

## ARTICLE

# Other museums: The disruptive potency of curatorship for the emergence of other modes of power, knowing, and being

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## Abstract

In Brazil, the decolonial turn has prompted a discursive reconfiguration of art museums over the last decade, primarily through exhibitions driven by critical and reparative thinking. Consequently, alternative perspectives have emerged, aiming to propose exhibition narratives rooted in marginalized knowledge and imaginaries. Focusing on the Museu de Arte do Rio (Rio Museum of Art) as a privileged place of thought, this article delves into the curatorial methodologies employed for two exhibitions: *Mulheres na Coleção MAR* and *Casa Carioca*. These exhibitions have paved the way for another way of being a museum, holistically committed to its decolonization. While the sustainability of the changes brought about by these exhibitions may be questioned, it is recognized to acknowledge their role in collaborating to establish other interpretative frameworks for understanding local realities, defining as the primary beneficiaries of this process, not the museums themselves but the communities and individuals who grapple with the daily impacts of coloniality.

## KEYWORDS

Brazil, *decolonial turn*, exhibition, Museu de Arte do Rio, museum discourse, policies of representation and representativity

## INTRODUCTION

For over five decades, museum theory and practice have been driven by a series of epistemological and interdisciplinary *twists* or *turns* responsible for the emergence of new modes of museum existence. Included in this ingenious and sometimes dizzying mechanism is the *decolonial turn*.

According to Maldonado-Torres (2007), “decolonization is an idea that is probably as old as colonization itself” (p. 261). But it is mainly in the last decades that the decolonial turn has been consolidated as a thought and practice deeply committed to triggering a greater understanding of the impacts of *coloniality* in our contemporaneity, and an “other paradigm” (Mignolo, 2003) for the construction of other ways of being and existing in the world rather than those generated by *colonialism*. Coloniality here means the structural consequences of the modern narrative, that is, patterns of power, knowledge, and being that emerged as a result of colonialism and that continue to define representations, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). “Other paradigm” means the diversity of critical forms of analytical, utopian, and emergent thought grounded in histories, struggles, experiences, and livings marked and connected by the colonial horizon of modernity (Mignolo, 2003). Thus, from the recognition of a coloniality, which persists and is sustained within a system of discrimination and violent suppression of realities and knowledge, the decolonial turn has advanced with the reinscription of devalued histories and perspectives, making use of radical exercises of “un-thinking, un-disciplining and re-educating” (Maldonado-Torres, 2014).

The museum of the present is the result of modern democratic culture, and its institutionalization process has transformed it into one of the main responsible players for the production and maintenance of modernity. Museums are not only technologies of representation; they are proactive institutions in the construction of social realities (Noronha, 2017). In other words, the museum of the present consolidates itself as one of the main modern instruments for the construction and transformation of the identity of individuals and nations, as an epistemological technology for the production of knowledge and fabrication of worlds (Preziosi, 2006a, 2006b). Thus, its proliferation or dissemination throughout the world is directly related to the extensive dissemination and preservation of modern Eurocentric thinking, universalized through colonial processes which “discredited and, whenever necessary, suppressed all social practices of knowledge that contradicted the interests” they served (Santos & Meneses, 2009, p. 10).

This presupposes that implicit to the museum's consolidation as a scientific instrument of conservation, classification, and display of testimonies of knowledge and human creation, as an instrument of learning and of exalting national historical values (Hooper-Greenhill, 2001), it carries as a legacy the imposition of a mode of viewing the world based, for example, on the classification of peoples around the idea of race which constituted, founded, and conferred legitimacy to power relations and colonial domination, creating identities, hierarchies, places, and social roles (Quijano & Ennis, 2000); on a modern/colonial gender system that is organized through a patriarchal order and the binary categorization of bodies as man/woman, human/non-human (Lugones, 2007); or even in the perverse experience of historical alienation to which colonized populations were subjected (Quijano, 1997). Perversity that omits the violence underlying the expansion of modern institutions in the name of “progress,” “freedom,” and “peace” (Muñiz Reed, 2019).

However, one of the phenomena that mark the museum of the present is its *reinvention* process, where reflecting on the ways of knowledge construction is a vital aspect—which implies the search for other institutionalism. According to Noronha (2017), this discussion has been developed by museological critical thinking through reflections focused on the agenda or political motivations implicit in museum practices, which, in turn, concerns questions about ethics, morality, the sociological issues of exclusion and inclusion, advantage and disadvantage (Clifford, 1997; Greenberg et al., 1996; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; Karp et al., 1992; Karp & Lavine, 1991; Weil, 1999). In other words, such reflection has been developed through discussions about the museum's own interpretative framework, that is, about its mechanisms of construction of practices and knowledge, its codes, conventions, and languages, in synthesis, about its mechanisms of construction of discourses and representations (Duncan, 1995;

Hooper-Greenhill, 2001; Padró, 2003; Pollock & Zemans, 2007; Semedo & Lopes, 2006; Sherman & Rogoff, 1994; Whitehead, 2009).

