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Cultural and Creative Mural Spaces

Community, Culture and Tourism of Uruguayan Contemporary Muralism and Other International Mural Spaces

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Preface

This publication includes some of the results of the social innovation project 'Social function of Uruguayan muralism in the 20th century as a vehicle and model of sustainable heritage activation: Decentralization, identity and memory', subsidised by the Ministry of Economy and Business and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain, as well as the Polytechnic University of Valencia, between 2010 and 2016. It was developed by the Microcluster of Cultural and Creative Industries Research, Tourism and Technology (www.ccis.upv.es), under the direction of Professor Virginia Santamarina, with the help of the National Directorate of Culture of Uruguay (National System of Museums project), the Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Nation (Restoration Workshop), the National Institute of Fine Arts (IENBA) of the University of the Republic, and the Municipalities of Maldonado, Tacuarembó and Colonia. This project was characterised by the participation of society in the innovation process, with the objective of aligning its results with the real values of society and the objectives of sustainable development (SDG). This implied the participation of all the actors (universities, government, central government, local associations, educational centres, etc.) through inclusive and participatory methodologies, at all stages of the innovation processes, contemplating aspects such as open access, gender equality, scientific education, ethics and governance, with the aim of supporting the democratisation of their culture and economic development through their heritage.

Contemporary mural art has two sides, as described in the following chapters. 'Social Realism: A Political and Social Art' highlights the influence of the Mexican muralist Diego Torres on some Uruguayan artists, such as Felipe Seade. And in 'Constructive Universalism and the Influence of Torres García', the authors described the important role of the Uruguayan artist in the evolution of contemporary Uruguayan mural art, following the history of Uruguayan society. This approach has been crucial to understanding how Uruguayans are able to identify with mural art.

In 'Constructive Universalism: The Golden Artistic Age', we saw how the influence of Torres García has inspired many Uruguayan artists, and continues to do so.

And ‘Abstraction: The Unknown Part of Uruguayan Contemporary Muralism’ stresses the new universe built around Torres García.

The relevance of mural art in Uruguay can be seen in the National School of Fine Art, where a university extension for mural painting started in the 1960s, as this chapter explains. Mural art is present throughout Uruguay, not only in the capital Montevideo, but also in other cities such as the MAAIS of San Gregorio de Polanco, Rosario, Pan de Azúcar and Colonia del Sacramento. There may be different aims and artistic relevance, but there is the same objective as in open air museums: public mural art. Murals also coexist with new emerging artistic expressions, such as graffiti and post-graffiti, which, as explained by the authors, developed mainly in urban contexts from the end of the twentieth century.

In ‘Consequences and Needs of Uruguayan Contemporary Muralism’ the authors summarised the challenges to the sustainability of this heritage.

Projects worldwide have encouraged and presented murals as a new and democratic art form that, more and more, attracts community identity as well as the cultural interest of tourists. For example, Martínez Carazo’s ‘Museographic Project of the Uruguayan Contemporary Mural Production’ presents an in-depth study of more than 1200 murals located in Uruguay.

In ‘Murals in North America’, the authors present the different ways of building a strategy around murals, from beautification to new urban groups. There are also other cases in Europe, for example in Spain (‘Incomplete Museum of Street Art’), Italy or the United Kingdom, and on other continents such as Australia and Africa (‘Crossroads: Urban Murals and Their Relationship to Memory, Tourism and the Possibility of Conservation and Restoration’).

Finally, the impact of mural art as a driver of economic development has been proved in many locations, not only in Uruguay but also in countries such as Canada, Germany and Northern Ireland.

