as well as the disassociation between visual representations and the cultural meanings of the practice. In their turn, Australian official institutions have been striving to build awareness for many Aboriginal nations by highlighting the diversity of creativity beyond the more famous abstract-like dot-painting style. When it comes to Aotearoa New Zealand, practices suggest a respectful way to navigate Māori culture within the art system, although highly immersed in tourist and creative industries in the global market. The country stands with a more solid practice of self-determination for Māori, with cultural spaces more open to alignment with Māori's own narratives.

In Mexico and Brazil, the primary intention is to promote *arte popular* as a form of cultural heritage, leaving the effort to accommodate these manifestations to the Western art market for private sectors. In this sense, the embodiment of cultural memories in *arte popular*

has been mainly represented through the narratives built by official institutions. As a result, Brazil maintains blurred boundaries in the ethnic-racial identifications of the population and its consequent association with *arte popular*, whereas Mexico presents more clarity in the association of its national heritage to the production of each of the Indigenous peoples, even with the process of hybridisation and Iberian influence as a strong trait. Within the APM realm, this country identifies artistic practice not only by geographical region but also by the related Indigenous peoples. In parallel, both Latin American countries remain with the separation of realms between popular and contemporary arts. The art coming from the peoples still does not occupy clear spaces in the art world, and it is mainly connected to the idea of artisanship. In that respect, the social class divide evidenced in popular manifestations may be a greater barrier for a cultural agency in mainstream spaces, while ethnic, identity or Indigenous identification can enable navigation through the art-culture system with more assertiveness around self-representation.

It is noteworthy that while at different levels, Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia have striven to regulate and implement cultural protocols and advisory councils to guide interaction with their traditional arts, this is not the case in Mexico and Brazil. While these countries' Indigenous or popular communities must undoubtedly have their specific ritual practices around culture, when it comes to presenting their popular creative works in art exhibitions there are no mandatory cultural protocols. Self-curating experiences also appear in New Zealand's praxis, whereas in Mexico and Brazil, the other's hegemonic gaze is usually preeminent for *arte popular*.

There are also convergences of practices when considering the current global model of commercialisation of culture. From Brazil to Australia, from Mexico to Aotearoa New Zealand, most artists work in a conventional art market system, with commissioned works for specific clients or exhibitions. However, even in this market context, in a contradictory way, art is seen

as a possibility to expand the so-long-silenced voices. The appreciation of these artistic manifestations transforms them into a source of regular income for families—most often the only work activity available in the region—as communities receive subsidies to assist in essential services as well as entrepreneurship training so that they can achieve ethical fair-trade levels in artmaking.

Such an individualising marketing reality goes against the previously mentioned function of Brazilian popular artists as narrators of a collective. Hence, there is a shift from the role of the visual storyteller of the people to that of a culture producer worker who sells his labour effort following market interests. There is wide use of culture for civil rights acquisition, which, as García Canclini and Yúdice assert, comes to meet the shortcomings of neoliberalism by equating citizenship with consumerism. This latest stage of capitalism appropriates the artist's productive capacity. It displaces the cultural identification function of art to strengthen its power in all types of production, including those of creative and aesthetic realms. In this sense, a paradox has been imposed on peoples' art by the current neoliberal order: while it is co-opted for strategic purposes by government management, or to offer exclusive products to consumers and tourists, their artistic valorisation also promotes a process of resignification of traditions and reappropriation of identity values so that communities learn to be proud of themselves and their origins.

On a legal level, through international instruments as well as national and local policies, it is possible to observe a progressive valorisation of peoples' arts with a dual function. On the one hand, what is perceived is a generalised "aestheticisation" of cultural expressions, in the sense of adjusting them to the global market logic. Entrepreneurial and performative experiences that exhibit artmaking mainly for tourist consumption bring the uniqueness of the visual qualities of peoples' art into play. Although such an enterprise is justified to endow communities with sustainability, this is ultimately employed to benefit the country's national

image. On the other hand, the application of culture as a tool for acquiring or enhancing their citizenship reflects the inseparability of the social, political and cultural spheres for these “culturally oppressed” groups in an entirely different way to the Western understanding of autonomous art. Insofar as historical reparation relies on cultural awareness, the arts from peoples under conditions of oppression appear as an indispensable component by embodying cultural memories and enabling the strengthening of collective identities.

As evidenced in the governmental regulations on the promotion of cultural diversity in favour of sustainable development, the tourism activity focused on Indigenous and popular cultures has gained global prominence.¹⁰² The marketisation of the art of these peoples is aligned with the tourism industry advances, which uses their imagery as a symbol of uniqueness for specific travel destinations, “a means of securing ‘branding’ that is instantly recognisable as being part of that country” (Ryan and Opal 308). Even when the “tourism product” is specific to a locality, in order to participate in the global market, peoples’ art may end up being adjusted to a “formula” to take part of so-called experience tourism, included within the umbrella term of “experience economy” (Pine and Gilmore). This is a global trend in which the memories built in a place by experiencing local cultures become the final product for tourists. In this way, peoples are seen as producers of art and culture, transforming not only their creations into commodities but also shaping their ways of life into performances for visitors.

However, such state efforts may translate differently into the institutional strategies of museums that often aim to ensure the visibility of the heterogeneity of these cultures. Within the neoliberal logic, both museum practices and cultural tourism activity have become an arena of negotiations in which commercialisation, political representation, community

¹⁰² The tourism influence has brought other challenges such as art counterfeiting and copying, not explored in this thesis, especially due to its primary connection with Indigenous graphic patterns, which does not necessarily happen within APB. Although further advances have been made in intellectual property protection legislation is still needed in the four countries, mainly due to the need for collective order protection, positive progress is taking place in Oceania. For specific examples of government action to prevent art forgery see the Māori made trademark *Toi Iho* in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Australian campaign “Fake Art Harms Culture.”

reorganisation, and identity redefinition go hand in hand (See, for example, Alexis Bunten; and Paul Liffmann). Consequently, the representation of cultural heritage either through exhibitions or experiences acts as a mediator between different social agents with different levels of power. For this reason, rather than relying only on larger national projects, local initiatives such as community museums, or other initiatives managed by the groups that own the cultural practice, may be a safer avenue for them to maintain greater decision-making autonomy and agency over their culturally represented knowledge.

Therefore, complying with cultural policies that are aligned with a nation branding strategy does not mean that cultural institutions are invested entirely in a market-oriented approach. They have also enabled alternative forms of aesthetic experiences to occupy official exhibition spaces and created forums for enhancing peoples' narratives. This attitude sheds light on the relational aspects of people's art and opens new debates about the ways to represent it, ranging from contextualisation to artwork self-sufficiency. Some of these options will be further considered for the Brazilian case in the following Chapters.

CHAPTER III

Arte Popular Brasileira as Micro-utopia

If in Latin America the enjoyment of material goods is reserved for the very few, the majority must resign themselves to consuming fantasies.¹⁰³

– *Eduardo Galeano, A descoberta da América (que ainda não houve)*

3.1. APB as Cultural Memory

Following a “curatorial trend” at the beginning of the twentieth century, intellectuals, artists, and official institutions recategorised cultural expressions of the people, labelling them as “folk or popular art” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination* 228). APB was progressively accepted into diverse artistic fields, such as artisanship, art, and design. First observed in popular expressions such as sculptures, paintings, and textiles, APB has since then fluidly traversed institutional boundaries, with different government administrations collaborating to finally declare it as national cultural heritage. Simultaneously, the art industry sector started to promote APB to make it more desirable in the marketplace, attracting higher social classes consumers. This Chapter elaborates on the symbolic functions that APB fulfils in Brazilian society, and what is behind the ethical, aesthetic, cultural and commercial appreciation it has received from those diverse agents involved in its creation, promotion, and circulation in cultural forums. Considering all these realms, this Chapter advances the thesis that APB constitutes a micro-utopia in offering a symbolic place for enduring cultural memories against the dehumanising processes of modern neoliberal society. It elaborates on the different meanings of micro-utopia for those who consume APB and the popular artists who create it.

¹⁰³ “Se na América Latina o gozo dos bens terrenos está reservado a poucos, é preciso que a maioria se resigne a consumir fantasias.”

Becoming an Artist to Represent Brasilidade

Supported by interviews with artists, cultural intermediaries, and public officers from twelve towns or villages and three urban centres, this section focuses on the discourses put forward by public institutions, the private sector, and non-profit organisations involved in the process of promoting APB.¹⁰⁴ The emphasis will be on the “transactional” dynamic that has been consolidated from the institutional and private sectors, at whose core is APB’s “auratic” meaning and status, which, to be retained, requires maintaining the existing oppressed condition of the artists.

In accordance with a decolonial perspective, it is possible to say that the formation of the modern nation-states, whose independence movements in the Americas were initiated in the eighteenth century, represents the establishment of a structure of power and domination that imposed one single identity over many other pre-existing nations, such as the Indigenous and diasporic peoples. As explained by Aníbal Quijano, “the process of the independence of states without corresponding liberation of societies was not a process of the development of nation-states, in the European sense, but a rearticulation of the coloniality of power upon new bases” (“Coloniality” 227). In Brazil, the consolidation of national identity, or *brasilidade*, attempted to define Brazilian people’s uniqueness, shaped within the oppressive colonial system forged by the Portuguese colonisers against the descendants of Indigenous peoples and enslaved populations of African origin. As Darcy Ribeiro states, the Brazilian consciousness was historically built on contradictory attempts towards the cultural erasure of Indigenous and African ancestors while retaining a careful selection of traditional elements from these same groups. The goal was to distinguish Brazil from the European metropolis (*Brazilian* 86), hence

¹⁰⁴ See fig. 6, p.42, and Appendices One and Two for detailed information on the places visited and groups interviewed.

confirming the critical role later played by popular cultures and specifically by APB on the construction of Brazilian identity.

In that regard, popular cultures occupy a key place in the nation-building process, being used either through a direct appropriation to create national symbols or as vivid spaces to re-elaborate and re-interpret contemporary society, as is the case of APB. Because popular cultures embody “the absence of division into autonomous spheres of the economic, the cultural, and the political” (Browitt 19), it has a paradoxical basis: while it engages with the dominant order—thus being at risk of co-option by the neoliberal rationale to become part of “mass culture”—it maintains a potential for challenging the modern society parameters to become what this thesis describes as micro-utopias.

As elaborated in the Introduction, in Brazil, the inclusion of popular cultures into institutional spaces was first accomplished by the Brazilian Folkloric movement, especially between 1947 and 1964. This was a period in which, according to Vilhena, the efforts of folklorists were aimed at protecting those manifestations that condensed the still recent formative process of national culture and, as such, should be protected from foreign influence (260). After this period, the developing institutionalised social thinking in the country began to recognise popular cultural creativity as intertwined with modern life today. The then existing official agenda is what stirred the opening of museums and the organisation of exhibitions of public and private collections, especially between the 1960s and 1980s. Roberto Rugiero,¹⁰⁵ the owner of the forerunner Brasiliana Art Gallery in São Paulo, confirms this idea by highlighting the presence of APB artists in “erudite” spaces, as exemplified by the various editions of the São Paulo Biennial, especially those held between the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ From this section onwards, all the quotes referring to cultural intermediaries and popular artists constitute excerpts from the interviews conducted during field research in Brazil in 2019.

¹⁰⁶ One example was the exhibition “Uncommon Art” held in 1981 during the XVI São Paulo Biennial, as the exhibition of the production of singular artists “on the fringes of the cultural art system” (Andriolo, 158).

The intangible heritage policy has also made it possible for marginalised communities to gain a voice in institutional spaces. One of the most remarkable contributions derived from granting heritage values to APB is that it enables the incorporation of narratives from an entire collective into material objects. In its physical formats, such as sculptures, paintings, textiles and woodcuts, a chain of transmission of vernacular knowledge is made visible. Therefore, what APB communicates are ontological realms that preserve cultural memories through symbolic means.

APB's narrative authority is associated with the idea of capturing the identity of Brazilian people, even if its production is not widely known throughout the country, and within an art world that gives pre-eminence to individual rather than collective expression. Several galleries specialising in APB use a similar discourse to promote their collections. Words such as sensitivity, spirituality, spontaneity, purity, intuition, originality, and authenticity are frequently used to describe this art. In general, gallery owners claim that consumers seeking to purchase APB pieces fit into a sophisticated, upper-middle-class profile. They are liberal professionals who, in their search for "existential fulfilment"¹⁰⁷ no longer feel satisfied with mass consumption artefacts, or who "have already overcome the pleasures of silver and acrylic,"¹⁰⁸ in the words of Ana Maria Schindler, the owner of the Pé-de-Boi Art Gallery in Rio de Janeiro. Visual artists, architects, and designers who work in the creative industries integrate the interested public as they seek inspiration in what Vilma Eid, owner of the Estação Art Gallery in São Paulo, describes as "the pure forms of APB artists"¹⁰⁹ (fig. 35).

To conceptualise APB, Roberto Rugiero prefers the concept of "arte espontânea" 'spontaneous art,' where spontaneity is seen as inherent to the creative process of popular artists (fig. 36). Rules, or expectations, do not limit them, as popular artists are thought to be rather

¹⁰⁷ "realização existencial."

¹⁰⁸ "já superaram os prazeres da prata e do acrílico."

¹⁰⁹ "as formas puras dos artistas da APB."

moved by “an internal drive”.¹¹⁰ For Rugiero, APB artists are those who “have their feet on the ground,”¹¹¹ because their social condition has been shaped by poverty and all the harsh living circumstances that today define APB. The merchant explains that “the popular artist often emerges from extremely serious situations in their life, from great monetary deprivation, illness, family misfortune, difficult situations that lead them to connect with a spiritual force, because a great characteristic of APB is spirituality.”¹¹²



Fig. 35. APB collection of the Estação Art Gallery, São Paulo.



Fig. 36. APB collection of the Brasiliana art gallery, São Paulo.

In this context, spirituality has to be understood in a non-religious sense, but rather to describe an existential search for our true self. As Jacob Golomb points out, the human being “is a spiritual self, trying to unite contrary tendencies of soul and body. To exist is to be in the

¹¹⁰ “uma necessidade interna de criar.”

¹¹¹ “tem o pé no chão.”

¹¹² “o artista popular surge muitas vezes de situações de extrema gravidade de sua vida, de grande penúria monetária, doença, desgraça na família, situações difíceis que o levam a se conectar com uma força espiritual, pois uma característica fantástica da arte popular é a espiritualidade.”

process of becoming one's self' (56). The longing to reunite with the authentic self emerges from the shock resulting from a "strong pressure exerted by social convention and educational systems" (Golomb 72). We could, therefore, say from the perspective of cultural intermediaries, that they nurture the desire to identify an authentic "self" in popular artists since, due to their assigned oppressed condition in society, they do not conform to the standards, or are less affected by problems created by modern Western society. Spirituality is also described by cultural intermediaries as a subjective state of sensibility, in which artists can express themselves more freely and intuitively. When referring to this aspect, Ana Maria Schindler says that artists are "on the threshold between human and bird, extremely sensitive."¹¹³ Under this ideological view, APB's works are perceived as embodying nature itself, which is what bestows their art with a holistic meaning of existence. Such an imaginary integration with nature, rather than offering a form of escapism, can be translated as a desire of finding ways to better navigate modern challenges, or as put by Umbach and Humpfrey, this admiration appears "as a partial corrective to the present, to be experienced and cherished in that present, which held the promise of restoring a dimension to human life and experience that life in modern cities could not cater for" (25).

Following these ideas, gallery owners influence the process of shaping an idealised image of these creators' lives, contributing to utopian ideals for public consumption. According to Jasson Gonçalves da Silva, a woodcarver who lives in the community of Monte Santo, in Belo Monte, Alagoas, gallery owners, aware of his manual skills with wood, asked him to experiment with creating sculptures. "I used to work with wood, [to make] bullock carts, doors. Then, a gallery owner asked me to make a couple of wooden figurines. She did the orders, but

¹¹³ "no limiar entre o ser humano e o passarinho, extremamente sensív[eis]."

she let me do that by myself. [She used to say] ‘the imagination is yours’” (fig. 37).¹¹⁴ Thus, there is a conscious effort to keep alive the artists’ desire to create and their capacity to continue innovating, differentiating their work from artisanal production.



Fig. 37. From left to right, Jasson in one of his “throne” chairs, in his atelier, Belo Monte; APB collection of the Karandash Art Gallery, which includes Jasson’s chairs and one of his sculptures (anthropomorphic figure with a snake in mouth), Maceió; Jasson’s sculptures in the Pé-de-Boi Art Gallery, Rio de Janeiro.

At the same time, according to Maria Amélia and Dalton Costa, visual artists and owners of the Karandash Art Gallery in Maceió, the conditions of poverty in which popular artists live can often compromise their creative capacity. That is why “the artist’s imagination is awakened, instigated, and this is the role of the curator, the merchant. Otherwise, they will only do Lampião, Maria Bonita, pregnant women” (Maria Amélia),¹¹⁵ which are figures and archetypes already consolidated in the popular imaginary and in traditional Brazilian handicraft production (fig. 38). The words of Roberto Rugiero corroborate this role assigned to the cultural intermediaries of adapting APB to the demands of the market: “APB merchants interfere a lot [in the production]: they suggest themes that better respond to the market demands. It’s a difficult job, not highly appreciated. ... Gallery owners are on a tightrope, the eternal balance

¹¹⁴ “Trabalhava com madeira, carro de boi, porta, daí a dona de uma galeria pediu para eu fazer um casal de bonecos, foi as duas primeiras peças que eu fiz. Ela fazia as encomendas e deixava eu fazer por conta própria. [Ela dizia] ‘A imaginação é sua.’”

¹¹⁵ “o imaginário do artista é despertado, instigado, e esse é o papel do curador, do merchant. Senão, ele vai fazer só Lampião, Maria Bonita, mulher grávida.”

between repetition that is on the verge of artisanship and the creative breath that guarantees the authenticity and originality of the artworks.”¹¹⁶



Fig. 38. From left to right, wooden sculptures by the artist Vêio of iconic characters of the Brazilian Northeast popular culture: the musician Gonzaguinha; the religious leader Padre Cícero, a couple of dancers; and Lampião, the hero/bandit of *sertão*, Nossa Senhora da Glória, Sergipe. Clay figurines representing Lampião and his wife Maria Bonita, ABMAM, Caruaru.

These narratives reinforce the modern ideal of artistic activity as an intellectual, creative work, detached from a mechanical or repetitive work, often labelled as mindless and degrading, to which human beings submit themselves only in the attempt to survive or earn an income (David Beech 38). Paradoxically, even though cultural intermediaries say they have to encourage popular artists to create, it is in the condition of poverty that they find the so-called spontaneous creativity and identify in the everyday experience of popular artists elements for “aesthetic appreciation” (Berleant 50).¹¹⁷ The artists themselves recognise this relationship between APB and poverty, indicating that the former is a creative resource employed to circumvent the privations imposed by the latter. In the words of the woodcutter J. Borges [José Francisco Borges], from the city of Bezerros, Pernambuco, “APB is stronger in the poorest regions because those who can study will not swap a good job to get into a mound of clay.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ “O *merchant* de arte popular tem muita interferência [na produção], dão tema, orientam para adequar ao mercado. É um trabalho difícil, pouco valorizado. ... Os galeristas ficam em uma corda bamba, o eterno equilíbrio entre a repetição que beira o artesanato e o fôlego criativo que garanta autenticidade e originalidade das obras.”

¹¹⁷ This process of aesthetic appreciation of the APB will be expanded upon in the following Chapter.

¹¹⁸ “A arte popular é mais forte nas regiões mais pobres, porque quem pode estudar não vai trocar um bom emprego para pegar um monte de barro.”

In the same way that gallery owners contribute to constructing the utopian imaginary consumers are looking for, the APB artist is also influenced by such expectations. The sculptor João das Alagoas (João Carlos da Silva), from Capela, says: “Those of us who survive by making art, have to do the things that our clients like the most. And they like folklore, the traditional plays, dances, the life in the countryside”¹¹⁹ (fig. 39). Thus, a nostalgic preference for depicting a life deceptively kept intact by modernity prevails.



Fig. 39. João das Alagoas working on one of his signature pieces, inspired by the folkloric character of the Boi Bumbá (traditional ox costumed used in carnival celebrations), in his atelier, Capela.

In discussing the taste for antiquities, Jean Baudrillard asserts that such interest is associated with both authenticity and nostalgia in a complementary way. In a psychoanalytical sense, nostalgia is related to the regression to maternal origins, “the older the object, the closer it brings us to an earlier age, to ‘divinity’, to nature, to primitive knowledge” (*System* 76). In turn, authenticity reflects an obsession with certifying authorship, “a search for a line of descent and for paternal transcendence” (76). These principles are also applicable to handmade products, which generate a fascination for “having passed through the hands of someone, the marks of whose labour are still inscribed thereupon: we are fascinated by what has been created, and is therefore unique, because the moment of creation cannot be reproduced” (76). From this perspective, APB amalgamates the figures of artists, community, and cultural reference and

¹¹⁹ “a gente que sobrevive da arte tem que fazer as coisas que os clientes mais gostam. E eles gostam do folclore, brincadeiras, danças, da vida do interior.”

expresses collective knowledges through individual creation. The object of APB carries these senses, which are constituted by cultural memories of a particular social group and tracing the uniqueness of the hands of the creator, at the same time. Thus, while authenticity expresses individuality, nostalgia reveals community foundation.

Micro-Utopia, Authenticity and Nostalgia

As discussed in the previous Chapter, the concept of authenticity pervades philosophical and artistic fields. In the first case, intellectuals strive to explain the nature of our true selves. In the second, it can be used either to validate an original over a copy, or to qualify a pure, non-corrupted artwork. Umbach and Humphrey discuss authenticity as a political concept “that is deeply implicated in authority and power relationships” (7) and embedded in distinct cultural settings. Assigning authenticity to an object, an experience, or a lifestyle reflects ideological decisions with a selection of some elements and the exclusion of others.

In APB’s case, authenticity combines different interests, which are exogenous to the object itself. First, the art world aims to choose authentic works that can be distinguished from crafts, therefore highlighting the uniqueness of individual authorship, exclusivity, and non-serialised techniques. In that context, APB presents a tenuous balance between artisanal and artistic production, as it needs to maintain a connection with the collective while demonstrating individual creativity. In the words of Maria Elizabeth Costa, “many artists have levels of excellence and exceptionality, but their works are built over a collective form of knowledge through which their authorial work emerges”¹²⁰ so that collectiveness is an inspiring element in the creative process of popular artists. Nevertheless, whereas institutional preservation policies and practices identify *saberes e fazeres* as one of APB’s main heritage values, gallery

¹²⁰ “muitos artistas têm níveis de excelência e excepcionalidade mas que se fundamentam em um saber coletivo que embasam o trabalho autoral.”

owners strive to promote the names of popular artists in the art market, highlighting creative individuality. Máira Fontenele Santana, the coordinator of CRAB/SEBRAE—remarks that these different attitudes may generate conflicts of interest. As an example, Fontenele reports that the election of one of the popular artists showcased in the exhibition “Origem Vegetal—a Biodiversidade Transformada” ‘Vegetal Origin—the Biodiversity Transformed,’ in 2016,¹²¹ was the target of criticism by gallerists who alleged they had “done a huge job of disassociating his name from handicrafts and SEBRAE was again associating ... [the artist to] these spaces.”¹²² In turn, the gallerist Vilma Eid argues that APB and Brazilian handicrafts have followed two separate paths, and that should be respected. According to her, “cultural policies should stick to handicrafts, helping to teach the skills and organise them into [production community] centres.”¹²³

Second, following market expectations, APB must represent an impartial non-profit stance on the part of the artists, so its authenticity is not compromised. By choosing to acquire such a product, the quest for authenticity acknowledges the merits of the artwork while also granting the consumer a product with “auratic” meaning, as it does not entirely respond to market trends. In a standardised consumer society, when meaningful differences are no longer evident, the paradoxical result is the quest for distinction. In that context, authenticity becomes an essential value for consumption, following “the logic of personalization” (Baudrillard, *Consumer* 97), through which consumers are led to the idea that they can customise their choices and differentiate themselves from everyone else.

A notable quality of authenticity is its ephemerality, meaning that it is an ideal that can only be pursued but never fully reached. This dimension gains special value during periods of

¹²¹ Exhibited from March to December of 2016, this was the opening exhibition of CRAB. More information can be found on <http://www.crab.sebrae.com.br/exposicoes/2/origem-vegetal>.

¹²² “feito um trabalho enorme de desassociar o nome dele de artesanato e o SEBRAE estava associando novamente ... [o artista a] estes espaços.”

¹²³ “as políticas culturais deveriam se ater ao artesanato, ajudando a ensinar o fazer a se organizar em centros.”

change, of social turmoil, when the existing codes are no longer sufficient to explain the current reality. However, when authenticity becomes the general rule, it loses its role as an alternative to the prevailing social and “current ethos” (Golomb). It is precisely its ephemeral nature that makes authenticity viable in very specific socio-cultural environments, such as those communities that are not totally integrated into the so-called modern lifestyle, hence the natural association that is created between the local and authentic production.

Likewise, nostalgia has been associated with local particularities and worldviews (Berliner 28). In this analysis, nostalgia is understood as specifically related to a collective expectation about an imagined place or time rather than to a personalised recollection of memoirs. From a sociological and anthropological perspective, nostalgia is often defined as a longing for misperceived past or a lost culture that is not necessarily realistic or that it may not even have existed. This idea emphasises the non-existence of a reality fixed in a tradition that is immune to the reinterpretations of the present. Such interpretation is particularly relevant when considering that APB authorial outputs differ visually from customary community practices. Although those practices continue to be grounded in popular creativity, institutional interference by intellectuals linked to public management, by collectors, and by the market have influenced APB’s repositioning as cultural heritage. Thus, as an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm), APB establishes a continuity with the past amidst the transformations of the present.

Milan Kundera conceptualises nostalgia as “the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return” (*Ignorance* 5). Even if it is a longing for the “apotheosis of the known” (6), there is not necessarily a direct correspondence with the reality, for “the stronger their nostalgia, the emptier of recollections it becomes” (33). Kundera means that nostalgia happens for those left in an “unknown” (8) place and who are prevented from remembering together (33). In this sense, nostalgia is contingent on a continuous (re)elaboration of reminiscences

trying to fulfil an emptiness founded on the uncertainties of present circumstances. From a collective perspective, Janelle Wilson argues that nostalgia participates as the necessary emotional component for the continuation of identity (35). Nostalgia then is founded on the understanding of the role played by traditions to guarantee what Anthony Giddens describes as “ontological security” in modern times (*Consequences* 105). It can even be used towards building new world possibilities while adjusting the past to current needs, “a world able to resist cultural homogenization and to preserve ethnic diversity, a world where social and political recognition can be gained for the powerless” (Berliner 30). Despite nostalgic interpretations being commonly assessed as a misuse of history, a paralysed moment, Alisson Blunt recuperates the idea of nostalgia when working with collective memory, which she describes as a “productive nostalgia” (718), encompassing not only narrative and imagination but also enactment in the present. Similarly, Wilson defines nostalgia as a “longing for utopia, projected backwards in time” (37).