At the same time, what these discussions have evidenced is that museums are not constituted as passive effects of external conjunctures nor as stable manifestations of internal essences and truths (Fyfe, 2006). Instead, museums constitute themselves as arenas of encounters, as places crossed by multiple and often conflicting ideas, desires, knowledge, goals, and interests; as places of confrontation, tension, and cleavage (Zolberg, 1981). Thus, the *reinvented* museum is situated in a confluence between discourses and critical, reflexive engagement, radically problematizing its own genealogy, its own limits, and its cultural and institutional assumptions. In this sense, it emphasizes both the discursive and reflexive nature of its practices and processes where knowledge is not only presented as the result of perception, learning, and reasoning, but above all as the process of perception, learning, and reasoning with the production of a specific outcome (Whitehead, 2009). And a possible result of this process is the decolonization of the museum itself manifested by the daily *praxis* of different agents—audiences, artists, conservators, curators, security guards, managers, museologists, and leaders, by the daily exchanges and negotiations, by the positions, knowledge, and meanings resulting from all this dialogical process of interaction (Noronha, 2017).

Therefore, the museum's reinvention presupposes a systematic interrogation of the regime of rationality that underlies its practices, an active (self)critique. The contestation of the classificatory categories that underlie the social construction of reality is thus one of the consequences of this reinvention, as well as the redefinition of roles and the tension of the relationships of trust, authority, and responsibility between the agents in charge of the production of knowledge. However, are museums really open to confronting the disruptions and instabilities implicit in this process and assuming other modes of existence? The movement toward making museums more inclusive institutions, which began in the 1970s, has strengthened the role of museums in creating more egalitarian societies through the conscious representation of difference and diversity. But, “diversification,” as diversity can still exist within this western bias (Akel, 2020). As an end in itself, it reiterates structures and categories of power and legitimacy. Responding to this challenge asks museums for a more profound commitment to and respect for other regimes of practice and a reorientation of the focus of their reinvention.

Diversity reinforces the existing unjust system, decolonisation challenges it. Diversity authorises the advantaged, decolonisation empowers the underrepresented and undervalued. Diversity seeks to include people, decolonisation seeks to **rehabilitate** them.

(Albayrak-Aydemir, 2018)

In Brazil, during the last decade, the decolonial turn has gradually stimulated a discursive reconfiguration of the art museum from a critical and reparative thinking. In this sense, and referring here specifically to the field of art, museums have been approaching exhibitions as a space for “experimenting with looks, meanings and knowledge left aside by traditional art historiography,” as well as questioning the “regimes of intelligibility, visibility and sensoriality” (Friques & Basbaum, 2020, p. 12) that govern their practices and policies. In other words, among more or less fortunate attempts, the *reinvention* of art museums in Brazil is based, above all, on the realization of the critical potency of curatorship as a possibility of creating other narratives for art, through a less condescending and more argumentative look (Dona, 2021). On curatorship as an exercise of perception of the urgencies of the present, from a critical look at the past for the construction of others forms of reality for the future, for the representation and construction of other imaginaries. That is,

on curatorship as a “generating work” capable of “resolving the past, rewriting the present, transforming the future” (Jordão, 2020, p. 16).

It is in this context that the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (Art Museum of São Paulo) [MASP, for example, in 2017 changed its mission and declared itself a “diverse, inclusive and plural museum” (Museu de Arte de São Paulo, n.d.-b). To this end, through a curatorial project consisting of exhibitions and a series of parallel events, it sought to problematize the suppression of histories, revising and rewriting them.

It is important to consider the plural term “histórias” that points to multiple, diverse and polyphonic histories, histories that are open, inconstant and in process, histories in fragments and in layers, histories that are neither totalizing nor definitive. After all, “histórias” in Portuguese encompasses both fiction and non-fiction, personal and political narratives, private and public, micro and macro.

(Museu de Arte de São Paulo, n.d.-b)

*Histórias da sexualidade* (Histories of sexuality), *Histórias Afro Atlânticas* (Afro-Atlantic histories), and *Histórias das mulheres. Histórias feministas* (Women's stories. Feminist histories) were the three thematic axes that guided the discursive reconfiguration of MASP, between 2017 and 2019, built through other narratives about desire, eroticism, and gender issues; about the flows and refluxes of experiences, creations, cults, and philosophies between Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean; about the hierarchies of traditional history; about feminist practices and strategies in art; about the possible relationships between the museum and the street, between art and activism. Also during this process, MASP established a partnership with Afterall<sup>1</sup> for the development of other readings about exhibitions, collections, and museum collections in order to map other artistic and curatorial practices “that explicitly question and criticize colonial legacies in art, curating and the production of art criticism” (Museu de Arte de São Paulo, n.d.-a).