Valencia, Spain
May 2020

Virginia Santamarina-Campos
Eva-María Martínez-Carazo
María De-Miguel Molina

Contents

Abbreviations

AAC	Constructive Art Association
AIAPE	Association of Intellectuals, Artists and Journalists
ANCAP	General Administration of Fuels, Alcohol and Portland
CPCN	Commission of Cultural Heritage of the Nation
CEDARTES	Centre for the Development of Structured Art
CTIU	Confederation of Intellectual Workers of Uruguay
MEC	Education and Culture Ministry
ENBA	National School of Fine Arts
ETAP	School of Plastic Arts
ICOM	International Council of Museums
IENBA	National Institute of Fine Arts
MAAIS	Ibero-American Art Open Air Museum
MIAU	Unfinished Museum of Urban Art
ANTEL	National Telecommunications Administration
PAR	Participatory Action-Research
PORN	Plan for the Regulation of Natural Resources
RRI	Responsible Research and Innovation
SFUCM	Social Function of the Uruguayan Contemporary Muralism
TTG	Torres Garcia's Workshop

Part I
Uruguayan Contemporary Muralism

Chapter 1
Challenges and Opportunities of Uruguayan Contemporary Muralism

Virginia Santamarina-Campos, Eva-María Martínez-Carazo, María De-Miguel-Molina, and M. Ángeles Carabal-Montagud

1.1 Context

A new concept of nation emerged after the Mexican revolution of the twentieth century, which required the creation of an identity. In this democratising movement, the participation of plastic artists played a fundamental role, redefining a new concept of art, using murals as a means of communication with the people. This movement transcended Mexican borders through the muralist Siqueiros, who called to the new American generation of artists, inviting them to build monumental, human, public, and identitarian art (Santamarina-Campos 2017).

As a result, there was extensive muralist production throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Uruguay, reflecting the subversion of international languages to speak of their own content, favouring an aesthetic based on a nationalism of egalitarian impulses and reliably interpreting the roots of their culture. On the one hand, we find murals with artistic and historical qualities linked to social realism, constructivism and formalistic tradition, executed by an exclusive minority of plastic artists and located in closed and centralised spaces, linked to 'high culture'. On the other hand, there are also murals born from the processes of regionalisation, at the hands of more vulnerable groups, in search of access to the creation and consumption of popular culture through open public spaces, with a strong connotation of social function and establishing themselves as cultural goods that demand awareness of the symbolic dimension of the society they represent. This nonconformist character is reflected not only at the conceptual level, but also at the technological

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level, where it undergoes a period of experimentation, where traditional techniques are replaced by new procedures and commercial products (Santamarina-Campos 2017).

At present in Uruguay, the lack of resources and training in the intervention and management of cultural heritage, has caused a loss of awareness of the symbolic dimension of these murals, forgetting their social function and precipitating their deterioration due to a lack of social interest as a result of ignorance about their value as significant manifestations of a cultural practice. In addition to this problem is the complexity involved in the conservation of these works, many of which were made with experimental materials which have generated complex problems that are difficult to address. Finally, due to the lack of qualified and experienced restoration technicians and the absence of regulation for this discipline, inappropriate interventions have taken place (Santamarina-Campos 2017).

1.2 Needs of Uruguayan Contemporary Muralism

Uruguay has very rich contemporary muralist production, but it is conditioned by poor knowledge and appreciation, both in the institutional and social spheres (Santamarina-Campos et al. 2017b) This has generated a process of heritage deactivation that in some cases has led to the destruction of murals of great heritage value, such as the Dumas Oroña mural sculptural relief made in 1968 (Image 1.1), located in the former Tacuarembó Street Commercial Gallery in Montevideo, and demolished in 2018, from which a mould was made with the commitment to reproduce the work in the new building that would occupy the original site (Cibils 2018). '[A]nother tragedy, irreparable, was that of the beautiful murals of Norberto Berdía in the former San Rafael hotel in Punta del Este' (Informant 94) (Image 1.2) destroyed in 2019 (Gallardo 2019).

This process of heritage deactivation is related to a particular Uruguayan idiosyncrasy, a consequence of the heterogeneity of Uruguayan culture due to the symbiosis of the different civilisations that settled in this place, and that often does not recognise its enormous heritage legacy and its scope, which is valued to a greater extent when recognised and investigated by external experts (Informant 18). The director of the Restoration Workshop of the CPCN noted that 'in reality, I think that now we are becoming more aware of what our heritage is, I even think that a lot is also being generated following the first Heritage Day that took place here in Uruguay, in which many people were mobilised (...) That I think helped a lot to make each person a little more aware of what we have and what we have to take care of, because in reality our heritage belongs to everyone: those who work for the country, those who live here and everyone, all the people' (Informant 15).