Therefore, by facilitating a reconnection with the origins, nostalgia leads to a fascination for human production not subject to modern life. When looking back, nostalgia and authenticity work together to envision alternative ways of life rooted in cultural heritage. It is a safe return, without threatening the advances and privileges enjoyed in the present, such as “furtive contacts between the present and the past, ... echoes” (Kundera, *Ignorance* 79). That is not a past freed from imperfections—for which we would be in the realm of “kitsch,” a flawless aesthetic ideal, often machine produced, that “excludes everything [that is not perfect] from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence” (*Unbearable* 248)—but rather a past that represents “a reconciliation with the finitude of life” (*Ignorance* 8). For the consumer public, whether in the context of an exhibition or as buyers or collectors, APB serves as a route to satiate in part these existential needs. Whereas authenticity is a feature to assert the genuineness of *brasilidade*, nostalgia is the emotion that comes attached

to cultural memories associated with an imagined previous reality. This is how APB turns into a “place” that restores a form of balance and facilitates a connection with a world beyond and outside the uncertainties gestated and promoted by neoliberal society. Furthermore, it is an art that follows the cycles of nature, without distinction between tradition, innovation, and invention. Thus, the imagined past embodied in wood, ceramics, fabric, paints, and recycled materials comes to satisfy an existential longing for fulfilment, to become a micro-utopia, that is, a “place” for reaffirming the pluralities of life that mark Brazilian identity in opposition to the totalising facet of the current capitalist order.

Within this framework, cultural intermediaries value APB’s nostalgic and authentic elements as both visual representations of difference, and therefore a creative manifestation not conforming to the standards of modern society, and a cultural practice that is able to re-signify the place occupied by the popular classes. To the extent that APB is consumed as a nostalgic approximation to an authentic Brazilian place, it has the potential to re-elaborate the past and the present occupied by its creators in order to enable alternative realities. In the words of Renan Quevedo, APB collector and creator of the project “Novos Para Nós,”¹²⁴ “APB is the greatest treasure that exists in Brazil that adds identity, [while] it incites questioning, and identifies fissures in our way of thinking.”¹²⁵ It is an art coming from social groups that are at once a reflection of the oppression going on in the country, and the population responsible for the cultural production to be identified as national heritage.

¹²⁴ The marketing professional Renan Quevedo created the project *Novos para Nós* (New to Us) in 2017, with the aim of finding and cataloguing names for the heritage of Brazilian popular culture and giving visibility to them. According to him, the idea is “to celebrate the national production of so many artists spread throughout Brazil, and of whom we have no knowledge.” More information on the project can be found on <https://novosparanos.com.br/sobreoprojeto>.

¹²⁵ “A arte popular é o maior tesouro que existe no Brasil que agrega identidade, [ao mesmo tempo em que] provoca questionamentos, identifica fissuras no nosso modo de pensar.”

3.2. Micro-utopia between Instrumental and Ontological Needs

In addition to the existential values attributed to APB, cultural intermediaries also emphasise its economic function in communities. Gallery owner Ana Maria Schindler clarifies that many APB creating centres, such as the Ilha do Ferro village of the city of Pão de Açúcar, in Alagoas, and the Jequitinhonha Valley meso-region, in Minas Gerais, are “the result of moments of economic crisis and unemployment. ... [Ilha do Ferro is] an example of how APB may be renewed and expanded in times of crisis.”¹²⁶ According to the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), these localities are in regions classified as semi-arid, known as *sertão*. The *Atlas das representações literárias de regiões brasileiras* (Brazil, IBGE 11–12) explains that the term *sertão* has suffered variations in meaning over time with the fluidity of its territorial borders. Between the 16th and 18th centuries, it was originally associated with lands far from the coast; passing through dangerous lands inhabited by Indigenous populations not yet colonised; then lands described as not yet under the strict control of the state, a lawless land, until it became associated with the dryness of the climate as it is categorised today. The *Plano Territorial de Desenvolvimento Rural Sustentável da Bacia Leiteira* ‘Territorial Sustainable Rural Development Plans’ (Brazil, Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário) describes them as rural territories with an agricultural-based economy, whose land is highly concentrated on a few landowners.¹²⁷ In addition to the arid climate conditions, there is a lack of infrastructure in basic sanitation, water, and energy supply, as well as in access to health and education systems. The shortage of jobs results in a population dependent on resource transfers from government programmes. Civil society activities also have been taking place in the region to encourage the formation of cooperatives and associations of small local producers (fig. 40).

¹²⁶ “fruto de momentos de crise econômica e desemprego. ... [A Ilha do Ferro é] um exemplo de como a arte popular se renova e cresce em tempos de crise.”

¹²⁷ The Territorial Sustainable Rural Development Plans were conducted by the Ministry of Agrarian Development, extinct in 2016 during Michel Temer’s presidential term.



Fig. 40. Ilha do Ferro Village, on the São Francisco riverbanks.

The possibility of having access to art objects from a radically different socio-cultural and natural reality leads consumers to build a romanticised image of rural life, or even a more modest life in urban areas, seen in perfect balance either with the environment or with a communal life, beyond the socioeconomic vulnerability in which communities find themselves immersed. When encountering the creation of art objects that incorporate free and organic forms, that respect natural raw materials embodying narratives of legends, stories of festivities, that highlight these communities' resilience, these consumers create "an imaginary of place that overlaps the harshness of life" (Ana Maria Schindler).¹²⁸ For Schindler, this idealised image bestows a spiritual value on APB's works and "creates expectations, which is good for the artist."¹²⁹ Schindler states that her business is restricted to "the artists who have a connection with Brazilian culture,"¹³⁰ which, in her discourse, is equivalent to popular cultures, so that it is the connections with the place and its peculiar ways of living that generate the value of the artworks (fig. 41). Similarly, Renan Quevedo signals the links between APB, its place of origin, and cultural memory:

[APB] has much to tell us about a particular region. ... [Artists become] chroniclers of life. So, they tell a lot about how society develops in that region, ... [which comes associated with] an idealisation of life. And you start to see a lot of dreams. You start

¹²⁸ "Um imaginário do lugar que se sobrepõe à dureza da vida."

¹²⁹ "cria expectativas, o que é bom para o artista."

¹³⁰ "os artistas que têm uma conexão com a cultura brasileira."

to see the unconscious behind the pieces that it's impossible not to mention. So, there's a lot of these people's idealisation, of what a well-lived life would be.¹³¹



Fig. 41. APB collection displayed in the Pé-de-Boi Art Gallery, Rio de Janeiro.

Cultural intermediaries interpret APB as a portrait of people's hopes, albeit gallerists show awareness of the intricate negotiations in this process of idealising the place of the APB artist. These constructs not only benefit artists in the market but also sustain the sales and exhibition spaces of the cultural intermediaries themselves. They thereby contribute to a utopian construction of APB that, through these idealising lenses, intends to offer consumers a retreat from the misfortunes of city life, or the modern neoliberal forms of alienation.

Along the same lines, the gallerists Maria Amélia and Dalton Costa state that “the essential step in understanding APB is to distinguish [artists'] physical space, where they live, to get to know the artist as a person. [This means] to dive into this deep Brazil. Seeing the landscape and its inhabitants and not just looking at the object.”¹³² As suggested by Ricardo de Oliveira, this notion of “deep Brazil,” or *Brazil profundo*, echoes Euclides da Cunha's literary work “Os Sertões,” published in 1902, which focuses on the spatiality of the *sertão* and its geographical characteristics and population. In Cunha's work, the *sertão* appears as a space of

¹³¹ “tem muito de contar sobre uma determinada região. ... [Os artistas se tornam] cronistas da vida. Então, eles contam muito sobre como a sociedade se desenvolve naquela região, ... [que vem associada a] uma idealização de vida. E você começa a ver muito de sonhos, você começa a ver o inconsciente por trás das peças que é impossível de deixar de citar. Então, tem muito da idealização dessas pessoas, do que seria uma vida bem vivida.”

¹³² “o essencial para entender a arte popular é mergulhar no espaço físico deles [dos artistas], onde eles habitam, conhecer a pessoa do artista. É mergulhar nesse Brasil profundo. Ver a paisagem e os seus habitantes e não olhar somente o objeto.”

barbarism not yet civilised, in full contrast with the nation under consolidation in the coastal regions, and a refuge that gathers the ideal conditions for the creation of the Brazilian people.

This is how the term *Brasil profundo* found its way into cultural discourses on *brasilidade*, to become a recurrent reference to describe Brazilian art and popular cultures from the Northeast and part of the central region, which are constituent regions of the *sertão*, later also incorporating the northern region of the country, with the yet unexplored forest areas. Maria Elizabeth de Andrade Costa, Head of the research department of the Centro Nacional de Folclore e Cultura Popular (CNFCP), defines *Brasil profundo* as,

a Brazil that needs to be known by the Brazilians themselves. It is difficult to identify with something you don't know. We are talking about a country of continental dimensions with few routes of communication. We have a huge hydrographic network, a dense forest, populated regions isolated from each other, without a very strong interconnection network. So, Brazil often surprises and amazes the Brazilians themselves.¹³³

In this context, by occupying the official spaces of art and culture, APB functions as a carrier of messages from these various regions of Brazil that nevertheless suffer from inefficient transport networks. This capacity of representing stories and memories about local communities explains the incorporation of APB as a national heritage.

However, this cultural memory has been disseminated mainly as a resource for marketing purposes. Likewise, the institutional concern to ensure the economic sustainability of these communities has become one of the pillars of the discourse of valuing and preserving cultural practices. Máira Fontenelle Santana asserts that “the story associated with the product enhances its value and it helps to sell.”¹³⁴ She explains that the role of CRAB/SEBRAE is

¹³³ “um Brasil que precisa ser conhecido pelos próprios brasileiros. É difícil você se identificar com uma coisa que você não conhece. A gente está falando de um país de dimensões continentais com poucas vias de comunicação. Temos uma rede hidrográfica enorme, uma floresta densa, regiões povoadas isoladas entre si, sem uma rede de interligação muito forte. Então muitas vezes o Brasil surpreende e espanta os próprios brasileiros.”

¹³⁴ “a história associada ao produto valoriza e ajuda a vender.”

“repositioning APB and handicrafts, dissociating them from souvenirs, street markets and placing them on the high-value market.”¹³⁵ One example of SEBRAE’s initiative was the 2012 *Brasil Original* project created to attract high-income consumers who would visit the country during the World Cup and the Olympic Games.¹³⁶ According to Fontenelle, the project aimed at placing on the market handmade products that are “the face of Brazil,”¹³⁷ and create a differentiation in the international market through handicrafts. *Brasil Original* actions were devised to consolidate partnerships with designers in several states, promote the training of artisans for better price definition, customer service qualification and packaging improvement, and create business rounds with retailers. An analysis of these institutions’ initiatives indicates that the “spiritual value” described above is assimilated by the market to incorporate a commercial value into it.

The marketisation process experienced by APB responds to forms of instrumentalisation of culture, as described by George Yúdice: “culture is increasingly wielded as a resource for both socio-political and economic amelioration” (*Expediency* 9). This mechanism is partly the result of a weakening of the public sphere as the guarantor of social services, including culture, and is replaced by the private sector and organised civil society, which together originate a process of “NGOization” in which “[cultural] identity is the lynchpin of rights claims” (*Expediency* 77). When addressing APB from an intangible cultural heritage perspective, Elizabeth Costa corroborates this, especially regarding the need to commercialise artworks in order to ensure the sustainability of *saberes e fazeres* in the communities: “There are few popular artists who can make a living from their art. They usually have another occupation. They are a small farmworker, a carpenter; they have a mechanical

¹³⁵ “reposicionar a arte popular e o artesanato, desvincular a ideia de souvenir, de feira de rua e posicioná-lo no mercado de alto valor.”

¹³⁶ More information about this project can be found on <http://www.agenciasebrae.com.br/sites/asn/uf/NA/projeto-brasil-original-transforma-artesaos-em-dono-dos-seus-proprios-negocios,daa8dbd917110710VgnVCM1000004c00210aRCRD>.

¹³⁷ “a cara do Brasil.”

workshop ... They have another activity that guarantees their subsistence. So, when there is the possibility of commercialisation, it is fundamental [to take advantage of that opportunity].”¹³⁸

Costa stresses that the policy of preserving Brazil’s intangible heritage is considered an international reference because it includes a process of monitoring the registered cultural references.¹³⁹ She adds that the main objective of the CNFCP is to ensure that cultural references remain significant in the communities, which is not always possible if they do not generate income. From this perspective, entrepreneurial initiatives in the context of a creative economy are considered key for maintaining the cultural knowledges within the communities. In this sense, the state recognises the need for cultural intermediaries to promote and commercialise APB, since “one of the biggest struggles is the passing on of knowledge, so it needs to be valued in order to attract the interest of the younger generations” (Costa).¹⁴⁰ One of the cultural intermediaries that have facilitated APB’s entry into the market is ARTESOL, a non-profit organisation created in 1998 by the anthropologist Ruth Cardoso, then the first lady of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, to create a network in the productive chain of Brazilian handicrafts, connecting artisans, artists, designers, retailers, state development programmes and cultural institutions (fig. 42). Josiane Maçon Alves da Mota, the general coordinator of ARTESOL, states that “commercialising the products is intrinsic because this generates income and makes people willing to preserve their knowledge.”¹⁴¹ With a focus on the creative economies market, Mota clarifies that the organisation aims at minimising the local

¹³⁸ “São poucos os artistas populares que vivem da sua arte. Eles geralmente têm uma outra profissão. Ele é um pequeno agricultor, um marceneiro, tem uma oficina mecânica ... Ele tem uma outra atividade que garanta o seu sustento. Então quando há a possibilidade de comercialização, é fundamental.”

¹³⁹ The Decree 3551 of 2000, which creates the National Programme for Intangible Heritage, states that the IPHAN must re-evaluate registered cultural assets at least every ten years to decide on the revalidation of the title “Cultural Heritage of Brazil.”

¹⁴⁰ “um dos maiores gargalos é o repasse do saber, então precisa de valorização para angariar o interesse das gerações mais novas.”

¹⁴¹ “a questão da comercialização dos produtos é intrínseca porque daí vem a geração de renda e faz com que as pessoas perpetuem o saber.”

poverty of the communities by promoting artisanal activity and APB, which helps maintain traditional knowledges active.¹⁴²



Fig. 42. showcase of handicrafts from various regions of Brazil held at ARTESOL headquarters, São Paulo.

Such standing demonstrates the interplay that exists between the market and heritage, where the latter is considered as “‘Value Added’ industry,” which “ensure[s] that places and practices in danger of disappearing because they are no longer occupied or functioning or valued will survive. It does this by adding the value of pastness, exhibition, difference and, where possible, indigeneity” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination* 150). From this standpoint, the cultural reference status of APB, derived from the narratives incorporated into it, adds value to the artworks to become desirable objects of consumption. They, therefore, participate in the heritage industry and grant the popular artists’ communities a “second life, as exhibitions of themselves” (*Destination* 7). The idea of second life, now within the neoliberal context, is visible when artists are granted the title of *Mestre do Patrimônio Vivo*, which influences the economic and social dynamics of the place, as detailed in previous chapters.

Popular artists who receive the *Mestre do Patrimônio Vivo* title show pride in their testimonials, such as Mestre Luís Antônio, a clay sculptor from the Alto do Moura region,

¹⁴² The high level of economic oppression goes so far as to lead some artists to mistakenly assume that the interest of the government and gallerists in their creative output will automatically convert into a retirement pension for them, and they get angry and frustrated when they realise that is not the case.

Caruaru, Pernambuco, who was elected a living heritage of Pernambuco in 2019: “They said I deserved to be a master. ... I had the talent to be the representative of our culture and thank God, I made it”¹⁴³ Luís Antônio da Silva remembers his position as representative of Brazil since his participation in the international tourism fair in Japan in 1986, an event that brought together delegations from thirty-six countries (fig. 43).



Fig. 43. Mestre Luiz Antônio in his workspace, where he exhibits a reproduction of his picture taken when he participated in the international tourism fair in Japan and one of his famous clay sculptures representing urban workers, Alto do Moura, Caruaru.

Branding National Identity

The narratives of *brasilidade* that are prevalent in APB’s marketisation illustrate how cultural values serve to consolidate branding discourses. The idea of nation branding, also defined by Simon Anholt as “competitive identity,” represents “the synthesis of brand management with public diplomacy and with trade, investment, tourism and export promotion” (7). In this perspective, there is a confluence of strategies combining the unilateral government efforts to convey its policies to others, that is, public diplomacy (Goff 421), with the efforts of various non-state actors, such as NGOs, cultural industries, intellectuals, and artists. It follows, then, that the idea of *brasilidade* represented in APB is not only supported by the state, as it involves various entities, all of which have a role on its valorisation, namely, collectors, gallery owners, retailers, private cultural institutions, including researchers on the field.

¹⁴³ “Eles botaram que eu merecia ser Mestre. ... Eu tinha o dom de ser o representante da cultura nossa e graças a Deus cheguei lá.”

Moreover, the inclusion of APB in the nation branding strategy occurs when also incorporated in cultural industries, featuring in soap operas or as a theme of Escolas de Samba in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.¹⁴⁴ The actions of the private sector, for example, involve APB sales to consulates in Rio de Janeiro and embassies in Brasília, as Ana Maria Schindler and Maíra Fontenelle Santana respectively report in their interviews. Schindler recalls that her initial proposal to work with APB in the 1980s was to export the artworks to other countries, but when confronted with implementation difficulties, she decided to open the art gallery. The gallerist today celebrates that the export project did not work out, as it “was going to be a catastrophe because [the great interest of foreign buyers] was going to demand a mass production that is not supported and is unfair to the artist’s method [of work].”¹⁴⁵

Therefore, several public and private agents operate jointly, so the *brasilidade* values incorporated into APB are appreciated not only by a foreign public but mainly by Brazilians themselves. As stated by Martínez Expósito, this multilateral emphasis involved in nation branding processes is what contributes to its success, which makes use of “often contradictory messages, delivered by a plurality of voices, including not only the government itself but also other governments and other societies, friends and enemies, allies and competitors”¹⁴⁶ (68). In that context, a country’s brand may be forged even without the state having a clear and coherent plan of action. Thus, the social milieu that has been promoting APB participates in that process while also cultivating in the consumers the nostalgic desire for acquiring APB as a product of *brasilidade*.

¹⁴⁴ For instance, see the Globo telenovela “A Lei do Amor,” aired in 2016, in which the main character was the owner of an APB gallery. For examples of samba schools that have also paid tribute to APB in their storylines, “O mundo de barro de Mestre Vitalino” ‘The world of clay of *Mestre Vitalino*’ by Império da Tijuca, 2009; “Cordel Branco e Encarnado” ‘Red and White Cordel’, by Acadêmicos do Salgueiro, 2012; and “Madeira Matriz” ‘Master wood’, by Acadêmicos da Rocinha, 2018.

¹⁴⁵ “ia ser uma catástrofe porque [o grande interesse dos compradores estrangeiros] ia demandar uma produção em série que não é suportada e é injusta com o método do artista.”

¹⁴⁶ “mensajes a menudo contradictorios, emitidos por una pluralidad de voces entre las que, además del gobierno, está la propia sociedad, y también otros gobiernos y otras sociedades, los amigos y los enemigos, los aliados y los competidores.”

From this standpoint, APB's meaning is attached to its dual role as a source of income generation in communities under harsh economic conditions, which needs to be commercialised. However, in the process, it also facilitates these communities' social empowerment through identity affirmation. In that regard, it draws closer to George Yúdice's idea of the "expediency of culture," in which state and civil society invoke cultural differences of communities under conditions of socioeconomic vulnerability and combine "culture-as-vernacular practices, notions of community, and economic development" (*Expediency* 20).

To this pragmatic understanding of the role of culture, I add that the success of the APB market is also built on the consumer's longing for a product that could satiate its nostalgia for different ways of life, or life as it used to be. Here, APB is by no means feeding into empty consumerism, but rather filling up an ontological vacuum. It is within this analytical perspective that my research sustains that APB represents a micro-utopia. In this process, multiple power relations occur, which generate various advantages for the different agents involved. The artists gain more practical elements to navigate modern society when their art provides them with socioeconomic development, whereas the buyers find comfort against the discontents created by the modern, alienating reality they live in, all of which ultimately create new meanings for APB. Consumer desire allows the artists to benefit from their insertion into the market by contributing to the production of culture. Those negotiations can simultaneously present an avenue to display Brazilian cultural diversity, an idealised performance of a better life for the consumer society, community reorganisation around traditional practices, profitable business for gallery owners and retailers, and the possibility for fairly remunerated work for APB artists. In the next section, I will analyse the perspectives of APB's artists on this matter.

3.3. Art as a De-alienating Vehicle: The Ethos of *Arte Popular Brasileira*

Whereas consumers find in APB a form of micro-utopia, a retreat from their own present world, APB artists are granted a space to reflect on their own socio-cultural positioning. For them, this utopian ideal opens paths towards reshaping individual and collective working relations while also igniting subtle forms of resistance and agency. This section will emphasise the negotiations undertaken by popular artists to overcome existing forms of exploitation in the marketplace. The analysis will be centred on the individual artists' perceptions of their own engagement with the market and the institutional approach, as well as how their collective work organisations can be seen as a path to de-alienation.

Complex negotiations take place in which artists consent to certain aspects imposed by cultural intermediaries but reject others to protect their cultural, communal, personal values, that is, their *saberes e fazeres*. Their intimate bond with their communities is what shelters them the most. The APB artists' foundation on collective support is shaped and consolidated by the oral sharing of stories, skills, and techniques. Luis Vilhena associates orality with the maintenance of a "community atmosphere" (282) related to popular cultural practices, which guarantees the authentic character of these manifestations. Vilhena also points out that in oral transmission lies the capacity to preserve the aura of APB, for being the origin of the "'spontaneity' attributed to the 'people' ... [and, therefore,] would allow it to escape from the principle of 'technical reproducibility' in art that increasingly characterises modernity" (283). Recognising the role of orality, Lira Marques, ceramist and painter in clay pigments from the city of Araçuaí, in the Jequitinhonha Valley, Minas Gerais, elaborates on her relationship with "ancient wisdom"¹⁴⁷ by explaining that "the region's handicraft ... is like a chant, passed down from mother to daughter."¹⁴⁸ Similarly, Ademir Antônio da Silva—President of the Associação

¹⁴⁷ "sabedoria dos antigos."

¹⁴⁸ "o artesanato ... da região é igual cantiga, vai passando de mãe para filha."

dos Artesãos de Barro e Moradores do Alto do Moura (ABMAM), in Caruaru, Pernambuco—recollects his childhood memories, which bring to light the transference of *saber fazer*, directly related with the emergence of APB (fig. 44).

At the time, through the stories told by my mother, by my grandfather, they used to say, ‘Let’s go to the house of comrade Vitalino, he’s making these puppets that look like people’... And the comrades would gather there, talking, and they had this opportunity to be able to start a masters’ birthplace there. I think that it was so simple, so natural that they had no idea. The friends started, in a very casual way, to have this contact with Master Vitalino. ... And it was passed from generation to generation, at that time with agriculture becoming more difficult. And people [commented]: ‘Look, look, Master Vitalino went there and sold a little doll. Then another so-and-so went there and put it in the street market and sold it. Who could imagine he would sell it?’¹⁴⁹



Fig. 44. Showcase of the works of the artisans of the community Alto do Moura, who follow a similar style from the one inaugurated by Mestre Vitalino, ABMAM, Alto do Moura, Caruaru.

Attracted by the possibility of receiving an income without abandoning their communities and ways of life, many families have switched to artisanal activity. This trans-generational community knowledge is clearly articulated in the concept *berço de Mestres* (masters’ birthplace), which describes the tradition of artists trained by observing the work of others. It also reflects a concrete need for survival, which is being supplied by another activity

¹⁴⁹ “À época pelas histórias contadas, pela minha mãe, pelo meu avô, diziam assim, ‘vamos lá na casa de cunpadre Vitalino, que ele tá fazendo uns bonecos parecendo gente’... E os cunpadres ficavam ali reunidos, conversando, e tinham essa oportunidade de poder ali tá começando um berço de Mestres. Eu acho que de forma tão simples, tão natural que eles nem imaginavam. Os amigos começaram, de forma bem livre, a ter esse contato com o Mestre Vitalino. ... E foi passando de geração a geração, na época a agricultura tomando uma proporção de mais dificuldades. E, o pessoal [comentava]: ‘olha, olha, o Mestre Vitalino foi lá e vendeu um bonequinho. Aí cunpadre fulano foi lá e botou na feira e vendeu. Não é que vendeu?’”

rather than the primary agricultural one. In the trajectory followed by APB artists, manual skills often come from other occupations. Thus, artists who work with wood have previously worked as carpenters, boat, or ox-car builders. Those who use clay derive their knowledge from making utilitarian ceramics, such as pots, pans, and household utensils. Both clay and wood also had a ritual function when artisans produced *ex-votos* or saints to express the communities' faith (fig. 45). In addition to manual skills, family income is earned through informal work, rural occupations such as sugarcane harvesters, or workers in tile and brick factories. These exploitative activities, marked by low wages and the impossibility of social ascent, leads to different forms of deprivation, from material to psychological, which are the base of what characterises the socioeconomic history of APB creators.



Fig. 45. From left to right, collection of wooden votive pieces, Estação Art Gallery, São Paulo. Artworks by the popular artist Irinéia Rosa Nunes da Silva, which started her work creating clay votive heads, Museu Muquém, União dos Palmares.

Aligned with Paulo Freire's thinking, it is possible to state that the social forms of living and cultural expressions that do not fit into the productive-and-profit-making neoliberal model have been consistently erased or put aside, representing what we can define as socio-cultural oppression. Freire states that it is only as "transforming and creative beings" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 101) that people can fully eliminate their dehumanising oppression "in which people are reduced to things" (103). In this process of liberation, culture plays an active role as this is the realm that allows the people to regain their socio-historically active position in the world.