Also assuming the critical potency/strength of curatorship as a means for a discursive turn, the Museu de Arte Aloísio Magalhães (Art Museum Aloísio Magalhães) inaugurated, in 2021, the exhibition *Das coisas políticas e as políticas das coisas* (Of political things and the politics of things), under the coordination of art critic Ana Luísa Lima. As a result of a broader project which aim was to contribute to the discussion on the several dimensions of the relationship between art and politics, this exhibition proposed to reflect on issues of representativity—of class, gender, and race—based on the absence of certain groups of artists in its collection. These absences or omissions were also identified in the collection of the Museu de Arte Contemporânea do Paraná (Contemporary Art Museum of Paraná), by the curator Fabrícia Jordão, and discussed in the exhibition *Pequenos Gestos: Memórias Disruptivas* (Small Gestures: Disruptive Memories) held under her curatorship, between 2019 and 2020. Based on a curatorial practice committed to decolonial processes, Fabrícia Jordão started from an active reading of the works of art in the museum's collection, as a critical exercise to imperatives of Brazilian modernity, to highlight and confront the colonial logic present in the denial and silencing implicit in the narratives developed until then about this collection (Jordão, 2020, p. 8).

Among these and other possible examples is the Museu de Arte do Rio | MAR, assumed here as a privileged place of thought for having been created from scratch as the possibility of an “other museum,” attributing to its curatorial program the guiding role of its institutionality. In other words, MAR was born proposing other understandings about the city of Rio de Janeiro, about art and culture in the contemporary world, about its social, symbolic, and political dimensions, as well as the conflicts and contradictions inherent to them. These understandings are constructed through a curatorial program based on collaborative processes and insurgent epistemologies.

## MAR: FOUNDING CONTEXTS OF IDENTITY AND DISCOURSE

The Museu de Arte do Rio | MAR opened in 2013 and its creation is marked by intense conflicts characterizing the revitalization project of the Port Area of Rio de Janeiro, the region where the museum is located. Known as *Porto Maravilha* (Wonderful Port), this urban revitalization project, in turn, was born as the fruit of a public–private partnership and was driven by Rio de Janeiro's definitive entry into the market of organizing major international events (2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games) and by its inclusion in the flow of real estate capital reproduction and speculative gains, in the context of the international crisis. Thus, the Porto Maravilha project was initiated in 2009 with the aim of promoting the socioeconomic, environmental, and urbanistic recovery of a historically and culturally emblematic region of the city which, however, had been showing real signs of decay since the 1970s (Gonçalves, 2013).

It can be observed that the interest in revitalizing the Port Area of Rio de Janeiro was already present in the successive urbanistic projects implemented by public policies, since the 1980s, with architectural heritage being identified as an element of potential tourist attraction. From 2000, this interest is based on a strong proposal of investment in building museums, attributing to such institutions the ability to attract audiences and resources. As such, it is in this year and context that the proposal to build a branch of the Guggenheim museum as an element of restructuring of the socioeconomic and symbolic urban fabric is announced (Noronha, 2017). Received by divergent opinions and defeated by civil society movements (artists, architects, political parties), this proposal inaugurates a whole process of discussion and negotiation for the opening of another museum in the region, MAR, which, however, should take on a different plan: It should establish itself as a place for the distinct ways of conceiving memory, art, and city (Sant'Anna, 2013).

There is, however, another important context to be considered for an understanding of MAR's identity and discursive constitution. We are referring to the integration of the Port Zone of Rio de Janeiro into an imaginary territory, of resistance of Afro-descendant culture and ethnic and social representativeness, known as *Pequena África* (Little Africa). This territory was deeply impacted by the Porto Maravilha project, which neglected its history, memory, and social and cultural life, and caused the removal of countless families who lived there, especially in Morro da Providência.<sup>2</sup> In the midst of this process, *Pequena África* was reappropriated by several social actors who affirmed their belonging to this territory and imprinted different meanings on it (Bitter & Vassallo, 2019). In this way, the very project that made the creation of MAR also establishes it as a contact zone (Clifford, 1997), making it responsible for representing the material and immaterial dimensions of this territory, but above all, for acting in favor of its communities.

Just before the inauguration of the museum, criticism of the Porto Maravilha project grew at the same rate as the process of real estate speculation and attempts to remove the local population from Morro da Providência. According to Sant'Anna (2013, p. 46), non-governmental organizations began to represent the directly affected groups, drawing attention to the impacts of these reformulations on their lives, as well as to the indifference of the public power. Consequently, the MAR, directly associated “with the process of urban reform and real estate speculation of which its headquarters was an instrument” (Sant'Anna, 2019, p. 115), became an item on the agenda of social movements. It was questioned how a museum in this context, acting between the public and the private, could be representative, or even if it would be possible to act “inside” the museum and at the same time be “against” a city project based on the expulsion of the poorest or marginalized populations (Szaniecki, 2013, p. 6). Crossed by all these questions, the MAR takes its place: imbued with responsibility for the impact it had on the lives of its “neighbors,” among consensus and dissent, noises proper of a democratic environment, it opens its doors with a desire for reparation (Dona, 2021).



As for the curatorial projects undertaken, the conflicts generated by the relationship between the museum, the Porto Maravilha project, and the inhabitants of the region were decisive, creating many paths and reflections for the institution to constitute itself as a critic and develop its discourse. As such, one of the museum's opening exhibitions, *O Abrigo e o terreno: arte e sociedade no Brasil* (Shelter and Land: Art and Society in Brazil) proposed a discussion on the impact of the urban reforms and their conceptions of the city, based on artists' initiatives and work. Curated by Paulo Herkenhoff and Clarissa Diniz, the exhibition was characterized as an exploration of “the forces that ally and conflict in urbanistic, social, and cultural transformations of the public/private space” (Museu de Arte do Rio, n.d.). Thus, since its early days, the museum lived “the political contradictions of its project, and that by not being curatorially avoided were inversely summoned to compose its curatorial discourse at the moment of its inauguration” (Guimarães, 2019, pp. 53–54).