This problem may be connected, on the one hand, to the destruction of the cultural archives during the military dictatorship, which caused a loss of documentary sources hindering the research processes of muralist production. The absence of catalogues and inventories of these heritage resources has hindered their safeguarding, management and valuation, since, in order to disseminate and generate value, it

Image 1.1 Detail of mural by Dumas Oroño (1968), located in the Costa Gallery (Avenue July 18 and Tacuarembó) in Montevideo, now disappeared. (Source: Own elaboration, Graphical record of the RRI Project. SFUCM 2010)

is necessary to know what exists through documentation processes and registry. As the director of the Area of Archaeology (CPCN) stressed, 'knowing, valuing, conserving, is all linked. Obviously, what is unknown is not preserved (...) And then there would be a whole part (...) of new tools to achieve education, communication (...) The community has to be involved. There is no doubt, because (…) it is they who are going to have to manage, care for, take charge, report if there are problems' (Informant 19).

As a consequence of the above, we can say that social awareness of the importance of Uruguayan muralism is less entrenched than in other Latin American countries with a great mural tradition, such as Mexico, where 'all people, give it tremendous importance' (Informant 29). It is therefore often difficult to establish connections or parallels between the muralist conception in Uruguay and other countries, since it is felt that 'there is not a very strong or important movement (...) not as strong as in other countries, such as Mexico' (Informant 20).

On the other hand, it is important to remember that contemporary mural production was severely restricted in the mid-twentieth century because of the 'quarrel of the walls and brushes' (Informant 24). 'The complaint was between the 1950s and 1960s (...) There was a law, which required 1% of the cost of a building to be spent on decorating it with murals' (Informant 24). The architects defended the purity of

Image 1.2 Detail of mural by Norberto Berdía (1948), located in Hotel Casino San Rafael, in Punta del Este, now disappeared. (Source: Own elaboration, Graphical record of the RRI Project. SFUCM 2010)

architectural forms, the primacy of the window and the existence of glass structures, against the muralist artists, which led to the restriction and drastic devaluation of the use of murals at that time.

A lack of knowledge about mural production has meant that the dominant style has been prioritised, constructivism (Informants 16, 18 and 29), mainly represented in Uruguay by the Torres-García Workshop (Image 1.3), which considers muralism the art par excellence (Informant 22), to the detriment of other styles, such as social realism (Image 1.4), which has artists such as Seade, Berdía, Urruchúa, Garino, Mazzey or González among its greatest exponents in Uruguay (Santamarina-Campos 2017). For this reason, constructivism is identified as the Uruguayan national art.

The conceptual complexity of the precepts on which the constructivist mural movement is based mean that most people misunderstand it. Constructivism 'is based on the rules of the golden measure, which are based on colour, composition and psychology, but there is no very clear discourse, no quick reading through which it can be understood. Uruguayan muralism or Torres García's school, however, is a muralism that somehow ends up being understood, because one has to understand how the mural works and the organisation of pure colours, the symbolism of humans, of nature ... If one begins to understand that, then they can

Image 1.3 Unknown author. Replica of the 'Pax in lucem' mural in the Saint Bois Hospital of Joaquín Torres-García. Peatonal Sarandí street, Montevideo. (Source: Own elaboration, Graphical record of the RRI Project. SFUCM 2010)

understand the narrative, but it is not a narration or a clear reading such as in Mexican muralism, which reflects the oppression of the indigenous peoples (...) The golden composition has a number, reflecting where it comes from, why those colours were used, what means man, woman, water, land, sea ... most people do not understand' (Informant 16).

In this sense, we can say that muralism is an art with strong social content but that is not always perceived or interpreted in all its magnitude due to its high symbolism. It is thus a language coded in signs, based on the golden measure and atonal painting: pure colour, flatness, orthogonal composition, symbolism and maximum respect for architecture (Informant 24). Its reading is therefore undoubtedly much more complex than that of Social Realism, which emphasises the search for narration of strong socio-political and identity content through volume and chiaroscuro, and, therefore, allows a clearer link with the Mexican current to the extent that it provides a more direct social message (Santamarina-Campos 2017).

