

The Lure of the Latin

A Brazilian gallery will exhibit at the fair for the first time as demand grows for pieces from Central and South America



From its beginning in 2005, Design Miami has looked south. When Art Basel established its sole North American fair on Miami Beach in 2002, the lure was not only the December sun but also the untapped potential of the Latin American market. When Craig Robins and Ambra Medda launched their collectable design fair in Miami three years later, it made sense to appeal as much to collectors from Brazil, Venezuela and Argentina as to a North American and international clientele, while offering a gateway to an international market for Central and South American designers.

From 2005, New York dealership R and Company sourced works by key Brazilian modernists at Design Miami, among other specialisms, and fellow New Yorker Cristina Grajales (herself Colombian) presented emerging young designers such as the Chilean-born Sebastián Errázuriz. In 2008 the Campana brothers, Fernando and Humberto, from São Paulo, already on their inexorable rise to international stardom, were named Designer of the Year.

Since then, interest in Latin American art and design has continued to grow in North America and Europe. This year, New York offered us New Territories: Laboratories for Design, Craft and

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Art in Latin America at the Museum of Arts and Design, and *Moderno: Design for Living in Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela, 1940–1978* at the Americas Society. At Christie's London last year, a rare low table, a thick slice of vinhático wood (c1955) by the Brazilian modernist Joaquim Tenreiro (1906-92), was bought by a European private collector for £68,500, a record for the artist.

In 2014, Rodman Primack took over from Marianne Goebel as fair director of Design Miami and Design Miami Basel, which takes place in June. Whereas Goebel's expertise lay in Europe, Primack, former chairman of Phillips auction house, started his career working for Christie's in Latin America; he speaks Spanish and Portuguese fluently and spends part of each year in Guatemala. "We are trying to bring in voices from the region where there are galleries," he says. "Many have strong local markets but have not felt the need to connect internationally."

Primack's efforts have paid off. This year, the well-known São Paulo gallery, Firma Casa, will be the first Brazilian gallery to exhibit at Design Miami, with a newly commissioned collection by the Campanas. Mexico's ADN Galeria is taking part in the Design Curio programme with a project by the Mexico-based, Manila-born sculptor and furniture designer Eduardo Olbés.

Paulina Hassey, co-director of ADN, comments, "There is a growing awareness from international collectors . . . Our design has a unique personality. We feel it is very different from European and North American design."

Sonia Diniz, who founded Casa Firma in 1994, echoes Hassey. "It's without question that Brazilian art and contemporary design is growing at a tremendous pace, not only within the country itself but also internationally."

Over the past 20 years Diniz has seen the market develop in Brazil, driven by both young and seasoned collectors. In the past five years there have also been major exhibitions of Brazilian artists abroad, she adds. "This not only includes the Campanas' work but talents like Zanini de Zanine, Sergio Rodrigues, Rodrigo Almeida, who are all forces internationally." Diniz is hoping that the Campanas' latest collection, Cangaço, inspired by artisanal traditions of leather and wicker in Brazil's north-east, will capture the imaginations of international collectors.

There is a strong showing of both modernist and contemporary Latin American design at this year's fair. R and Company are bringing sensuous, hand-carved pieces by Tenreiro. The gallery's directors Zesty Meyers and Evan Snyderman have been researching Brazilian modernism for some 15 years, and are currently exhibiting a selection of important Brazilian designs from the late 1940s to late 1970s, *Brazil Modern*, in their New York gallery.

Meyers says of Brazil from around 1940-70, "There was great skill, matched with great natural resources." Designers such as Tenreiro and Oscar Niemeyer worked for private patrons, often over many years. During the years of military dictatorship, until the late 1980s, none of the work could be exported and much is still owned by the original families.

"It is the last great discovery of mid-century modernism," Meyers says, adding of Tenreiro, "he is one of the best hand-carvers of all time. The joinery is so immaculate: he is trying to focus your

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eye on details. He could do a whole sequence of chairs and each one would push things forward. Giò Ponti was the only comparably innovative designer.”

Tenreiro is a reminder that Latin American modernism — fuelled by the creative burst that came with the rapid economic development in the region after the second world war — was never an isolated phenomenon but shaped by waves of immigration and intercontinental cultural exchange. Gallerist Rossella Colombari will chart this exchange in a display of works by Giò Ponti and others, recreating the style of the modernist Villa Planchart, in Caracas, Venezuela, which Ponti designed and decorated for private clients in 1956.

However, the success of modernism, coupled with repressive political regimes, stifled creativity during the 1980s and 1990s. As Marc Benda of New York gallery Friedman Benda puts it, Brazil “never quite made that jump out of modernism”.



It was the Campana brothers, Benda argues, “who brought the new air. They have courage; they never look back; they trust the future”.

With their collaborations with local craftsmen, their exuberant repurposing of salvaged materials, their deep roots in Brazilian culture but readiness to collaborate, the Campanas have responded imaginatively to the growing market for collectable design, becoming, in Benda’s words, “synonymous with South American design”. Friedman Benda will exhibit their Detonado Buffet (2015), unveiled in November, and Pirarucu Sofa (2014), which is covered in the expertly tanned skins of the Amazon’s largest freshwater fish.

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Benda asserts that today, encouraged by the brothers' success, there is a plethora of young designers. His gallery is also showing a sleek marble and brass coffee table by GT2P (Great Things to People), a design, architecture and art studio from Chile, established in 2009 to combine craft and digital technologies and crowned Designer of the Year in Chile in 2013. The studio has also been invited to collaborate with *Belong Here Now* at Design Miami, an outdoor installation and performance space that has been created by Airbnb and Design With Company.

As further confirmation of the vitality of contemporary Latin American design, the pioneering dealer Grajales will show exquisite silver pieces by Alexandra Agudelo and a metal carpet by Hechizoo Textiles from Colombia. Pedro Barrail, from Paraguay, has designed wooden furniture tattooed by a secluded tribe, while Gloria Cortina, from Mexico, is represented by a beautiful table made of golden obsidian and bronze, and her Feather Screen, of obsidian and pink quartz.

Grajales says, "In a globalised world, where everything is starting to look the same, it's wonderful to see how these designers coming from Latin America are reclaiming their culture and traditions but at the same time, their designs are very contemporary."
Design Miami, December 2-6, designmiami.com

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