Finally, it is important to emphasize that MAR was created based on a political and critical curatorial practice that is still maintained today, as demonstrated by the exhibitions that will be addressed below. Thus, its recent history raises questions such as what is the place of a museum in the public sphere and what is the place of society within the museum. Consequently, as a museum with inclusive policies, questions about representation and representativeness are also at the heart of its discussions (Dona, 2021). Nine years after its opening, these questions are still pertinent, and the museum remains committed to answering them.

## **CURATORSHIP AND COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES. *MULHERES NA COLEÇÃO MAR***

*Mulheres na Coleção MAR* (Women in the MAR Collection) was an exhibition held by the Museu de Arte do Rio as part of a strategic partnership with the Women of the World Festival, promoted by the Women of the World Foundation—WOW, dedicated to driving solutions that advance women and girls and encourage them in the pursuit of gender equality. The exhibition was inaugurated in 2018, marking the beginning of a project to encourage the donation of artworks by women artists to the MAR's collection; and presents itself as the result of a series of political and social debates that are potentially projecting Brazilian artistic institutions toward a reflexive process, where its agents tense up discourses and narratives consolidated through actions, among which, the curatorial practice. In this sense, the exhibition proposed a discussion on the places that women occupy in Brazilian art and society not only by questioning the gaps in the museum's own collection but also through a collaborative curatorial process, signed by its team and involving women from its various sectors, provoking a rupture with the hierarchical relations of institutional power and that configure its normative modes of action (Dona, 2021).

The curatorial proposal of *Mulheres na Coleção MAR* began with the holding of a series of four meetings between female employees and collaborators who hold different positions in the museum to think about and discuss the place of women in contemporary society and in Art. More specifically, it involved between 30 and 50 women working in different positions such as receptionist, manager, museologist, security guard and, based on their individual experiences, they exchanged opinions about their work in the institution, about gender and sexuality, about hierarchies among women, about gender definitions and normativity.

In the meetings, different themes were discussed regarding “being a woman”, “being a woman, a museum professional”, class differences, hierarchies among the group, and differences in lived realities, such as the privilege of white middle-class women, the distance travelled between home and work by poorer women, most of them black women. The main themes of the conversations centred on violence

against women and on the definitions and normativity of the female gender: “being a woman is whatever she wants to be”.

(Amanda Bonan, MAR's Curatorial Manager. Personal communication, April 2023)

It is noted that, according to Aquino (2016, p. 99), this “doing with the other” that characterized the curatorial process of *Mulheres na Coleção MAR* evoked a “mobilization of affective dimensions,” provoking a mutual recognition and appreciation among its participants. Thus, these meetings configured themselves as a possible means of institutional reinvention, where the women employees of normally invisible sectors of the museum found a fertile space for construction and exchange of thoughts, and the opportunity to be heard. In other words, the participation of such diverse women during the curatorial process of *Mulheres na Coleção MAR* enabled the creation of other, plural, territories, representing a questioning of the invisibilities present in the institution itself, such as, for example, that of indigenous women, trans women, and women of mixed racial descent.

In addition to being configured as a space/time for debate and *visibility*, this series of meetings that preceded the exhibition allowed the participating women to experience narrative construction—as an inherent action in curatorial practice—through practical rehearsals/exercises of organizing/associating works of art from the museum's collection into constellations (Oliveira, 2020, p. 297). The different concepts addressed and discussed in these meetings were the basis for the definition of the five thematic nuclei which ended up structuring the exhibition: *Portrait/Representation*, *Political Body*, *City and Landscape*, *Abstractions*, and *Poetics*. In other words, *Mulheres na Coleção MAR* was constituted as a network of contextualizing and critical perspectives which provided more complexity to the discussion about the disparity between female and male authorship in the history of art and consequently in the museum's collection itself.

More emphatically, the *Portrait/Representation* nucleus (Figures 1–3) problematized the historical impossibility of women acting as subjects of their own narratives and representations. This reality has manifested itself in several ways, such as, for example, the impediment of women's access to artistic education or the socio-cultural barriers that made it impossible for them to become professional artists. Or even, the constant sexualized representations where old but present power relations are evidenced. These representations are the fruit of a feminine image constructed by an objectifying view throughout history and which persists today as unattainable expectations and stereotypes. Thus, this nucleus presented works of art by women who created, through their artistic production, a perception of themselves or other women and/or other readings of their identity (Figure 4), including Abigail de Andrade (1864–1890), Bertha Worms (1868–1937), and Brígida Baltar (1959).