The difficulty posed by constructive-based muralism, of being understood and interpreted by society, has encouraged very few to attempt to interpret their language exactly, 'reading is more difficult for ordinary people, the image is more complex, (…) It is governed by the golden rule, there is a study of proportions of the elements of colour' (Informant 18). Only the experts have gained further understanding.

Another aspect that could condition the perception of these heritage resources is their state of conservation, which in many cases is deficient, 'medium-low level' (Informant 25), hindering their reading and normalising their destruction. This

Image 1.4 Detail of the 'Mercury' mural by Eloy Boschi (1972). Headquarters of the National Port Administration of Uruguay. (Source: Own elaboration, Graphical record of the RRI Project. SFUCM 2013)

problem is associated with the fact that we find numerous murals of high artistic quality but important technical deficiencies. That is to say, Uruguayan contemporary muralists, at the technological level, were not orthodox in their use of traditional materials and procedures, both because of their ignorance, and because of their desire for innovation (Informants 16 and 24). This prompted much technical experimentation (Santamarina-Campos et al. 2017b), given the introduction from other disciplines of materials whose behaviour was unpredictable and unknown in the short or medium term. Serious compatibility and stability problems quickly arose, due to the use of supports that were in poor condition, a lack of preparation (Informant 16), or the vulnerability of the pigments and materials used outdoors to the weather'. For example, in the murals made at the Saint Bois Hospital 'what was done was painting with ship paint, (…) the wall was not prepared' (Informant 16). Little effort or money was invested in the stability and durability of the materials used and, 'the contemporary artist does not care, does not think that the painting can last, there is no intention of consulting someone who has experience and can recommend a type of painting, but what it is always about is to be as practical as possible and buy the most convenient paint, which does not take much time to complete (...) It is a matter of practicality that it later leads to these problems.' Informant 18), therefore, an ephemeral conception of mural art prevails.

Linked to this situation, is an urgent problem for the conservation and restoration of murals. The current insufficient and inefficient state of restoration procedures mean that there is a need to innovate the procedures and methodologies, and has meant that it is necessary to undertake more aggressive interventions to avoid irreparable losses. One of the most frequent and drastic inadequate interventions, it would be the start of the wall painting itself when it is decontextualised of its place of origin. This measure, in turn, causes other problems derived from the controversy about the new locations and exposure of some removed murals, and the possible suitability or lack of conservation standards conditioning presented by the new locations. In this sense, the most important intervention case, which for many specialists has been made throughout the Latin American area, and at the same time most controversial because of the results it entailed, was the process of extracting the mural paintings made by the Torres-García workshop at the Saint Bois Hospital in Montevideo, Uruguay, in several phases. The first murals that were removed were transported and exhibited in Brazil, where they were irretrievably lost in a fire, and those that were removed in later stages were relocated to the Torre ANTEL of Montevideo, to a building that does not comply with the appropriate environmental conditions for optimal conservation (Informant 17).

On the other hand, the lack of value and social recognition of muralist production has accelerated the state of disgrace and abandonment in which many murals are found, often as a result of the deterioration, loss or demolition of the buildings on which they were made. This tragic situation has motivated repeated social complaints from numerous groups, which highlight the widespread poor state of conservation of Uruguayan murals, and strives to preserve the endangered wall heritage.

This situation could be linked to the lack of regulated training in conservation and restoration (Santamarina-Campos et al. 2017b), given the absence of a specific academic degree in this area (Informants 15, 17, 25 and 29). The lack of definition of a code of ethics has also caused, on the one hand, a precariousness in labour regulation, visible in both worrying professional interventions carried out by unqualified staff and the inappropriate interventions resulting from professional negligence. ‘Anyone says: ah, I restore‘ (Informant 25). In this sense, most of the professionals come from the artistic field and it is common that the prevailing criterion is not the recovery, but, on the contrary, a repainting of the work (Informant 25). It is even common practice for technical staff to delegate the intervention to be performed by artists (Informant 25). This means lowering the costs of restoration but does not guarantee good results. For example, the 2004 intervention for the mural of the ‘Workers under construction’ by Esteban Garino in the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of the Republic, was carried out ‘with teachers from the School of Fine Arts, people who did not have knowledge of restoration but were willing to guide me’ (Informant 18). An empirical training model prevails, using transmitted knowledge. This entails a double danger, given the risk of outdated inheriting and knowledge, and of falling into automatic and vitiated dynamic processes. As indicated by a former employee of the CPCN-MEC Restoration Workshop ‘I learned with the restaurateurs that were in the workshop (…), what they learned at the time