That alienation imposed on those communities that APB artists come from relates to the sense of alienation described by Marx, which refers to human distancing, in its multiple forms: from the object produced by work, from the means of production, from society, and from oneself, this last one resulting from denying workers the possibility to realise their own potential through meaningful work (111–15). This alienation from production and its various consequences has been reconceptualised by Hannah Arendt as an alienation from the world, and more recently by David Harvey when he develops the concept of “universal alienation” to emphasise that this condition is not limited solely to the working class, as it permeates all spheres of society (“Universal Alienation”). Regarding the transformations of the capitalist system, it can be observed from Harvey’s reading that universal alienation manifests itself in several forms of estrangement, such as in the distancing from nature due to massive environmental degradation, in the lack of decision-making power to be found in corrupt or undemocratic forms of government, and in the copious indebtedness of the population in the context of the consumerist society.

In the scenario opened by APB, a double movement to reverse alienating conditions can be observed: consumers, gallery owners, and collectors nourish the desire to connect with APB, and popular artists engage in this creative activity in order to minimise the effects of the social alienation that has oppressed them. Hence, one can identify how popular artists’ alienating conditions are lessened when they are given the opportunity to create objects that are culturally and economically valued outside their communities. Vavan (Edivan Alves Lima), a wood sculptor from Ilha do Ferro, compares: “Before, I used to work in the fields, making roof tiles, [in] bars, transporting students in a motorboat. Today I don’t leave art for anything, for me there is no comparison; art is very good”¹⁵⁰ (fig. 46). Irinéia Rosa Nunes da Silva, a

¹⁵⁰ “Antes trabalhava na roça, fazendo telha, [em] bar, transportando estudante em lancha. Hoje não deixo a arte, pra mim não tem comparação, é muito bom a arte.”

ceramist of the *quilombola* community Muquém, also highlights: “Thank God, after I learnt this [modelling the sculptures] my life has improved a lot.”¹⁵¹ In a reverse movement, while the consumers distance themselves from the shortcomings of modern life, the artists get access to what up to now have been the elusive benefits of modernity, which includes accessing fundamental rights and guarantees of dignity and freedom that were denied to them for not fitting into modernity’s strict parameters.



Fig. 46. From left to right: wood storage in Vavan’s atelier, Vavan with some of his finished pieces, detail of some of the artworks in his storage space, Ilha do Ferro.

APB artists’ proximity to nature and old forms of community involvement is what ultimately nourishes their creative process. In contrast to mass production, APB aims for creative authenticity, that is, to produce an art obtained from the unpredictability and spontaneity that is derived from working with the real circumstances at hand, so creativity is adjusted to the conditions with no pre-fixed ideas. This volatility also relates to what nature dictates. Artists who work with clay, such as sculptor João das Alagoas, point out that besides variations in the type of clay, the uncertainty of the result comes from the process of firing the material. “Because the final master is the fire, we have no control once we put it in the kiln.”¹⁵² In turn, many of the wood sculptors report that they only decide what they will create after seeing the piece of wood that is available. Mestre Aberaldo Sandes Costa Lima, a sculptor from the village of Ilha do Ferro, Alagoas, explains: “We used to get wood that had died, that was

¹⁵¹ “Graças a Deus depois que eu aprendi isso aqui [as esculturas] melhorou muito pra mim.”

¹⁵² “Porque o Mestre final é o fogo, a gente não tem controle depois que bota no forno.”

dry in the bush, and many times one could already see the piece that could be made. ... And there are pieces, of which I have made many, that I only make the head, the rest comes ready from nature”¹⁵³ (fig. 47).



Fig. 47. Mestre Aberaldo, in his atelier and some of his sculptures in production that combines anthropomorphic forms with natural shapes of wood, Ilha do Ferro.

The collective, on the other hand, appears not only in the themes represented but also in the creators' habits and life choices. Mestre Zezinha (Maria José Gomes da Silva), from Campo Buriti village, in Minas Gerais—although currently standing out as an individual artist in the art market—recognises the value of her community base. For her, being nominated as “an artisan is fine. Artist is too chic. I prefer to be the same size as my sisters. Even in the old days, when I didn't even have a proper journey of experience, people said I'd do well. And here, nobody has ever turned my light off.”¹⁵⁴

Community Organisation around APB

The Jequitinhonha Valley region in Minas Gerais is an example of community transformation through the organisation of APB as remunerated work. In the 1960s and 1970s,

¹⁵³ “A gente pegava pau que morreu, que tava seco no mato e muitos deles você já via que ele dava uma peça. ... E tem peças, que eu já fiz muitas, que eu só faço a cabeça, o resto já vem da natureza feito.”

¹⁵⁴ “artesã tá bom. Artista é muito chique. Prefiro ser do tamanho das minhas irmãs. Mesmo antigamente que eu não tinha nem estrada, as pessoas diziam que eu ia me dar bem. E aqui, ninguém nunca apagou a minha luz.”

in order to foster the socioeconomic development of the Valley, government agents and other entities developed a series of actions with local communities.¹⁵⁵ Among the several initiatives, artisanship was preeminent. To value the tradition of the existing pottery activity, between the 1970s and the 1990s, the Comissão de Desenvolvimento do Vale do Jequitinhonha ‘Jequitinhonha Valley Development Commission’ (CODEVALE) created the Craftsmanship Programme, which organised workshops where older women oversaw teaching younger ones. As a driving force, it facilitated a creative space, allowing a progressive transition from utilitarian to artistic ceramics production. During this period, CODEVALE systematically bought the ceramic pieces and redistributed them in urban centres, serving as a mediator between APB works and the collectors who were then starting their collections.

Ulisses Mendes, APB artist and son of a ceramist from the city of Itinga, Minas Gerais, says that this period was a time of “socialism in the Valley when this community perspective saw in the artisans the possibility of finding allies to assist the people.”¹⁵⁶ External actors have also stimulated the creation of community organisations, such as artisans’ associations, to facilitate greater autonomy in the production and marketing of APB. This has resulted in the local valorisation of *saberes e fazeres* by the communities themselves. Artists understand such exogenous action as an indispensable impulse, without which it would not have been possible to continue with their cultural practices. As artist Lira Marques puts it, “to value people is to support them in what they already have.”¹⁵⁷ Today, many collective organisations are self-managed, and their headquarters have become spaces where artisans receive visitors, exhibit their pieces, and tell their life stories. They organise the works by identifying each author and

¹⁵⁵ Three entities are considered seminal for the fostering of craft production in the Vale do Jequitinhonha region and are constantly remembered by the local artisans and artists: CODEVALE, created by Minas Gerais state law Law n.3764 of 1965, the Rondon Project, created by federal law n.6310 of 1975, and the grassroots Catholic organisations working under the principles of Liberation Theology, a movement disseminated in Latin America in the late 1960s.

¹⁵⁶ “socialismo no Vale, quando essa perspectiva comunitária via nos artesãos a possibilidade de encontrar aliados para ajudar as pessoas.”

¹⁵⁷ “valorizar as pessoas, é ajudá-las naquilo que elas já têm.”

act as intermediaries in negotiating prices, receiving orders from retail shops throughout the country and participating in exhibitions. They also help secure access to raw materials and negotiate the purchase of wood to fire the pieces. With the experience of collective management, the artisans acquired an agency capacity to guarantee the sustainability of the ceramic activity for women. Deuzani Gomes dos Santos, in the city of Minas Novas, one of the founders of the artisans' cooperative, also led the way to offer visitors homestays in the artisans' houses with clay modelling workshops, where they can learn the whole process, from removing the clay, cleaning, modelling, painting with natural pigments and firing the pieces in the kilns (fig. 48).



Fig. 48. From top left to bottom right, Deuzani demonstrates the preparation of the clay and the modelling techniques; the kilns used to burn her pieces; some of her clay pieces; the accommodation she provides for visitors at her home.

Moreover, APB in the Jequitinhonha Valley has transformed the role played by women, who are predominant in the ceramic activity sector. This position has generated local recognition, such as the statue in the community of Santana do Araçuaí, Ponto dos Volantes, made in 2006 in honour of Mestre Isabel Mendes da Cunha (1924–2014),¹⁵⁸ the first artisan

¹⁵⁸ In recognition of her action in favour of Brazilian culture, Isabel was awarded a UNESCO prize in 2004 and in 2005 received the Order of Cultural Merit from the federal government (See Mascelani, *Caminhos*).

who started making large format all ornamented clay dolls and spread her knowledge among women (fig. 49). When placed as a city monument, it represents one of the most iconic personalities of the place, a woman, poor and black, recognised as responsible for the transformation of the Valley.



Fig. 49. On the left, the statue of Isabel Mendes with a sign saying: “Through clay, the raw material of the human being, Ms Isabel, with her skilled gift and divine inspiration, reinvents the man and the woman of the gardens of Eden in the Jequitinhonha Valley. A homage from the people of Ponto dos Volantes to the artisan Isabel Mendes Cunha, the greatest expression of our municipality and our people”; on the right, Maria Madalena with the last works from her mother, and one of her own unfinished.

Maria Madalena Mendes Braga, one of Isabel’s daughters who continued the artisanal practice, says that her mother took part in the foundation of the cooperative in 1979, aiming to help her neighbours. She explains her mother’s legacy to the region: “We didn’t have much education, and my mother left her art for us.”¹⁵⁹ As a result, women have assumed a leading role in the communities. They are responsible for both income and the maintenance of the family nucleus since the region has been marked by male emigration in search of work. As stated by Deuzani Gomes dos Santos, a ceramist from the community of Coqueiro Campo in Turmalina, “after the cooperative[s], women got involved in handicrafts, and this transformed the towns. And the men no longer had to go out to work on the sugar cane harvest and could

¹⁵⁹ “Nós não tinha nem escola, e a mãe deixou a arte pra nós.”

continue working on the family farm and helping with the heavier parts of removing and preparing the clay since the sale of the handicrafts contributed to the family income.”¹⁶⁰

Some of the artists who were encouraged to create and produce during the 1980s and failed to maintain a support network such as the cooperatives fell into a new exploitation system, this time by the art market. Noemisa Batista is the most iconic example of this exploitation. She lives in a very secluded area, making it almost impossible to get there by car at certain times of the year. Her ceramic pieces are celebrated in the art world as artworks that portray the daily life of the *sertanejo*, with her work participating in private and museum collections. However, such fame is not reflected in her living conditions (fig. 50).¹⁶¹ The collector Renan Quevedo explains after visiting the 2012 exhibition, “Teimosia da Imaginação” (Stubborn Imagination) in 2012, he found that the presence of APB in a high art environment was very contradictory, which prompted him to get into field trips to meet the artists in the places where they live.¹⁶² One of his first visits was to Noemisa’s house, which was, according to him, a “conflicting” experience as “she has the status of a popular artist but lives in immense financial misery.”¹⁶³ The socioeconomic vulnerability of the Jequitinhonha Valley, as well as the other regions where the creative activity of APB is concentrated, makes the artists even more susceptible to being exploited by mediators.

¹⁶⁰ “depois da[s] associaç[ões], as mulheres se envolveram com o artesanato, e isso transformou as cidades. E os homens não precisavam mais sair para trabalhar na colheita da cana-de-açúcar e podiam continuar trabalhando na agricultura familiar e ajudando nas partes mais pesadas de tirar e preparar o barro, já que a venda dá o artesanato ajudava na renda da família.”

¹⁶¹ Noemisa was the only popular artist who, despite kindly receiving me at her home and showing us her work, did not want to be recorded. Aged 75, Noemisa appeared to be tired and reported having already answered question many times about her work. During the fieldwork, it was common to hear informal accounts of the exploitation of local traders that she suffered with examples of exchanging her pieces for liquor. In the reference bibliography on APB, Noemisa appears as the most original ceramist of the Jequitinhonha Valley, with international fame, despite living in difficult economic conditions (About Noemisa’s work, see Frota).

¹⁶² About this exhibition, see Naves et al.

¹⁶³ “ela tem o status de artista popular, mas vive em imensa miséria financeira.”



Fig. 50. Noemisa's house, rural area Caraí, Minas Gerais and her artworks in the private collection of Renan Quevedo, São Paulo.

Aline Sena Carmona, director of the Museum of Araçuaí, Minas Gerais, points out that, like Noemisa, other artists of the region are affected by “mental disorders and alcoholism” as a psychosocial effect caused by the art market. The director states that these artists feel frustrated because “they know [their] potential and see that their work is recognised everywhere, but in the city, they have no recognition.”¹⁶⁴ Therefore, the community organisation effort appears as a guarantor of returning the benefits of APB to the community. Government agents and liberation theology priests initially acted as propelling agents to build a sense of ownership and pride towards popular community knowledge. They gave visibility to the situation of misery under which the population lived and helped them to become aware of the conditions of oppression in which they found themselves. From this recognition and the promotion of local cultural activities, the people began to realise the value that their own culture had, which gave back to the community a sense of dignity.

In this community setting, some artists who have reached a level of individual recognition and have detached themselves from collective production argue that APB offers them a platform for social critique. Lira Marques' sculptures, for example, depict scenes of

¹⁶⁴ “Eles sabem do [seu] potencial e vêem que o trabalho é reconhecido lá fora, mas na cidade, não têm reconhecimento.”

drought, hunger, and poverty. Ulisses Mendes, in turn, represents the difficulties of life in the *sertanejo*, as in one of his best-known pieces, “o Cristo sertanejo” (the country Christ), in which the man of the *sertão*, in possession of his working tools, is shown crucified in place of Jesus of Nazareth (fig. 51). The artist says that he prefers to make pieces in smaller sizes so that he can charge less, sell more, and spread the stories of life in the Valley.



Fig. 51. From left to right, clay sculptures representing the poverty of the Jequitinhonha Valley by Lira Marques, exhibited at Araçuaí Museum; Cristo Sertanejo by Ulisses Mendes, representing the suffering of the people, his atelier, Itinga, Minas Gerais.

This same communal feeling of the collective is found in Alto do Moura, Pernambuco, where each family of artisans also identifies in the figurative ceramic activity the possibility of a dignified life. As Emanuel Vitalino Neto, a third-generation artist from the Vitalino family, states, “there is a respect from the community [as] we live from the same art.”¹⁶⁵ In view of the tourist attraction caused by the artistic activity and craftsmanship in clay, a whole cultural circuit of visitation has been fostered by local authorities, including a museum dedicated to clay, which presents utilitarian pieces and artistic production (fig. 52).

¹⁶⁵ “tem um respeito da comunidade, [pois] sobrevivemos da mesma arte.”



Fig. 52. Exhibition rooms of the Museu do Barro (Clay Museum), Caruaru, Pernambuco.

Therefore, two extremes become evident in this process, one in which the people who create culture and art are exploited by the market and by official institutions, hence continuing with old, poor practices, although now this exploitation occurs in the art market. On the other hand, when the people manage to organise themselves in a support network that is anchored in their own popular creativity to fight against the exploitative mentality of the market, or to gain more autonomy to express their creativity and decide their own methods of selling, then they find space for resistance. There is, therefore, a feeling of hope that gives people back a sense of dignity, enabling them to recognise the value of their own culture. Through affective connections with cultural memory, creative processes, mainly conducted by women, have changed the way space and the people who live in it are perceived, thus representing a form of resistance to the current exploitative conditions of contemporary neoliberal society.

Popular Artists' Autonomy and Dependence

Beyond the value bestowed on APB by cultural intermediaries, the artists interviewed report having achieved a condition of greater freedom through artistic practice, whether financial or in the management of their time. Many find autonomy in organising their own work around their family nucleus. Usually, domestic and workspaces are merged into a single place, family members are involved in production and sale, and the younger generations help in the use of social networks to market the products. The titles of *Mestre do Patrimônio Vivo* granted

by state governments, along with the recognition of artisanship as a formal occupation,¹⁶⁶ also contribute to the transformation of the perception of APB in the communities themselves. João das Alagoas expresses the effect of the title of Mestre on his life: “It’s something so important that we think it’s not true. I’m happy to be able to show my family that they can make a living out of this.”¹⁶⁷

This understanding is close to the idea that artistic activity, even when adjusted to current work politics, is characterised by uniting labour processes with pleasure and self-realisation, in what David Beech calls “aesthetic labour” (34, 88) in opposition to drudgery or alienated labour, which is exercised with the exclusive function of survival. In the case of APB, since it is closely related to artisanal work that is often arduous and sometimes repetitive, the conflict is not on the type of work that is done. Instead, the self-fulfilment is on the repositioning of the subject coming from communities in oppressed conditions who are now appointed as representatives of the culture of that place and even of the nation. Popular artists now find in the expression of their work the validation of their knowledge, creativity, and skills. Transformed into creative beings, to use Freire’s words, popular artists find themselves in their production, thus re-humanising their existence.

In addition to the human and cultural value the artists gain by carrying out dignified work, the value attributed to APB objects attests to the importance of cultural knowledge in the communities themselves, which are constantly undermined by the logic of modern society guided by pragmatism, profit, and productivity goals. As Joseane Mota of ARTESOL points out, “sometimes they [the artists] don’t give the value that we [the cultural intermediaries and consumers] give.”¹⁶⁸ When there is a redefinition of the artist’s social role, the communities

¹⁶⁶ See footnote 53, p.73.

¹⁶⁷ “É uma coisa tão importante que a gente pensa que não é verdade. Eu fico alegre, pra poder mostrar pra família que dá pra viver disso aqui.”

¹⁶⁸ “às vezes eles [os artistas] não dão o valor que a gente [os intermediários culturais e consumidores] dá.”

become proud of their own cultural universe and begin to understand in their own knowledge the relevance of preservation. To quote Ulisses Mendes, “recognition comes from the outside, and then they promote our name here.”¹⁶⁹

Regarding the valorisation of APB in the Jequitinhonha Valley, Erena Barcelos, Cultural Heritage Advisor of the city of Itinga, Minas Gerais, highlights the valorisation of APB in that region: “Handicrafts are known all around, and Ulisses Mendes is valued abroad. [However], students in schools were ashamed to be the children of an artisan. That is why the work [of heritage education] of the cultural centre and of the council is important.”¹⁷⁰ It can be seen from the trajectory traced out by APB that, in the market logic, the valorisation of knowledge by the communities themselves derives from a previous external recognition. However, the popular artists’ feeling of value in relation to the place they belong depends on an educational process that has been built over time and structured at the local level.

This external recognition that generates visibility for APB artists is granted for the entire community, which is achieved by the role played by the artists’ cooperatives, or by individual artists, whose names gain notoriety in the market. To reach the transition between community artisans and APB artists with individualised authorship, the action of cultural intermediaries, as guarantors of their value, is dominant. In general, when asked about the activities of gallery owners, retailers and collectors, the interviewees answered that they are aware of the profits made with the artworks’ resale. They admit that, without the intermediaries, they would not have reached what they have today, as the clay sculptor Sil da Capela, from Alagoas, states: “I don’t seek to know the prices of gallerists. But I can’t speak badly of gallery owners, because they have their work, publicity, they reach a lot of important people. I have grown a lot with

¹⁶⁹ “o reconhecimento vem de fora e aí eles divulgam o nosso nome aqui.”

¹⁷⁰ “O artesanato é conhecido por aí e Ulisses Mendes é valorizado no exterior. [Porém], as crianças nas escolas tinham vergonha de ser filho de um artesão. É por isso que o trabalho [de educação patrimonial] do centro cultural e do conselho é importante.”

gallery owners” (fig. 53).¹⁷¹ Along the same lines, Ulisses Mendes conveys this ambiguous feeling:

The artist should not follow these reselling values too much, it can mess with your head. ... On the other hand, it is good when it multiplies our price, because it adds value and makes it easier for us to sell. ... The retailers helped a lot to promote us because not everyone can get here. Today the sales are made by Whatsapp.¹⁷²



Fig. 53. Sil's artworks exhibited in a solo show, Museu Théo Brandão, Maceió.

Similarly, APB artists are aware that the valuing process of their works depends on the relationship that must be maintained with the place they inhabit. J. Borges recognises the twofold reliance on the local place and the gallery owner interference for the maintenance of his position in the market: “I am an artist made from the ground, from the earth. ... My inspiration comes from the local place, from the stories of the *sertão*, the myths, nature. ... My work is an *arte popular*, but in my hands, it doesn't have much value, those who value it are the people from outside, the dealers”¹⁷³ (fig. 54). Ulisses Mendes confirms: “We are interesting

¹⁷¹ “Não procuro saber de preço dos galeristas. Mas eu não consigo falar mal dos galeristas, porque eles têm o trabalho deles, divulgação, alcançam muita gente importante. Eu cresci muito com galerista.”

¹⁷² “O artista não deve seguir muito esses valores de revenda, isso pode mexer com sua cabeça. ... Por outro lado, é bom quando multiplica nosso preço, porque agrega valor e facilita a gente vender. ... Os lojistas ajudaram muito a divulgar, porque nem todo mundo consegue chegar aqui. Hoje as vendas são feitas pelo Whatsapp.”

¹⁷³ “sou um artista feito do chão, da terra. ... Minha inspiração vem do local, das histórias do sertão, dos mitos, da natureza. ... Meu trabalho é uma arte popular, mas na minha mão não tem muito valor, quem valoriza são as pessoas de fora, os revendedores.”

because we live here. If we go to the big city, we disappear in the middle of the concrete jungle. Here we have characters to create.”¹⁷⁴

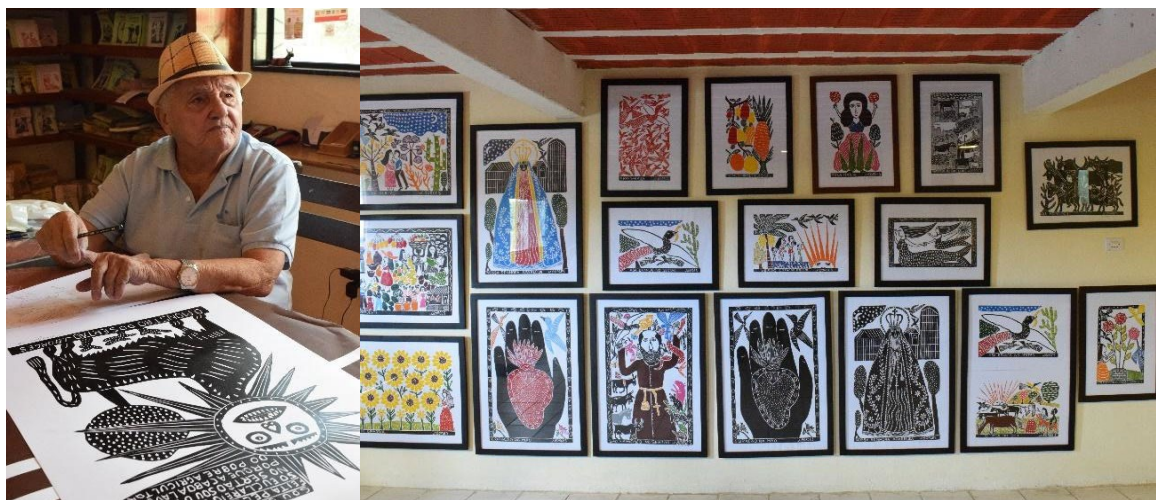


Fig. 54. J. Borges and some of his woodcut prints inspired by popular stories and daily life of the Northeast, in his atelier, Bezerros.

The artists' apparent privileged position, which is bestowed upon them by the consumer, is characterised by unity with the environment and the people of which they are part. This then creates the expectation that the artist must remain in their community to safeguard such “privilege.” From this follows that the artist must retain a localised position in order to be given access to a globalised market. Boaventura de Souza Santos understands this local versus global dichotomy as a utopian construction process when considering the transitional space of the concept of “baroque subjectivity” (58) in Latin America. Such a concept does not rely on universal laws, and therefore, as the author says,

baroque subjectivity invests in the local, the particular, the momentary, the ephemeral, and the transitory. But the local is not lived in a localist fashion, that is, it is not experienced as an orthotopia; the local aspires, rather, to invent another place, a heterotopia, if not even a utopia. Since it derives from a deep feeling of emptiness and disorientation caused by the exhaustion of the dominant canons, the comfort provided by the local is not the comfort of rest but a sense of direction. (58)

¹⁷⁴ “A gente é interessante porque a gente mora aqui. Se a gente for pra cidade grande a gente some no meio da selva de concreto. Aqui nós temos personagens pra criar.”

Accordingly, the artists' permanence in their own communities is central to securing APB's authenticity to circulate in the globalised market. This condition finds expression in the testimony of Mestre Irineia: "I am here, but my arts are worldwide."¹⁷⁵ Such an emphasis on the local can either take the form of a micro-utopia providing a retreat for the consumers, or of a transformative spark for the reality of popular artists providing citizenship status. Here we confront APB's paradox: its appreciation by official cultural circuits in large urban centres is conditioned by the "simple life" of the artists in their place of origin. Moreover, the preservation of APB's aura requires artists to withdraw themselves from the mainstream, as they facilitate an alternative beyond the norm of forms of consumption.

3.4. The Endurance of APB's Aura in the Marketplace

Benjamin defined aura as the chronological or spatial distance that exists from everyday life and a historical, a natural object, or a work of art (255). To perceive an object's aura, it is necessary to detach from the object to allow contemplation of its uniqueness. It is "the unique existence in a particular place," or "the here and now of the work of art" (253) that has been threatened by technological reproducibility, whose result is mass culture, thereafter responsible for creating the consumer society's desire to be closer to objects of art, bringing them into their daily lives as commodities. By moving from local to global arenas, APB has also gained an auratic value when acceding to the art world. Ironically, the market, responsible for facilitating the adaptation of popular cultural expressions to consumers, has invested APB with new meanings, with cultural intermediaries, in fact, assisting in enhancing APB auratic quality by taking it beyond its community of origin while preserving its connection with collective values. This auratic gain is then reinforced by APB's consumers, who ratify its difference, or its authenticity, as it is seen as separated from the values of the modern neoliberal society.

¹⁷⁵ "Eu estou aqui, mas minhas artes estão no mundo."