The *Political Body* nucleus explored the tensions inherent in the perception of the female body as a space of dispute and play of forces in the social field, displacing it from its position as a passive object to be contemplated in the museum. Thus, the artworks presented in this nucleus gave rise to the rescuing of female bodies from the traditional hegemonic representation (Vicente, 2011) revealing new meanings. Through the artworks of artists such as Lyz Parayso (1994), Nazareth Pacheco (1961), and Berna Reale (1965), subjectivities, conflicts, and the different abuses to which women are subjected according to their social class, race, and sexual orientation were explored. However, not from a victimizing but from a reactive perspective which emphasizes the politicization of the female body and its use as an instrument of cultural and symbolic reinterpretation of reality, in a process of self-reinvention beyond oppressive social constructs.

The *City and Landscape* nucleus (Figure 5) was based on a reflection on the historical difficulties of being a woman artist in Brazil, manifested, for example, in the aforementioned limitations to access to artistic education and the constraints faced in enjoying the city freely



**FIGURE 1** View of the nuclei Portrait Representation. Photograph by Daniela Paoliello 2018. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cum.12639)]



**FIGURE 2** View of the nuclei Portrait Representation. Photograph by Daniela Paoliello 2018. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cum.12639)]





**FIGURE 3** View of the nuclei Portrait Representation. Photograph by Daniela Paoliello 2018. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cum.12639)]



**FIGURE 4** Detail of Ana Miguel's work. Photograph by Daniela Paoliello 2018. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cum.12639)]



**FIGURE 5** View of the exhibition *Mulheres na Coleção MAR*. Photograph by Daniela Paoliello 2018. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cam.12639)]

and as a reference and artistic experience. In this sense, it included artworks by artists such as Amélia da Silva Costa (1876–1922), who stood out for their trajectory and success and who portrayed, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the public space and the landscape from their domestic environments. This reflection is updated with the display of artworks by artists who portray the city and the contemporary landscape in different ways and who claim woman's view on the public space, such as Ione Saldanha (1919–2001) and Regina Vater (1943).

The nuclei *Abstractions and Poetics* broadened the discussion and reflection on female artistic production through artworks expressive of the different languages and art forms employed by women, and which extrapolate generalizations such as connections to specific themes or *ways of doing* related to the female gender. For example, the contributions of Lygia Pape (1927–2004) and Lygia Clark (1920–1988) to Brazilian Constructivism are recalled; as well as the contributions of Fayga Ostrower (1920–2001), Beatriz Milhazes (1960) and Mira Schendel (1919–1988) to the construction of abstract thought in art. On the other hand, the experimentations and crossings between languages, proper of contemporary artistic production and characterizing the works of artists such as Neide Sá (1940) and Lenora de Barros (1953), who “work with words and its plastic-visual unfoldings” (Museu de Arte do Rio, 2019), are also referred.

*Mulheres na Coleção MAR* was the museum's first exhibition to assume a collaborative curatorial project, echoing the growing interest of many museums to adopt more inclusive methodologies to carry out practices that address issues of self-determination, voice, and perspectives together with other people, especially those who feel the impacts of coloniality daily (Ouédraogo & Modest, 2018). An interest that has been accompanied by

an also increasing criticism of the effectiveness of these practices and the sustainability of their effects. In other words, “if, as this criticism suggests, collaboration's promise is an increased democratization in terms of contributions, decision-making and authority, and in the redrawing of the lines of power, then this promise is often not achieved in practice” (Ouédraogo & Modest, 2018).

To assume collaboration as a path toward the decolonization of the museum presupposes, therefore, realizing that its fragility lies exactly in unfulfilled promises. In *Mulheres na Coleção MAR*, the curatorial text itself reveals its limitations:

...no selection is homogeneous. Racial and class differences, for example, present themselves in an even more evident way and are still highlighted in the institutions from systematic exclusions, which are also not yet solved here.

(Museu de Arte do Rio, 2019)

However, the exhibition does not respond only to the decolonization of the art institution. By assuming as collaborators women from a specific geopolitical and cultural context, many of them of African and indigenous descent, it inscribes itself in another process of struggle and resistance, moving away from an universal feminism. At the same time, it recognizes the particularities of this context with regard to its modes of oppression, violence, and the collective strength of women and autonomous communities in the production of other horizons and ways of existence (Curiel, 2015; Espinosa Miñoso, 2017; Lugones, 2011). Its impact is, above all, the transformation of these women's daily working and meeting space (the museum) into a place for engagement, sharing of experiences/perceptions and mutual caring. Highlights, in this sense, the positive effects of the exhibition on strengthening interpersonal relationships among MAR female employees.

Everyone sitting in a circle, regardless of their position, the function they perform, and exchanging as equals is really unique in a work environment. I think it's very important that this has happened and has greatly enriched the relationship among women.

(Ana Paula Rocha, museology trainee. Museu de Arte do Rio, 2018)

I see this collaborative process as something fundamental nowadays. We have been discussing new ways of doing art and productions, and I think we live in a time in which we can no longer emphasise individuality in terms of the hierarchisation of thoughts and knowledge. So, I think that sitting in a circle and thinking about the process collaboratively, in an affectuous way, when we allow ourselves to be affected by other people's stories and experiences, understanding how we pass this experience to art is a process that is fundamental.