in Europe or in Mexico; they transmitted the knowledge to us and that was what we applied, but we have no academic training or scholarships' (Informant 17).

The lack of specific training limits or hinders the development of research in this area, which results in restricted knowledge of the work and history of restoration, as there is no documentation of previous interventions. The scarce research on muralism also denotes a lack of appreciation of this artistic manifestation. This translates into the absence of dissemination and communication policies, and very few publications on the production of, and interventions in, murals. Although the restoration carried out at the Saint Bois Hospital is recognised by experts as the most important in South America 'there is no publication that records the before, during and after' (Informant 17).

Similarly, there is support from a scientific analysis laboratory, which implies a lack of certainty in the work procedures and results obtained. The intuitive method explain the absence of proven data (Informant 16).

All this has conditioned, in the last instance, a strong dependence on foreigners, where local staff travel to countries with academic training to fill training gaps (Informants 15, 20, 25 and 29), and consult with foreign specialists such as advisors and teachers, or import equipment and materials (Informants 17 and 23). All this is detrimental to the sustainable development of technical and human resources, while implying an increase in costs, because most scholarships, internships, courses, and so on are partially or totally paid for by the interested parties themselves.

Another fundamental issue is the huge legal vacuum that exists in Uruguay, given the absence of any cultural heritage law at the national level. This has had an impact, on the one hand, on the effectiveness of some measures, such as, for example, the breach of government law about the execution of mural projects in the halls of buildings in the mid-twentieth century. In accordance with this precursor regulation and of great interest for our research, it was mandatory to allocate 1% of the cost of the building to mural projects. This initiative proved very ineffective, however, despite the efforts of numerous artists and art critics, such as Amalia Polleri, to move it forward (Informant 24).

It is clear that the antiquity and lack of application of the current regulations (Informant 19), Law 14.040 (1971) (Law n° 14.040 1971) constantly forces us to seek support in more modern laws to achieve comprehensive management, for example, through the Land Management Law (Law nº 18.308 2005), the Environment Law (Law nº 17.283 2000b), or the Law on Protected Areas (Law nº 17.234 2000a).

It is essential to emphasise that in Uruguay there is a lack of consensus, communication and institutional support to ensure the protection of the Uruguayan mural heritage. This is caused by discrepancies between the Restoration Workshop and the CPCN-MEC (Informants 25 and 29). In this regard, although the Department of Restoration is the only conservation body at state level in Uruguay and enjoys greater seniority, as it was created in the early 1960s as an independent executing unit (Informant 15), the truth is that the CPCN-MEC (Law n° 14.040 1971) has assumed full responsibility since 1971. As a consequence, since 1971 the CPCN-MEC has determined the authorisation and prioritisation of the works to be

performed, and responsibility in the Department of Restoration is only delegated for the diagnosis and execution of the works (Informant 25).

Finally, there has been bad management of Uruguay's cultural heritage as a whole, and of murals in particular, caused by a lack of interest. This is evidenced in the few technical and human resources. On the one hand, conservators are in great demand for work but there are very few operators, which means that it is not feasible to deal with the decaying artworks in a timely manner. There has been a drastic reduction in the number of available restorers around - 80% (Informant 15) and the low remuneration means that the majority of restorers must also work on other jobs (Informant 25).

On the other hand, there are numerous local problems, due to the expiration of much equipment and security systems which have not been subject to periodic reviews, and to the deficiencies that some properties present (Informant 25).

