

# ESCALA

Essex Collection of Art from Latin America

## José Pedro Costigliolo biography

José Pedro Costigliolo was born in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1902 and from 1921 to 1925 studied at the city's *Círculo de Bellas Artes*. Subsequently he explored both graphic art and an art of formal construction through the organisation of increasingly non-naturalistic geometric forms. He contributed to the development of constructivist art both in Uruguay and internationally.

The earliest example of Costigliolo's work in the ESCALA collection is a small silk-screened poster entitled *Palacio de la Música*, 1929. The graphic hard edges, yet still figurative design, demonstrate important technical issues which were to absorb him over the following decades. By the early 1950s he was moving away from hard-edged figuration and began working in the tradition of constructivism. His paintings were now created from geometric shapes freed from specific visual reference.

The impetus from the visual to constructed paintings in Uruguay and other Latin American countries was instigated in part by the return of Joaquín Torres-García to Montevideo from Europe in 1934. Torres-García's form of constructivism generated both followers and the development of alternative dissenting constructivist schools, such as the 1940s Grupo Madí in Buenos Aires. While playing a key role in constructivist art in Europe his work tended less to the austere hard edged abstraction of his European contemporaries and more to the inclusion of personal and cultural symbols.

In 1952 Costigliolo co-founded the Grupo de Arte No-Figurativo (Non-figurative Art Group) with his wife María Freire whose work is also represented in ESCALA. Members came from Grupo Madí which drew on a variety of sources such as Dadaism and Russian Constructivism. Arte No-Figurativo was more concerned with the artistic visual process, side-stepping politics and the propaganda and activist stance of Grupo Madí and other Argentinian and Brazilian groups. Arte No-Figurativo lasted for only two exhibitions under that name. The exhibition brochures show that the group was composed of a wide range of styles, from an expressive and lyrical form of art to the more hard-edge formalism of Costigliolo and Freire.

In 1953 Costigliolo and Freire were invited to the 2nd São Paulo Bienal where they experienced Brazil's form of constructed art firsthand. Between 1957 and 1959 the couple travelled to Europe, where they went to numerous studios, art galleries and met with early pioneers of European constructivist art, including; Antoine Pevsner (brother of Naum Gabo), Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart and Georges Vantongerloo. Costigliolo took particular inspiration from the colour and form he saw in medieval stained glass in French churches.

From this time Costigliolo's work encompassed a limited repertoire of form and colour. The flat backgrounds create space for the rhythmic movement and harmonious balance of strictly geometric shapes. The works are carefully constructed to appear machine made and only on close inspection can the viewer make out the faint grooves of brush strokes, occasional pencil outlines and a rare irregularity in the outline of a geometric shape.

The essence of such a strictly constructed art indicates a faith in an idea of a universal archetype or truth as opposed to the experience of the uniquely particular. Costigliolo had a number of national and international exhibitions and was awarded several prestigious prizes. He died in 1985.

## References

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