It is APB incorporation into the cultural and artistic circuits that has bestowed to it the status of micro-utopia, with the idealisation of the ways of life found in the popular artists' places of origin what first gives APB an aura. Its marketisation may reflect an "aestheticisation" of communities' everyday life, "[an aestheticisation], not as a principle of universal emancipation but as a figure of profitability on a planetary scale"¹⁷⁶, which would neutralise its aura (T. Escobar, "Arte" 17). Yet, APB insertion in the art world exhibition spaces allows for a process of "re-auratisation" that shed light not only in the artworks, but in their socioeconomic and cultural circumstances, which may also benefit the communities of popular artists. Such contemporary positioning go through the market exploitation of culture, which, in a contradictory way, has allowed for reinstating in the art field the auratic essence of APB, awakening the artists' critical potential, inasmuch as, "the auratic distance makes room for the play of gazes, relegates the plenitude of meaning and allows difference to be inscribed" (T. Escobar, "Arte" 18).¹⁷⁷ That "difference" now serves the communities themselves, opening a transformative power for their APB artists:

When we started, handicrafts didn't have much value. Today it is valued internationally. The Valley was the shame of Brazil. [But] the people of the Valley are not miserable. With the work of the women and the strength of the handicrafts, no one dares to say that this is a Valley of misery. Nobody has the courage to say that, and we don't accept it either.¹⁷⁸ (Deuzani, Minas Novas)

The role played by popular cultures in Brazil's nation-building process, motivated mainly by a modern and anthropophagic attitude, has gradually created the conditions that explain the cultural place that APB occupies today. The neoliberal era that followed established

¹⁷⁶ "no como principio de emancipación universal sino como cifra de rentabilidad a escala planetaria."

¹⁷⁷ "la distancia aurática abre un lugar para el juego de las miradas, relega la plenitud del significado y permite inscribir la diferencia."

¹⁷⁸ "Quando começamos o artesanato não tinha muito valor. Hoje é valorizado internacionalmente. O Vale era a vergonha do Brasil. [Mas] o povo do Vale não é miserável. Com o trabalho da mulher e a força do artesanato, ninguém mais se atreve a dizer que aqui é um Vale de miséria. Ninguém tem coragem de dizer isso *e a gente também não aceita.*"

a floating status for APB, from national cultural heritage to art and consumer cultural products. The narratives that APB conveys have been used by various agents, prompting a shift in the consumers' society cultural values, where, as stated earlier, coexist existential and social forms of alienation. From the point of view of cultural intermediaries, a universal existential alienation, aggravated by the society of mass consumption, has created a desire in the consumer to reconnect with authentic forms of living, closer to nature and imbued with a sense of community.

This desire for authenticity resembles somehow Indigenous nations' epistemological claims and their call for recognition, which directly challenges the assumption of universalism imposed by the modern Western paradigm (Dávalos, "Movimientos" 23–24). Such an awareness shifts the focus from the individual self and highlights the communitarian subject, the one who seeks in small, localised narratives answers for the ontological void that has been accentuated in neoliberal society. Therefore, the aura of APB is sustained by the alternative ways of life that it symbolises. It is evidenced by orality, in contrast to formal, institutional forms of knowledge. This auratic value of APB represents a form of alterity that requires the artists to distance themselves from the modern lifestyle, even if in an idealised way, which, consequently, brings this creative manifestation closer to the *brasilidade* that was envisioned in the nation-building era.

From the artists' perspective, APB assists them in confronting the social alienation that has deprived them of the benefits and rights of modern Brazilian society, becoming a vehicle for expressing senses of freedom as it functions as a (re)humanising agent to reinstate their "modern" citizenship. Although the artists have to accommodate themselves to the market's expectations, they find spaces to exert autonomy in their creative processes, especially when this occurs in a collective way, such as in artisans' cooperatives. In addition, the valorisation of popular cultures by the various agents involved in the formation of nation branding has

consequences that surpass the aims of creating a competitive identity in the globalised market. Such valorisation also increases the communities' sense of pride in the very cultural practices they carry out. These de-alienating effects translate into the establishment of dignity for the artists and their communities by repositioning them as *detentores do saber* 'knowledge holders' of Brazilian society. Culture, therefore, becomes a platform for claiming rights when other means have proven to be ineffective.

APB's role as a messenger of *brasilidade* allows for the re-signification of the artist's place in their society, which is legitimised by the heritage discourse and the art market. From a Marxist perspective, one can say that in the APB context, the workforce is repositioned, moving from the condition of exploitation that serves the generation of wealth¹⁷⁹ to now fulfil the purpose of creating the country's culture. The representation of APB in official cultural spaces, such as museums and art galleries, symbolises democracy of participation in national cultural production. When the popular classes position themselves as authors, or artists, this democratisation does not occur due to an effect of technical reproducibility, which allows greater public access to and engagement with artworks, as identified by Benjamin, but rather it is prompted by the legitimisation of these social groups as creators of culture.

The micro-utopian positioning of APB creates de-alienating effects, as it redeems both those who have appropriated the culture of the other, that is, the consumer, and the "other" in its search for "strategies for entering ... modernity" (García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*), that is, the APB artist. The micro-utopia of APB is a vehicle of liberation in a two-way street. On the one hand, the consumer turns APB into a small narrative to compensate for the failure of the great utopian project of modernity. On the other hand, the artist makes use of these small

¹⁷⁹ "The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever-cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men. Labor produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity* – and this in the same general proportion in which it produces commodities." (Marx 107)

narratives of localised and communal knowledge that they possess to step into this same modern project that excluded them in the first place. Within the current social order built on capital accumulation and endless consumption, the micro-utopia does not escape the market's regulatory power over all human spheres. Nor can it be said that it is subordinated to the market's demands, bringing advantages only to APB intermediaries. As a micro-utopia, APB is a new place within the commonplace; it is the discovery of potentialities; it is the invention of life when life becomes unbearable. If there is no document of culture that does not also represent a document of barbarism (Benjamin 392), in a double play, APB is simultaneously a portrait of one social group's exploitation of others and a reflection of the resilience capacity of these same exploited groups. Symbolically, this process entails placing an artistic expression coming from the lower classes as a cultural representation of a country that persists in a racist, misogynist and classist social reproduction. If art is a utopian place for envisioning possibilities, or a micro-utopia, the attitude of legitimising APB within institutionalised spaces in Brazil may well pave the way for real socio-political transformations.

When the objects of APB occupy museums and galleries or are acquired by consumers, being displaced into exhibition spaces, the meanings of alterity represented in the art objects reaffirm their aura. It is through visual experience that the effects of APB as micro-utopias are absorbed by the consuming public. In this regard, to the social, cultural, and political dimensions, one should add the aesthetic dimension, insofar as the concepts of nostalgia and authenticity are manifested in the formal results of the artworks. The following Chapter will precisely address this aesthetic dimension.

CHAPTER IV

Aesthetic Experiences and Sensibilities of Arte Popular Brasileira

The artist's freedom has always been 'individual,' but true freedom can only be collective. A freedom aware of social responsibility that breaks down the boundaries of aesthetics, the concentration camp of Western civilisation.¹⁸⁰

– Lina Bo Bardi, *Discurso sobre a significação da palavra artesanato*

4.1. APB's Decolonial Practice

When focusing on the aesthetic dimension of APB, and after having located the investigation under a decolonial theoretical perspective, it is possible to say that APB is also part of a decolonial form of aesthetics, one that is, however, directly generated by the people. This is not to claim that all APB creation is decolonial in its origin or that popular artists follow a decolonial agenda in their act of creating. What is proposed is that APB sets itself apart from the universality principle that dominates Eurocentric forms of aesthetic, to participate instead in aesthetics in which multiple universes are manifested, or what in a decolonial language is described as “pluriverses.” In this sense, although APB does not represent a knowledge produced with a decolonial purpose, it can be seen as presenting a set of non-colonial epistemological continuities, a set of knowledges and practices Brazilians describe as a popular compendium of *saberes e fazeres*.

By considering these symbolic meanings, this Chapter examines the aesthetic appreciation of APB, conceived as a relational and holistic experience. It is relational as the artwork cannot be aesthetically experienced in isolation; instead, APB synthesises the lifestyles of popular artists and the ways they interact with the world to create the artworks. In their turn,

¹⁸⁰ “A liberdade do artista foi sempre ‘individual’, mas a verdadeira liberdade só pode ser coletiva. Uma liberdade ciente da responsabilidade social que derrube as fronteiras da estética, campo de concentração da civilização ocidental.”

cultural intermediaries consider the ontological, material, and historical circumstances from which this art has emerged to appreciate APB aesthetically. As a holistic experience, aesthetic appreciation occurs precisely in the encounter between the artist, the artistic object, and the consumer. In this way, what the artists intends the object to reflect, and the consumer's expectations complement each other. This is what Stuart Hall proposes in his constructionist approach to aesthetic-cultural analysis so that the attributed meanings are found in the mediation provided by the artworks (*Representation* 13–74). Berleant corroborates this position and adds that an aesthetic experience results from an engagement between artist and public mediated by the art object (109). For this reason, this Chapter will analyse APB's formal results considering the meanings produced by the artworks. As discussed in the previous Chapter, APB's positioning as a materialisation of micro-utopia creates a symbolic place that assists in de-alienating both the artist and the consumer. In that sense, the aesthetic experiences will be analysed according to these two different points of view.

The subject's senses mediate the aesthetic experience lived by those who create and those who consume artworks. Those senses can be synthesised in the metaphor of the gaze that attributes meaning to artworks. Based on this idea, the following sections focus on the appreciative and the learning gaze to address the aesthetic experiences of cultural intermediaries (APB's first consumers) and that of popular artists, respectively. Attention will be given first to the produced meanings coming from the consumers' interpretations, second to the artists' creative intentions, and finally to the ways micro-utopian meanings are represented in APB artworks through their formal qualities.

4.2. The Appreciative Gaze: The Aesthetic Experience of Cultural Intermediaries

Ángel Rama describes *la ciudad letrada* ‘lettered city’ as a city within the real city, which is governed by experts who are part of the institutional intellectual order. The lettered city has structures in place that “regulate the physical world, norms the life of the community, and oppose the scattering and particularism of any sensible invention” (Rama 43).¹⁸¹ As explored throughout this thesis, when adapted to the prevailing European frame of thought, elements of popular cultures, “many of rural origin who are stylized and culturized” (Rama 167),¹⁸² were appropriated by the liberal arts to respond to the need for creating a national artistic aesthetic that could set each country apart, and to separate them as well from the European models (Rama 150–169).

APB comes from an unlettered reality, apparently unordered, but with elements that make it attractive to the public of the lettered city described by Rama. That is due to its micro-utopian potency, which nurtures consumers’ nostalgia for an authentic place. The collector and researcher Jairo Campos confirms this relationship between APB and popular ancestral origins when stating, “the popular is greatly based on orality, on this storytelling thing, on performances, on traditions that are made sacred in oral manifestations that people simply pass on from generation to generation, ... And I see all of that like language, representation, like the production of meaning.”¹⁸³

The unlettered place where APB is created presents tangible and intangible outcomes that are different from what is conventionally adopted by the structured society of the lettered city, and which are recorded in ways other than in written form. APB is endowed with a

¹⁸¹ “ordenan al mundo físico, normativizan la vida de la comunidad y se oponen al desperdigamiento y al particularismo de cualquier invención sensible.”

¹⁸² “muchos de origen rural a los que se estiliza y culturiza.”

¹⁸³ “o popular se dá muito pela oralidade, por essa coisa das histórias, das performances, das tradições que são sacralizadas nas manifestações orais que as pessoas vão simplesmente passando de geração em geração, ... E eu vejo tudo isso como linguagem, como representação, como produção de sentido.”

“singularity, outside the normal, the conventional, the trivial, ... that is preserved by the hands of someone” (Jairo Campos).¹⁸⁴ APB embodies, therefore, the continuity of *saberes e fazeres* that have been able to survive the universalising effects of the coloniality/modernity duet, whose succeeding cultural homogenisation is now perceived as the norm.

When authorising APB’s entrance into a world that is not its own, the gaze of cultural intermediaries is seen as a guarantee seal of good art. The gallerist Vilma Eid states that in order to understand APB, “the essential thing is not to think, the essential is to look at art”¹⁸⁵ so that feeling surpasses the act of rationalising. More than resorting to a single sensory sense, “vision is understood to exceed sight” (Buci-Glucksmann 144). Thus, the cultural intermediaries’ gaze combines sensory faculties of the body and the spirit, hence overriding cognitive attempts to define aesthetic and formal characteristics to detect the works’ quality.

On the other hand, Roberto Rugiero, declares that it is necessary to have a “knowledgeable eye” to identify good APB. For him, “you can only achieve this if you know many types of art, many art sectors, then you acquire a knowledgeable eye, or sometimes you are born with it [if the person has sensibility].”¹⁸⁶ These two possibilities relate to the distinction proposed by Panofsky between the “scholar,” including the “connoisseur” and the “art historian,” and the “appreciator” (23–50). The connoisseurs are experts in identifying dates, authenticity, and quality of the works during their aesthetic experiences. Art historians seek to adjust the aesthetic experience to a rational investigation and historical contextualisation. In its turn, appreciators are described as someone able to experience the artistic objects unpretentiously, only according to their preferences and cultural background. With this interpretation, there is an understanding that the ability to appreciate APB, when

¹⁸⁴ “singularidade, fora do normal, do convencional, do trivial, ... que se preserva pelas mãos de alguém.”

¹⁸⁵ “o essencial não é pensar, o essencial é o olhar para a arte.”

¹⁸⁶ “você só consegue se você conhecer muitas artes, muitos setores da arte, aí você adquire um olhar conhecedor, ou então já nasce com ele [se a pessoa tem sensibilidade].”

represented in art collections, depends on a code defined by a specific group of connoisseurs, in which cultural intermediaries participate. As Pierre Bourdieu interprets in his theory of habitus, the cultural intermediaries' gaze represents a system of social distinction. As a quality endorsement, their gaze is what allows APB to be decoded by consumers.

The prior knowledge that influences the sensibility of the appreciator is noted by gallery owners when they report that the profile of the client interested in APB is a "sophisticated" one. Although the need for a "knowledgeable eye" may seem contradictory, since artists do not hold the codes of distinction and legitimisation, this refined taste of customers reflects a traditional view of what art is. From this perspective, gallerists attempt to systematise popular creative production according to the aesthetic appreciation standards of higher social classes so that APB can be accepted within the canonical art world system.

Rugiero addresses the role of art galleries in this process of creating a taste for APB among the higher social classes. Referring to the influence of another pioneering gallery from São Paulo, Rugiero sustains that "the work of Estação Art Gallery was very important in this sense of [...] glamorising [APB],"¹⁸⁷ which guaranteed for many artists the possibility of being able to ask for higher prices and maintain a consuming public. The artists themselves report the confusion they felt when their creations aroused the interest of a public with a higher socioeconomic status and "connoisseurs" of art, as J. Borges states about his transition from being a *cordel* author and illustrator to becoming recognised as an artist (fig. 55):¹⁸⁸

I got into art so ingenuously that I didn't know what I was doing. I was suspicious about the people who bought it because it was during the military regime, and I said 'they are buying my work, it's not because it's worth anything, it's because they are going to take it to Brasília, do an analysis, and if they find any slip-up, they will come and arrest me. ... because I don't think they buy these illustrations [woodcut prints] that I make because

¹⁸⁷ "O trabalho da Galeria Estação foi muito importante nesse sentido de [...] glamourizar [a APB]."

¹⁸⁸ *Cordel* is a form of popular literature based on oral histories and printed in booklets to be sold in street markets mainly in the Northeast region. It was commonly illustrated by woodcuts and recited by the authors at the streets, being considered a form of literature that had as main public an illiterate population. the *Cordel Literature* was registered as intangible heritage by IPHAN in 2018.

they think they are pretty, no, this is no fun at all. Then, after this gallery invited me,¹⁸⁹ I kept going to exhibitions of primitive artists, those figures that were much uglier than mine, and I said, 'I think I am in the middle of this primitive artist, popular artist thing. That's it. There is nothing subversive about it. Then I started to learn. But I did not know what was actually going on. ... Only one day a woman arrived from Rio [de Janeiro] and she said, 'when I see woodcuts, I go crazy because I like them so much that I do not even know what to choose.' ... and I said 'ah, I understand now what the secret is. It is a type of art.' I got into art, and I didn't learn from anyone. I never went to art school, nobody taught me a lesson, didn't give me a single word to explain anything. I started out foolishly like that, and people embraced my work, and I was living off a job without knowing what I was doing.¹⁹⁰



Fig. 55. Cordel booklets. On the right, a detail of a cordel cover, J. Borges atelier.

In this excerpt, it is interesting to note how J. Borges refers to the exhibitions he took part in, in the 1960s and 1970s, as “primitive art shows.” The artist is reproducing the labels that first collectors gave to his woodcut prints. In this sense, it becomes evident that the

¹⁸⁹ J. Borges refers to a gallery in the city of Recife for whom he worked exclusively between 1972 and 1975.

¹⁹⁰ “Eu entrei tão ingênuo na arte que eu não sabia o que fazia. O povo que comprava, eu tinha medo, porque era em pleno regime militar rigoroso, e eu disse ‘eles tão comprando esses trabalho meu, isso num é porque vale nada não, é porque vão levar pra Brasília, fazer uma análise, e uma hora que eles encontrarem algum deslize, eles vêm me prender. ... porque eu num acho que eles compram essas figuras que eu faço pra usar porque acham bonito não, isso não tem graça nenhuma. Aí depois que essa galeria me convidou, aí eu fiquei indo lá em exposição de artista primitivo, aquelas figuras muito mais feias do que as minhas, e eu digo ‘acho que eu tô jogado é nesse meio do artista primitivo, artista popular. É isso, num tem nada de subversão não.’ Aí fui aprendendo. Mas eu não sabia o que era. ... Só que um dia chegou uma mulher do Rio e ela disse ‘quando eu vejo xilogravura eu fico doida, porque eu gosto tanto que não sei nem escolher.’ Eu peguei o nome, botei num papel, botei no meu bolso, e depois eu fui no dicionário, abri, procurei xilogravura, é gravura em madeira e quem faz é o xilógrafo. ... e eu ‘ah, tô entendendo agora qual é o segredo. É um tipo de arte’. ... Eu entrei na arte, não aprendi com ninguém, nunca frequentei escola de arte, nem ninguém me deu lição, me deu uma palavra sequer para explicar alguma coisa. Eu entrei adoidado assim e o povo abraçando o meu trabalho e eu fiquei vivendo de um trabalho sem saber o tava fazendo.”

evolving conceptualisation of APB comes from cultural intermediaries and is later absorbed by popular artists to adjust their creations to market demands. J. Borges transitioned from small size illustrations to creating painting-size prints to respond to consumers' requests. This movement corresponds to the fundamental principle of shaping APB as a contemporary cultural phenomenon. As seen in Chapter Two, in the same way creations in ATSI canvas painting in Australia and APM in Mexico result from exogenous influences or demands, J. Borges also illustrates how APB repositioned itself as a marketable Brazilian tradition.

Jasson, a wood sculptor, also comments on his creative process as the realisation of something that seems worthless and gains value when the gaze of others appreciates it. For him, his pieces are “a pretty ugly thing that ended up looking beautiful,”¹⁹¹ while his own neighbourhood went on mocking him, as he says *mangando*: “Let’s take a look at Jasson’s messy stuff.”¹⁹² Aware of this interplay between artist and public, João das Alagoas, ceramic sculptor, elaborates: “It’s not the artist who makes the artwork, it’s the one who sees it.”¹⁹³ The idea of the “knowledgeable eye” is expressed in Jasson and J. Borges statements in a representation of what Pedro Pablo Gomez explains as “the aesthetics operating for a re-westernisation” (González Vásquez et al. 126),¹⁹⁴ when other sensitive and creative manifestations must conform to the aesthetic rules of modern Western logic in order to participate in official artistic spaces. At the same time, the expectation of becoming art through the view of the “knowledgeable” consumer reflects the effects of coloniality in the ways of thinking of the people themselves, who have only transformed the expression of their aesthetic sensibility into beauty when the so-called experts validate it. It is as if the popular view, once

¹⁹¹ “uma coisa bem feia que terminava e ficava bonito.”

¹⁹² “Vamos lá ver as bagaceiras de Jasson.”

¹⁹³ “Quem faz a obra num é o artista não, é quem vê.”

¹⁹⁴ “[d]el operar de la estética para la re-occidentalización.”

colonised, unlearns to appreciate its own creation since it is different from what mass media promote as a standard of beauty.

APB Categorisations and Thematic Repertoires

Throughout APB's historical process of valorisation and legitimisation, the artistic objects classified as *popular* were associated with the ideals of *brasilidade*, of a *Brasil profundo*, of true art representing the nation. In the words of Elizabeth Costa, APB "is the product of Brazil's symbolic universe."¹⁹⁵ This is a cosmos of unlettered places, grounded in local dynamics and preserved beyond conventional institutional knowledge. Besides the links with spontaneity and spirituality, exhibition catalogues and specialised books on APB also associate these artistic objects with "imagination," "fantasy," "inventiveness," the "oneiric," an imaginary that goes beyond the rational and logical principles governing modern society's order.

It is important to recall that in the Brazilian quest to establish its own visual interpretative rules, Oswald de Andrade points out that the dual condition of Brazilian reality derives from a blend of "forest" and "school," in which the rationality coming from foreign colonisation must be moulded to the unconstrained ancestral and popular knowledges (Andrade and Rego, "Manifesto" 186–87). Rule-averse, popular creativity solves challenges of the present moment, but it is always equipped with cultural memories grounded in the past. As APB does not follow institutional academic rules, the terminology used to elucidate it—*arte popular*—conveys meanings emanating from several different formal outputs created within different geographical, historical, and epistemological contexts. Therefore, it does not comprise a unique style.

¹⁹⁵ "é produto de um universo simbólico do Brasil."

Regarding the recurring themes in APB, cultural intermediaries usually distinguish artists who narrate collective practices based on community settings, and artists who draw their inspiration from an individual imagination, dreams, fears, and desires. While the former maintains a more figurative model, the latter tends towards greater formal freedom, without a necessary direct association with concrete models, as further explored in the closing section of this Chapter (fig. 56).



Fig. 56. From left to right, figurative clay sculpture by Vitalino, Museu do Barro, Caruaru; wood-carved stylised sculpture by Aberaldo, Memorial Mestre Fernando Rodrigues, Ilha do Ferro.

Based on this, those more figurative artistic objects narrate children's festivities and games, celebrations and religious devotion, scenes from families' daily lives, rural and urban workers, peasant life, and the relationship with nature. This relationship also appears in the recurrence of pieces with hybrid forms, some anthropomorphic and others zoomorphic, combining collective stories with individual inventiveness. Some artists also try to emphasise the qualities of raw materials and natural organic shapes (in this last case, generally wood).

Although popular artists establish individual authorial styles, their connection with *saberes e fazeres* may engender intergenerational style continuities. This creates the so-called APB schools, as happens in Capela, Alagoas, the Jequitinhonha Valley, Minas Gerais, and the Alto do Moura district, Pernambuco, in clear examples of what Papousek defines as a "village

style” (169). In many cases, the transmission of *saberes e fazeres* is restricted to the Mestre’s family members, giving rise to a style connected to that family in particular.

Cultural intermediaries have an ambiguous stance regarding intergenerational stylistic transmission. Whereas some consider this a form to perpetuate knowledge, thus revealing a heritage perspective on APB, others believe that the practice may diminish its artistic value, bringing it closer to artisanal copy. On this issue, Jorge Borges Mendes, collector, and curator of the Museu Janete Costa of Arte Popular, Niterói, states that although some cases are merely copies, in others, it is possible to perceive an evolution in each generation. Mendes believes this to be a valid and natural process: “I think they have lived with that [they grow up seeing their relatives creating APB] and learned it because there is a very strong orality on this. So, I think it’s very legitimate. But I would like them [the children] to distance themselves a little bit [from their parents]. I can already see some of them... creating their own work. If you ask me ‘and for a collector?’ Yes, I’d prefer a new artist. But I think it’s legitimate to continue the family’s work.”¹⁹⁶ Vilma Eid, in turn, says that she does not consider the continuators as artists. “I don’t think that tradition applies to calling them artists. And I think that is disappointing because they have the technique. However, nobody tells them: ‘you can take risks. Use your technique to do whatever you want to do’. On the contrary, everyone closer to them says: ‘no, we want it just like that’ because they are a commercial success. No, I don’t buy it.”¹⁹⁷ The gallerist mentions the example of an artist from Tracunhaém, Pernambuco, Nuca [Manoel Borges da Silva] (1937–2014), whose work has been continued by his children, who have replicated their father’s style without transforming any part of it, which she,

¹⁹⁶ “Eu acho que conviveu com aquilo e aprendeu, porque existe uma oralidade muito forte nisso. Então eu acho super legítimo. Mas eu gostaria que de alguma maneira que eles também [os filhos] se distanciassem um pouco [dos pais]. Eu já percebo alguns ... criando uma obra própria. ... Se você perguntar ‘e pra um colecionador?’ Sim, eu vou preferir um novo artista. ... Mas acho legítimo dar prosseguimento ao trabalho da família.”

¹⁹⁷ “Eu acho que essa tradição não vale para chamá-los de artistas. E eu acho uma pena. Porque eles têm a técnica. Mas ninguém diz pra eles ‘vocês podem ousar. Usem a técnica pra fazer o que vocês quiserem fazer’. Pelo contrário, todo mundo que tá próximo deles dizem ‘não, nós queremos assim mesmo.’ Porque é o sucesso da venda, o sucesso comercial. Eu não compro.”

therefore, considers a serial production: “he personally encouraged his children to do the same as he did; hence it became handicraft” (fig. 57).¹⁹⁸



Fig. 57. Clay sculptures by Nuca, CRAB collection, Rio de Janeiro.

Maria Amélia and Dalton Costa explain that it is important to encourage families and communities to continue the work of the Mestres because, during this process, new artists can emerge. They refer to the case of Antônio de Dedé’s family (Antônio Alves dos Santos, 1953–2017), from Lagoa da Canoa, Alagoas, who they supported to develop a career to become nationally and internationally recognised. Dalton recounts his first encounters with Antônio de Dedé: “[I asked] ‘why don’t you make bigger things?’ [and he replied:] ‘Because I don’t have money to buy wood.’ So, we bought a truckload of wood, and from then on, he became Antônio de Dedé.”¹⁹⁹ The gallerists explain that they also encouraged him to teach his children because the role of the gallerist is to stimulate creativity, give tips to the children, and guide them until they detach from their father’s style and find their own path. “Many collectors, though, want to buy only from the Mestre, and when the Mestre dies, they abandon their children”²⁰⁰. Maria Amélia adds that after this work, she convinced the Museu Edson Carneiro representatives to

¹⁹⁸ “ele mesmo incentivou os filhos que fizessem como ele; e aquilo virou artesanato.”

¹⁹⁹ “[perguntei] ‘por que você não faz coisas maiores?’ ‘Porque não tenho dinheiro para comprar madeira.’ Aí, compramos um caminhão de madeira e daí em diante ele virou Antônio de Dedé.”