(Gabriela Freitas, production trainee. Museu de Arte do Rio, 2018)

Also, representative of the commitment of *Mulheres na Coleção MAR* to transform the museum into a place of sharing, affection, and listening is the inclusion in the exhibition of the poem *Vozes-Mulheres* (Voices-Women) of the Afro-Brazilian writer Conceição Evaristo (1946). First published in 1990, the poem bears witness to generations and generations of black women in Brazil who have been silenced and confined to subordinate jobs and historically predetermined places. It is the manifesto of a power accumulated through pain and precariousness that finds in the voice of the daughters of these generations a possibility of freedom and existence.

*Vozes-Mulheres*, Conceição Evaristo.

Voices-Women (2016), trans: Maria Aparecida Salgueiro de Andrade e Antonio D. Tillis

A voz de minha bisavó

ecoou criança

nos porões do navio.

Ecoou lamentos

de uma infância perdida.

The voice of my great-grandmother

echoed as a child

inside the ship's bowels.

Echoing moans

of a lost childhood.

A voz de minha avó

ecoou obediência

aos brancos-donos de tudo.

The voice of my grandmother

echoed obedience

to the white-owners of everything.

A voz de minha mãe

ecoou baixinho revolta

no fundo das cozinhas alheias

debaixo das trouxas

roupagens sujas dos brancos

pelo caminho empoeirado

rumo à favela.

The voice of my mother

whispered echoes of revolt

in the very end of the other's kitchens

under the trusses

of whites' dirty linen

along the dusty road

towards the slum.

A minha voz ainda

ecoa versos perplexos

com rimas de sangue

e

fome.

My voice still

echoes perplexing verses

in rhymes of blood

and

hunger.

A voz de minha filha

recolhe todas as nossas vozes

recolhe em si

as vozes mudas caladas

engasgadas nas gargantas.

A voz de minha filha

recolhe em si

a fala e o ato.

O ontem – o hoje – o agora.

Na voz de minha filha

se fará ouvir a ressonância

O eco da vida-liberdade.

The voice of my daughter

uniting all our voices

gathers within itself

the dumb silenced voices

choking in our throats.

The voice of my daughter

gathers within itself

speech and action.

Yesterday - today - now.

In my daughter's voice

the resonance will be heard

the echo of freedom-life.

Finally, with regard to the effects of *Mulheres na Coleção MAR* on the museum's more traditional functions and, more specifically, on the acquisition of works for its collection, the exhibition marked the beginning of a specific donation campaign for works by women authors which extended to the several editions of ArtRio, an international art market held in Rio de Janeiro. Following its usual practice of indicating, during the market, a list of artworks of



interest to potential donors, MAR began to identify artworks by women artists that it intends to integrate into its collection, thus reinforcing its commitment to the disruptive processes that the exhibition provoked and in a certain way inaugurated in the museum.

## CURATORSHIP AND INSURGENT EPISTEMOLOGIES. CASA CARIOCA

In September 2020, when staying at home was synonymous with the public health order but also with a drastic deepening of social inequalities—economic, educational, gender, and ethno-racial, MAR inaugurated the *Casa Carioca* (Houses of Rio de Janeiro) exhibition (Figure 6). Curated by Joice Berth and Marcelo Campos, the exhibition proposed the construction of a new understanding of the carioca<sup>3</sup> house and, particularly, about dwelling “in all its historical expressions, renewals and insurgencies” (Berth, 2020, p. 22). Convening counter-hegemonic knowledge, the exhibition was structured from a political direction defined through sources, official data and representations on Brazilian dwelling, and in dialogue with the thought and practice of several researchers and articulators who came together to deepen the debate on housing, dwelling, and the right to the city in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>4</sup> Assuming as a context of tension the dwelling as a privilege—of class, of gender—and access to housing as a fundamental right for all, the exhibition proposed to talk about popular housing or social housing, built by the hands of its residents, rich in affection and human relationships and representing the majority of Brazilian dwellings.<sup>5</sup>

Houses made of wood, zinc tiles, clay, exposed bricks that will never be plastered. Houses built for years on end, by builder masters and the neighbourhood itself, which always pull together for building, always in joint effort [...]. Enlarged houses



**FIGURE 6** View of the Casa Carioca exhibition. Photograph by Elisa Mendes 2020. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions)]

that gain other rooms, either upwards or to the sides, and accommodate various family arrangements [...]. Houses threatened with demolition, for the unfair and never restored right to the city, thus cementing social segregations. Houses dragged away by floods, stricken with violence, brought about by the inequality of purchasing power, which does not allow making the dream of home ownership come true [...]. [Houses that are lived in], in the samba backyards, in the barbecues on the concrete roofs, in the housewarming *feijoadas*.

(Campos & Berth, 2020a, p. 21)

The exhibition also takes the house and the body as a context of tension, as objective and subjective places of existence and ancestry, respectively. Thus, it proposed to address the different social understandings that both reveal, that is, discourses that “vociferate about absences and presences, about places of exclusion and neglect, about hierarchies and subalternities” (Berth, 2020, p. 22). This way, dwelling is understood as the insertion of the individual space in the collective space, and the carioca house becomes the manifestation of “social markers of privileges and exclusions” (Berth, 2020, p. 22).