All this has led, in conclusion, to a problem of invisibility and lack of recognition of conservation and restoration work. It should be noted that the Workshop does not open its doors even on Heritage Day (Informant 17), an initiative promoted by the architect Lindsey in 1995, during his tenure as president of the CPCN-MEC, to implement the dissemination and enhancement of heritage assets and activities (Informants 15 and 19). The importance of involving the community in order to achieve the effective conservation of this broad and valuable cultural legacy cannot be understated, through a revaluation of both the assets to be preserved and the technical personnel responsible for their maintenance.

1.3 Conclusion

The consumption of the past in Uruguay today drives an increasingly demanding cultural tourism, turning these mural spaces into highly vulnerable places. The triad of tourism, heritage and markets draws new 'glocalised' Uruguayan maps today. It is thus necessary to promote research towards new models of sustainable management that guarantee the different resources linked to this social art.

This publication aims to promote the democratisation of Uruguayan culture, through the recognition and activation of the muralist production of the twentieth and twenty-first century in its increasingly broader vision, that is identifying spaces of Uruguayan cultural practice that are linked to elements of sustainable human development.

In relation to the lack of social and institutional appreciation and recognition of contemporary muralist production, we can, however, list some initiatives that have keept muralism latent. A top-down strategy has not worked for the conservation of Uruguayan muralism, but down-top initiatives have preserved many valued murals around Uruguay:

- The Carlos Páez Vilaró initiative at the Cordón de Montevideo bus terminal in the 1930s (Santamarina-Campos et al. 2015).

- The collective experience of the School of Fine Arts in Montevideo (1960–73), carrying out ephemeral mural initiatives of strong social commitment (Informant 18).
- The collective exhibition 'Murals TTG' in 2007 at the Gurvitch museum, where 'in addition to photos of all murals, photos of projects ... there were about ten or twelve real murals' (Informant 22). The results of the exhibition were collected in the publication 'MURALES TTG' which brings together more than forty projects and sketches of murals.
- The blog 'muralero movement', promoted by professors and students of the National School of Fine Arts Institute of Montevideo (Muralero Movement 2013)
- The Declaration as a National Monument in 2014, by the CPCN, of the two murals by Jonio Montiel in the city of Tacuarembó, which have been designed for community development in that city (Santamarina-Campos et al. 2017a).
- The declaration of Cultural Interest in 2016, by the MEC, of the 'Painting the sidewalks' project, an initiative organised by a street art movement, private and educational institutions that has travelled through different neighbourhoods of Montevideo and localities of the country promoting integration, art, fun and recreation (Santamarina-Campos et al. 2017a).
- The Meeting of Public Art in Colonia del Sacramento, organised by the Tourist Association of Colonia and the Municipal Administration in 2013, on the occasion of the anniversary of the declaration of Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the Day of the International Declaration of Human Rights (Santamarina-Campos et al. 2017a).
- The social initiatives of the open-air museums of San Gregorio de Polanco, Rosario or Pan de Azúcar in Maldonado in the 90s, are precursors of open-air museums in Uruguay in their creation and management (Informant 16 and 18), giving the muralism linked to 'popular culture' greater appreciation, protection and social roots than the muralism belonging to 'high culture'. 'It sought, from the social point of view, to create a tourist town from the realisation of the mural as an element to attract people and generate tourism' (Informant 16).

In the legal vacuum that exists in Uruguay, given the absence of a cultural heritage law at the national level, the CPCN in recent years has promoted the 'Cultural Heritage of the State. Promotion. Protection. National System', which is currently under debate and pending approval (Parliament of Uruguay 2017).

Finally, regarding the lack of regulated training in Conservation and Restoration in the country, the National School of Fine Arts Institute of the University of the Republic have shown great interest and willingness for the progressive implementation of subjects related to conservation and restoration. The first initiative was the teaching of the subject 'Investigating art in the neighbourhoods. National mural painting: the current situation, its conservation and restoration' in the last year of the Bachelor's degree in Drawing and Painting in the 2016–2017 academic year. At the end of 2019, 'the director of the Fernando Miranda National School of Fine Arts Institute told me that he intends to study a project to formulate a postgraduate course

on conservation and restoration, at the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Culture' (Informant 95).

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