²⁰⁰ “Agora muitos colecionadores querem comprar só do mestre e quando o mestre morre, abandonam os filhos.”

organise an exhibition about Antônio de Dedé's family, demonstrating their efforts to promote the entire family's artistic creations (fig. 58).



Fig. 58. Sculptures by Antônio de Dedé, CRAB collection.

From the artists' point of view, the motivation behind passing on knowledge across generations has a different meaning. The Mestre expects the family to learn his work to continue their legacy. Likewise, the children feel proud of the knowledge produced by their progenitors. That is why they choose to reproduce their style, so the act of copying them does not devalue their work, but rather is a sign of recognition of its value. Emanuel Vitalino says that his grandfather "Vitalino had six children, five of them learned the art of clay. ... My father [Severino Vitalino] gave it continuity ... When I saw my mother making it, I started to make it too. ... The work is individual, each one [in the community] has their own style. I try to follow the style of my father and my grandfather."²⁰¹ Despite this concern to keep their work alive, the artists acknowledge that there is difficulty in gaining market acceptance when they opt for keeping the family traditional knowledge. J. Borges clarifies, "many people in my family

²⁰¹ "Vitalino teve seis filhos, cinco aprenderam a arte do barro. ... Meu pai [Severino Vitalino] deu seguimento ... Eu vendo minha mãe fazendo, comecei a fazer também. ... O trabalho é individual, cada um [da comunidade] tem seu estilo. Eu procuro seguir o estilo do meu pai e do meu avô."

The importance of mestre Vitalino for Alto do Moura was promptly recognized by his family who transformed his house into a museum as early as 1959, a space later incorporated by the city government as a municipal cultural heritage site in 1969 (municipal law No. 2,070 of April 26). Currently the city government subsidises a monthly subsidy to the Vitalino family so that they can host visitors themselves and sell their pieces, being Emanuel Vitalino one of the people in charge of the museum.

learned, they have been working with woodcut prints. ... The children have started to sign with their own names. But customers still want those with my name. ... art sells more depending on whose name is on it” (fig. 59).²⁰²



Fig. 59. J. Borges family atelier.

Despite intergenerational oral transmission being an intrinsic characteristic of APB, when they get into the market, popular artists are faced with an ethical dilemma between perpetuating a family or community-style, or evolving to create an individual style, one that may be more economically attractive, as it provides the market with novelty. There is, in fact, a conflicting effort to achieve a balance between these two possibilities, for it is the ability to represent a collective and retain ancestral attributes that guarantee APB value as cultural heritage. Thus, what Papousek calls “feature of repeatability,” which is “a set of variations on some prototypes and themes” (163) according to specific cultural codes, it is a strategy adopted by many families and communities of popular artists to visually identify elements that evoke

²⁰² “muita gente da minha família aprendeu, trabalham com as impressões. ... os filhos começaram a assinar. Mas os clientes ainda querem mais com meu nome. ... A arte vende mais pelo nome.”

cultural memories, but at the same time create a certain level of innovation. This subtle state of equilibrium bestows APB legitimacy and keeps its integrity in the art market.

Regarding the outcomes of APB, it is not possible to choose specific visual elements that define a particular formal result or style. APB resembles an umbrella term for artworks with a high degree of essentialisation of shapes to their most basic traits, minimal intervention in the raw material, simplified human features, and with or without adding colours. But there are also artworks with intense formal elaboration and detailing, whether in the modelling or the texture and graphic patterns (fig. 60). As Jairo Campos states, “I see APB as the essence of the Brazilian soul. ... as the one that best expresses in the field of visual arts this variety that Brazil is, this extraordinary dimension that Brazil is, because there are many genres, many forms, many interpretations, many techniques. It proves in practice that we are indeed a plural Brazil.”²⁰³ To forge this connection with *brasilidade*, besides the association with the themes and the human types represented, elements of the popular imaginary and a fantastic world are highlighted, which popular creators externalise through their labour activity.



Fig. 60. From left to right, clay sculptures by Noemisa; clay sculpture by Ulisses Pereira, Jequitinhonha Valley, exhibition “Brasilidade,” CRAB.

²⁰³ “eu vejo a arte popular brasileira como a essência da alma do brasileiro. ... como a que melhor exprime no campo das artes visuais essa variedade que é o Brasil, essa dimensão extraordinária que é o Brasil, porque são muitos gêneros, são muitas formas, muitas leituras, muitas técnicas. Comprova-se na prática que nós somos de fato um Brasil plural.”

The handmade impression on the artistic object refers to popular ingenuity in finding formal solutions using only the elements available in their surroundings. These artistic forms are, in fact, visual continuities of a social condition which Bruno Zevi called “desperate efforts” to denounce what he describes as an “intolerable existence” (293),²⁰⁴ and which are imprinted on the creative, intentional forms of APB. Such efforts to leave traces of the physical work and the basic materials used are noted in the passage of the fingers for the clay modelling, in the steps followed by artisanal labour, of the sandpapers, made with corn cobs, or with a piece of cloth, of the “small knives,” “little sticks” or other natural and daily instruments adapted to creative need, and, finally, in the layers of time that dye the wood, darken the clay or manifest the sustainable reuse of plastic and metal scraps (fig. 61). By imprinting those traces, popular artists are in some way leaving a testimony about the hardships of their existence. Their conditions of oppression are then stamped on the artworks, thus, asserting the connections between the visual elements and the artists’ existential, social, cultural, and economic positioning in society. At the same time, they are perceived in a subtle manner in the artworks so that the hardship can still be aesthetically appreciated by consumers as a distant place, one that is still worth living. In other words, for the buyers, these qualities represent a micro-utopian reality, where suffering is translated into connections with simplicity, nature, and community.



Fig. 61. Tools used by the artists of the Jequitinhonha Valley.

²⁰⁴ “esforços desesperados”; “existência intolerável.”

The charm emanated from APB appears as it represents an alternative to artworks and design products that fall under “industrialism,” in which objects can be indiscriminately reproduced, at low cost and with a “flawless precision governed by careful calculation” (Berleant 61). APB, by contrast, fall into the category of handmade with a uniqueness that equates to the

pre-industrial art objects because they were produced by skilled craftsmen using relatively simple hand tools. Such objects applied intricate workmanship to a unique design. The suits of the large amount of labour required with a small output were objects that were rare and expensive. Because they were produced by hand, traditional art objects showed an irregularity resulting from human workmanship and fallibility, and provided an opportunity for the artist/craftsperson to make unstudied, intuitive decisions in the process of fashioning them. (60)

In this context, selecting the materials that will serve to communicate the chosen theme is paramount to building an aesthetic perception of APB, associated with the election of formal solutions in an intuitive manner. The raw materials indicate a close connection with the natural environment and a simpler life. It shows “realness” as opposed to the superficiality derived from serialised goods.

Cultural Contextualisation for Aesthetic Appreciation

When exhibited in museums, the biographical relationship with APB artists is highlighted with curatorial narratives to contextualise the objects within the community’s daily life, which, according to Elizabeth Costa, facilitates a better engagement with the museum’s visitors. Moreover, it is worth recalling from previous Chapters that all the labour effort translated into the forms of the artistic objects is enhanced by the biography of popular artists and the condition of oppression they endure. Roberto Rugiero also comments on this public connection achieved by APB exhibitions, citing the example of the “Mostra do Redescobrimento–Brasil 500 anos” ‘Re-discovery Exhibition,’ in 2000, in which, according to

him, the module dedicated to APB was the one with the best public reception.²⁰⁵ In the same vein, the curator Jorge Mendes states that “APB has a faster acceptance, which communicates better, different from, I will put in quotation marks, ‘contemporary art.’”²⁰⁶

In these curatorial trajectories, there is often a concern to localise artistic expressions to establish the notion of belonging to a specific place, and to a greater extent, to the entire country. In this practice, APB’s stories gain an identity value. Being APB a collective mnemonic repository, its appreciation becomes an intimate part of acknowledging a particular culture, a way of living. Aesthetic appreciation is hence complemented by the links established with cultural memories.

In addition to the artist’s biography as an enhancer of aesthetic appreciation, it is also necessary to observe the actual interactions that may occur between artists and buyers or spectators. The public that consumes or appreciates APB through exhibitions set in urban centres constructs an image of the popular artist’s life and how this influences their creative process from what is narrated to them in these spaces (fig. 62). To complement the curatorial narratives, besides the textual and audiovisual narrative resources, some of these cultural spaces invite the artists to the exhibition openings nights, for rounds of conversation with the public, or to offer workshops.

Such an inclusive approach, however, is not practised by all cultural intermediaries. Some gallery owners prefer to exhibit APB’s objects without the participation of the artists in the events. The justification is that the transiting of popular artists in conventional art spaces typically frequented by upper social classes, and the appraisal as a talented artist they receive in those venues may cause the artists to experience high degrees of frustration when they

²⁰⁵ On the exhibition see Brasil+500.

²⁰⁶ “a APB tem uma aceitação mais rápida, que se comunica melhor, diferente da, vou botar aspas, ‘arte contemporânea.’”

subsequently return to their ordinary lives. Ana Maria Schindler argues that the authenticity of popular artists is better “preserved” if they do not participate in fairs or exhibitions, and remain in their living and working environment.



Fig. 62. “A invenção da Terra” exhibition of Tania Maia Pedrosa collection, Casa do Patrimônio, Maceió.

Therefore, what is chosen in this case to facilitate an enjoyable aesthetic experience is the appreciation of the artwork in itself, so that people see APB as “an aesthetic work, beautiful, and one that they want to have around” (Schindler).²⁰⁷ Moreover, some scholars and agents engaged in the field claim that the association of APB to the communities’ history and the artists’ biographies that places the artwork in a heritage position may weaken the aesthetic fruition capacity of the artwork by itself. In 1977, Luis Neves had already named this need “a documenting habit” (202), in which APB is reduced “to a proof of a certain type of life, of a certain historical juncture that is alien (or supposedly alien) to the experience of the observer.”²⁰⁸ Through the exaggerated emphasis on documenting, which, according to Neves, does not occur with the so-called academic or erudite arts, the auratic gain of APB is obtained with the work’s historical reading overriding the sensory experience of the object itself.

²⁰⁷ “um trabalho estético, lindo, que queiram conviver com aquilo.”

²⁰⁸ “vício do documentalismo”; “a uma prova de um determinado tipo de vida, de uma determinada conjuntura histórica alheia (ou supostamente alheia) à experiência do observador.”

The option for presenting APB exclusively through artistic objects seems to occur amid a dispute over positions concerning the colonial matrix of power, as described by Mignolo. On the one hand, there is an attempt to detach it from the “documenting habit,” seen as a prerequisite for the aesthetic fruition of APB. On the other hand, by representing it on the “white walls” of modern exhibition spaces, what arises is the risk of subjugating the popular creations to the same modern logic of artistic representation. Evidently, museums and art galleries are, in essence, colonial institutions. Thus, to be included in these cultural arenas without changing the forms of representation may correspond to yet another strategy of modernity that expands its spaces of privilege to encompass the so-called excluded manifestations, which, however, must be subordinated to its rules (González Vásquez et al. 125).

In this later case, what is proposed is for the artistic object to be appreciated independently from the creator’s circumstances. Nevertheless, unlike other products, when APB acquires a status of cultural commodity, popular artists cannot be completely estranged from their artworks. This occurs because APB preserves a sense of “real community life” (Marx 123), in which the artwork’s social significance is preserved during the creative process. Under the perspective of maintaining APB’s innate sense of the social, the presence of the popular artist in the artwork, even if only through the representations prepared by cultural intermediaries in exhibitions, is an indispensable condition for the aesthetic appreciation of this creative manifestation.

As already explored in Chapter Three, the museography experiences developed locally, through local museums and memory spaces created in the communities of the popular artists, or created by themselves, reveal this need to circumscribe the works in the places where they have been created. Without overlooking formal qualities of the artworks, the relational aspect of APB requires that exhibition spaces test new solutions with a deeper contextual immersion

of the objects to be appreciated, one that is not patronising but that enhance the artists' voices. In that sense, a contextualisation that surpasses the "documenting habit" corresponds to alternative approaches of representation that construct new socio-cultural meanings, bringing museums closer to communities while putting them at the service of the population.

4.3. The Learning Gaze: The Aesthetic Sensibility of Popular Artists

From the popular artists' perspective, the metaphor of the gaze permeates every aspect of their creative universe. For them, continuing with those *saberes e fazeres* comes from what may be defined as a "pedagogy of the gaze," which in the words of Mestre Zezinha, makes the artist a "teacher of oneself."²⁰⁹ It is by observing the work of others, the family's routine, the neighbour's skills, and the nature's cycles that the artists discover their ability to handle the raw material and the tools, to innovate and make art out of clay, wood, stone, fibre, metal and loom. For popular artists, the gaze also represents their creative spark. About his own creative process, Jasson states, "I make everything through vision. I have that vision, then I think, this is going to be beautiful."²¹⁰ At one of the doors of his house, Jasson wrote that "the artist does not know, the artist creates."²¹¹ This reveals an intimate relationship between the creative act and other non-exclusively cognitive and rational realms.

Perceptive sensibility and intuition can access elements of the artists' environment, as well as their memories and life experiences which are translated into the material form of the artistic object. Lira Marques adds that besides a certain familiarity with the land, it is necessary to be curious. She says, "as I did not have any schooling to learn this, we go by intuition, you experiment, and it works, you see that it works, and we go ahead. We go on like this,

²⁰⁹ "professor de si mesmo."

²¹⁰ "tudo eu faço através da visão. Tenho aquela visão, aí penso, isso assim vai ficar bonito."

²¹¹ "o artista não sabe, o artista cria."

experimenting.”²¹² On intuition, Berleant, in his new aesthetic theory, is seeking to integrate into Western thought what has long been recognised in other artistic traditions, such as in the East (91–100). For him, intuition corresponds to a perceptual impulse that participates in the aesthetic experience when faced with complete sensory immersion, integrally connecting the arts and the world in a manner that is not fragmented by analytical theories. Among the various intuitive facets, creative intuition is described by Berleant as an act of “sensing the way forward, knowing before reason what feels right and works and what does not” (96), thus revealing a form of understanding that precedes the intellect. Using the sensory aspect of intuition seems to be metaphorically equivalent to the “feeling arm of the intellect,” or “the eye without which reason is blind” (94). Vision in the words of the popular artist corresponds, therefore, not only to the physiological sense of seeing but also to pre-existing knowledge of intervening in a reality already traced by collective and ancestral experiences.

Some artists, in turn, seek to establish a planning method to then proceed with their work. Mestre Marcinho, a clay and wood sculptor from Araçuaí, explains that he dreams or “daydreams” about the piece’s history and writes it down, including what he defines as the social criticism it carries. After that, he designs the piece before producing it. Like the ceramic sculptor João das Alagoas, Marcinho reports liking to read books about art, and, in his case, he has Aleijadinho as his greatest reference.²¹³ Aleijadinho is one of the most important Brazilian artists acknowledged by academia, and Marcinho proudly reports that his neighbours call him “the Aleijadinho of the Valley.”

However, although most of the artists interviewed do not acknowledge having a systematic planning that precedes the object, as taught in academic circles, they do mention an

²¹² “como eu não tive escola nenhuma pra aprender isso, a gente vai por uma intuição, você experimenta e dá certo, você viu que dá certo e a gente vai pra frente. ... a gente vai assim, experimentando.”

²¹³ Also known as Antônio Francisco Lisboa, Aleijadinho (1738–1814), a mulatto (mix of white and black descent), was a sculptor and architect in Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, and is considered the greatest exponent of Brazilian baroque in the Eighteenth century (See James Hogan).

ideation process that anticipates the outcome. This is the case of Jasson, who states that during the process of separating the material and before working on the piece, “I can already see it done.”²¹⁴ Popular artists elaborate such ideation during other daily life activities. They usually do not register their creative solutions in writing but rather in memory and orality during their daily routine. These *saberes* accumulated in memory are then intuitively translated into *fazer*es to create the pieces that seem to be born spontaneously. Averaldo states, “in one’s mind [the piece] comes already made.”²¹⁵ It is an accumulation of life experiences that, at the given creative moment, may seem to dismiss the need for reflection or search for inspiration, as can be inferred from the words of Vavan who says he does not need to look at nature, “I already have it thought out how I am going to make it.”²¹⁶

At the same time, popular artists identify nature, the knowledge transmitted by the family, and the community’s culture as the three elements that inspire their creative activity. Zezinha mentions that she creates clay creatures and spreads them around her gardens in an attempt to give back to the earth what the mining activity took away from it: “I made the animals that I would like to take back to nature because we live in a devastated place.”²¹⁷ Zezinha, as well as other artists, considers her creative process, pointing out the difficulties and problems she faces in her daily life. According to the artist, through her work, she intends to restore some of the memories she had of the native fauna, now almost non-existent in the region.²¹⁸ Lira Marques also creates a series of paintings with clay pigments that she calls “my backlands creatures,”²¹⁹ representing imaginary zoomorphic and phytomorphic figures, with no real direct equivalent, but which indicate both the crudeness of the environment and the

²¹⁴ “já tô vendo ela pronta.”

²¹⁵ “na mente da pessoa [a peça] já vinha feita.”

²¹⁶ “já tô com ela pensada de como eu vou fazer.”

²¹⁷ “Eu fiz os animais que eu gostaria de levar na natureza porque aqui é um lugar devastado.”

²¹⁸ On the mineral exploitation of the Jequitinhonha Valley, see chapter five.

²¹⁹ “os meus bichos do sertão.”

delicacy that can be inferred from the tiny foliage and efflorescence that emerge from the painted creatures (fig. 63).



Fig. 63. From top to bottom, animal clay sculptures by Zezinha, Turmalina; clay pigment painting series “Meus Bichos do Sertão” by Lira Marques, Araçuaí.

These examples indicate how the artists find new ways of conveying their connection with life, the environment, society at large, and the community when the concrete world surrounding them fails to provide basic needs. To preserve the reminiscent beauty, they retain in their memories, the artists resort to creativity to extend what they once knew to new forms of life beyond human rationality. What is more, these artists’ desire to restore forms of life no longer existent can be interpreted as an implicit critique of the modern destructive drive that has been devastating the planet, a value that finds resonance in the consumers’ nostalgic feelings for attaining a closer balance with nature and society.

In addition to the natural environment, local community’s stories are a source of inspiration. Sil da Capela enumerates: “the themes I get from the Northeast, the mother telling

stories, the boys playing with marbles, with pawns, ... the jackfruit tree.”²²⁰ With this strategy of using local dynamics to create, Luis Antônio explains: “the mind helps. I start with what we have, the Northeast, our culture.”²²¹ In defining his themes, Luis Antônio finds inspiration in the urbanisation process of Caruaru and the consequent appearance of new occupations linked to modernisation and new technologies, such as “dentist, doctor, operating caesarean sections, veterinarian, flour mill, photographer, cameraman ... electrician.”²²²

Likewise, Mestre Zezinha declares that her creative process “flows naturally” without planning beforehand and that her inspiration comes from the surrounding community, “you end up passing a part of your life into the piece.”²²³ Since women have relevant social roles in the region (see Chapter Three), the conversion of utilitarian ceramics into decorative and artistic pieces took the form of brides, mothers, and female teachers (fig. 64). The most well-known ceramic works in the Jequitinhonha Valley are the brides, a tradition initiated by the Mestre Isabel Mendes. As the women who began the artisanal practice in the region lived alone, without husbands, who migrated in search of work during the dry season, the brides’ modelling portrayed the women’s desires and expectations amidst the harsh reality they faced.



Fig. 64. Clay sculptures by Luis Antonio (left) and by Noemisa (right), “Brasilidade” exhibition, CRAB.

²²⁰ “os temas eu consigo tirar aqui do nordeste mesmo, a mãe contando história, os meninos brincando de bola de gude, com peão, ... o pé-de-jaca.”

²²¹ “a mente ajuda. Eu começo pelo que nós temos, o Nordeste, nossa cultura.”

²²² “dentista, médico, operando cesariana, veterinário, casa de farinha, fotógrafo, cinegrafista ... eletricitista.”

²²³ “flui naturalmente”; “você acaba passando um pouco da sua vida na peça.”

Furthermore, the detailing and refinement of the dolls' outfits, in a position of austerity, with ornamented dresses, necklaces, earrings and make-up, also denotes the act of valuing the leading role assumed by the female figure in the family nucleus and the community at large. As the curator Jorge Borges Mendes puts it, "a bride is an object of desire [that they now accomplished, which means] they are not waiting for any husband [anymore], they have overcome all that, ... they are in search of better days. By the way, [now] most [husbands] have returned to knead the clay for the women."²²⁴ The initial tendency to represent in ceramics light-skinned women is also associated with the artisans' view of the superiority of women from big cities, who occupy a higher social class. Progressively, the dolls' repertoire incorporated women with darker skin, representing the region's *mestizo* features. Today it is possible to find dolls of all skin tones and hair types, and with variations often requested by consumers (fig. 65).



Fig. 65. "The dolls" by Zezinha at the artist's home.

The artists' gaze also holds a sense of great responsibility to tell the place's story and portray the harsh social reality endured by the population, as mentioned in the previous Chapter under the idea of social denunciation. Under the watchful gaze of popular artists who set out to

²²⁴ "noiva é um objeto de desejo [que significa] que elas não estão [mais] à espera de marido nenhum, elas já superaram tudo isso, ... elas estão em busca de dias melhores. Aliás [agora] a maioria [dos maridos] voltou para amassar o barro pra elas."

narrate these realities, the artist takes on the role of a “detective,” as Ulisses Mendes explains, who sustains that being part of the people offers a privileged position of being immersed in a world of stories whose country has shown interest in hearing. “First, I create the character ... who will have instant visibility that people will decipher what it represents easily. ... I have to go on retreats in rural areas to talk to people and see how the rural people live. I have to store it in my memory.” Just like a writer, Ulisses Mendes visually narrates in his pieces stories of these investigations, “I take the character from reality itself, from the survival of the people.” For him, art represents “a social contribution that I needed to make, ... so that I could help the Valley ... that I represent the peasants, the workers, that I am not of the elite.”²²⁵

The artist Véio (Cícero Alves dos Santos), from the city of Nossa Senhora da Glória, Sergipe, talks about what he considers an obligation to tell the stories of his people, as a holder of popular knowledge, since, according to him, Brazilians do not value the knowledge of the *sertão*. With this intention, Véio created in his house the “Museu do Homem Sertanejo” ‘Museum of the Countryside Man,’ in which he leads a guided tour for all visitors through a path where he retrieves traditional instruments and machinery, tools, typical clothing, votive objects, professions, among other elements connected to the habits of the *sertanejo*. It illustrates, therefore, “the primitive part of the man of the *sertão*, a man without knowledge, but an inventor man.”²²⁶ In the words of the popular artists, they are part of a sector of society that if on the one hand does not hold knowledge—this term being directly related to institutionalised and formal knowledge—on the other hand, they possess the inventive capacity, to create intuitively from *saberes*, a form of knowledge that is not learned in educational institutions, but in daily life, in the community, in the natural environment. Only after visiting

²²⁵ “Primeiro crio o personagem ... que vai ter uma visibilidade instantânea que a gente vai decifrar o que ela representa instantaneamente. ... Tenho que fazer retiro pelo meio rural para conversar, para ver o jeito do homem do campo.... Tenho que armazenar na memória.”; “Tiro o personagem da realidade mesma, da sobrevivência do povo”; “uma contribuição social que eu precisava prestar, ... para eu conseguir ajudar o Vale ... que eu represento os camponeses, os trabalhadores, que eu não sou da elite.”

²²⁶ “Parte primitiva do homem do sertão, do homem sem conhecimento, mas do homem inventor.”

the museum does Véio begin to talk about his work, which presents various phases according to collectors and scholars. Véio is one of the most celebrated contemporary artists among popular artists. In catalogues of his career, it is common that there is an attempt to disconnect him from APB to exalt the value of his art—although his works still appear in several APB publications and private and official museum collections dedicated to APB (fig. 66).



Fig. 66. Entrance to Véio's land and one of the spaces of his Museu do Homem Sertanejo.

As previously mentioned, religious customs also significantly influence APB's creative process (fig. 67).²²⁷ Popular religiosity indeed permeates all the daily life of the Brazilian people so that, as Lélia Coelho Frota states, there is a fluidity between rituals and festivities, with an inseparable connection between faith and life (364–65). In fact, for many popular artists, religious figures constituted their first types of creative representation. For the popular artists interviewed, who mostly declare themselves Catholic, receiving requests from clients to represent figures of other religious denominations may be considered a point of conflict. Luis Antônio says that despite being Catholic and against his family's opinions, he makes the image of Iemanjá—a deity from the Candomblé religion—because he considers it to be a very saleable piece. Luis Antônio mentioned that when he told his church minister that he was making some pieces of “Iemanjá,” he obtained permission. “He said: ‘it is culture, there is nothing wrong with it, just do it’” (fig. 68).²²⁸

²²⁷ About Afro-Brazilian religion influence on APB, see Emanuel Araujo.

²²⁸ “Ele disse, ‘é cultura, tem nada não, faça.’”



Fig. 67. From left to right, installation representing faith in Afro-Brazilian and Catholic religiosity, in which *ex-votos* sculptures are used. Théo Brandão Museum, Maceió.



Fig. 68. Christian procession and Iemanjá procession: clay sculptures by Luis Antônio, Caruaru.

The case of Irinéia and her husband Antônio Nunes is intriguing because the family changed their religious denomination after being legitimised as popular artists mainly by the making of votive heads. Irinéia explains that her family is currently Protestant and even offers the house for the minister to hold services in the community. Many *quilombola* community members, who have also converted to Protestantism, associate the artistic production of Irinéia with “macumba,” a term considered derogatory to refer to the Afro-Brazilian religious practices of Candomblé and Umbanda. This is mainly because her artworks derive from votive pieces

and have features that recall connections with African origins, also linked to the community's historical formation from the descendants of resistance groups against slavery until the seventeenth century (The Quilombo of Palmares). Irinéia, however, explains that the pastor also “authorised” her to continue creating her pieces, since they are art and culture. They are, thus, exempt from committing a sin against the Neo-Pentecostal beliefs.

The representation of religiosity by popular groups leaves room for reinterpreting certain doctrines and inserting elements that traditionally would not have been accepted by the Catholic Church. A woodcut by J. Borges entitled “The arrival of the prostitute in heaven”²²⁹ exemplifies this issue. The illustration also originated a *cordel* of his authorship, whose story tells the confusion caused by the prostitute at the entrance gate of heaven for arousing the sexual attraction of the devil and the saints and the wrath of the married woman (see fig. 55, p. 216). Religious characters, saints, angels, and the devil are thus humanised to interpret the social dynamics found in popular reality. As is recurrent in APB, a movement of “carnivalisation” occurs, in which the work inverts hierarchies although perpetuating patriarchal structures (Barbosa et al.), with this last element socio-culturally explained by the colonial matrix of power.