Houses where mothers raise the children of other people as an occupation (in addition to their own), houses in an eternal fight for demarcation, between the public power and the ancestral recognition of the original and enslaved peoples, villages, maroon settlements. Houses that otherwise blend it all, ancestral altars, radical women, informal jobs, and raising debts, while access to water and oxygen, common resources, gifts of nature, in a pandemic and unequal reality, once again expose deep divisions between classes, genders, and ethnicities in a long-divided city, which sees solidarity and neighbourhood efforts save those who have always been alone.

(Campos & Berth, 2020a, p. 21)

Also fundamental to the political direction of the exhibition were the *place of speech* and *empowerment* as contemporary, social concepts, and processes, transversely addressed by the exhibition discourse. In this sense, the invitation made to Joice Berth to be part of the curatorial team configured itself as an important step so that more democratic conceptions and unimaginable realities, characteristic of the contestation and revelation that characterize empowerment (Berth, 2019), were brought to the museum. From her social identity as a woman, black, and architect, Joice Berth also brought another perspective on Architecture, problematizing its condition as a discipline limited to the recognition of white and male bodies (Dona, 2021). According to Berth, “being an architect and urban planner is also a political act. It involves thinking, planning, and building the places where human relations take place and also determining and reflecting multiple aspects of this truly diverse and unequal society” (Campos & Berth, 2020b, p. 89). In a sexist and racist society, as long as spaces for speech and action are not opened up to those who have never had the power to make decisions, the field of architecture will continue to reproduce an oppressive logic.

According to Lima (2018), curatorship is a strategic position within the system of culture through which it is possible to observe how power relations are organized both in the aesthetic field and at the institutional level (p. 246). In the aesthetic field, a politics of stereotypes is observed which “through images, paintings, newspapers, advertisements, maps and books, disseminates a whole system of representation that, when crystallized, forms the cartography of difference” (Lima, 2018, p. 247). At the institutional level, the impediment of black women and men in accessing the institutional spaces of art has caused a limitation of narratives and the predominance of an excluding epistemology. Thus, the conquest of institutional spaces and dispute for their discourses by people omitted from epistemic privilege is an essential step



toward the decolonization of museums. It is also important to mention Marcelo Campos as a black man, curator, and art historian, committed to provoking epistemological ruptures through the curatorial projects he has been developing at MAR.

Thus, based on their distinct *places of speech* and on a process of much listening, reflection, and involvement, the curators elaborated 11 nuclei to form the exhibition, presenting them not as conceptualizations created from readings of the works of art on show but as subjects that configure a turning point in the discourse on the history of social housing in the city of Rio de Janeiro: *Life and Work*; *Self-building of Popular Housing in Brazil*; *Celebrations and Insurgences*; *Earths, Straws, Seashells and Zincs*; *Get Out of Here*; *International Style*; *My Shanty*; *Occupied House*; *The House on the Network*; *The Dream*; and *Meeting Room*.

More specifically, these nuclei addressed issues such as the subjective dimension of the use of spaces and territories we can build (Figure 7); the violence underlying architectural projects, domestic work, the right to land denied, and eviction policies; the utopia and failure of modernist, international architecture incorporated in Brazil; gender inequality in architecture and its impact on the production of projects that continue to reproduce oppressive logics in the constructions of houses; the lack of public policies related to housing; the vulnerability of self-built houses; the plurality of materials used in the construction of Brazilian houses; the house as a space for the construction of memory and affection; the marginalized body as a *quilombo* and its disruptive power to represent other forms of existence compared to those traditionally dominant (Campos & Berth, 2020a).

In this sense, artworks by young and peripheral artists have been summoned, from distinct contexts considering socio-racial, ethnic, and gender representativeness, who discuss the issues addressed by the exhibition through their own life stories, among which Tadáskia (max willà morais) (1993), Agrade Camiz (1988), and Rafael BQueer (1992). Their works were exhibited side by side, without hierarchical or chronological divisions, with works by historically consecrated artists and from different generations. According to Fernandes (2020), these



**FIGURE 7** Rommulo Conceição, *The fragility of human affairs can be an indisputable spatial limit*, 2015. Glass, metal, ceramics, and automotive paint. Photograph by Elisa Mendes 2020. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cam.12639)]

artists were influenced by European aesthetic trends and were interested in portraying the daily life and dwellings of Rio de Janeiro, such as Eliseu Visconti (1866–1944). Artists represent engravings of social concern, such as Oswaldo Goeldi (1895–1961) and Renina Katz (1925). Painters—chroniclers of popular customs, such as Djanira (1914–1979). Representatives of Brazilian Constructivism, such as Lygia Pape (1927–2004), Lygia Clark (1920–1988), and Hélio Oiticica (1937–1980). Video artists, focusing on women and the intimate, domestic space, such as Leticia Parente (1930–1991). Artists who emerged at the end of the 20th century, such as Adriana Varejão (1964) and Luiz Zerbini (1959), and who have stood out since the 2000s, such as Lúcia Laguna (1941) and Daniel Murgel (1981).