The Market Influence

As discussed in the previous section, cultural intermediaries are aware of their guiding role in the artists' creative process. However, artists also report that they negotiate the requests to which they choose to consent. According to popular artists, one of the elements most specified by buyers is the sizes of the artworks to fit the collections, exhibitions, or decorative environments. J. Borges explains, “I started because I needed to illustrate my *cordel*. People from Rio [de Janeiro] asked for bigger sizes, and after Ariano [Suassuna], I made them all

²²⁹ “A chegada da prostituta no céu.”

sizes.”²³⁰ Aberaldo also comments that most of his orders specify size and colours but grant him autonomy to create the shapes. According to him, the interest for larger or smaller sizes depends on the type of consumer. While tourists prefer smaller pieces, retailers and gallerists buy all sizes, as they can hire the transport service. The artist also says that making varied sizes makes the wood materials more efficient since it minimises wood waste.

Choosing the colours of the piece is the second point where customers most interfere, to which many artists are not opposed. Ana Maria Schindler cites the example of the artist Nino (João Cosme Félix da Silva, 1920–2002), who, according to her, had an extreme artistic sensibility. Still, she says that if a designer asked him to paint everything red, he would do it. J. Borges relates, “I always did [the woodcuts] in black and white, and then people demanded everything to be coloured.” According to him, the European collector prefers black and white because of the tradition of engraving, whereas “from America and from here [Brazil], they prefer the colourful ones.”²³¹ Other artists say that once they have defined their style, they decide to keep it without submitting to clients’ requests. Sil da Capela says that she has already been asked to paint her sculptures, but she does not want to: “I do not see my pieces painted, but in the colour of the natural clay.”²³²

In the Jequitinhonha Valley, whose ceramic pieces are known for their painting in natural clay pigmentation, the painting style was also the result of the assertion of pioneer artists in maintaining this practice without interference. Maria Madalena, daughter of Mestre Isabel Mendes, explains that her mother shared with the community her preference for using clay paint instead of “bought paint.”²³³ This attitude of maintaining a tradition is reflected today in

²³⁰ “eu comecei porque precisava ilustrar meus cordel. todos os outros cordelistas mandavam eu fazer capa. O pessoal do Rio [de Janeiro] pedia tamanho maior e depois de Ariano [Suassuna] eu fiz de todo tamanho.” The Brazilian intellectual Ariano Suassuna (1927-2014) was a researcher and enthusiast of popular culture, specially of the Northeast, to whom J. Borges credits his fame.

²³¹ “sempre fiz [as xilogravuras] preto e branco e depois o povo exigia muito o colorido”; “da América e daqui [Brasil], gosta mais do colorido.”

²³² “eu não enxergo as minhas peças pintadas, e sim na cor do barro natural.”

²³³ “tinta comprada.”

consumer preference, which, according to ceramist Deuzani Gomes, many buyers complain about artificial paint and prefer natural ones (fig. 69).



Fig. 69. Ulisses Mendes showing his system of numbered natural clay pigments allowing the choice of the correct colour to be obtained after the kiln firing.

Other ceramic communities, such as Capela, Alagoas, reflect on the importance of being part of APB's national cultural circuits, such as fairs and exhibitions, and how they influence the creative process and the choice of production methods. João das Alagoas says that initially, his pieces were made without paint, keeping only the natural colour of the clay. When the artist got familiar with the production in the Jequitinhonha Valley and learnt about painting with clay pigments, he started to experiment with natural pigments, a practice that until then did not exist in his town (fig. 70).



Fig. 70. Painted clay sculptures representing characters from the popular dance "Reisado" by João das Alagoas.

The cultural circuits experiences also have influenced the way artists sign their pieces, which started from the insertion of APB into the art world. In a creative way, popular artists adapt to this demand and, once they interpret the signature as an essential element for the piece's value, they choose strategic places to place it, and no longer in internal or inferior parts of the sculptures. Artist Véio, for example, explains that he usually signs his name on the front or the top of his woodcarvings. Jasson, in turn, created his own tool to sign his pieces taking advantage of his skill as a blacksmith. As a kind of stamp, Jasson made the inverted letters of his name in metal, which he carves into the piece to further confer authenticity to his work. Luiz Antonio also made a stamp with the word "Mestre" to be imprinted on the clay and his signature goes under the piece. For him, the *Mestre do Patrimônio Vivo* title is the symbol of greater recognition, and the stamp can therefore be in more evidence than his own name (fig. 71). A similar case occurred with the artist Vavan from Ilha do Ferro. Vavan, who was starting his journey as an artist, and whose pieces were beginning to be valued in the market, decided to sign his pieces as "artist Vavan." However, the Karandash Art Gallery owners, the primary buyers and encouragers of Vavan's practice, warned him that "real artists" do not need to write the term "artist" on their pieces, signing only with their proper name. Without understanding, Vavan accepted the rules of the game and began to sign his name only.



Fig. 71. From left to right: Jasson's letters in metalwork to stamp his pieces; wooden chair by Jasson, Belo Monte city, Alagoas; clay sculpture by Luis Antônio with his stamp "Mestre," Caruaru.

Besides the authorship requirements, the market's demand also creates a need for originality. Paradoxically, those same agents that demand maintaining essential characteristics

associated with the popular, such as themes, colours, and specific materials, disapprove the popular artist's practice of indefinitely reproducing the same renowned pieces. Ana Maria Schindler mentions that large market events, such as the Feira Nacional de Negócios do Artesanato–FENEARTE, make artists spend years reproducing the same pieces until the very market discards them because of their repetitiveness. “FENEARTE has the capacity to make artists get rid of their creativity, stop producing new things to make what they know will sell.”²³⁴

At the same time, popular artists, now producers of national culture and members of the country's heritage, have their labour force displaced to creative activity and thus become dependent on the commercialisation of their pieces to guarantee the survival of their families.²³⁵ Artist João das Alagoas explains this direct dependence on the market: “If the client asks, we do it because this idea of creation is more for the independent artist.”²³⁶ To establish their own stylistic and authorial repertoire, it is common for popular artists to start working with the reproduction of this set, which may eventually suffer formal variations in shape, size, and colouring.

In distinguishing what separates artisanship from APB, Maria Amélia and Dalton Costa point out the problem of copying and repetition caused by market demand. “APB detaches itself from artisanship when it creates its own identity, and the artist tries not to repeat himself.” Maria Amélia adds: “Today, amazing popular artists are repeating themselves because of the market.”²³⁷ Aware of this borderline between novelty and conservation of tradition to maintain commercial interest, popular artists establish their own forms about what they understand to be

²³⁴ “A Fenearte tem a capacidade de fazer com que os artistas se desmanchem de sua criatividade, deixem de produzir coisas novas pra fazer aquilo que eles sabem que vão vender.”

²³⁵ Only a few popular artists selected from the state governments' living heritage public call receive a lifetime grant, which, however, is equivalent to only one minimum wage, insufficient to support a family in Brazil.

²³⁶ “o cliente pedindo, a gente faz, porque esse negócio de criação é mais para o artista independente.”

²³⁷ “A arte popular descola do artesanato quando ela cria uma identidade própria e o artista procura não se repetir”; “Hoje artistas incríveis de arte popular estão se repetindo por causa do mercado.”

a copy and an innovation for creating a differential within the market. Mestre Zezinha explains that the public started to look for her dolls about twenty-three years ago, and then she began to specialise in this type of pieces. For her, “the artisanship [market] is made of opportunities. ... So, you have to adapt yourself to all forms of market requests.” The artist describes the kind of innovation she pursues to satisfy the market: “She [the doll] has not gone out of fashion. At first, I made the doll only standing. Then I created her sitting. ... you can make several styles, with shrunk legs, stretched legs, on her knees. You create a small difference in a piece that is already old, so it looks like it’s new, you know?”²³⁸ That constitutes a stylistic variation within the same creative realm, which is equivalent to creative innovation from the point of view of popular artists (fig. 72).



Fig. 72. Ceramic dolls from Vale do Jequitinhonha, Minas Gerais. Pé-de-Boi Art Gallery Collection.

Popular artists convey the recurrent concern of having to demonstrate originality in their creative practices. As Lira Marques claims, “my work is more of an inspiration.” The artist

²³⁸ “o [mercado do] artesanato, ele é feito de oportunidades. ... Então, você tem que tá adaptada a todo tipo de mercado”; “Ela [a boneca] não saiu de moda. De primeiro, eu fazia a boneca só em pé, depois inventei de fazer ela sentada. ... você pode fazer vários estilos, de perna encolhida, de perna esticada, de joelhos. Você cria uma pequena diferença numa peça que já é antiga, aí parece que ela fica nova, sabe?”

started her practice by creating clay masks inspired by the faces of the local population. Attentive to the history of the place, she says, “I started making masks and figures because my mother used to talk about the region here, [where] you [used to] see many cases of slavery. And I am of Black and Indian descent too. Because what was there in the region? There were Indigenous people who were expelled from here.” In addition to anchoring her work into local reality, she also mixes references from her readings and travels, as is the case of her encounter with runes made in bone that aroused her desire to make ceramic runes: “I really like the symbols, which is a wisdom that can speak of a person’s life. ... I started to make several that I find interesting ... and the person can have a set of runes as a curiosity, and that can speak about the person’s life as well.”²³⁹

The emphasis on establishing a personal style appears even when artists are part of so-called family schools or traditions. In the town of Capela, the artists who learnt the technique from Mestre João das Alagoas, through guidance from the artist himself, seek to maintain a personal mark on the production. “I see in each person a trace. It’s almost a digital print thing.”²⁴⁰ Sil recounts her process of finding her own style based on João das Alagoas’ suggestion: “he said ‘since you come from a farm, why don’t you start doing the jackfruit tree?’”²⁴¹ In this sense, beyond the digital print of each person and seeking to meet the demands of the market, artists define their own set of criteria that would indicate authorial authenticity, which is marked by visual elements that are unique to one artist. For example, the specific foliage of a tree, the modelling of scenes in front of building façades, or of a particular animal would become the artist’s mark to be recognised among all the other APB pieces (fig. 73).

²³⁹ “o meu trabalho é mais de inspiração”; “eu comecei fazer máscaras e figuras. Porque minha mãe falava aqui da região, você vê falar muitos casos de escravos. E eu tenho descendência de negro e de índio também. Por que o que é que tinha aqui na região? Tinha os índios que foram expulsos daqui”; “Gosto muito dos símbolos, que é uma sabedoria que pode falar da vida da pessoa. ... Comecei a fazer vários que eu acho interessante ... e a pessoa pode ter um conjunto de runas como curiosidade e que podem falar sobre a vida da pessoa também.”

²⁴⁰ “Eu vejo em cada pessoa um traço. Parece que é coisa da digital.”

²⁴¹ “ele disse ‘já que você veio de fazenda, por que você não começa a fazer a jaqueira?’ ...E foi que deu certo mesmo.”

These same parameters sometimes override the artists' personal desires, as can also be seen in João das Alagoas' words:

Sometimes I make something different, and they accept it, but you have to do what they ask. Today I work more on commission, so I don't make many different things to sell. The piece that sells the most is the ox. Now I also make separate pieces of folklore figurines, and they are well received. I recently invented the open ox to make something new. Before, I used to do more the peasant, the guy on a horse, with a hoe, a straw cigarette, a little cottage, and people loved it. If I could, I would only do this all the time. And then came this interest about the ox, about São Francisco. And then Sil began to receive requests to make little houses, churches, so I left that for her, and I continued with the oxen.²⁴²



Fig. 73. Sil da Capela with her artwork.

Likewise, Luis Antônio, from Alto do Moura, one of the first followers of Vitalino's practice of creating figurative pieces in ceramics, is emphatic in clarifying that, although Vitalino was the pioneer of this practice in the region, nobody copied Vitalino's work, "each one did it the way the person understood how to make it ... we made it according to [our own]"

²⁴² "Às vezes faço uma coisa diferente e eles aceitam, mas tem que fazer o que eles pedem. Hoje trabalho mais por encomenda e não crio muito diferente para vender. Peça que mais vende é o boi, agora faço as peças soltas dos bonecos de folclore e tá bem aceito. Inventei recentemente o boi aberto, para fazer algo novo. Antes eu fazia mais o camponês, o cara no cavalo, com enxada, com cigarro de palha, umas casinha de campo e o pessoal adorava. Se eu pudesse, eu só vivia fazendo isso. E aí veio esse negócio de boi, de São Francisco. E aí a Sil começou a receber pedido de fazer casinha, igreja, aí eu deixei e fiquei fazendo boi."

mind.”²⁴³ Indeed, careful observation of the art objects can distinguish authorship among the creators of the same community based on the manual traces, finishing touches and recurring themes. Some even distance themselves totally from the style of the pioneer artist and create their own creative repertoire, as is the case of Mestre Galdino [Manoel Galdino de Freitas, 1929–96], a ceramist sculptor from Alto do Moura. Galdino created a unique set of characters with detailed textures and features, exaggerated eyes and mouths, elongated members, almost caricatured shapes, or a mixture of zoomorphic elements, with animal heads and tails and humanoid bodies, composing imaginary animals (fig. 74).



Fig. 74. Clay sculptures by Galdino at his memorial, Alto do Moura, Caruaru.

However, most cultural intermediaries cite the Caruaru school as an artisanal practice that has become repetitive, mainly due to the high demand from the tourist cultural market. If we examine, for example, one of Vitalino’s famous works from 1963, “The hunter and the jaguar,” and the work of Luis Antonio, entitled “Transamazonic,”²⁴⁴ which depicts the Indigenous person and the jaguar, it is clear the derivation of the latter on the former. Luis Antônio’s explanation, however, is that the characters are different and, consequently, the final work is not a copy: “Vitalino made it with a leather hat, I made it with an arrow, and he made

²⁴³ “cada um ia fazendo do jeito que a pessoa entende de fazer ... a gente fazia no [nosso] pensamento.”

²⁴⁴ “O caçador e a onça” ; “Transamazônica.”

it with a rifle. So that it wouldn't be like his, I made it differently.”²⁴⁵ In this manner, the creative approach of the popular artist remains linked to a collective repertoire of references, like a shared heritage that is made available for their individual creation (fig. 75). It is not only a matter of a “pseudo-individualisation,” as described by Adorno, to simulate the idea of the originality of the work (see Chapter One). In the case of APB, the variation around themes and formal results known to the community may mean a form of resistance to the standard of individuality imposed by the modern logic of authorial genius. Almost like a “copyleft” as opposed to “copyright” (Friedman 97). That corresponds to a firm statement about the collective nature of knowledge and that innovation is always necessarily built on objects already created.



Fig. 75. From left to right, one of the versions of the sculpture “o nego atirando nas onças” by Vitalino, Museu do Barro, Caruaru; sculpture “Transamazônica” by Luis Antônio, at his atelier.

Therefore, amongst popular artists, one can perceive a different understanding of what is an original and what is at a copy. In APB, individuality is manifested through the unique act of imprinting on the piece the manual gesture, and the constant reinterpretations of common

²⁴⁵ “Aí Vitalino fez com o chapéu de couro, eu fiz com a flecha e ele fez com a espingarda. Aí pra não ser que nem a dele, eu fiz diferente.”

everyday themes confirm the artist's uniqueness. Such elements may, however, be insufficient for cultural intermediaries to guarantee APB's participation in the art market according to conventional standards. The testimonies here mentioned indicate to what extent among popular artists the sense of the collective prevails over that of competitiveness. On the other hand, those artists consecrated by the market for their creative originality, position themselves to maintain their difference with respect to what their community of origin produces, as the artist Véio, who argues that his work is "something you have never seen, so how can it be popular?"²⁴⁶

In Caruaru, however, the distinction between what is considered artistic or artisanal is not a reason for conflict, and the same creative agent can make pieces considered for tourists or for collectors. What is seen as a problem by collectors and gallerists is understood by the communities as a capacity for innovation, to reinvent themselves, and maintain market interest in their creations. Ademir Antonio da Silva and Emanuel Vitalino explain that the high rate of tourist visits has stimulated the community to produce what they call "African dolls"²⁴⁷ due to the figurines' skin colour. These ceramic pieces made in series, with the use of the lathe, started fifteen to twenty years ago and created a new segment within the community's ceramic production, that is, the "work of the dolls" (fig. 76), separated from the one which Ademir calls "traditional work," based on Vitalino's work. Ademir explains that for the community, the priority must be "the tradition that was established by Mestre Vitalino [style]" and that this is the collector's preference. However, the African dolls are considered vital, as "we need a product that sells more. ... Every time a new opportunity arises because new pieces become attractive so that people can subsist, I am happy."²⁴⁸ Emanuel Vitalino confirms that he is currently dedicated to both lines of work, as the African dolls "delight the tourist."²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ "uma coisa que você nunca viu, então como é que pode ser popular?"

²⁴⁷ "bonecas africanas."

²⁴⁸ "o tradicional feito a partir do mestre Vitalino"; "necessitamos de um produto que venda mais ... Cada vez que surge uma nova oportunidade de tipos de peças para que as pessoas possam tá subsistindo, eu fico feliz."

²⁴⁹ "encantam o turista."



Fig. 76. “Dolls” and “African dolls”, clay sculptures at a retail store, Alto do Moura.

Similarly, with respect to the pre-eminence of the artisanal practice in Caruaru, Maria Amélia and Dalton Costa refer to the community of Ilha do Ferro, in which “all of them have always been artisans, mainly for survival. They needed to make their tools, their boats.” In the village, “artisanship is already in those peoples’ DNA,”²⁵⁰ which, allied to the market’s high demand, makes it easier for copying one another. This, following the gallery owners’ criteria, can jeopardise the condition of artists that many of the inhabitants presently hold. About the works of APB that transit in the market, the collector Jairo Campos, affirms that the main interference in the creative practices is provoked by increased demand, which requires the artists to accelerate their production time. “An artist who has a trace that demands detailing”²⁵¹ has to surrender to the market’s time, causing what Campos names “a crippling of production.”²⁵² In the same line, Ana Maria Schindler cites the example of the transformation of the works of the artist Véio due to the great market interest: “I like the old pieces, the

²⁵⁰ “sempre foram todos artesãos para a sobrevivência mesmo. Eles precisavam fazer suas ferramentas, as embarcações”; “a artesanaria já está no DNA do pessoal da Ilha.”

²⁵¹ “Um artista que tem um traço que demanda detalhamento.”

²⁵² “aleijamento da produção.”

miniatures, the figurines, the stories that Véio told through the pieces. ... Today's production is production, but I'm not taking away the artist's merit."²⁵³

Another element that influences the artist's creative process is, according to gallery owners Maria Amélia and Dalton Costa, the sharing through social networks and sales through instant messaging applications. The gallery owners state that, if on the one hand, this generates visibility for the artist, who "is starting a piece and the whole world already knows about it" (Maria Amélia), on the other hand, it "speeds up the artist's production, which is bad" (Dalton Costa).²⁵⁴ In this context in which popular artists repeat their sculptural types indefinitely to meet consumer demands, the maintenance of the authenticity criterion as a market differential of APB seems to rest not on the object itself but on the idea of *brasilidade* that it represents.

4.4. Micro-utopias and the Aesthetics of the Oppressed

Within the abundant stylistic possibilities of APB, this research discussion thus far allows me to establish two major blocks of APB that occupy opposite poles and stand out for their representativeness. In the first realm, APB has been given the status of Brazil's cultural heritage, as it is seen as materialising ancestral knowledges and practices. From a stylistic and thematic point of view, the artistic expression appears in a more figurative form, illustrating daily activities, traditional characters or religious beliefs, visually displaying and actualising community knowledge that has been transmitted through generations. The pieces assist in dignifying the localised places of the people, portraying common workers, women and men who have historically experienced multiple forms of privations, but who also celebrate the joys of childhood, traditional festivities, and celebrations, and have been able to maintain old forms of religious, ethical, social codes, for which they express their devotion.

²⁵³ "Eu gosto das peças antigas, das miniaturas, das figurinhas, das histórias que o Véio contava através das peças. ... A produção hoje é produção, mas não tô tirando o mérito do artista."

²⁵⁴ "está começando uma peça e o mundo já está sabendo"; "acelera a produção do artista, o que é ruim."

In the second realm, APB pieces acquire a certain degree of essentialisation of forms, often highlighting the natural traces of the materials. Usually, wood is the material that enables extreme kinds of minimal intervention.²⁵⁵ Consequently, these representations take distance from the general figurative style. In this second case, APB is more readily associated with the art world, being further apart from the definition of artisanal activity, since popular artists reach a certain level of formal abstraction, in close proximity to “contemporary” artistic practices (fig. 77).

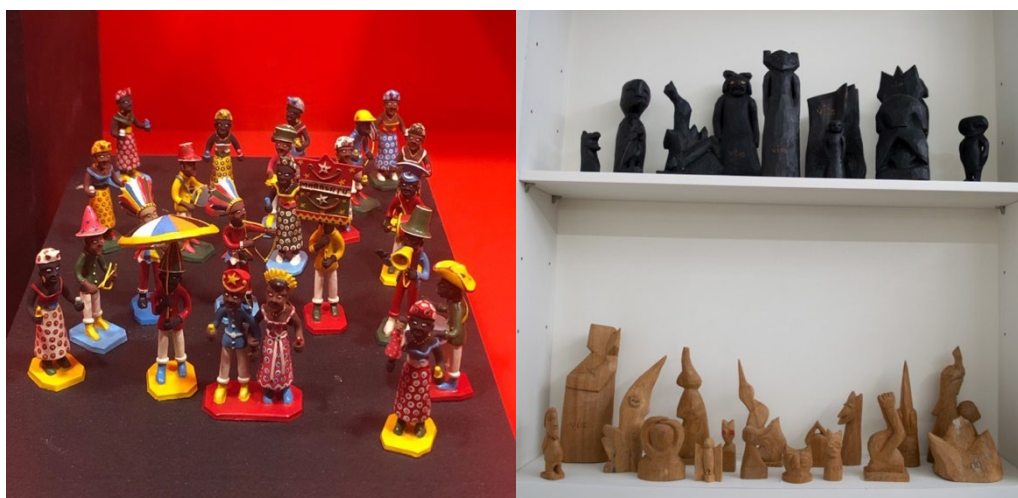


Fig. 77. “Miniature sculptures.” From left to right clay sculptures assemblage of Maracatu popular dance by Socorro Rodrigues from Caruaru at “Brasildade” exhibition, CRAB; wooden sculptures by Véio, Estação Art Gallery collection.

From this particular division—with some artists fluidly navigating this spectrum—one can trace an analytical path of APB’s formal results to identify micro-utopian meanings. Despite the copious variation existing in this creative practice, the gallerists themselves exercise an attempt to establish a stylistic progression of APB in order to make it fit into the academic format of aesthetic appreciation. Vilma Eid comments that “today APB has a contemporary aesthetic because it has a cleaner aesthetic.” By “cleaner aesthetic,” Eid refers to a minimalist approach towards the materials. Therefore, the artistic pieces present fewer

²⁵⁵ Clearly, there are other APB varieties in between these two contrasting poles not explored in this section. There are also clay sculptures that reduce the forms to their essential shapes, although they cannot be qualified within the realm of minimal intervention. See, for instance, the sculpture by Ulisses Pereira in which creatures with essentialised forms appear as if sprung from the earth, fig. 60, p.224.

elements to situate them locally and, hence, are more relatable to “universal” and “abstract” artistic ideals, coinciding with those endorsed by conventional aesthetics theories. Yet, the connections with the artists’ local places are still maintained, as will be elaborated in the last part of this section. Vilma Eid continues, “in the 1970s, for example, [APB had] a more baroque aesthetic. Today, I think that the artists no longer have the patience to make the columns made, [for example,] by Arthur Pereira, by GTO” (fig. 78).²⁵⁶



Fig. 78. carved sculptures by GTO, Estação Art Gallery collection.

Baroque is a term to describe a style that has gained an epistemic value in Latin America, central to understanding the particularities of Latin American cultures and arts. Using Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ “baroque ethos” concept to explain the non-conformity to the centralising power and the rules present in Latin America as a whole, which was discussed in Chapter One, it is possible to delineate an avenue to situate the subversive components present in APB, to finally locate its aesthetic elements in relation to what this thesis has proposed as APB’s micro-utopian cultural-symbolic value.

²⁵⁶ “hoje a arte popular tem uma estética contemporânea, porque tem uma estética mais limpa. Nos anos 70, por exemplo, era uma estética mais barroca. Hoje eu acho que os artistas não têm nem mais paciência para fazer as colunas que eram feitas pelo Arthur Pereira, pelo GTO.”

The Baroque Excess

As already discussed, a large part of the creative production of APB presents a more figurative result, to narrate people's cultural memories, moving through a variety of themes. The formal elements are exaggerated and often disproportionate in both facial features and body shapes. The detailing is excessive and may appear rough or meticulous. The selected themes connect extremes and bring together human and animal creatures, earth, heaven and hell, laughter, and tragedy (fig. 79).



Fig. 79. Carved totems by Guilherme from Parnaíba, Piauí State, Janete Costa Museum.

To tell these stories, the artistic objects rely on what may be called the “social types” identified by the artists in order to represent the people. According to Stuart Hall, social types constitute the roles played by people in public and private contexts, including spaces of dream, leisure, devotion, and work (*Representation* 258). However, those types represented by APB are not in opposition to what Hall explains as stereotypes, in a divide between the ones who belong to the society and the ones who are excluded from it. On the contrary, APB representative types reposition the people as a symbolic representation of nationness, in this case, of *brasilidade*, including and celebrating diversity and not excluding “the different.” In this sense, APB figuratively represents social types such as solo mothers of large families,

female cooks and teachers who take care of the new generations while the men work in the fields and factories, the *retirantes* ‘migrants’ who try to escape the drought of the *sertão*, the peasants who cultivate the land, the *vaqueiros* ‘cattle herders,’ who ride through the *caatinga* ‘semi-arid vegetation,’ the religious figures that instil hope in the people, the passionate couples, the dancers and the musicians, who celebrate life in festivals despite all the suffering and poverty that surrounds the community. When elevated to the condition of art and valued as heritage, these social types are dignified, relocating the culture of the oppressed to a level of solemnity, thus contributing to the re-humanisation process of these communities.

The physical features of the social types represented by APB, which are modelled with local raw materials, distance this art from what the Eurocentric aesthetic standards define as the ideal of beauty (fig. 80). As expressed by Enrique Dussel, the estrangement of the habits and corporeality of these other peoples causes them to be judged as “the brutal, savage, with an undisguisable aesthetic ugliness” (“Siete Hipótesis” 24).²⁵⁷ This localised aesthetic is achieved as it is created from the particularities of the local people, their circumstances, and the materials available to them, and not from universal standards and conventions. Visually, the social types appear with more robust body proportions and prominent facial features, giving signs of time’s passage and labour effort on clothes and working tools. Those elements comprise a popular aesthetic often associated with rusticity, coarseness, and even ugliness. Dussel comments on this dissociation between beauty and aesthetic creation coming from groups in situations of oppression as a mark of domination:

The apparent ugliness of the countenance of the oppressed, the withered face of the farmer, the hardened hand of the laborer, the rough skin of the impoverished woman (who cannot buy cosmetics), is the point of departure of the *aesthetics of liberation*. It is the entreaty that reveals popular beauty, the non-dominating beauty, the liberator of future beauty. Aestheticism is the dominant ideological imposition of the beauty

²⁵⁷ “lo brutal, salvaje, con una fealdad estética inocultable.”

admired by cultures of the center and of the oligarchical classes (imposed by the mass media). It is the ideology of beauty. (*Philosophy of Liberation* 124–25)



Fig. 80. Sculptures from Tania Maia Pedra Collection. From top to bottom, left to right, Vitalino; Resêndio da Silva; Irinéia; João das Alagoas; Manoel Graciano Cardoso; Resêndio da Silva; Noza; João das Alagoas. Casa do Patrimônio, Maceió. Photos provided by IPHAN, Alagoas.

Rather than a form of “ugliness” to signal “others,” in the sense of those stranger or unfamiliar (Eco 391), it is an ugliness directly associated with oppression. Amidst the possible explanations for describing ugliness, Umberto Eco associates it with a social phenomenon, in which the elements that the “lower” classes use and create are seen as “disagreeable or ridiculous” (394). Aesthetics for liberation, then, begins when the actual features, shapes, colours, sizes, costumes, and gestures of the people and their environment are reinterpreted as worthy of being celebrated as fundamental participants in their history, their cultural memory. In this context, the celebration of the “aesthetics of the oppressed” is considered a step towards the liberation of these same groups. This thesis borrows Augusto Boal’s concept in the context of his “theatre of the oppressed.” This is not a celebration of the condition of oppression but instead an acknowledgement that there are other forms of beauty that have been silenced because of oppression. As another way of naming the aesthetics for liberation, the aesthetics of

the oppressed understands that the people are creative protagonists, and not only consumers of someone else's art and culture, but producers, and, as such, they have their own aesthetic resources to learn more about themselves, and about their own sense of beauty.

Ulisses Mendes, for instance, points out that “simplicity is not a mark of poverty, it was the way we have always lived. The poor also have their advantages, of going out, of sleeping on a beach, sleeping in the bush, so what is the point to pursue other [habits], right? So, I wanted to show this simplicity, this beauty that the countryman had.”²⁵⁸ There is a close connection between the beauty of what is considered poor and the freedom of just “being.” Lira Marques stresses that it is impossible to talk about the beauty of the region without talking about poverty, and that art can serve as a platform to communicate these social injustices: “I write on the clay, I show this to people on the clay.”²⁵⁹ The baroque appearance of APB, which reveals an aesthetic of oppression, at times in the form of suffering, at times caricatured, is in this process transformed into a text that talks about those seeking better days. Therefore, the aesthetics of the oppressed is one in which the people reflect upon and articulate their own reality through artistic creations. As a result, peoples' art, and more specifically APB, externalise worldviews that oppose dominant and oppressive truths.

Minimal Intervention

By minimally intervening in the form, the artists consciously or intuitively choose which wooden parts should be modelled and those in which the natural state would be kept intact. In the work of Aberaldo, for example, there is a greater degree of essentialisation, with the pieces created following the wood's natural shape, “many of them [the branches] you could

²⁵⁸ “a simplicidade não é pobreza, era o jeito da gente viver. O pobre tem suas vantagens também, de sair, de dormir numa praia, dormir no mato, ele vai perseguir outros [hábitos], pra que, né? Então eu queria mostrar essa simplicidade, essa beleza que tinha o homem do campo.”

²⁵⁹ “eu escrevo no barro, mostro isso para as pessoas no barro.”

already see that it would make a piece. ... I only make the head; the rest comes from what nature has already made.”²⁶⁰ The central theme is still the human figure, but now featuring a deformed body and greater expressiveness dedicated to the face, with features reminiscent of exaggerated noses or chins and wide-open eyes. Following this line of work, Aberaldo has different series, including monopods, tripods, and multiple heads when the wood allows it (fig. 81).



Fig. 81. Above, wood sculptures from left to right by Fernando Rodrigues, Petrônio, Nino, Véio, Zé Bezerra. Tania Maya Pedrosa Collection, Casa do Patrimônio, Maceió. Photos provided by IPHAN, Alagoas. Below, monopod, tripod and multiple heads sculptures by Aberaldo, CRAB.

From minimal intervention in the raw material, the artist's gaze gives the selected fragment of nature a new identity, causing the piece to change its state of natural element to take on an anthropomorphic or animal form. This process thereby re-signifies nature, moving it towards the status of art, without denying nature predicates but building from them. It is not a formless art, amorphous “formlessness,”²⁶¹ since the predominant forms are the pre-existent natural shapes. Instead, it is a material outcome with emphasis not on the technical ability of

²⁶⁰ “muitos deles [os galhos] você já via que dava uma peça. ... Só faço a cabeça, o resto já vem da natureza feito.”

²⁶¹ About the idea of formlessness, see Guilherme Winisk.

the artists but on their sensibility to identify in their environment forms that can be translated into art. As Bourriaud (21) states,

form only exists in the encounter and in the dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artistic proposition with other formations, artistic or otherwise. ... There are no forms in nature, in the wild state, as it is our gaze that created these by cutting them out in the depth of the visible. Forms are developed, one from another. What was yesterday regarded as formless or “informal” is no longer these things today.

Therefore, the artistic object represents a fragment of the apparent natural disorder and without the disciplining hand imposed by the human being. Nevertheless, it is not a random natural fragment that is extracted. Through their learning gaze, which is derived from a community body of knowledge, the artists can individually build creative interpretations of their own reality. Following Dussel’s aesthetics of liberation, the individuals who have a higher perceptive aptitude to express themselves artistically do so from the attentive recognition of collective elements, presenting the people’s aesthetics through authorial originality (“Siete hipótesis” 32). This is how in APB, individuality and collectivity coexist. Several popular artists have an indisputably unique style, but they are all part of the same collective aesthetic that represents their place in the world.

In the kind of APB with minimal intervention, popular artists have the power to foresee the final piece’s potency, abstracting this fragment of the given reality and transforming it into a new object, a form, by giving it an artistic meaning. Like a photographer who frames a scene, the gaze of the popular artist bestows a new structure on the natural fragment allowing it to participate in the created human world—in line with Arendt, for whom the world is the result of human work and creative power. Through their work, the individual mark of popular artists grants authenticity to the natural fragment they have “elevated” to the condition of art. The way popular artists look to nature, and the way they understand nature’s patterns, enables them to identify these “artworks” in the environment in which the artists exist, and introduce them to

the art world as a particular world, a special place or singular reality to which not every person has access.

Following this line of analysis, the artists' gaze also confers aura to APB, allowing it to participate in the "lettered city" opened to them by cultural intermediaries. For example, the artists' gaze chooses the best positioning for artwork on the ground; the addition of colours and elements that evoke human and animal features, such as marking of eyes, tongue, nostrils, or other body members; as well as the narratives created to explain artistic intention. A similar practice is identified in the work of the woodcarver Zé Bezerra, from the Catimbau Valley, Pernambuco. As defined by collector Renan Quevedo, many of Zé Bezerra's sculptures are "creatures trying to escape from the wood,"²⁶² as if the artist was assisting them to emerge into the world (fig. 82).



Fig. 82. Zé Bezerra artworks from Estação Art Gallery collection.

Generally, an APB artist adds a title or a story to the piece, be it more figurative or essentialised, as is the case of Véio, whose work always has "name, story and fictional character ... For me, the more [I make] the thing that no one has ever seen, the better. It [needs to have a

²⁶² "bichos que tentam escapar da madeira."

name], because if it doesn't have a name, it's something you've never seen, how are you going to [understand] it?"²⁶³ All his pieces, figurative or not, are based on everyday stories and cosmologies of the *sertão*. His pieces' sizes range from miniatures to natural scales or taller than a human-size figure. The curator Jorge Mendes distinguishes the artist's phases, explaining that Véio began more systematically and precisely, representing the *retirantes* and the *sertanejos*, then, he started to essentialise the forms until he reached his current style.

Véio's work serves as a good example to summarise APB's two broader aesthetic categories: baroque exaggeration and minimal intervention, especially when he refers to "closed wood" and "open wood."²⁶⁴ Closed wood constitutes the large blocks of wood from which the artist carves the forms, giving greater freedom to create the desired "character" and include varied details, since the "offering it [the wood] gave [to the artist] was the raw material, but, curves, none."²⁶⁵ On the other hand, open wood corresponds to branches full of ramifications, in which the modelling is conditioned to the natural form and, consequently, to the artist's sensibility in extracting the most appropriate fragment. In this set, his artworks range from a more recognisable human form to anthropomorphic structures, reaching a level of extreme simplification where we cannot recognise much but only loosely associate some parts with animal or human heads and members (fig. 83).

In this symbiosis between environment and human existence, APB, in its distinct aesthetic facets, clearly opposes the predictable serial and mass-produced art, thus retaining its aura. Collector Jairo Campos associates this popular aesthetics with a form of resistance to the standardisation of capitalism, which was explored in previous chapters:

²⁶³ "nome, história e personagem ... Pra mim quanto mais [eu fizer] a coisa que ninguém nunca viu, pra mim é excelente. [Tem que ter um nome], porque se não tiver o nome, é uma coisa que você nunca viu, como é que você vai [entender]?"

²⁶⁴ "madeira fechada e madeira aberta."

²⁶⁵ "oportunidade que ela [a madeira] deu foi a matéria-prima, mas, curvas, nenhuma."

I see it all as a conscious or unconscious boycott of the great capital, this refusal to die, to become equal, to become commonplace, to this jeans thing ... [taking the idea of jeans as an example of] the way capitalism goes through like a steamroller and destroys clothing, habits, local singularities to the detriment of what is chic because it comes from outside.²⁶⁶



Fig. 83. Vêio artworks in his farm: examples of “closed wood” (left) and “open wood” sculptures (right).

In this process of offering consumers micro-utopian meanings, APB provides popular artists with a space for exploring the unexpectedness of everyday life, the intuitive freedom to find solutions, the uncontrollable actions of nature. The artists, therefore, affirm their cultural values and receive social and economic benefits whilst nurturing the consumer’s utopic aspirations. APB is a form of art that hence participates in a pluriversality where, through figurative or essentialised formal solutions, it creates an aesthetic signature that challenges universal modern standards by emphasising the particular and the localised as beautiful. It is the localised knowledges that retain that signature, representing authenticity for unique experiences, in which nature and community have a central place; nostalgia for ways of life long gone; dignity found in simplicity; and loyalty towards community values. In this creative process, the popular artist demonstrates their *sentipensante* structure, “that person who tries to

²⁶⁶ “Eu vejo isso tudo como boicote consciente ou inconsciente ao grande capital, essa negativa de morrer, de se igualar, de tornar-se lugar comum, a essa coisa jeans ... [tomando a ideia do jeans como um exemplo à] forma como o capitalismo passa como um rolo compressor e acaba com as vestimentas, os hábitos, as singularidades locais em detrimento daquilo que é chique porque vem de fora.”

combine the mind with the heart, to guide life on the right path and to endure its many stumbles” (Fals Borda 9).²⁶⁷ Their creative activity of transforming, moulding, and extending the physical world into an artistic object constitutes a respectful approach to the natural being, without violating it, or colonising non-human life forms. In this complex and minimal process, APB’s aura takes shape, which makes it attractive in the marketplace to the point of becoming a micro-utopian realm.

Towards an Aesthetic of the Oppressed

The intimate interface with the elements that compose the world of the APB artist, in which the boundaries between individuality and collectivity, human being and nature, intellectuality and corporeality are blurred, resonates with a relational thought, with an understanding of the world constituted from the relationships between all beings. Just as Arturo Escobar elaborates, from the alternatives of social, economic, and political forms of organisation, conceived by Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant populations, and peasant communities of Latin America, a pluriversality emerges to contest the universal domination of the modern Eurocentric ontological model (“Latin America”). Against the dualistic worldviews of modern ontology that divides nature and culture, and individual and community life, in the relational ontologies, “there only exist subjects in relation, including the relations between humans and non-humans” (39). From this point of view, in APB, there is an interweaving of the artists’ sentient bodies, their interpretative capacity about the world, the translation of this interpretation through manual skill, their connection with the physical world, their creative work interconnected to their daily life, all of that encompassing their *saberes e fazeres*. The separation of any of APB’s components may demean its aesthetic experiences.

²⁶⁷ “aquella persona que trata de combinar la mente con el corazón, para guiar la vida por buen sendero y aguantar sus muchos tropiezos.”

That is why contextualising APB's cultural origins in exhibitions is essential to conveying and maintaining its aura. By understanding the aesthetic experiences of this creative manifestation in all its relational power, one understands APB's capacity to become a micro-utopian realm, which, contrary to the Western model, does not compartmentalise existence. Instead, APB incorporates spatially and temporally all aspects of human experience and other non-human entities in a relational manner, situating individual expression within a collective foundation. It represents the current social organisation in which the artists are immersed, supported by past and future generational knowledges and the environment that surrounds them.

When explaining his preference for the title “artisan,” João das Alagoas shows an understanding of the symbiosis between his work and himself: “I think that the artisan [description] is more appropriate because we work with our hands, with our body.”²⁶⁸ Given that the popular artists' action is indivisible from the concrete result of their work, their creative labour practice corresponds to a performative act, whereby the effects produced by the artist's body in its totality accompany the artwork. On performance, Angela Marino explains that although ephemeral, it is a way of incorporating memories and traditions and transmitting knowledge in a non-textual way (148–51). The performative act is spatially and temporally unique, even if repeated countless times by the performer. Thus, every time it is repeated, it reproduces, in fact, cultural memories in all their vividness. Such understanding helps to justify APB's close connection with the concept of living heritage applied to popular artists. They are recognised as a living heritage for reproducing and updating cultural memories in a performative act that complements the meanings attributed to the artworks. Because the artists are the knowledge holders, their actions of generationally passing on their *saberes e fazeres*, through community involvement and institutional organised workshops, reinforces the value

²⁶⁸ “Eu acho que o artesão combina mais porque trabalha com a mão, com o corpo.”

of the material outcomes of APB. It is their “persona” that characterises the cultural heritage. Therefore, APB represents a fusion between local “episteme and praxis” by amalgamating the performance of *saberes e fazeres* within the actual artworks.

This creative, inventive, intuitive, and integral aptitude is preserved in the frontier spaces, not entirely subsumed by modern logic but not completely separated from it either. “That is what is most interesting because while the erudite artists, of [those following a European] canon, seek to reach this aesthetic level with awareness [following logic, conscious reasoning, and analytical skills], popular artists commonly do not need to use this awareness” (Jairo Campos).²⁶⁹ That is, popular artists acquire aesthetic results aspired by academic artists in an intuitive manner, basing their creativity on life experiences. Lira Marques confirms this distinction, “I am not from the academy, and they think it is amazing.”²⁷⁰ These lines imply that it is this localised world interpretation that constitutes the aesthetic appeal of APB. Such artworks conform to what is intended to be created as *brasilidade*: “Better recognition is still to be seen, but if I have to show where Brazilian cultural identity is, I would say that it is not in the great centres, it is not where capitalism is, ... it is exactly in the recesses of the places, in the rural areas, it is on the margins” (Jairo Campos).²⁷¹

To summarise, it is possible to say that the insertion of APB in the heritage and artistic spheres results from its adjustment to the modern logic of representation. However, its valorisation represents a recognition that the current institutional models and conventional aesthetic appreciation are overloaded with oppression against Indigenous, Afro-Brazilians, peasants, and inhabitants of urban peripheries. Furthermore, it is precisely the cultural

²⁶⁹ “Isso é que é o mais interessante, porque enquanto os artistas eruditos, do cânone, procuram atingir esse nível estético com consciência, os artistas populares comumente não utilizam essa consciência.”

²⁷⁰ “eu não sou da academia e eles acham o máximo.”

²⁷¹ “Há ainda um grande dever de reconhecimento, mas se tiver que mostrar onde está a identidade cultural brasileira, eu diria que não está nos grandes centros, não está onde o capitalismo está, ... ela está exatamente nos recôncavos dos lugares, nas zonas rurais, está à margem.”

memories of these oppressed peoples translated into art and culture that differentiates Brazil as a nation. The marketisation of APB with its valorisation as art and as heritage points towards an effort to occupy a gap of cultural meaning within Brazilian neoliberal society. When inadvertently offering a micro-utopia to the public and private sectors, APB grants access to a place of retreat to the consumers. More importantly, it recuperates a central place to the popular artists who had been neglected by the logics of oppression. In line with Adolfo Colombres, to give prominence to arts coming from oppressed peoples is “to make a place for them in the universality from which they have been excluded.... And even if the attempt to totally de-westernise the concept of art fails, the effort will not fail to benefit the people” (72).²⁷²

APB’s inclusion in cultural circuits may indicate democratisation of these spaces. Yet, to preserve the conventional forms of cultural representation of APB by “delocalising” them from their context may result in an illusion of inclusion, whereas popular classes remain under-represented in other political, social, and economic spheres without translating it into the construction of citizenship and a guarantee of social rights. Although not enough to change such dynamics, a decolonial analysis of the aesthetic experiences undertaken by APB constitutes a necessary step for recognising the people as agents of their own representations. Recognising the relational power of APB acknowledges popular cultural pluriverses, which bring about layers of resistance and re-existence in the social fabric, and it may indicate possible paths for liberation. As Paulo Freire asserts, without considering the culture of the oppressed and supporting the repositioning of the people into “creative beings” (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 101), the possibility of overcoming domination and rehumanising existence is incomplete.

²⁷² “hacerle un sitio en la universalidad de la que fue excluido Y por más que se fracase en el intento de desoccidentalizar totalmente el concepto de arte, el esfuerzo no dejará de beneficiar al pueblo.”

CONCLUSION

We are witnessing the end of the idea of art as aesthetic contemplation and returning to something that the West has long forgotten: the rebirth of art as collective action and representation, and the rebirth of their complementary opposite, solidarity meditation. ... Fiesta and contemplation. An art of conjugation.

– Octavio Paz, *Alternating Current*

APB is an artistic expression within the realm of popular cultures, and as such, it also embodies the idea of “popular” that represents the symbolic battleground of unbalanced power distribution. As discussed in this thesis, popular cultures equate to the cultures of the oppressed, in which APB creators partake in those groups suffering socio-economic deprivation and that have been prevented from accessing fundamental rights and guarantees of modern Brazilian society. Yet, APB has gained a cultural heritage status that has brought to the fore oppressed cultural memories to sustain a discourse of national identity. Within the wider usage of popular creative expressions and their relationship with national agendas, I have analysed the negotiations involved in the marketisation of APB in the broader context of a neoliberal society. This comprises a stage when the idea of *brasilidade* bestowed upon APB by public and private sector representatives has been manipulated by the market to offer consumers an “authentic art,” in the modern western sense of the term.

In this process, cultural intermediaries, public officers, and third sector representatives now see popular artists as guardians of culture, capable of translating their *saberes e fazeres* into artworks, hence preserving their communities’ cultural memories. In the current neoliberal era, the valorisation of those “intangible” aspects has accompanied the instrumental role given to APB. This fosters socio-economic development in the popular artists’ long-neglected communities as one alternative that compensates for the state’s inefficiencies. It is possible to say, then, that nation branding agendas have been promoting APB in the market as the epitome

of *brasilidade* while also positioning the artworks as one means to alleviate forms of oppression created by the capitalist modern Western society. Differently from nation-building, the nation branding approach moulds APB to support not only a political discourse on *brasilidade* but—equally importantly—it assigns culture a social and economic value to be traded on the market. The conformation of cultural memories through a business mindset creates a conundrum that is intrinsic to our current capitalist age. This means that popular artists find new ways to reach citizenship status within this pragmatic use of cultural memories. The role of guardians and narrators of culture re-signifies the existence of popular artists through dignified activity, which was previously denied to them in informal or precarious occupations they experienced.

In parallel, my central goal was to elucidate the nature of APB's allure for upper-class consumers, despite its creators' oppressive conditions. The investigation demonstrated that an extra ontological component secures APB's aura in the marketplace beyond its instrumentalisation: the urge for more encompassing and meaningful experiences due to the vices of modern society. These grounding encounters connected to a sense of community, and closer to nature are found in localised alternatives, insofar as the promises of universal emancipation through the expansion of progress and knowledge were not met by the neoliberal stage of capitalism. It is in these local realities where APB fits.

Those who have been disappointed by the failure of grand narratives draw attention to the small, simple solutions to what is non-conventional and different from the mainstream. This non-homogenised creativity is precisely found in oppressed cultures, who were kept in the margins and to whom the benefits of the Western-modern world had been refused in the first place. In such circumstances, the efforts of cultural intermediaries and the state to position APB as an authentic representation of *brasilidade* have enhanced its market attractiveness. APB has been functioning, then, as one mediator for consumers striving to re-connect with other forms of creativity that resist being disfigured by progress. What commenced with a curiosity for

“otherness,” for those living in the *Brasil profundo*, has been converted into a realm in which authenticity can be found.

When observing the deprived life conditions of popular artists, the instrumental use given to APB indicates that the modern project has not lived up to the utopic ideal of universal rights and guarantees for a better life. Regardless, popular artists’ lifestyles are the ones that consumers fetishize as authentic. Hence, APB exists amid a paradox. It is a creative practice of peoples oppressed by the alienation imposed on them by the capitalist Western modern society—a sense of alienation as described by Marx. However, the art created by these same oppressed groups is assisting in alleviating that alienation experienced by society at large—in its expanded sense described by Arendt and Harvey. That is, those who have benefited from what the Western modern capitalist system has offered feel, however, estranged from deeper meanings of life. In contrast, oppressed cultures, historically marginalised, have maintained a reservoir of traditional forms of knowledge and their ontological values.

To explain this complex dynamic, I have proposed the concept of micro-utopia as a theoretical framework to describe APB’s position as a symbolic place for fulfilling this ontological gap. Micro-utopia is an ideal place where life alternatives imbued with simplicity, nature and community spirit become available, a possibility only within reach of the individual who aesthetically experiences the artwork, hence its “micro” modifier. Cultural intermediaries attribute the significations of micro-utopia when, in their position as collectors, curators, and gallery owners, they seek personal fulfilment through the artworks they acquire, while inspiring the consumer public and exhibition visitors to absorb other possible worlds through APB. Micro-utopia is thus an aspiration for those consumers who feel incomplete by the modern ethos but, at the same time, are not necessarily interested in transforming the current market logic. Therefore, it is within the market domain that APB acquires micro-utopian meanings to symbolically address the deficiencies provided by the very market-oriented system.

As a form of micro-utopia, APB offers consumers a place for accessing those ontological values through experiencing an “aesthetic of the oppressed.” As such, another interpretation for a utopia that is characterised as “micro” is that it underlines alternative solutions using “small” possibilities: those unpretentious creations that come from ignored realities of peoples who have been marginalised, a sum of socio-historical, political, and cultural factors that, following Paulo Freire, I have described as the oppressed sectors of society. In that seemingly modest creativity, there is no overuse of resources to the point of waste, or acceleration of time to speed up production—although the market may push in these directions—like the excesses sanctioned in capitalist society. APB does not present itself as grandiloquent. Instead, it is a moderate channel through which popular artists communicate their realities, and that is perceived by consumers as a vessel for imagining a worthier life.

APB’s micro-utopian dimension challenges the very idea of modern Western aesthetics, where art is more than a contemplative activity, becoming also a comprehensive sensory and contextual experience. In this encounter, APB objects mediate collective relations, resituate cultural memories, and re-locate *saberes e fazeres* to a central place in the larger society, a process possible due to popular artists’ guardianship of other epistemologies. This creative experience, built on relationality rather than strict rationality, emphasises the local as a more substantial place than global standards. Thus, the grand narratives stand aside for small narratives to be pursued, not transforming society but rather redeeming the individual.

The fieldwork conducted supports these affirmations. Cultural intermediaries provided accounts about their customers and considered themselves as the primary consumers of APB. In this position, they were able to provide their interpretations of the meanings acquired by APB within cultural circuits, considering their own influence exerted to enhance APB’s aura. Public sector agents, non-governmental organisations and artists’ and artisans’ cooperatives were also instrumental in offering their perspectives on the market engagement of popular

artists to meet consumers' expectations. These two groups of interviewees emphasised the connections between APB and a "real" Brazil, with artists who create out of limited resources and yet can present "pure" formal results, portrayed as uncorrupted by mainstream conventions.

Cultural intermediaries assign meanings of spontaneity and spirituality to APB that only happen because popular artists live on the margins of society where there are no aesthetic norms to limit their creativity. These qualities reinforce APB's authenticity in the marketplace and connect with the future-oriented nostalgia of consumers, which long for a harmonious past to inspire transformations in the present. In this process, APB is allocated in institutionalised cultural spaces as a visual representation of difference. To aesthetically experience these artworks, cultural intermediaries' preferences range from contextualisation to the self-sufficiency of the objects. In both cases though, the artists' biographies and their cultural memories infused in APB accompany its formal results. This curatorial interlocation with its social, economic, and political contexts contributes to constructing APB's micro-utopian sense as a resting place from the shortcomings of neoliberal society.

Bringing the idea of APB as a micro-utopia to light was also inspired by considering other experiences in the global arena, such as Indigenous peoples in Oceania and Latin America. The epistemic place of the Global South created the theoretical support for the cross-cultural analysis of peoples' art from international contexts that, despite their fundamental differences, are steeped in internal oppressive conditions. The cross-cultural analysis underlined artistic creations that exist outside the hegemonic Western framework and yet have been used to fulfil nation-branding agendas. Thus, it corroborated that the Brazilian case responds to a global trend of institutional promotion of peoples' art, including an emphasis on their intangible values. Notwithstanding the instrumentalisation of their creative practices, those peoples have actively advocated for their arts' relationality, with artistic creations that cannot be disconnected from their ancestry and the local places they occupy in the world. One

cannot affirm, then, that the adjustment of peoples' art to institutionalised cultural spaces is solely a reflection of a pragmatic response to capitalist demands. Its participation in modern systems of representation and consumption are, in fact, in an ambiguous condition of both complying with the current order of branding the nation and opposition against the normalisation of the market mentality.