Listening to the community, to the stories lived by the residents of Rio de Janeiro was another methodology adopted by the curatorial team for constructing the exhibition narrative. Besides serving as reflection material for the elaboration of the distinct thematic nuclei, these testimonies were integrated into the exhibition as a series of videos produced by the collective *Três Marias Filmes*. They opened the possibility for a more effective engagement with the public, contributing to constructing meanings and connections between the museum and the communities represented.

A sensitive and critical look at the issues and realities addressed articulated the expository narrative, which manifested itself both in the textual content (Figure 8) that contextualized each nucleus, as in the expography. As essential elements for the construction of another discourse, they distanced themselves from the romanticization or exoticization of that which is the result of a historical issue, of a political articulation of territorial division (Campos, 2021). Precariousness is a reality, the lack of technical assistance in the construction of dwellings results in vulnerable houses that put their residents at risk. Without disqualifying these constructions, the curators reconstructed a narrative of social housing that sought to give new meaning to the way people see their conditions—objective and subjective, according to Campos (2021),



FIGURE 8 Nuclei The House on the Network and My Shanty. Photograph by Elisa Mendes 2020. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cam.12639)]





**FIGURE 9** Andrey Zignatto, *Stacking*, 2014–2016. Crumpled bricks on a wheelbarrow. Photograph by Elisa Mendes 2020. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

attributing value to self-constructed houses, belonging and pride to those who built their dwelling with their own hands (Figure 9).

Finally, *Casa Carioca* promoted a rewriting of the history of housing in Brazil from “those whose experiences are often ignored” (Alcoff, 2016, p. 135), inscribing itself as “a curatorial practice in decolonial perspective” (Lima, 2018, p. 246). In this sense, its impacts extrapolate the construction of an inclusive, diverse, merely historical or disciplinary exhibition narrative. Its effects lie, in fact, in the “active and processual rupture, both collective and individual, with power structures that have been articulated to be hierarchizing at the expense of the scarcity of groups situated at the bottom” (Berth, 2019, p. 35), inside and outside the museum.

## CONCLUSION. WHAT REMAINS IS ANOTHER BEGINNING

Approaching MAR as a privileged place of thought for this reflection allowed us to evidence that the relationship between the disruptive power of curatorship and the decolonial turn in museums concerns more than a narrative rearrangement of objects. In other words, the path toward the decolonization of the museum presupposes the collaborative construction of other epistemologies engendered by other knowledge and perspectives that operate holistically in all instances of power in the institution. At the same time, it allows us to affirm that, according to Muñiz Reed (2019), the decoloniality of museums is not limited only to curators.

Decoloniality is a cultural call for arms, an invitation to rearticulate our collective past experience, questioning its weight and biases, in the hope that with every step

forward, we might make increasing sense of our condition and contribute to the possibility of a world without coloniality: the world otherwise.

(Muñiz Reed, 2019, p. 10)

This means that, besides both exhibitions reaffirming that the consolidation of other epistemologies depends on broader structural changes, causing fractures in the previously rooted discourses and power relations, they establish a significant place for the sharing of experiences, nurturing a fertile ground for more complex and plural ideas and actions, and for the construction of other modes of existence inside and outside MAR. Thus, even if these fractures are configured as temporary, the sustainability of their effects resides in the shared knowledge about the specificity of the geopolitical and cultural context in which the museum is inserted, which generates a more precise confrontation to specific modes of oppression, discrimination, and violence. It also resides in the empowerment and strengthening of interpersonal relationships between different individuals and communities historically invisibilized and that reinvent MAR either through their daily work or through the struggle and resistance against everything MAR and the museums of the present bring as manifestations of coloniality.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All data underlying the results are available as part of the article and no additional source data are required.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Research centre of the University of the Arts London, dedicated to contemporary art and exhibition stories. Based at Central Saint Martins, from its relationship with different parts of the globe, it promotes publications and events that have as their basis for discussion the relationship between contemporary art and society in general. About Afterall, see <https://www.afterall.org/about/>.

<sup>2</sup> Initially called Morro da Favela, Morro da Providência plays a central role in the history of Rio's favelas. It is considered to be the first illegal urban settlement in Rio de Janeiro, originating the use of the term “favela” to designate the other hills of the city with similar characteristics (Gonçalves, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Carioca: adjective relating to the city of Rio de Janeiro; noun relating to an individual born in or living in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>4</sup> In February 2020, MAR held the *Seminário Casa Carioca* (Carioca House Seminar) with the aim of discussing social housing, the right to the city and the issue of ethnicity, class, and gender in architecture and housing. This event was essentially attended by architects, and urban planners and the discussions were mediated by Marcelo Campos and Joice Berth. This seminar was fundamental for a more precise outline of the curatorial discourse and gave rise to a study group that accompanied the development of the exhibition.

<sup>5</sup> Note that, according to data extracted from a survey conducted by the Brazilian Council of Architecture and Urbanism, about 85% of Brazilian housing is self-built, that is, built by the residents themselves, without the help of architects or engineers (Campos & Berth, 2020a, 2020b, p. 56).

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