A parallel may be drawn with Livio Sansone's explanation of the valorisation of Afro-Brazilian culture today: "the new popularity of black or 'African' symbols, and their conspicuous use in the arenas of leisure and religion, express both conformism—the wish to belong and to consume—and protest; it is one of the ways through which a section of the black Brazilian population tries to achieve respect and status" ("Local" 215). From this point of view, it can be said that the valorisation of peoples' arts—in the international perspective adopted in this thesis—supersedes the instrumental value that has been given to it. Beyond this, peoples' art may also use the institutional spaces available to them to voice their agendas. Peoples' art constitutes communicative platforms for expressing realities and ways of knowing that are not captured by the literate world of knowledge. Moreover, such artistic manifestations gain auratic dimensions given by the state and consumers in general, representing an integration of the individual with ancestry, the natural environment, and the community in a way considered lost within modern society. Such subjectivities were further examined in the Brazilian case.

The inseparability of the social, economic, and political dimensions of artistic practices has been evident in the relationship between political activism and Indigenous arts in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Mexico. It can also be expanded to other Latin American countries. Although not studied in this research, Chile is a current example of that engagement. The 2021–22 Constitutional Review process has enabled popular participation with the petition to include their agendas, such as the state recognition and support of artisanal activities. This Chilean people's appeal aims that the state acknowledges "all people involved in crafts, arts and skilled

occupations as fundamental pillars in the construction of a model of solidarity and sustainable economy, as well as of the identity and cultural traditions that are representative for the different regions and territories of Chile” (Chile, *Iniciativa Popular*).²⁷³

In the case of APB, this awareness of employing artistic expression as a platform for social critique is specific to some artists and not an all-encompassing condition. Generally, popular artists do not make political use of their art—although political interpretations may be conveyed through curatorial activity. Popular artists are mainly concerned with using APB as a meaningful work that liberates them from previous exploitations. Through APB, they can communicate their own stories to general society and, in the process of working to “produce culture,” obtain social validation.

Through interviews with popular artists, this research examined the effects of marketisation on their creative practices and pointed out why APB occupies such a relevant place in consumerist society. One central assertion is that the autonomy of the artistic expression of their stories and abilities has been preserved, although artists may adjust colours, sizes and sometimes themes to fit market demands. They point out that their “lack” of schooling and their capacity for learning from their own engagements with the natural and social environments is what sparks customers’ interest, which encourages them to maintain their customary cultural practices. For the artists, their creativity is connected to a perceptive and intuitive sensibility to depict their collective experiences. This represents an inner knowing that derives from a “learning gaze,” decoding cultural memories from the communities into authorial expressions. In this sense, the individual genius praised by the modern ethos is replaced by a collaborative production of *saberes* in which the next artistic innovation of popular artists results from their re-elaborations of the ways the people have already been

²⁷³ “Todas las personas que se dedican a las artesanías, artes y oficios como pilares fundamentales en la construcción de un modelo de economía solidaria y sostenible, así como de la identidad y las tradiciones culturales representativas de las distintas regiones y territorios de Chile.”

existing and creating in a specific context. Originality, thus, intertwines with generational transmission, and personal imagination is ingrained in local histories.

The well-established academic debates over the characterisation of APB as arts or crafts remains a conflictive topic for cultural intermediaries, as the interviews were able to document. On the one hand, public sector and non-profit organisations ratify the value of APB by reaffirming its collective meanings, hence confirming its heritage value, and highlighting its artisanal quality. On the other, gallerists and retailers stress the authorial creation of artists, placing APB as an individual creation. The interviews conducted with a representative group of popular artists revealed a fluidity in seeing themselves as artists or artisans. This is a concern they admit belongs to the cultural intermediaries and not to them. In general, popular artists feel satisfied by the recognition their creative practices enjoy, which is even more meaningful as they acknowledge their art is of an intergenerational nature, concerned with telling their communities' stories through skilful manual abilities, which reflect their values and the appreciation of their surroundings.

Furthermore, the resilience of *saberes e fazeres* is combined with the transience of nature. Popular artists, then, work in a non-intrusive way to facilitate the materials and tools used to exude their own meanings. Thus, these artists' perspectives also highlight APB relationality and align with a more holistic understanding of aesthetics in which the art objects are visual continuities of the real conditions of the artists' lives, including the marks of domination present in their tools, workspaces, household, natural environment, and in their physical appearance. In this process, "aesthetics of the oppressed" are also reassessed by popular artists, assisting them in respecting their culture and gaining dignity regarding the position they occupy in Brazilian society.

There are also other social transformations that affect work dynamics, shifting, for example, gender roles within the communities, like those in the Jequitinhonha Valley, where

women have regained a sense of value through their leading creative work. In this context, micro-utopia meanings attributed to APB by cultural intermediaries have other implications for popular artists. These meanings reverberate into their lives, although they are not searching for other worlds, since the alternative realities of micro-utopia are the popular artists' own creative universe. But this echo also has ontological effects for the artists beyond the instrumentalisation of culture. The artists' position of not being concerned with qualifications of artist or artisan, or their preference to ignore profits from the resale of their pieces are indications that they do not occupy a place in the market, aiming to emulate a citizen/consumer profile that is celebrated by modern society.

Besides, the artists' choice to stay living in their places of origin is not only a result of the market requirement to enhance APB's aura but also a strategy popular artists employ, consciously or not, to access both worlds. The fact that artists have transitioned from more strenuous occupations to working with art is as if they have been granted an emergency exit from exploitation and can now reap some of the benefits of modern society without having to give up the way they live. In this sense, the micro-utopia produced for consumers has as a side effect: a possibility of liberation for artists so that they can engage with the market without having to conform to it. Participating in these market exchanges is one of the means they have found to allow the continuity of their *saberes e fazeres*. In this condition of narrators of the culture of the oppressed, a re-humanisation occurs for the artists in the way their creations re-purpose their role in society from a low-skilled labour force to representatives of national culture. To some extent, this process also imprints on the communities a re-signification of their own culture.

The emphasis on the local put forward by the Brazilian state reiterates the pluralities that comprise the idea of *brasilidade*. Official practices for APB promotion both as art and as cultural heritage, although driven to create a national representation, allowed the insertion of

the “popular” into institutional spaces, hence enabling discussions about the situations of oppression incurred by popular artists and their communities. This reassessment was possible because of the policies for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, which, while considered by some countries to fragment the tangible and intangible aspects of culture, in Brazil, these policies facilitated an official acknowledgement of culture in a more integral manner, encompassing cultural memories from hitherto ignored groups. The state use of the “cultural references” concept to implement intangible heritage policies brings communities to the central stage of institutional preservation and recognises heritage’s vitality. Therefore, although the community as a whole is not involved in market exchanges, they can resonate with the sense of dignity created by the institutional valorisation of their cultures.

My research signals that the participation of APB in institutional spaces has transformed the popular artists’ understanding of their creative expression, assisting in decolonising their minds regarding what they consider beautiful or worthy of preservation. Changes in power distribution are visible, especially in collective experiences of cooperative organisation, through which people have been acquiring agency to look for more ethical forms of trading. The resorting to technologies and social media has also approximated artists and consumers, serving to minimise the experiential differences and exploitation patterns that may occur during the intermediations for APB circulation.

As it is a common feature of the “popular,” the marketisation of APB comes with a lot of grey areas and the market exchanges that take place do create feelings of competitiveness and individualism within the communities, in the sense that the current art system elects a few popular artists to be celebrated while a vast majority is locked out. In this iniquitous order, most popular artists struggle to enhance their communal values while accepting the need to be individualised as authors. By considering all these double-edged effects for artists and consumers, one of the arguments of this thesis has been that oppressive conditions are implicit

in APB. Therefore, to situate APB according to theories of alienation and oppression is an important advance to this topic so as not to perpetuate the exoticising views of difference. Instead, it helps to recognise that popular artists partake in the current market system and that their creations do not detach from the exploitative circumstances they and their communities face. Without doubt, the oppression endured by the communities where popular artists live has not been extinguished with the transition of APB to the heritage and art worlds. On the contrary, preserving certain conditions of oppression is one central element to guaranteeing APB's aura in the marketplace.

García Canclini had already stated that despite the current valorisation of popular cultures, a complete peoples' agency would only be possible with a radical transformation of the existing social order, including the democratisation of civil society, which could change the forms of institutional organisation where peoples are accepted to participate in decision-making forums (*Transforming the Popular* 113). From the decolonial prism, the possibility of escaping the colonial matrix of power also requires interpretation of the local cultural manifestations without automatically replicating established concepts. This thesis affiliates with this remark and with García Canclini's assertion. It has attempted to escape and destabilise some Anglophonic concepts that do not fit Brazilian reality and to reaffirm the specificities of Portuguese language concepts, such as the definition of APB and its embodiment of *fazeres e saberes*. However, although it is not yet possible to envisage alternative systems for artistic representation so that these popular manifestations can reconcile their communities of origin with institutional spheres, these artists can take advantage of the current cultural institutions that give them room to be heard.

The nation-building process employed popular creative expressions as a representation of Brazil's unique diversity, but in a way that precluded the people from participating in constructing those cultural narratives. In the nation branding rationale, the cultural diversity

presented through *brasilidade* is now adjusted to market demands, which still prevents agency for popular artists. Nonetheless, the ongoing advances in identity politics and popular social movements, and academic thought with, for example, decolonial theory and memory studies, serve to regulate the market's role. Such awareness overflows to curatorial practices concerned with enabling artists to participate more actively. Even when popular artists do not engage in curatorship, they are mindful that they are working to preserve Brazilian culture and that their role is to keep their memories alive. In that process, APB's auratic meaning reinstates "difference" as a social validation, which gives popular artists more autonomy to navigate the market. Ignoring the voice of the oppressed becomes impossible, at least in the terms of one hundred years ago.

The path taken in this thesis attests to the intertwining of contrasting positions, those of the popular artist and the public who consume them. One nourishes the other and fuels the longing for authenticity and national cohesion that are, in fact, established on systems of oppression. The "charm" found in the life of the oppressed due to dissatisfaction with progress, to use the words of Roberto Schwartz (*Misplaced Ideas* 173–74), as stated in the epigraph to the Introduction of this thesis, ultimately reverberates to open fissures in the social fabric, which can be applied to the advantage of the "popular." By using consumer desire in their highly creative ways of life, the people may find space to re-exist, resist, and reinvent themselves. If there is a desire on the part of the elite to consume *arte popular brasileira*, one must also ponder the effects of this desire on the people themselves and this has been a central concern of this research. It does not correspond to a route to overcoming the current dominating order. Still, it suggests that by investigating the conflict zones engendered by cultural practices, ways out can be identified.

The re-humanisation process for oppressed groups can be achieved only by first pursuing awareness about it, which may lead to critical transformative actions. Along these

lines, APB insertion into official spaces of museums and galleries can thus act in favour of the transformation of existing oppressive social relations to the extent that re-appropriation of APB may contribute to peoples' education, in a broader sense, helping to strengthen their self-worth before general society. In this regard, museum spaces have been playing a fundamental role. Justo Pastor Mellado highlights the potential of cultural institutions to promote citizenship to the excluded majorities in the case of Latin America (37–39). This means that working on cultural differences through institutional promotion can result in reparations for these historically oppressed groups. The institutional approach must then consider the inseparability of political and economic aspects when working with popular cultural practices in order to grant social inclusion to these groups.

When expanding the Brazilian case to an international perspective, this study was confronted with the disconnection between APB and Indigenous arts, and to some extent, Afro-Brazilian arts, due to an emphasis on class inequalities, in detriment to other identity components. This separation is seen more clearly in Brazil than in other Latin American countries, where a closer identification between popular and Indigenous has guaranteed elaborations on the popular capacity for resistance. Although APB is undeniably a representation of oppressive conditions endured by the Brazilian people, the scarce discussion regarding ethnicity marks as one identitarian feature of popular artists often hinders APB from contesting the system that oppresses them. This is so also because APB's market appeal often disguises the potential for resistance of the "popular." Besides, given that poverty saturates the "popular" in Brazil, ethnicity appears still as an evasive recognition for artists, cultural intermediaries, and state representatives. In this sense, the effects of ethnicity on APB should be further explored. In addition, there are current elaborations of Indigeneity and Afro-Brazilian cultures to Branding Brazil through the arts field, representing different scenarios to be researched. Recent examples are the 2021 exhibition "Moqué_m_Surari: Arte Indígena

Contemporânea” ‘Contemporary Indigenous Art’ in the 34th Biennale of Sao Paulo and the virtual exhibition “Os Primeiros Brasileiros” ‘The first Brazilians’ by the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro.²⁷⁴

Furthermore, the gender roles performed in APB should also be the subject of subsequent investigation as specific forms of oppression that subsist within communities of popular artists and reflect the patriarchal aspects of society. Likewise, points of friction within popular creativity are evident with the expansion of new religions within the communities, especially of evangelical denominations and, to a certain extent, of Afro-Brazilian religions that clash with the predominant Catholic precepts. The study of strategies employed by popular artists to accommodate their *saberes e fazeres* to different religious beliefs may uncover other forms of negotiation in the field of popular religiosity.

The cases examined in Oceania brought attention to the need for further research on the relationship with individual and collective intellectual property regulations for popular cultures as has been happening for Indigenous practices. Ancestral knowledges related to other practices, such as the use of popular medicine and gastronomy, may also be misappropriated by market exploitation and, as such, should be protected by IP regulations.

Specifically to the marketisation of APB, this thesis has indicated the artists’ awareness of the interplay between novelty and tradition in order to maintain APB’s commercialisation appeal, which leads popular artists to establish their own parameters about what they understand as original and copy, innovation and repetition in the market. Deeper knowledge about the formal characteristics of APB is needed to determine how popular artists convey their understandings of originality.

²⁷⁴ See https://mam.org.br/exposicao/moquem_surari-arte-indigena-contemporanea/ and <https://osprimeirosbrasileiros.mn.ufrj.br/pt/>.

Finally, another avenue for future research is the analysis of the influence of massive natural and social events in popular cultures, such as the repercussions of the Covid-19 global outbreak. The pandemic brought to the fore the fragile condition of the art field and how the prominent levels of precariousness in society exacerbated the lack of legal protection for labour in the art sector. Nevertheless, through social media sharing, it was the arts that kept the spirit strong when isolation prevented the exercise of human life in its collective essence. Organisations also stood up to help popular artists whose sales were compromised, such as the ARTESOL auctions of APB with benefits reverting to the artists. In addition, many artists reinvented themselves using social media to get closer to customers and disseminate their art and the way they live. Further investigating the use of technologies as layers of mediation for negotiations between popular artists and consumers may also bring relevant information for the marketisation of APB in contemporary times.

All the interviewed popular artists, without exception, whether more or less celebrated by the market, emphasised that their main role was to tell their stories through APB. They recount that their inspiration comes from what they experience in everyday life with their peers and how sharing these experiences substantiate their social place. Through the hands of popular artists, the “popular” is about togetherness, an abstract feeling of belonging to something bigger than oneself that is bonded not by great national feats but by shared adversities. And this the market exchanges cannot obliterate even if they strive to individualise the art of the Brazilian people. When popular artists channel the “aesthetic of the oppressed” with APB, they express that amid poverty, there is room to rejoice and that though we must confront imposed sorrows, no one can bear to resist without dreaming. For this reason, celebrating the beauty of the people also supports those who continue fighting for them.

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APPENDICES

1. Brazil Case Study: Visited Exhibition Spaces and APB Collections

BRAZIL		
STATE	CITY	EXHIBITION SPACES AND COLLECTIONS
ALAGOAS	Maceió	Museu Théo Brandão de Antropologia e Folclore – UFAL
		Casa do Patrimônio (The House of Heritage) – IPHAN/AL
		Karandash Art Gallery
		Private collection Professor Jairo Campos
	União dos Palmares	Espaço de Memória (Memorial Space) Artesã Irinéia Rosa Nunes da Silva/ Museu Muquém – UNEAL
	Pão de Açúcar	Espaço de Memória Artesão Fernando Rodrigues dos Santos/ Museu Ilha do Ferro – UNEAL
SERGIPE	Nossa Senhora da Glória	Museu do Homem Sertanejo located at the home-atelier of artist Véio
PERNAMBUCO	Caruaru	Museu do Barro (Clay Museum)
		Caruaru Street Market
	Alto do Moura District – Caruaru	Casa Museu Mestre Vitalino
		Espaço de Memória Mestre Galdino
		Showroom of the Association of Artisans and Inhabitants of Alto do Moura
	Bezerros	Museu da Xilogravura (woodcut) located at home/atelier of artist J. Borges
MINAS GERAIS	Araçuaí	Museu de Araçuaí

		Showroom of Association of Artisans of Araçuaí Elcina Ribeiro
	Ponto dos Volantes	Showroom of Association of Artisans of Santana do Araçuaí Village
	Minas Novas	Showroom of Association of Artisans of Coqueiro Campo and Campo Buriti Villages
RIO DE JANEIRO	Niterói	Museu Janete Costa de Arte Popular
	Rio de Janeiro	Museu Nacional de Folclore Edson Carneiro and National Centre for Folklore and Popular Culture
		Centro de Referência do Artesanato Brasileiro – CRAB
		Pé-de-Boi Art Gallery
SÃO PAULO	São Paulo	Museu Afro Brazil
		Brasiliana Art Gallery
		Estação Art Gallery
		Private collection Renan Quevedo
		Artesanato Solidário – ARTESOL: Show room and Artiz retail store

2. Brazil Case Study: Interviewed Groups

2.1. Popular Artists

POPULAR ARTISTS – INTERVIEWED				
STATE	LOCATION	NAME		TYPE OF APB
ALAGOAS	Muquém Quilombola Community, União dos Palmares	Irinéia Rosa Nunes da Silva (Mestre <i>do Patrimônio Vivo</i>)	(1949–)	Clay Sculpture
		Antônio Nunes	(1940–2020)	Clay Sculpture
	Ilha do Ferro Village, Pão de Açúcar	Aberaldo Santos Costa Lima	(1960–)	Wood carving
		Vavan (Edivan Alves Lima)	(1961–)	Wood carving
	Monte Santo Village, Belo Monte	Jasson Gonçalves da Silva	(1954–)	Wood carving
	Capela	João das Alagoas (João Carlos da Silva) (Mestre <i>do Patrimônio Vivo</i>)	(1958–)	Clay Sculpture
		Sil da Capela (Maria Luciene da Silva Siqueira)	(1979–)	Clay Sculpture
MINAS GERAIS*	Araçuaí	Maria Lira Marques	(1945–)	Natural pigment painting and clay sculpture
		Marcinho (Marcio Barbosa Silva)	(1964–)	Wood carving and

				clay sculpture
	Santana do Araçuaí	Madalena Mendes Braga	(1949–)	Clay Sculpture
	Campo Buriti Village, Turmalina	Zezinha (Maria José Gomes da Silva)	(1968–)	Clay Sculpture
	Coqueiro Campo Village, Minas Novas	Deuzani Gomes dos Santos	(1965–)	Clay Sculpture
	Itinga	Ulisses Mendes	(1955–)	Clay Sculpture
PERNAMBUCO	Alto do Moura, Caruaru	Emanuel Vitalino Neto (Emanuel Rodrigues dos Santos)	(1982–)	Clay Sculpture
	Alto do Moura, Caruaru	Luíz Antônio da Silva (<i>Meste do Patrimônio Vivo</i>)	(1935–)	Clay Sculpture
	Bezerros	J. Borges (José Francisco Borges) (<i>Mestre do Patrimônio Vivo</i>)	(1935–)	Xilogravura [woodcut]
SERGIPE**	Nossa Senhora da Glória	Véio (Cícero Alves dos Santos)	(1947–)	Wood carving
POPULAR ARTISTS – MENTIONED				
ALAGOAS	Arapiraca	Zezinho (José Cícero da Silva)	(1967–)	Wood carving
	Boca da Mata	André da Marinheira (André Barbosa Cavalcante)	(1969–)	Wood carving
	Ilha do Ferro Village, Pão de Açúcar	Fernando Rodrigues dos Santos (<i>Mestre do Patrimônio Vivo – in memorian</i>)	(1928–2009)	Wood carving
	Lagoa da Canoa	Antônio de Dedé (Antônio Alves dos Santos) (<i>Mestre do Patrimônio Vivo – in memorian</i>)	(1953–2017)	Wood carving
CEARÁ	Juazeiro do Norte	Nino (João Cosme Félix da Silva)	(1921–2002)	Wood carving

MINAS GERAIS*	Caraí	Noemisa Batista dos Santos	(1946–)	Clay Sculpture
	Caraí	Ulisses Pereira Chaves	(1924–2007)	Clay Sculpture
	Cachoeira do Brumado, Mariana	Arthur Pereira	(1920–2003)	Wood carving
	Divinópolis	GTO (Geraldo Teles de Oliveira)	(1913–1990)	Wood carving
	Santana do Araçuaí	Isabel Mendes da Cunha	(1924–2014)	Clay Sculpture
PERNAMBUCO	Alto do Moura, Caruaru	Vitalino Pereira dos Santos	(1909–1962)	Clay Sculpture
	Alto do Moura, Caruaru	Galdino (Manuel Galdino de Freitas)	(1928–1996)	Clay Sculpture
	Alto do Moura, Caruaru	Maria do Socorro Rodrigues da Silva	(1955–)	Clay Sculpture
	Tracunhaém	Nuca (Manoel Borges da Silva) (Mestre do Patrimônio Vivo – <i>in memorian</i>)	(1937–2014)	Clay Sculpture
PIAUÍ	Parnaíba	Guilherme (José Guilhaerducio dos Santos)	(1961–)	Wood carving

* All the popular artists and ceramists of the Jequitinhonha Valley are part of the collective cultural practice recognised in 2018 as intangible heritage of Minas Gerais, with the register of *Saberes e Fazeres* and Artistic Expressions under protection of the IPHAN of the State of Minas Gerais.

** Nossa Senhora da Glória is a town belonging to the State of Sergipe, which is adjacent to Alagoas, hence considered part of the same creative area of Pão de Açúcar and Belo Monte in this research.

2.2. Cultural Intermediaries

CULTURAL INTERMEDIARIES – INTERVIEWED			
STATE	LOCATION	APB COLLECTION	NAME
ALAGOAS	Maceió	Karandash Art Gallery	Maria Amélia Vieira Soares Costa Neves
			Dalton Costa Neves
		Private collector/ former dean of UNEAL when organised local museums: Espaço de Memória Artesã Irinéia Rosa/ Muquém Museum; Espaço de Memória Artesão Fernando Rodrigues dos Santos/ Ilha do Ferro Museum	Jairo José Campos da Costa
SÃO PAULO	São Paulo	Brasiliana Art Gallery	Roberto Rugiero (1942–2020)
		Estação Art Gallery	Vilma Eid
		Private collector/ Founder of the "Novos para Nós" Project	Renan Quevedo
RIO DE JANEIRO	Rio de Janeiro	Pé-de-Boi Art Gallery	Ana Maria Schindler
	Niterói	Private collector/ curator of the Museu Janete Costa de Arte Popular	Jorge Gomes Mendes

2.3. Public Officers and Third Sector Representatives

PUBLIC OFFICERS AND THIRD SECTOR – INTERVIEWED				
STATE	LOCATION	INSTITUTION/ AGENCY	NAME	ROLE
PERNAMBUCO	Alto do Moura district, Caruaru	Associação dos Artesãos de Barro e Moradores do Alto do Moura – ABMAM	Ademir Antônio da Silva	Head of the Association
	Araçuaí	Museu de Araçuaí	Aline Sena Camona	Museum director
MINAS GERAIS	Minas Novas	Association of Artisans of Coqueiro Campo/Campo Buriti	Terezinha Lopes dos Santos	Head of the Association
	Itinga	Municipal Secretariat of Education and Culture	Herena Reis Barcelos	Public officer – councillor of the city cultural heritage
	Araçuaí	Association of Artisans of Araçuaí	Elcina Ribeiro dos Santos	Head of Association
RIO DE JANEIRO	Rio de Janeiro	Centro Nacional de Folclore e Cultura Popular – CNFCP	Maria Elizabeth Andrade Costa	Public officer – Head of the Research Sector of the CNFCP
		Centro de Referência do Artesanato Brasileiro – CRAB/SEBRAE	Maíra Fontenele Santana	CRAB general coordinator
SAO PAULO	São Paulo	Associação Artesanato Solidário – ARTESOL	Josiane Masson Alves da Motta	ARTESOL general coordinator

3. International Perspective: Places Visited

AUSTRALIA	
Sydney	Museum of Contemporary Art Australia – MCA
	Art Gallery of New South Wales
	First Nations Arts and Culture – Australia Council for the Arts
	Badu Gili Light Show – Sydney Opera House
Alice Springs	Festival Parrtijma 2019, Desert Park
	Araluen Arts Centre
	Community Art Centres: Tangentyerre Artists, Papunya Tula Artists e Iwantja Arts.
Melbourne	Melbourne Museum – Bunjilaka Aboriginal Centre
	National Gallery of Victoria– NGV Austrália and NGV Ian Potter Centre
	Koorie Heritage Trust
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND	
Auckland	Auckland War Memorial Museum
	Auckland Art Gallery
	Te Paparahi Toi Māori – Walks in the city to visit urban Māori artworks
Wellington	New Zealand National Museum Te Papa Tongarewa
	Kura Art Gallery – privately owned gallery specialised in Māori Art and Design
	Wellington Museum
	Creative New Zealand
Rotorua	New Zealand Māori Arts & Crafts Institute – Te Puia Cultural Centre
MEXICO	
México City	Museo Nacional de Antropología
	Museo de Arte popular
	Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares

México City	Palacio de Cultura Citibanamex, Fomento Cultural de Arte Popular
	FONART – Fondo Nacional para el Fomento de las Artesanías and FONART retail store
	Ciudadela – public market of Mexican Arts and Crafts
	Coyoacan market
	Museo Frida Khalo
	Museo Nacional de Arte
	Museo de la Ciudad de Mexico
Oaxaca	Benito Juárez Market
San Bartolo de Coyotepec	Family atelier of Barro Negro (black clay) Doña Rosa
San Antonio de Arrazola	Family atelier of Alebrijes (wood sculptures) Sergio Santiago

